

EU Today Podcast 5 Transcript

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[Intro music in theme of piano playing Ode to Joy]

Katie Lindner: Hello, and welcome to EU Today, a podcast from the Center for European studies, a Jean Monnet Center of Excellence at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Thank you to the Erasmus+ program of the European Commission, the EU Delegation to the U.S., and the U.S. Department of Education for supporting our center and its programs. On this podcast, we sit down with scholars and policy leaders to discuss pressing issues facing the EU. We hope you enjoy it.

Brett Harris: Hello, my name is Brett Harris, and I am a Contemporary European Studies major at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In this episode, I will be interviewing Professor Urban Strandberg from the University of Gothenburg about his involvement with the International Youth Think Tank, and his experiences as an educator in the transatlantic context. Dr. Strandberg is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg. He serves as the Director for Master Programmes' Double Degree Tracks, and coordinates Gothenburg's partnership with UNC's TransAtlantic Master's program. In addition, Dr. Strandberg is the Manager for the International Youth Think Tank Project.

[Ode to Joy fades back in and plays for appx. 4 measures]

Brett Harris: Hello, I'm Brett Harris and today I'm joined by Urban Strandberg. And so you are the director for Master Programmes' Double Degree Tracks at the University of Gothenburg and you work with programs like the TransAtlantic Master's program at Chapel Hill, as well as with on-campus think tanks like Brännpunkt Europa and European Horizons at UNC. How does working in this transatlantic context shape your research and other projects that you're interested in?

Dr. Urban Strandberg: Well, I've been working with up studies programs in Gothenburg for the last 10 years now, and we have established collaborative partners overseas, in China, for instance, in Shanghai, and also in Europe, with Konstanz in Germany. And this is the part of our double-degree collaboration, which is about spending one out of two years in the other country to have the best of two academic departments and have a double degree so that you have a better chance to get yourself a job in the second country. And Chapel Hill and the TransAtlantic Master's program is our latest collaborator, [which] we are extremely happy to have, not only because this is a renowned, very dedicated Center, but also, since the transatlantic link, as we call it — the relationship between Europe and North America — is more contested and important than ever. So we are learning quite much. Chapel Hill is a very old university and renowned in European Studies. So we are learning much, and we are thinking that this will contribute to the bettering of the world for the future.

Brett Harris: Definitely, great. So thinking about that, you also are a manager for the International Youth Think Tank. Could you just share a little bit about how that project came to be? And maybe how it's been shaped by your interactions with other, either campus think tanks or international efforts?

Dr. Strandberg: Well, having worked with very dedicated students with both Bachelor's students and Master's students, and Doctoral students for that matter, for quite some time now, with people from different parts of the world and discovered the great energy, devotion, the will of change among young people as themselves, has eventually led me up to start this International Youth Think Tank, together with my best friend, former EU Commissioner, Cecilia Malmström. And this think tank, the sole purpose is to mobilize young people and try to promote the democracy movement to start in Europe. Hopefully, in the long run, in the world because we think that young people are much more — naturally from their own experiences, but also from their ideals — much more strongly believe in an open society, in a democratic society. So if we could mobilize the force, that devotion, the capacity and the future that the, I mean the promising future, from in that group, we would possibly help democracy and open society to thrive. And what an international youth think tank is trying to do is a mashup of two existing organizations that we already have seen in history are efficient. So the think tank: that is about gathering people who have a firm belief in the common value. In our case, an open society, a democratic society and let those people gather knowledge and form opinions about that value. That is one established organization which we know works. International conferences, on the other hand, are also something that we have seen in history. If you summon young people to conferences and let them talk about important

things, they will come up with results. So what we're doing is a mashup, you could say, between the think tank organization and international youth conference that makes an International Youth Think Tank. I think it's more important than ever because the suspiciousness that comes now from corona. I mean suspiciousness of other people in your country or between countries, and the borders are shutting down, and the rule of law is seriously challenged by parliaments making decisions of giving cabinets the possibility of taking decisions by decrees and thereby bypassing parliamentary democracy. These are threatening times, and I think it's even more important now — our ambition to mobilize the young people to stand up for an open society which is open, both in terms of a strong belief of openness in ideas, about thinking about different worlds that exists today, but also openness in terms of traveling, in terms of trusting other people in other countries. So, and I think Europeans, which I have met in so many numbers coming to Gothenburg to do the Master's program. And I always witness how remarkably a person will develop after meeting with other peers, and other students from other countries studying things, how they change their values, how they expand on the views of the world and that is the experiences of Europeans of young ages of today. They have been living in Europe, which has been more devoid of borders—physically, legally, culturally—than probably any time in history. And that has made a difference for them. And I think they couldn't believe how you could distrust people. They couldn't believe how it could be a situation where borders still or would be erected once more. So this is, to summarize what I have been doing when I'm studying and in research, teaching European Studies as a teacher, and seeing what happens now in current Europe and the world, this all boils down to the International Youth Think Tank project. We need to mobilize the young people to stand up for an open, democratic society.

Brett Harris: Definitely, that's really profound. So, a couple things you mentioned are this idea of a very "European" identity without borders among this younger generation. How do you think that changes how they perceive either institutions like the EU or even the transatlantic relationship, more broadly, especially as you mentioned, how it is sort of contested, in our current context?

Dr. Strandberg: Sometimes I have gotten the question from colleagues who are not engaged in an area study like European Studies like myself saying, "Why are we having a partner in the US. Why is that so important when you study Europe?" Well, I'm saying to them, Europe and the European integration process is very much historically mirroring the relationship across the Atlantic. Take the example of the Second World War: the Marshall funds came to Europe to build up Europe economically. NATO, the military presence was so important we have culturally

long, long, long historical bonds between Europe and the US. So, and young people once again they travel — now it's hard to travel back and forth — but they are always traveling both I mean physically and by help of different media. And they know the importance of understanding how a continent like Europe relates to and is influenced by another very influential continent, like North America. So I think that this thing about relatedness across the Atlantic will be ever more important in the minds of young Europeans after the corona crisis.

Brett Harris: Definitely. Thank you. So, we're about out of time, but are there any other comments or anecdotes— anything you'd like to share?

Dr. Strandberg: I will just want to say that what I think makes our think tank initiative quite unique is that we treat our young people that we invite to youth conferences and that we invite to stay engaged as youth fellows— we treat them as if they were full-blown adults. I mean, we asked them to tackle real world problems and we had great demands on them as if they were our colleagues or friends and they appreciate that. They stepped up in an amazingly strong way. I think that makes the difference because so many adults like me around the world are summoning young people and asking them to do things that they, the young people, think are funny, but we summon the young people to help us to solve the problems of the world, and that is the trick.

Brett Harris: This is all very exciting. And I wish there were more projects like this, on both sides of the Atlantic and everywhere. Thank you so much for sharing with us today and for sharing your expertise with me and our listeners!

[Ode to joy plays in the background]

Katie Lindner: Please note that any opinions expressed in the EU Today podcast are solely those of our guests and our hosts, and not of the UNC Center for European studies, which takes no institutional positions. Be sure to tune in for more episodes, and subscribe to *EU Today* wherever you listen to podcasts.

[Ode to Joy fades out]

Co-funded by the
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