

Believing in Europe

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Sometime at the end of February, you're sitting in your small room in your shared flat, and you feel empty.

You've just watched the news as you do from time to time.

Every now and then, when you want to know if anything good has happened today.

But today is another day on which the world seems dull and heavy.

It's the anniversary of the Hanau murders, the government is quarrelling, Navalny has died.

And so it goes on and on.

All you really want to do is rest,

You'd rather be somewhere in the sun by the sparkling blue sea,

in Italy, Albania or maybe Spain?

You know that you're not the only one who has those thoughts.

That makes it less awful and at the same time much worse.

To be paralysed by the speed and ferocity with which the next crisis comes crashing onto the shore, wave after wave.

To be saddened by the normality of hatred between people.

To be ashamed of all the privileges one grew up with when many others didn't.

To feel anger towards aggressively grumpy macho autocrats who, as old as they are, are knocking on death's door but still believe the world revolves around them.

You know all this, and so do many others of your generation.

Then you think: Isn't it also a bit of a privilege to feel such world-weariness,

Because what we are talking about here with a wagging finger, in measured moralizing,

Is not the reality of our lives.

Other people ask every day: What can I afford to eat today, how can I finance my daughter's school, and will we still manage to live here next year, or will it be so hot that the harvest fails again, the animals founder and we die of thirst?

They don't have the time, energy, or capacity to deal with our world-weariness,

Because what we talk about is their reality.

And far too often we just talk about them, not with them.

You're thinking all this in your small room in your shared flat at the end of February

And it makes no sense.
Confusing thoughts in chaotic times.
Nevertheless, you start writing these lines.
Because you want to believe, hope, dream... of Europe?

Let's believe in Europe,
In the 12 stars on sky blue
And many white doves,
In Justitia, the just woman.
Then maybe someday the world will seem less grey.
And where you rest your gentle wings,
All people will be brothers and sisters.

But what is this Europe we are supposed to believe in?
Well, Europe is, for example, when borscht, paella, and manti come together,
And we cry to Stromae's "Papaoutai",
When we take our ID to hitchhike to Bucharest,
And camp in Finland under the northern lights.

- Freedom

Europe is where anyone can kiss anyone,
Where "my body, my choice" holds true
And I can wear anything weird, shrill, strong,
I don't have to let a man tell me what to do.

- Equality

Europe is also where Ukrainians find refuge,
And people and cultures unite,
Where hundreds of thousands take to the streets against Putin,
And stand up for democracy and peace.

- Solidarity

Unfortunately, Europe is also

Where the woman with the highest office in the EU doesn't get a chair.

-Dear Mr Erdogan, give her a seat.

Or next meeting you will be the one watching from the street.

Where violence at external borders seems to simply happen

And refugees who are stranded on Greek islands between holidays and barbed wire,

At the gates of Europe,

Hope for a better life or have long since given up hope.

Where democratic principles are called into question,

And fascism once again finds a fertile breeding ground.

They always say: "History does not repeat itself."

But 1933 feels closer than ever,

Indeed, sometimes Europe seems like a well-intentioned dystopia,

A pale black and white copy of a perfect world

In which the Ode to Joy melody

As the last harmonious fantasy of sound

Gradually fades away.

Yes, Europe doesn't mean to always be of one mind

And still I won't break your leg for it.

Europe is not always love, peace, and harmony

and Friede, Freude, Eierkuchen.

No endless exchange of kisses à la française between Macron and von der Leyen.

Yet that's exactly what it's about: seeking compromises,

Even after 90 hours of summit meetings

In stuffy, sterile conference rooms full of smelly black patent leather shoes.

About bearing up when things get difficult,

About fighting when everything appears hopeless.

Accepting differences and being able to shake hands in the end.

Saying "Merci" and "Prego", asking "Cómo estás."

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And many white doves,
In Justitia, the just woman.
Then maybe someday the world will seem less grey.
And where you rest your gentle wings,
All people will be brothers and sisters.

Because it is not about the completion or perfection of Europe.
Europe is a process, dynamic:
Sometimes growing, sometimes stagnating,
Sometimes pulsating with force, then flabby again,
Sometimes louder, sometimes quieter.
Good things take time, and change does not happen overnight,
From one day to the next.

But as long as you feel the gentle wings,
See the 12 stars on sky blue and many white doves,
Everything seems less grey.
As long as there is a fire of hope within you,
Sprinkle sparks of confidence and rejoice in this crazy world.
It starts in the mind with freedom, equality, and solidarity.
Because if you believe in Europe,
In the 12 stars on sky blue
And many white doves,
In Justitia the just woman,
Then, after all, you also believe in this terribly magnificent world.