Young Enough to Make a Change?

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3 Main Points

– What was the Strategic Youth Congress, and what happened there? – Youth is not an excuse for passivity, but a reason for engagement- The SYC was a success for youth to be strategically involved in foreign-policy making

About the Author

Jonatan von Moltke has a BSc in Philosophy, Politics and Economics and an MA in International Affairs from the Hertie School. Academically, his

focus lied on EU foreign policy, international law, and crisis management. Professionally, he has worked on stabilisation in conflict regions for the Stabilisation Platform and interned at the German Federal Foreign Office's Permanent Representation in New York. He also co-founded the futurEU Club on EU Affairs at the Hertie School, and wrote his MA thesis interviewing EU diplomats on CFSP majority voting. He aims to foster a sustainable, just, and peaceful multilateral future by contributing to evidence- and consultation-based policy.

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The SYC takes shape

The first Strategic Youth Congress (SYC) organized by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik (DGAP) set out to give younger voices a real place in Germany's foreign policy debate. Hosted in the historical premises of the Italian Embassy in Berlin, the event brought together students, young professionals, and early-career experts who share the conviction that their generation should not just inherit today's world order but help shape it. The day was filled with panels, working sessions, and exchanges that looked at Germany's and Europe's role in an unsettled geopolitical environment and tested how youth perspectives might shape action programs.

The tone was set at the very beginning by a remark from the German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Reem Alabali-Radovan, who opened the congress with a piece of her own experience in politics: "We are not too young, but young enough." That phrase captured the spirit of the gathering, an insistence that youth is not a handicap but an asset, a source of urgency and creativity in dealing with momentous crises that will define the coming decades.

Panels and Workshops

The plenary discussions turned quickly to the consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine, which has upended Europe's security order and forced Germany to rethink long-standing assumptions. Panellists from the Bun-

deswehr, the Defence Tech Industry, Ernst & Young, and the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) weighed Germany's response to the Zeitenwende and how far it had actually gone in practice. The tone was alarming, urging the youth and population more broadly to think more pragmatically about the dangers of a potential Russian attack of a NATO country. A later panel with the parliamentarian Anna Lührmann (B90/Greens), DGAP researcher Katja Muñoz and a Microsoft representative discussed the interrelated dangers of misinformation and AI as potentials for domestic destabilisation also in the context of hybrid warfare. The last panel then turned to a systematic critique of the role of youth representation and youth interests in the political arena.

While these plenary panel debates created a shared frame, the SYC hosted a variety of workshops which gave participants the chance to move from reflection to concrete action. One session, on how companies manage geopolitical risks, stood out for the way it combined corporate and advisory perspectives. Presenters from EY and Volkswagen described how geopolitical analysis has become integral to corporate planning, as supply chains and investments are increasingly exposed to global shocks. The group tested out a specific risk-analysis tool in a hypothetical scenario, mapping outcomes along a spectrum to visualize trade-offs and uncertainties. The exercise made clear how much weight these assessments now carry in boardrooms and how far business has moved from treating geopolitics as background noise.

A second workshop on the future of German development cooperation revealed both opportunities and dilemmas. With USAID scaling back in parts of the world, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) has become the largest Western development actor alongside China. This prominence has raised the question of whether Germany should expand its role further and whether the EU should pool its weight more effectively. Participants also heard from GIZ representatives about a trend of "cherry-picking," where partner countries selectively choose with whom to cooperate. This complicates efforts to build long-term relationships, even as Germany enjoys a strong reputation.

The workshops were designed not to end in loose brainstorming but to produce action programs drafted by DGAP Youth members. These were prepared with the intention of presenting them to senior foreign policy figures during DGAP's seventieth-anniversary celebration the following day. That prospect gave the work a sense of urgency, knowing the proposals would not remain internal but enter the wider debate.

Youth as an empowering condition

Beyond these thematic sessions, the congress returned repeatedly to the role of young people themselves. In the final panel, the message was clear: younger generations should not be relegated to the margins but occupy a more visible place in political life. Looking back, both the ambition of the themes and the spirit in which they were tackled was striking. There was no

sense of resignation in the face of complex problems. Rather, participants challenged each other directly and pushed themselves to turn critique into proposals. The line from the minister at the outset, that we are "young enough," seemed to hang over the entire congress as a reminder that youth is not an excuse for passivity but a reason to engage.

As the event closed, it was clear this was only a beginning. The congress cannot by itself close the gap between youth and policy elites, but it created connections, built confidence, and set a precedent for further conferences of youth engaged in shaping Germany's and Europe's foreign policy futures. The congress showed that Germany's younger generation is not waiting to be invited into foreign policy conversations. They are already here, with their own questions, priorities, and proposals.

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