



Press release: Democracy under pressure

No Free Belarus Action this year, but.

For eight consecutive years the Young European Federalists (JEF Europe) have organised the pan-European "Free Belarus Action" in numerous cities across Europe on the 18th of March. The purpose of the action has been to condemn the last dictatorship in Europe and to show our support for the people of Belarus. In 2013, 100 cities all over the world and a variety of organisations joined our call for more freedom in Belarus. This is still important, but this year it is different, and we simply can not focus solely on Belarus.

Democracy is under pressure all over Europe. The threat to democracy is not only coming from dictators in post-Soviet states, but from various groups and situations all over the continent. In Belarus the situation has been grave for years, in Ukraine violence erupted at the end of November last year, and all over Europe democracy is threatened by the rise of nationalism and extremist parties.

Democracy under pressure

The Young European Federalists highlight three key issues on the verge of the European Parliament elections this year. First, as recent events in Ukraine have reminded us, democracy can never be taken for granted. The rise of nationalism and extremist parties is best countered by openly challenging the ideas of fundamentalists on the European stage.

Second, democratic development inside and outside of the European Union concerns us all. When faced with the consequences of a dissolving democracy we as Europeans must act. The dangers of unchecked governments should teach us the lesson that we need to safeguard democracy.

Third, we therefore need to fight the trend of falling election turn-out, and treat it as a threat to democracy and the democratic legitimacy of the European institutions. The European Parliament needs to be more accountable for the policies and actions of the Union.

"We are painfully reminded of the importance of democracy when we look to the riots in the streets of Kiev or the lack of fundamental rights of the people of Belarus, when we see nationalist and extremist parties popping up like mushrooms all over Europe, or even when we are faced with the lack of accountability of the European institutions", says Espen Berg-Larsen, Board Member of JEF Europe.

The need to speak up - and vote

On the 17th - 19th of March, all over Europe, the Young European Federalists will symbolically silence statues to draw attention to the fact that still so many Europeans are denied their right to speak.

"It is absolutely unacceptable for us as Europeans to stand by and quietly accept the status-quo. We need to speak up as Europeans to safeguard the democratic rights we all seem to take for granted", says Pauline Gessant, President of JEF Europe.

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