

Dear Europeers

thank you very much for your beautiful presence here today.

And a warm greeting and thank you to the delegations of the National Youth Agencies.

I have decided to write you a letter and to read it to you, because an Annual Meeting is a moment destined to remain in time and in memories. And this is my photograph of the beginning of the event. I leave it with you.

At the beginning of the pandemic, and for many months after the first partial reopenings, all European countries effectively closed their borders, introducing limits both for those who wanted to leave their own country and for those who wanted to enter another state.

Suddenly, our generation jumped back to a time it had no memory of, to before Schengen. In those days, many of us realised that it was not easy to travel between European countries before, that borders are a limitation. Fortunately, with some sacrifice, this period is already over. We are back to being able to travel without any particular difficulty, we are back to "thinking European", as we are used to doing. We have resumed studying, working, travelling and, many, falling in love abroad with a new taste, having also experienced the narrowness of lockdown.

Historically, to build a citizenship and a community, in our and many other countries, military service was an instrument to spread the language and build a common identity. The European Union has chosen culture and mobility, a gentle revolution that has led us to overcome barriers and build a network of skills, experiences and opportunities of which we are not just users, but nodes, crossroads.

We, who are children of this choice, feel not the duty but the desire and the need almost to involve our peers in this network, in this exchange.

Our way of being and feeling European citizens, inclusive and supportive, is to be an example, to bring our experience to those who do not know how many and how important are the possibilities of growth offered by European programmes.

The EuroPeers Annual Network Meeting that brought us together today is a great moment of participation that goes precisely in this direction: being together, being a network to learn and improve to participate and involve.

When I think about the Europeers Network, I am reminded of the narrow minority who still criticise the European Union, pointing out that it was born and perceived at the beginning as a common market rather than a community. I often respond to them with a short story by Italo Calvino from *Invisible Cities*. In the text, there is Marco Polo talking about a city in which at every solstice and equinox, the merchants of seven nations meet to exchange goods in a great market:

"But not only to sell and buy do you come to Euphemia, but also because at night by the fires all around the market, sitting on sacks or barrels or lying

on piles of carpets, at every word one says - such as 'wolf', 'sister', 'hidden treasure', 'battle', 'scabies', 'lovers' - the others each tell their own story of wolves, sisters, treasures, scabies, lovers, battles. And you know that on the long journey ahead of you, when, in order to stay awake from the rocking of the camel or the junk, you have to rethink all your memories one by one, your wolf will have become another wolf, your sister a different sister, your battle another battle, on the way back from Euphemia, the city where memories are exchanged at every solstice and every equinox.”

This for me is Europe today, this for me is the Network Europeers, this for me is being a Europeer: being part of a community that over the years has exchanged memories, has begun to imagine a common future thanks to the intersecting lives of its citizens.

To be a community of persons with the enthusiasm of feeling part of the generation of young Europeans in solidarity, to be active in their own communities to contribute to territorial development, to the growth of our peers, to social change.

The large network of Europeers that we are building and enriching, thanks to the richness and beauty of your presence, has precisely the objective of connecting your experiences and skills with the communities, in order to promote paths of social change.

Your role as ambassadors of mobility is precious and very important to inspire other young people to live the experience of European programmes. All of you, with your stories, your looks, your experiences, are witnesses of what Europe represents today: a house of opportunity for the new generations. For this reason, I sincerely thank you for your commitment and for the enthusiasm with which, every day and step by step, you unite your personal story with that of so many young people in the world.

Go on Europeers!