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NextGen Europe Should Embrace 360° Resilience

Young leaders from Generation Z can Make Europe Great Again

by Nicholas Dungan

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Europe faces many threats: American aggrandisement, Chinese competition, Russian revanchism.

Europe's young leaders currently emerging from Generation Z — those born roughly between 1995 and 2010, aged between 16 and 30 today — have the qualities that can Make Europe Great Again.

To do that, they should embrace the ambition of 360° resilience, for themselves and for their Europe.

NextGen European leaders are toughened by the times

Generation Z shows more toughness and potential for resilience than earlier generations. Their values are shaped by their being less spoilt, more socially responsible, having to work harder for success and being tech-savvy and tech-wary.

Most of today's established leaders — executives, politicians, academics — are in their fifties and sixties. They are from Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980. GenX grew up in an era of peace, came of age after the Berlin Wall fell and pursued their careers in the illusory Fukuyama-esque world of the end of history and the final victory of democracy and capitalism. For them, globalisation, a worldwide economy and no political fractures constituted the new normal. No wonder they are considered the most stressed generation today: all their comfortable assumptions were proved wrong. Yet they are in charge now — and often badly mismatched for the responsibility of shaping the future in a 21st century they can hardly recognise.

Millennials — Generation Y, born between 1980 and 1995, today in their thirties and forties — had it less easy. They endured 9/11 as students, saw fruitless "forever wars" conducted by the United States and its NATO allies, then entered into an economy of corrupt and broken capitalism epitomised by the financial crisis of 2008-2009. But they were the Facebook generation, too, narcissistic and tell-all, not digital natives, brought up like their forebears in an analogue world and ill equipped for the new and existential challenges never faced by humanity before: climate change, the dominance of unbridled tech, massive competition from the former 'developing countries', once-prosperous societies transformed by the loss of comfortable bourgeois certainties and privileges.

GenZ has had it tougher still but GenZ is tougher as a result. Members of Generation Z — born between 1995 and 2010 more or less — crave, ,indeed insist upon, a sense of purpose in their life and in their work. They recognise the reality of climate change, biodiversity loss and the need to incorporate sustainability into their daily habits. They don't love cars and are more responsible about airplane travel.

GenZ was born into a fully globalised world where they as individuals found themselves in competition with everyone from everywhere. Family status or being the product of the "industrialised world" were no guarantee of a job, a lifestyle or the ability to build wealth. They endure a relentless, ruthless culture of competition and they adapt to it. They don't display the

sense of entitlement of earlier generations. They are far more anchored in hard-bitten day-to-day realism.

GenZ are digital natives and have acquired the caution towards technology that their predecessors failed to show. The higher up the young-leadership scale, the less you will find NextGen Europe clinging to their phones, obsessing over messages or even, to the frustration of some, paying much attention to their emails.

GenZ judge themselves on discipline and achievement rather than being satiated by pleasure and comfort. As reported in the Financial Times, "The definition of luxury has changed. ... Young people don't want white tablecloths. ... They want a sexy gym, with incredible equipment." They would rather order a green tea than get wasted and sloppy on booze. They understand that holistic wellness includes cultivating their health, fitness, nutrition, sleep, appearance and mindfulness.

In a word, the young leaders of NextGen Europe are a generation of sophisticated Stoics. That's why they are better suited to Make Europe Great Again. That's why they can and should embrace 360° resilience for Europe.

Resilience means more than simple stamina

"Resilience" has become a buzzword, a keyword, a shortcut for expressing strength and success. But resilience is not a state, not a condition, not a status. It involves vastly more than just the ability to bounce back. True resilience is a complex, multi-functional, multi-faceted, dynamic and interdisciplinary process. Resilience requires the ability to anticipate, absorb and recover from disruption. It requires the unceasing ability to adapt to change. Even more, resilience means the capacity to accept risk, measure threats and achieve foresight.

Resilience depends on psychological balance. It incorporates and depends on mental fortitude, emotional control, self-confidence, self-awareness and self-discipline. These are NextGen virtues.

A fundamental tenet of resilience is the commitment to sacrifice now for increased security in the future — something contemporary European leaders have conspicuously failed to do. Resilience allows an individual or a society to take ownership of their future — to assume responsibility today for our own tomorrow. This is what NextGen Europe can do.

Resilience depends on adaptability and flexibility, not stability or stasis — the ability to navigate ever-changing complex systems, not just stationary complicated systems. To attain resilience necessitates a ruthless and rigorous sense of reality: what's happening? what does it mean? what depends on what? what fits with what? Absorbing shocks or disruption demands robustness; recovering from shocks or disruption is a test of rapidity. NextGen Europe young leaders share this sense of reality.

Resilience contains a philosophical side. The determination to achieve resilience is rooted in the components of classical Stoicism: wisdom, courage, temperance and a sense of justice — characteristics more those of GenZ than their forebears.

In action, resilience is a manifestation of human agency, the ability of humans to control themselves and their environment. Stoicism teaches that it is not what happens to us but how we react to what happens to us that shapes reality. We must constantly re-appraise ourselves and the situations we face, adapt our thinking to changing circumstances. Stoicism incorporates this need for mindfulness. And NextGen Europe young leaders display this Stoicism.

