

Yes to Europe?! – EU Commissioner Günther Oettinger in dialogue with Hamburg students

Hamburg, 20 November 2017

Together with EU Commissioner Günther Oettinger and the regional representatives of the political party youth wings, students in Hamburg explore the opportunities of participation in European public policy issues. In the early evening of 20 November, the auditorium of Heinrich-Hertz-Schule turns into a lively discussion forum in the framework of the *Understanding Europe* project.

The event follows up on the EU Crash Courses carried out by Schwarzkopf Foundation in cooperation with TUI Foundation at schools in Hamburg. Under the motto *Young people shape Europe? Opportunities and hurdles for (political) participation*, the young people discussed opportunities to engage in the European peace project.

At the beginning of the event, all participants are asked to position themselves based on three questions relating to European policy. The results of the survey show that the young people value the freedom of movement in Europe but seem to perceive policy-making in Brussels to be far removed from them: Most young people primarily associate 'Europe' with freedom of movement and bureaucracy, while only a few of them associate it with peace.

The survey also triggers the discussion with EU Commissioner Günther Oettinger and the other politicians. The dialogue with the audience focuses on the relevance of the European Community: What does the European idea mean for young people? And which European public policy demands do they wish to promote?

Günther Oettinger emphasizes: "European policy is a matter for young people. The yardstick is not just Hamburg, but Europe. Openness and cooperation can enable us to jointly foster values such as freedom of expression, human rights and tolerance and speak with a single voice."

Johanna, student at Heinrich-Hertz-Schule, welcomes the opportunity to engage in dialogue with EU politician Oettinger and the regional representatives of the political party youth wings: "I really like the open dialogue with the politicians. It is great for us to have been given the opportunity to raise our questions to decision-makers such as Günther Oettinger."

Thomas Ellerbeck, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of TUI Foundation, points out: "You will only understand if you ask questions. Projects such as Understanding Europe offer young people the opportunity to voice their questions and criticism. It is important for EU Commissioner Oettinger and the representatives of the regional youth wings to get involved in dialogue with young people. It is worthwhile to promote Europe, politics and democracy and invest a lot of time. Inspiring people for Europe and openly discussing the challenges facing our continent with young people is a joint task for politicians, civil society and the economy."

Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe has carried out the *Understanding Europe* project at Hamburg schools in cooperation with TUI Foundation since 2015. The goal is to encourage young Europeans to form their own individual opinions on European public policy issues and show them opportunities for participation. More than 3,000 young people have already experienced Europe in concrete terms based on that approach and have developed their own ideas for participation.



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