

birthday cake candles

(Original)

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I wasn't ready to die. Some say peace requires people to lay their lives down for it. *"I'm not like this. My 15-year-old body would not change anything—it would just be stepped on and forgotten"*, I thought trembling in the car, passing the protesting people on the streets of my hometown, Minsk. 2020—defrauded elections and thousands of broken lives caused my rose-coloured glasses of child-like idealism to shutter inwardly—that was the first time I got to experience the bleeding truth of what peace is NOT. I couldn't understand the mere possibility of violence as a phenomenon, but now I stopped denying that others do. With the regime covering my mouth and my heart bursting, feeling paltry as ever but resolutely unwilling to endure injustice, I started my battle.

What could I do? Find the others that shared my viewpoint and ambitions. Ambiguity of *international youth* as a stakeholder in the world-game evaporates once you truly meet it. For me, the European Scholarship Program in Tbilisi, Georgia, volunteering and activism across three countries and online were the paths to becoming a part of it—learning what matters and how I can contribute to the communal goals of improving lives. It was among people like me where I learned the value of consciousness, teamwork, honesty, dedication, power of care and desire to help others.

All of us, striving to improve our communities through actions, have faced the devastation of the current order: as I'm embracing my friends from different places, clutching their hearts to mine, warming them up, I feel my body resonating with their pain. Some (me included) can't return home and be accepted, empowered and safe there; we lost (or weren't ever given) our human rights, whether we belonged to a fragile societal group or to the majority; faced devastation from intra- and interstate military conflicts — and all of it created a never-ending blur hurting inside us, but also pushing us to each other and forward. Robbed of the right and opportunity to live in a peaceful world, we keep trying to

create it.

In school I learnt to verbalise the whole complexity of the word “peace” in one of its definitions—*the absence of war*. How sophisticated does the concept have to be, to get the world to agree on the three single words, continuing to debate the rest? Still, I believe with all its complexity there is nothing impossible for humankind to handle within our societies. Yet, everything comes to a standstill the moment privileged and powerful people decide they can determine fates: having studied dozens of global and local conflicts of different nature, I believe power dynamics is the core plague preventing the world from being *more* peaceful.

I might be idealistic, but I wholeheartedly believe that the best we can do is create the closest state to when people’s individual choices don’t limit the freedoms of others. Everyone deserves a life with fulfilled human rights and opportunities. I know it is impossible to be done completely, but I’m just 18, I want to stay alive and human, and I want other people to, so I believe we can find a way. Every action, or its absence, done by humankind starts with the mindset and values of the individuals. Through peer-to-peer education, exchange of thoughts, ideas and experiences among the youth, we can approach the worldwide community that evolves and improves for everyone equitably. Focusing on integrating young people in NGOs and other entities of civic society, creating conferences and platforms for them to collaborate with each other (e.g. MUNs), with the governments (e.g. European Youth Forum), to represent the ideas and opinions of youth on regional & international levels, and further empowering us to take action—is the necessary mainland supporting the world towards peace.

Blowing candles on my birthday cakes, I’ve always wished for *world peace*: mentally reiterating the wish and keeping quiet, or it won’t come true. I used to *hope* for peace, thinking it’s the only right thing. I don’t hope anymore, I *believe*. Believe, because I know: me and thousands, millions of others work for it together. Absolute peace is never fully possible, but I want to feel it closer, and I know WE'll make it.