

“Fear for the worst or hope for the best?” By Sofia Papadopoulou

It is an undoubted truth that the last few months have been intense and it is a time we will never forget. The COVID-19 pandemic is far from over and besides being a global pandemic and a public health crisis, it has also severely affected the economy and the financial markets. Significant economic impact has already occurred across Europe due to reduced productivity, business closures, trade disruption and decimation of the tourism industry.

My country, Greece, has suffered an unparalleled economic disaster for most of the last decade. An economic crisis, that has hit younger Greeks hard. As a result, Greek young adults, like myself, faced a stark choice. Leave the country or face a lifetime of unemployment. Unemployment in Greece hit record high.

Starting August 2018, the Greek government has tried to show that austerity is over, by providing additional funds to the lower and middle class and by reviving domestic and foreign investment. Even though, the so-called recovery has not reached most regular people, the young generation of my nation started seeing little hope of actual recovery in the future. The youth started seeing a future for themselves in their country that had prior given up on. But, in a painful twist for a country that had only begun to emerge from its financial hardship, coronavirus started spreading around the globe.

To the surprise of many, Greece so far has avoided the worst scenario, keeping the number of the Corona cases extremely low, and emerging as an example of how a vulnerable country can contain the virus if it moves quickly. But even a successful response against the virus will not stop the fallout. Greece is forecast to face one of the heaviest economic blows in Europe, since it is a country heavily dependent on tourism. Scientists have made it clear that the coronavirus will be with us and second lockdowns are highly possible, as long as we do not have a vaccine against it.

As we are approaching the debate on the EU Budget, as a young Greek citizen in times of coronavirus, I call on European leaders to start seeing the human behind the numbers. Young people from my Mediterranean country along with the other young European citizens, deserve all possible opportunities to develop our full potential to shape the future of the EU and to thrive in. We often face an extremely difficult start in the labour market, and this has been emphasized by the coronavirus pandemic. It is really hard to sustain our work - if we are fortunate to have one- in the middle of this pandemic. Member States need to prioritise investments that can help young people in the short and medium term. We deserve opportunities and we have to be in the center of the recovery plan.

COVID-19 can be that “wake-up” call for European leaders to intensify cooperation and a stark reminder that if they do not adopt resolutions for the debts of the “poorest” European countries, it would be hypocritical to keep talking about European solidarity. On this debate they have to make sure the voices of the young people of every European country are heard.

The right decisions from the European leaders, can offer hope that we can make it through this crisis and anything else we will face.

Sofia Papadopoulou

The author is a bachelor in Theology and master in Ecumenical Theology, both in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, currently she is a teacher in a kindergarten school, Berlin, Germany.