

Young Voices of the oïp

The young voices of the oïp are current interns who shared their perspectives on pressing international issues, sources of hope for the future, and recommendations for world leaders.



Question: Where do you see opportunity for change in the current unstable times?

"We are not in a transition – we are in a rupture." Mark Carney's remark in Davos captures a shift in which the global order is being reshaped under pressure. The crises confronting this order question existing rules and alliances. Yet, Europe's opportunity lies in transforming short-term crisis responses into

long-term strategic capacity under conditions of uncertainty. One opportunity is European security. The war in Ukraine has accelerated debates on strategic autonomy, joint defence, and the EU's geopolitical role. However, the more realistic opening is not immediate autonomy, but practical agency: Europe can become better at coordinating fast, targeted responses when larger institutions are blocked. Minilateral formats, such as the "coalition of the willing" supporting Ukraine, show how smaller groups of states can act more quickly where consensus is difficult. Their value lies not in replacing NATO or the EU, but in testing "complementary forms" of flexible cooperation that could later strengthen broader European security governance.

A second opportunity emerges from energy insecurity. The Strait of Hormuz crisis is a long-overdue wake-up call: Europe's dependence on fossil fuels also means dependence on geopolitical chokepoints. While diversification is necessary in the short term, the long-term opportunity lies in accelerating renewable energy, grids, storage and green technologies. This would reduce strategic vulnerabilities while also contributing to climate change mitigation. The challenge is to turn crisis-driven responses into durable capacity without allowing flexibility to become fragmentation.

Karla Heltriegel, Germany, BA International Relations and International Organizations (IRIO) (University of Groningen)



Question: How do we build pathways forward in a world facing overlapping crises?

Over halfway through the 2020s, a global pandemic, climate disasters, and ongoing armed conflicts have left us waking up to one crisis after another. This persistent state of "poly-crisis" has desensitized many to suffering and tempted

us to lose faith in the values that have underpinned global stability for decades. In this climate of exhaustion, the impulse to retreat into isolationism is growing, leading to a dangerous erosion of the principles that once guided us.

This retreat is starkly evident in the flawed argument that distant democracies can remain safe from authoritarian

expansion. We see this when leaders treat the Russian invasion of Ukraine or Chinese threats to Taiwan as “not our war” due to geographical distance. However, we must confront a stark reality: first they erase democracy in Hong Kong, then they violently invade Ukraine; if we keep on ignoring these threats, who will defend us when our allies are gone? The liberal values of freedom and democracy are not regional luxuries, but a global infrastructure that protects us all. Abandoning them invites a return to a world governed by violence rather than justice.

To move forward, we must recognize that authoritarian expansionism does not stop at distant borders. Their erosive tactics, specifically hybrid threats, are refined in active conflict zones before being exported elsewhere, as current destabilization in Europe vividly demonstrates. Democracies must overcome this delusional sense of safety and collectively reject authoritarian expansion. Restabilizing the world requires a reaffirmed commitment to the international liberal order to guide us through these crises and restore future prosperity.

Shih-Cheng Ho, Taiwan, MA Programme Political Science (University of Vienna)

opposition to the intimidation of these public watchdogs. Crucial will now be how rigorously the member states implement this directive into national law.

Another complementary path through and out of times of crisis lies at the societal level, as legal protection alone is insufficient. Populist rhetoric and social media increasingly shift the boundaries of acceptable discourse, fueling linguistic degradation, the erosion of taboos and disparagement. Yet, especially in times of crisis, it becomes clear how deeply democratic societies rely on the capacity for dialogue, mutual respect and social solidarity. “Building pathways forward” may therefore begin not with grand solutions, but with small, conscious choices: fostering dialogue instead of division and strengthening civil society against growing polarization.

Emilia Webhofer, Austria, MA Business Law (WU Vienna)

Question: Where do you see opportunity for change in the current unstable times?



Instability is disorienting, but it can also be the condition under which the most durable transformations become possible. The crises converging today, like democratic backsliding, geopolitical fragmentation, climate disruption, and economic precarity, are not merely threats; they are forcing a reassessment of the rules, alliances, and economic models that defined the last three decades and are now visibly failing.

