

MILLENNIAL DIALOGUE: Launch in Norway

**Norwegian Labour Party's
International Seminar
Oslo 6th November 2015**

Speech by **Dr. Ernst STETTER**
Secretary General of FEPS

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Intervention at 5pm

Dear friends,

It is a pleasure to be here with you today to discuss such important issues of our time and the challenges that the European project is facing amongst such renowned panelists.

Not least important for today's debate is the issue of a somewhat worn-out story about the younger generations. It features disenchanted, detached and dis-engaged young people, who have turned their back on the political system. People are saying, they *ignore* political appeals, they *distance* themselves from political campaigns and they *fail* to appear at the ballot boxes. However, their absence within the framework of institutionalised political conversation makes them a target of political prejudices.

At FEPS we have launched a global initiative called the Millennial Dialogue that seeks to shed some light to this growing phenomena of youth withdrawal. It is crucial that we as progressives take a further step to understand today's youth, as they are a very good indicator of what the future will look like and how progressives will be perceived by this generation.

In addition and most importantly, we should also enable ourselves to analyze what are the real challenges for the upcoming years to re-connect with this generation and what are the possible solutions that would bring progressives out of this malaise.

I am firmly convinced that the Millennial Dialogue project is a steady step in this direction – this is a project that aims to give voice to today's youth, to extract what inspires them and include their demands in the progressive's programmatic priorities!

The project was designed to serve a "3Ps rule" – being **positive, participatory and progressive**.

- It is to be **"positive"** because it is to change the terms on the current debate. There has been enough of complaining, blaming and shaming of young people for the fact that they do not attend the polling stations or for the fact that they do not subscribe to the political organisations. The aim is to listen, to learn and to change.
- It is to be **"participatory"** because it is to give the floor to the representatives of the youth. There has been enough of building stereotypes, alongside which the younger generation look homogenous in terms of appearance and individualistic, if not egoistic in terms of their attitudes. This is a grave mistake to think that one can see them, their dreams and their challenges as one uniformed cluster. The ambition of "Millennials Dialogue" is not about providing a "one model fits all manual", but about presenting the detailed self-portrait of this

age group in the richness of their diversity. The aim therefore is to ask the youth to express themselves, to extract what inspires them and to include their demands.

- It is to be **“progressive”** because it is to support the social democratic family in acquiring a new connection with the younger generation. There has been enough complaining that the youth does not make a link between the progressive initiatives, such as the Youth Guarantee and the political parties within the progressive family. It has been noted that to the contrary, the appeal of the centre left programme is not strong enough to compete with the one of the radical and protest parties that attract the younger voters these days. The ambition of the “Millennials Dialogue” is not about regretting the shift, but about enabling the younger generation to state what they expect social democracy’s mission to be about. The aim therefore is to frame the agenda jointly, to make a feasible plea and set the new criteria of the delivery by the centre left.

Before presenting to you the European trends and some of the very interesting results from Norway I believe it is important to explain where we are, what has happened so far and our ambitious goals for 2016 and beyond.

Where we are

Until September 2015 we have gathered 10 country-specific reports with a number of indications on what the younger generation is expecting towards politics and political systems.

What has happened so far

The project has been enthusiastically welcome and recognised as an innovative one, attracting even more partners within the EU and beyond – which allowed it to cover the majority of the European States and indeed *go global*.

Our goals

The discussion and enthusiasm with this project is growing and we will continue with our analysis throughout the globe up to 2016 with our flagship conference Call to Europe and beyond. Here we want to bring forward new and solid policy proposals that entail the potential to shape the development of ‘Millennial friendly’ party strategies and campaigns, capable to re-empower progressive politics amongst the younger generations.

We want Millennials to be politically engaged for the 2019 European elections!

Dear friends,

Now to the interesting part – what is the Millennial data telling us in terms of European trends and more specifically Norway’s results?

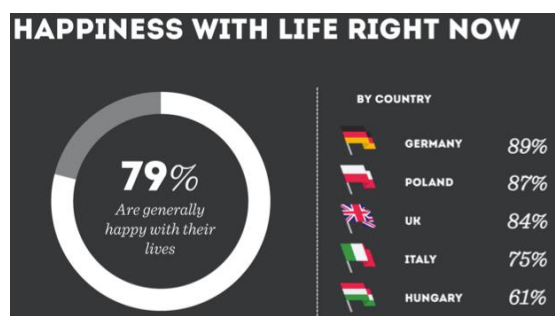
Firstly, **Millennials are not interested in politics in its current format, however they are politically aware and would be ready to vote.**



This is consistent amongst additional geographies that we have studied and therefore, **the conclusion arriving from these is that Millennials should not be painted as *politically disengaged*.** This group is clearly expressing readiness to vote. Where they are different is in their approach as a generation is that they do not think that established politics is a vehicle to change the reality – they rather point at economy or digital evolution as the factors causing either progress or regress.