360º resilience involves everyone

360º resilience is whole-of society comprehensive security. It is individual, personal, cultural. 360º resilience is local, societal, national and geostrategic. 360º resilience tests the ability of individual people, communities and interdependent systems to act together to anticipate, absorb, adapt to and recover from disruptions.

The best example and to date the finest model of whole-of-society comprehensive security is the system developed by the Finns in the 1960s to forestall and withstand aggression from the Soviet Union. The Finnish model has the distinction of being the first society-wide resilience model in recorded history to be developed in a democracy and adopted voluntarily, not imposed by the force and fear of some autocrat exploiting the population.

The Finnish model also demonstrates an important and too-often neglected component of resilience: deterrence. Effective and evident deterrence is a fundamental element of resilience, the discouragement of an adversary who considers that your ability to suffer or thwart his attacks reduces his chances of success and raises his costs of failure too fully for him to want to come after you. Threats and risks don't just happen: they very often arise from human agency and they can be deterred, discouraged, limited and even prevented by our human agency.

It is no surprise that Finland and Sweden were the first to show the highest states of awareness and preparedness in Europe. Both are vulnerable to Russian aggression. Until the current war in Ukraine, neither was a member of NATO. Each had to fend for itself. Much of Europe's weak resilience today stems from an over-reliance on and an over-confidence of American support which has been seriously and perhaps lastingly eroded by the current US administration. The rest of Europe can — and is trying to — learn the lessons of the Finnish and Swedish examples.

France, Germany and the Netherlands, among others, have issued booklets to their citizens on how to prepare for war or catastrophe. Again, Sweden was one of the first to do so and has just issued a new booklet

for businesses to increase their readiness, robustness and resilience. The recently installed Chief of the Defence Staff of the UK has renewed the call found in the British Strategic Defence Review for whole-of-society comprehensive security.

Another European vulnerability stems from the changes in how society functions compared to the immediate post-war years. Today the vast majority of critical services in society are provided by the private sector, by companies under capitalistic ownership and driven by financial management and profitability. There is scant evidence that the military establishment or governments have internalised the shocking truth that when an attack comes, society's access to vital services may simply not be met, yet the private sector is key to delivering those services.

Europe is woefully under-prepared to achieve whole-of-society comprehensive security as things stand today. Its warmaking capacity is severely compromised; its infrastructure is badly out of date and ill adapted to military transport. Few members of European societies have any direct military exposure. Most members of European societies have no experience of destruction or deprivation on a vast scale such as is only too obvious in Ukraine, though far from vivid enough in the rest of Europe.

Young people, NextGen Europe, who feel most European, are among the most sensitive to what is happening to other Europeans, especially in Ukraine. They will also be the ones to be called up for service and sacrifice when conscription is reinstated. They deserve, and should demand, their say in how Europe plans for its military defence: they will be the ones to do the fighting. If they want to and if they can, they will be the ones who will Make Europe Great Again.

NextGen European young leaders can Make Europe Great Again

What are the keys to success if NextGen European leaders want to take ownership of their future and Make Europe Great Again?

1. Unite

Involve everybody. "Unity in Diversity" is the motto of the European Union. Including everybody means more than just every nationality and every culture, it also requires every age group, every social status, every vocation, every person, every community. The young leaders of NextGen Europe can't be leaders if they don't have followers. They must pull together in families, schools, shops, workplaces, and use their digital savviness to bring people together, to overcome separations and differences and get everyone involved to Make Europe Great Again.

2. Shout

Make your voices heard. Insist on being listened to. The older generations who are running companies and countries today are shamed by the idea that they do not understand young people and petrified that young people will

turn against them. There has never been so much effort to include young voices. Make the message clear day in and day out to everyone who should listen that you intend that European society and European values should be fit for success in the future.

3. Demand excellence

Tolerance is a fundamental European value, but not tolerance of mediocrity, laziness, indolence and complacency, doing nothing for the community or society as a whole, taking advantage of everyone else and exploiting government generosity for one's own personal, passive, egotistical easiness and superficial satisfaction. Too many Europeans of previous generations expect to be protected, to have the right to be happy without hardship and to be guaranteed a life of ease without effort. NextGen European young leaders harbour no such illusions. Excellence and achievement come at a cost, the cost of caring enough to try, risking enough to fail, determination enough to succeed.

4. Show your stuff

Display thought leadership. There can be no-success in taking ownership of Europe's future unless NextGen European young leaders demand the cultivation of intelligence, insight, debate, intellect, strategy, analysis alongside the personal virtues of endeavour and performance.

5. Promote European values

NextGen European leaders should not be shy in asserting that Europe represents humanism, the Enlightenment, justice, the rule of law and the rights of man and the citizen. This is not to denigrate other cultures and societies, but NextGen European young leaders can still be committed to ensuring that Europe stands firm on its values in the face of American aggrandisement, Chinese competition and Russian revanchism.

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