

#WhatsTheMatterEurope

“It’s time to listen!” - An IDM initiative to rekindle the European idea

This year we celebrate 25 years since the EU accession of Austria, but why should we care about this anniversary? Being convinced that during the transnational Corona crisis Europe needs more mutual understanding and passionate advocacy than ever before, the IDM team launched the initiative “What’s the matter, Europe?” and presents a collection of personal stories on Europe.

June 12, 2020, Vienna | During May and June 2020, the IDM team asked for video statements from people who would like to share their personal keepsakes that symbolize Europe. Along with the slogan „What’s the matter, Europe?“, participants from varying fields shared their stories and wishes for Europe’s future, including the Austrian president Alexander Van der Bellen, EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn and MEP Claudia Gamon (NEOS). The videos can be found on Social Media under the Hashtag #WhatsTheMatterEurope and on the IDM YouTube channel. “We observed that valuing the European Union has a lot to do with personal experiences. The memories from travels, an exchange study or friends and family members who live abroad can inspire us to believe in the advantages of a common Europe”, says Sebastian Schäffer, Managing Director of IDM. “We were curious about how people in our network feel about Europe on a very personal level”, explains Mr. Schäffer why together with his team he kicked off a thought process on Europe’s future. “The idea was not only to commemorate the EU accession, but also to rekindle the European idea, which is now shaken by another severe crisis.”

Making Europe visible

In his contribution to the initiative, **Alexander Van der Bellen**, President of Austria, chose the small flag of the EU from his office desk in the Hofburg. For him, the flag is a sign for European unity through diversity. “**If the European Union did not exist, we would have to invent it**”, says Mr. Van der Bellen in his inspiring message. **Ulrike Guérot**, Professor at the Danube-University Krems, tackled **the need of European citizenship**, an idea so powerful, that it could unite Europe again and surmount divisions created by nation states. **Johannes Hahn**, European Commissioner for Budget and Administration, presented the miniature of a bridge he opened in Londonderry/Derry during his time as Commissioner for Regional Policy connecting a Protestant and a Catholic part of the country. “**Europe means, to overcome what separates us and to connect people**”, says Mr. Hahn in his statement.



Time to listen and discuss

“Europe cannot be improved by politicians only. We all must make up our minds and find out what matters to us. This initiative is a first step to an urgently needed discussion”, says Mr. Schäffer. “European integration does not stop with the accession”, adds Erhard Busek, chairman of IDM. “The European Union challenges us with a broad variety of narratives and perspectives. In politics, this means that we need to discuss all interests and find a compromise. In daily life, it is our task to listen to the stories of our neighbors and to understand their points of view.” The message of the Think Tank’s initiative is clear: “Europe does not need a new story; we just need to listen well to the existing ones.”

The stories are to be continued

“The initiative is not finished by collecting statements till 12th of June, which was by the way, the day of Austria’s referendum to the EU accession in 1994”, says Mr. Schäffer. “It takes every one of us to transform this enthusiasm into dialogue, cooperation and understanding to secure what maybe was taken too much for granted: a Union of peace, stability, prosperity and justice.” The IDM team will use the questions and wishes raised by participants as inspiration for the further work in the region.

Contributions to #WhatsTheMatterEurope can be found on [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#).

About the Institute for Danube Region and Central Europe

The Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM) is a non-profit research institution registered as an association and predominantly financed by public funds. Founded in 1953, the Vienna-based institute carries out fundamental research and mediation work with a regional focus on Central, East and South East Europe.

We are a think tank and a platform for actors and stakeholders from academia, politics, economy, administration, culture, media and civil society. In addition to research, our activities focus on knowledge transfer and science communication through events, publications and educational programs.

For further questions, please contact

Mag. Sebastian Schäffer, MA

Tel.: (+43) 1 319 72 58 – 20

s.schaeffer@idm.at

www.idm.at

Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn): IDMVVienna