Secondly, **Millennials do not find inspiration in contemporary mainstream politics, however they are optimistic and happy with many things in their lives, and they are confident to seek changes.**

The Millennial Generation has been spoken about broadly as the age group with a gloomy perspective of life due to the economic crisis and rising youth unemployment rates throughout Europe. Our survey points in that sense towards a different, quite unorthodox direction. From within the data, it seems that the younger generation under the current circumstances consider themselves as generally *happy*. With an optimistic **European average at 79%**, 89% of young Germans, 87% of young Polish, 84% of young British, 75% of young Italians and 61% of the young Hungarians claim to be happy! For **young Norwegians the percentages were also high at 86%**.



The conclusion arriving from these is, that Millennials should not be painted as *angry and*

disappointed. This group finds itself in general optimistic about their future and they seek and believe in possibilities for improvement – but they do not think that the mainstream, traditional political formula that had served their parents accommodates their aspirations and hopes for a change.

Therefore, how can progressives reignite their appeal to young people?

A secure indication would be to look at the issues that matter for Millennials.

I found particularly interesting the following statements of two young Norwegians:

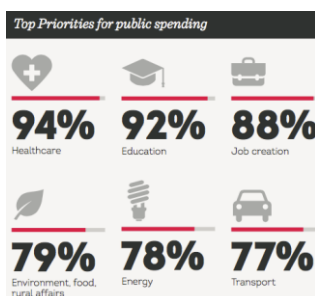
“The biggest problem in the political picture today, in my opinion, is the refugee crisis. Millions of people are fleeing from war and are in need of aid, it is our responsibility, in a country with an abundance of resources, to help those who have lost everything. It hurts to see all the hate and fear that pours out of some people here in Norway”

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“What I think the politicians should focus on is making more effort with the environment so we don’t destroy the environment more than it already is. After all we have just one planet, and it’s not so easy to find a new one.”

So Millennials don’t think politics is focused on their direct expectations, but they have clearly defined priorities they would like to see taken care of. This is particularly interesting when interpreted under the top priorities for **public spending**.

Job creation and dealing with poverty were considerably higher up the list of priorities in Italy, Poland and Hungary and the European average for public spending on healthcare was 89%, education 87% and job creation 84%. The same applies to Norway in terms of spending priorities:



Norway’s top priorities for public spending

This is a direct message from Millennials to politicians and it is clear that there is a call to review public spending priorities and putting healthcare in a broad sense (from life choices to prevention of sicknesses and healthcare system). It is also essential to attend the demand of the Millennials to offer life opportunities and choices alongside with the possibility to reconcile all of them (including jobs) with the family and social life that they find exceedingly relevant.

There are many other interesting findings which I invite you to explore at our dedicated website or at the FEPS stand. You also have the opportunity to take part and answer the questionnaire that was distributed to you – we want to hear your views on how progressives can create an innovative political project that would appeal to the hearts of young people!

In Norway one has to bring forward the excellent results from our movement. The Labour party scored the highest percentage of recognition in terms of understanding young people as well as in nearly all qualities Norwegian Millennials value in a political party such as honesty, having the right ideas to improve life in Norway and good response in a crisis.

There is therefore reason for optimism and one should not disregard that Social Democracy has a record of being a force that can deliver on empowerment, prosperity and progress for all. It is time for the progressives to come up with a refreshed narrative **to restore the link on the bases of which the young voters would see the progressive parties and their governance as a source of reassurance, reason for optimism and hopefulness about the future!**

I would like to conclude with 4 core questions towards our movement:

1. How to prove **that progressives understand the approach of the Millennials**, while responding to them with a feasible programme that will subordinate economy to a political rule and will make politics remain at the service of the society?
2. How to create **an innovative political project that would appeal to young people's idealistic belief that another world is possible**, while making it encompass the answers to both the challenges that they face and the aspirations that they have? Millennials can and should be seen as part of the solution to the paralysis that the traditional politics finds itself in.
3. How to **re-establish the link between politics, political culture and culture?** Millennials would engage in the partisan life that is attractive, while organisationally enabling creativity, diverse forms of self expression and political socialisation.

4. How to **renew the movement so that it presents itself as a real, serious alternative and not a part of a cartel system of the mainstream political consensus?** Even more than a programme, the Millennials would like to be able to rely on the politicians – and hence see a leader that they could entrust their hopes with.

If we work on the basis of such a positive, progressive and participatory debate I am convinced that today's youth will feel empowered to frame a progressive Millennial agenda jointly, to make a feasible plea and set the new criteria of delivery by the centre-left.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Read the [Millennial Dialogue Study on Norway](#)