

DAAD COMPETITION 2012

Europe – What next?
Your Advice to
Angela and David



Brian Shaw

“A suggestion for Europe and her young people”

Sehr geehrte Frau Merkel,

This is Rudolph Becker of the German Consulate in Edinburgh. I am writing to offer what advice I can in relation to Europe and what we should do to improve the situation of this great union. You are no doubt aware of the significant issues facing our continent at the moment- rising unemployment, huge debts, banks living on the edge, several countries with virtually no financial outlook and, perhaps worst of all, a lack of hope among the citizens of Europe. However, that does not mean we should lose hope or give up. You have never given up on Germany in the past, and now you must maintain that same attitude with Europe.

The Young People of Europe are perhaps the most important asset we have. They represent the future. From a university student in Bucharest, to an apprentice carpenter in Copenhagen, to a new Gymnasium entrant in Berlin, to the kids at the local skate-park here in Edinburgh, they are all equally important, because they will be taking over the helm of this great continent in the future. However, the leaders of Europe, including you, David Cameron and Jose Manuel Barroso, are so far ignoring this great asset. We are letting our young people fall down a slippery slope of doom and gloom. 50% youth unemployment in Spain; huge cuts to university funding in the United Kingdom, which puts the education of thousands of young people at risk; and widespread emigration from the countries of Europe. Why are the young people leaving? It's not because they dislike Europe or European ideals, but because they have no other choice. Other parts of the world provide better opportunities, and this sad fact tears families and friends apart.

I'm not going to write a whole letter to you complaining about the state of Europe without including some possible solutions. There is great hope, Frau Merkel. I have an unbreakable hope in Europe. All we need now is positive action. You, and all other

European leaders, need to address the problems associated with young people in Europe. You need to inspire the youth of

this continent with positivity, resilience and togetherness, the very same attributes that pulled Europe back from the ruins of two World Wars which crippled the entire continent. This also brings up the discussion of European values. What does it mean to be “European”, now that we're in a union of 27 countries? For me, and for most people in Europe, it's about unity. It's about togetherness and collaboration. This togetherness has made the rest of the World envious about what we have achieved in Europe.

A student at the University of Edinburgh, regardless of how underprivileged he may be, can spend a year studying or working in a different European country, with invaluable financial support from the EU. A young person who is struggling to find work in her home country, can travel freely and borderlessly between EU member states to work and live. A school group from Ireland can organise a cultural exchange with a school in Spain or Germany, no problem at all. Europe has made all this possible for young people. What we need are more programmes and initiatives like this; more ideas which embrace and strengthen the European values of unity and togetherness.

Frau Bundeskanzlerin, what I suggest to you is an EU-wide, extensive work experience and placement programme for young people. Authority figures around Europe need to work with, not against, industry to provide more placements and employment for the jobless citizens of our union. We all know the endless cycle of needing 3-5 years experience to get a job, but needing a job to get said experience. Experience is the key. Experience in another country is an invaluable extra. Incentives to employers could be provided by financial compensation and moral and professional support. We have the expertise in Europe to organise such a programme so what's stopping us? How will it help? Well, crucially, it will relight the fire of hope, which is burning very lowly around Europe. Young people will see that opportunities

still exist in Europe and they will not lose faith in it. Frau Merkel, you must make it clear to the next generation of Europeans that there is hope, that they have every reason to be confident. A programme like this would be particularly useful for graduates, many of whom simply cannot find work after their degrees, leading to a “brain drain” of quality people out of Europe. They study at high quality European institutions and then take their skills and expertise to America and Asia. This isn't necessary and

shouldn't be happening. Providing an opportunity for these graduates to get work experience is key to solving this great problem. It will take a lot of work. A lot of communicating with companies, universities and organisations around Europe. However, as the quote from the book of Galatians, now commonly-used idiom, goes: As you sow, so shall you reap. Europe is not spiralling out of control, and we don't need to redefine the fundamental European values of collaboration and togetherness. What we do need is hope. Barroso once said “There is no Europe without freedom and solidarity”, and he's right. It's time to have some solidarity with our young people. It's time to stand up and let them know we are here for them; to let them know they have a future here and to let the World know we are stronger than ever when we work together.

If nothing else, please take my advice and send out a message of hope to the young people of Europe. The importance of doing this cannot be overstated. Don't forget that it was thanks to the work of Schuman, Spaak, De Gasperi and Monnet that the whole European idea became a reality. That work has now materialised in a Nobel Peace Prize for the EU, a fantastic achievement. The challenge is now with our generation to continue this great work, not to remain static. Let's continue to build and secure a brighter future for the young people of Europe.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

Ihr Rudolph Becker