

TRANSCRIPT WITH SPEAKER IDENTIFICATION

Note: The wording of the previous verbatim version has been retained. Only speaker labels and paragraph breaks were added. Very short interjections that could not be assigned with certainty from the raw transcript are marked as “Speaker unclear.”

Participants:

- Moderator (Mr. Troost)
- Carmen Stadelhofer
- Heike Brzuske
- Sofia Tkachuk
- Georgi
- Valeria

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Welcome to Plattform on Radio free FM. It is four o'clock, and we are back in our usual time slot from 4 to 5 p.m. As you know, Plattform is on from Monday to Thursday with exciting topics and interesting guests. That is also the case today, and the studio is particularly full: there is not only a moderator, but also five guests sitting opposite me. The reason we are discussing today's topic is closely connected with the Danube Festival, which is still taking place here in Ulm. In connection with Europe and links to the countries bordering the Danube, we have an exciting topic: connections not only between neighbouring countries, but also between people—older people and young people. Today we will be talking about the intergenerational network Danube-Networkers for Europe, a project run by ILEU. We will explain in a moment what ILEU is, because here in the studio with me is the head and co-founder of ILEU, Carmen Stadelhofer. Hello, Ms. Stadelhofer.

Carmen Stadelhofer:

Yes, hello, Mr. Troost.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Once again, it is wonderful to have you here, and once again you have brought along some interesting guests from the project I just mentioned. It is a support project focusing on education and communication, and we will talk about it in a moment. Heike Brzuske is also here—not yet one of the senior participants herself, actually. Heike, a very warm welcome.

Heike Brzuske:

Hello, and thank you very much for the invitation.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

And, as I already mentioned, there is a connection between senior citizens and young people—in this case, young people from Ukraine. We have three guests: two girls and one boy from Ukraine. Valeria is here with us. Valeria, hello and welcome. And Georgi is here as well. Hello and welcome.

Georgi:

Hello. Thank you very much.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

And Sofia is also here. Sofia, a very warm welcome. It is lovely that you are here and found your way to our studio. You are on the radio for the first time, I was told, and I believe it is also your first time in Ulm. Everyone will be able to say a little more about that in a moment. I suggest we do what we always do and begin with a brief round of introductions. Ms. Stadelhofer can start, because she already knows how our introductions work—she has done this many times before. Just a few words about yourself, and then we will move on to Heike and the young people, in our usual format.

Carmen Stadelhofer:

Yes, gladly. First of all, because some listeners may not know this, ILEU stands for the Institute for Virtual and Face-to-Face Learning in Adult Education. Since 2008, one of our main areas of focus has been the Danube countries. Our aim is to bring people from the Danube countries—and now also from neighbouring countries beyond the region—together through projects and personal encounters, so that they can get to know one another better, prejudices can perhaps be reduced, and people can realise that we have something in common: this wonderful Europe.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm.

Carmen Stadelhofer:

We are currently holding a four-day meeting, our tenth one, which makes us very proud. Tomorrow, we will focus on a theme that accompanies us throughout these days: “Democracy Needs All of Us.” People of many different ages will attend this symposium. The youngest participant is 15, and I believe the oldest is 85. As you already suggested, it is truly about intergenerational encounters and learning. We will be happy to explain why this is so in a moment.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. So this is a large project that has been running for quite some time, hasn't it? It has already been under way for a while.

Carmen Stadelhofer:

This particular project is actually a relatively new pilot project, and it is running very successfully. But it is entirely in line with what we do. We do not want merely to talk about Europe. We want to exchange ideas with one another and do something together. That is exactly what we are doing in this project.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. Very nice. Heike, let us turn to you. Could you tell us a little about yourself?

Heike Brzuske:

Yes. My name is Heike Brzuske, and I learned about this wonderful project a year ago through a completely chance encounter with Carmen. A year later, I now wear two hats, or look at it through two pairs of glasses, so to speak. On the one hand, I am a senior partner in an online partnership with a schoolgirl from the same school in Odesa as our guests. On the other hand, I also work for ILEU and have helped with the project over the past year. It has enriched me enormously, because you can see how Europe can grow together. This is true both in the partnership itself—my student partner is called Julia—and behind the scenes, where you can see how actively people work together for democracy in Europe.