One opportunity might lie in the reorganisation of global power itself. The current moment of institutional tension and instability in the US is distressing, but middle powers and regional actors, such as the EU, the African Union, ASEAN, could make room for themselves and finally assert their greater capacity for action. While this more equitable order would initially be marked by institutional friction and heightened geopolitical risk, including the increasingly open use of force by stronger states against weaker neighbors, as seen in Russia's war in Ukraine, it may ultimately prove more resilient and representative than the hierarchies it is replacing. A second opportunity is generational. The civic energy visible in recent protest movements – from Serbia (2025) and Bangladesh (2024) to Turkey (2025) – signals that democratic commitment has not eroded. Young people are not disengaged; they are building new political vocabularies and forms of solidarity that institutions have not yet caught up to.

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Times of multiple crises threaten democracies not only from the outside, but also from within, as insecurity erodes trust in institutions and fuels polarization. Developments underscore the importance of rule-of-law elements such as the separation

of powers and democratically legitimized institutions. Yet, democratic resilience depends not only on institutions, but also on a resilient civil society and social cohesion. Both of which require the effective protection of fundamental rights, especially freedom of expression, press and assembly.

To this end, legislators must enact laws that safeguard democracy. A significant international step is the EU's Anti-SLAPP Directive (strategic lawsuit against public participation), which aims to protect journalists, activists and scientists from abusive, intimidating lawsuits. Key mechanisms include early dismissals and cost-shifting to plaintiffs. Although legal scholars criticize its limited scope, the EU is thus sending an important message in

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Finally, this moment presents an opening for structural modernization. Rising energy insecurity makes investment in renewables economically and strategically rational, not merely an environmental imperative. AI, meanwhile, can support this transition by augmenting human capabilities and reshaping education toward the adaptable skills a rapidly changing world demands.

Unstable times create a unique moment to rethink priorities: the challenge is not to restore what was, but to build forward with greater honesty about what the old order failed to deliver.

Giuditta Fiori, Italy, International MA in Security, Intelligence, and Strategic Studies (IMSIS) (University of Glasgow)



Question: Where do you see opportunity for change in the current unstable times?

The contemporary youth of western democracies on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean are inheriting societies from their predecessors who are significantly more socially atomized and economically stratified than seen before in recent memory. In the absence of radical course correction, the ramifications of this civilizational trajectory will likely define the rest of their lives long after their parents and grandparents are gone. I believe the best opportunity for change today is for those of us who are politically active to build a metaphorical "bigger tent" in which most people fit and whose foundations rest on universal issues – specifically affordability and livability above all else. Growing up, many of my peers struggled with groceries and rent while politics seemed to focus on everything else but that. This is a real disconnect felt by the people left behind in wealthy democracies. Our societies promise opportunity and equality but sometimes the economic landscape can be bereft of both. Even European social democracies with generous welfare states have historically failed to make the necessary accommodations to absorb the negative impact of macroeconomic shifts like deindustrialization and automation. It's important to recognize the opportunity in this failure – the potential for political mobilization around progressive causes. Issues of bread and butter have the greatest potential for universal appeal because they are felt ubiquitously. Yet, the current landscape of politics in the western world is characterized by intense tribal divisions that typically fall along identitarian fault lines – this is counter-productive

to generating real impact for the working person. A world where most people find themselves engaged in grievance-based struggles is a world where people are already divided and conquered by those with self-serving interests.

Jens Wirth Salander, Sweden/USA, MSc. War Studies (Swedish Defense University)



Question: How do we build pathways forward in a world facing overlapping crises?

In an age of overlapping crises, political discourse seems to become louder, faster, and more emotionally charged. The loudest reaction is often mistaken for the strongest leadership. Yet, restraint can matter just as much when it comes to finding solutions that actually last.

Urgency increasingly dominates public debate: from armed conflicts to climate emergencies, political actors are pushed to respond immediately, often driven by acute emotional pressure rather than long-term perspective. This does not just shape the tone; it also narrows what can be said and imagined. Complex realities get flattened into rigid moral positions and the space for negotiation quietly shrinks.

Pathways forward emerge when political responses are not driven by urgency alone, but by the space to think beyond immediate friction. They also depend on whether public attention rewards escalation, or whether there is still space for more careful, measured forms of engagement. In practice, restraint in politics means resisting the impulse to turn every crisis into a definitive, reactive stance. Lasting solutions rarely come out of environments dominated by public outrage. More often, they depend on the ability to keep dialogue going even when agreement feels distant, ensuring that political space remains open even in moments of intense pressure.

Restraint should not be confused with passivity. In moments of instability, it creates room for negotiation and longer-term thinking. Without it, even basic cooperation becomes harder. In a world defined by constant uncertainty, the ability to communicate crises without making them worse may be one of the most important political capacities we have.

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