



**SPEECH by Diversity Europe Group President Séamus Boland**  
**Diversity Europe Group webinar on 'Age of Inequality: Youth in times of COVID-19'**  
30 June 2021

Dear speakers, dear colleagues & friends,

On behalf of all Members of the Diversity Europe Group, I would like to thank you for participating in this webinar on the topic: '**Age of Inequality: Youth in times of COVID-19**'.

The webinar will explore two inter-related questions: **How has the COVID-19 crisis affected the mental health of young people in Europe and what has been the impact on their employability?**

I would also like to inform you that this meeting has been registered as an **official event** on the **online platform for the Conference on the Future of Europe**, to which and we will also upload the conclusions of the webinar.

Our very competent new Member, **Katrina Leitane**, will **moderate** this event. Katrina represents the National Youth Council of Latvia and she will guide you through the different aspects of this debate. I would like to thank both Katrina and Neza Repansek, our new Croat Member, for having taken up the challenge of moderating and speaking at this event! It is much appreciated, particularly as with COVID-19 you have not even had the opportunity to be physically present at the Committee!

Dear colleagues and friends, allow me to take a step back from the specific topic of today's webinar and to look at the **wider subject** of the **role and participation of youth in our societies**. Ultimately, this is at the heart of today's topic.

Over two thousand years ago, Aristotle said that "*Youth is easily deceived because it is quick to hope*". However, today, political scientists find that Millennials are the **least likely** to be swayed by political promises. They are also less likely than previous generations to **trust** others. In an article that I recently read, this was referred to as the '**tyranny of low expectations**'. I fear that for some young people, 'dreaming' of a better future, something that used to be their prerogative, is disappearing from their daily lives.

This brings to mind a comment by a speaker at an event we organised in March this year on the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs. The speaker, coming from the youth sector, lamented that **youth involvement in EU policy-making** is often and I quote: "**tokenistic**".

This contradicts sharply with the ambitious role of youth in society, as expressed by global leaders such as **Kofi Annan**. The former SG of the UN stated that "*Young people should be at the **forefront** of global change and innovation... (and that) **a society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline.***"

So what can we do together? I believe that we have got to rapidly move young people **away from a narrative of distrust and towards a narrative of hope and engagement**. In my opinion, civil society organisations and specifically, youth organisations are central to achieving this. And I salute the work

of the many organisations that we will have the pleasure of listening to today. Ultimately, we must allow **youth to claim their space**. We must **empower** them to **set the agenda** and to be involved in **meaningful legislative processes or debates**, such as the Conference on the Future of Europe. But to do this, we need grassroots youth organisations to be effectively involved and we need funding and training on youth advocacy. And we need you to make **alliances** among yourselves, at the **local, regional, national and European levels**.

I hope that this event can contribute in some small way, to **building those alliances** and the **confidence in the future of Europe** that so many of us aspire to. Thank you for your attention.