Yesterday, after one year, we had an extraordinary meeting with 45 participants: school students, teachers, senior women and men from many different Danube countries, including Ukraine, Moldova and Romania, as well as senior participants not only from Ulm but also from other German federal states. It was an incredibly wonderful encounter. It is important to add that, in this project, people initially only see one another online. Yesterday, many met in person for the first time, and that was very emotional. Valeria will explain later that she met her partner in person for the first time yesterday. Watching that, and seeing what the project has produced after a year, was wonderful.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

So until now, the relationship existed online, through communication by computer, mobile phone or similar digital media, and now it has become a real, in-person form of collaboration.

Carmen Stadelhofer:

That is all correct, but I would remove the word “only.” As I have often explained, we work online because the distances are enormous and we would otherwise have to travel very far simply to meet. Digital media help us enormously to get to know one another, and we work intensively on substantive topics. Of course, it is also wonderful to meet here in person now.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. Yes, the human dimension is naturally different when you can actually see the person opposite you—the partner you have been dealing with—rather than seeing them solely through digital media.

Carmen Stadelhofer:

That is true, Mr. Troost, but people really underestimate the quality of the relationships that can develop online when it is done properly. You can tell us about that yourselves, because you have had a partner since last September. I thought it was wonderful that you met yesterday, but I was even more deeply moved by what had developed between you, what you had discussed, and how a senior partner might say “my partner” with such a sense of personal connection. Something genuine develops, and it can also happen online. That is an important message I would like to convey. Many older people have reservations about new media, and we want to show that they can be a treasure when used properly.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Good. Now let us first get to know our young guests from Ukraine. Sofia, perhaps you can tell us a little about yourself and introduce yourself briefly.

Sofia Tkachuk:

Yes. My name is Sofia Tkachuk, I am 17 years old, and I come from Ukraine—more precisely, from the beautiful city of Odesa. I have been involved in music for 12 years. I love singing, including jazz, pop and folk music. I also do sports in my free time. I enjoy swimming and playing tennis. I am also interested in computer science and the IT sector, and in the future I would like to work in this field.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. So you are very versatile and have many different interests.

Sofia Tkachuk:

Yes, I am a very versatile person. I am always curious, I enjoy learning new things, and I always strive to learn as much as possible.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Yes. Are you still at school at the age of 17, or have you already finished?

Sofia Tkachuk:

I finished school this year. We have eleven school years, and this year I also completed my school-leaving examinations. I have now finished school and need to go to university. I have to apply to a university, and I would like to study in the field of IT.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. Very nice. You can study that in Odesa, then? Ah yes, very good. So you receive a qualification comparable to the German Abitur after the eleventh year. Here, students often continue until the thirteenth year, or until the twelfth year in the eight-year Gymnasium system. In Ukraine, you finish after eleven years of school.

Sofia Tkachuk:

Exactly. In the future, I would also like to come to Germany to study here, or perhaps to live here.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

All right. Very nice. Georgi, let us turn to you.

Georgi:

My name is Georgi. I am 16 years old and come from Odesa in Ukraine. [clears throat] I am working intensively on learning German. For me, German is not merely a school subject or a hobby; it is an investment in my future. I would like to speak the language fluently so that I can open up new professional and personal opportunities. My goal is also to study at a university in a German-speaking country later on. I am convinced that studying there would give me both an excellent academic education and valuable international experience.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

What are your hobbies? Do you also enjoy singing like Sofia, or are there other things you like to do?

Georgi:

In my free time, I am interested in music, films, computer games, [unclear], and literature. I also exercise regularly because it helps me balance everyday life and stay focused. I particularly enjoy learning new things and taking on challenges that help me develop.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. Very nice. Valeria, let us turn to you.

Valeria:

My name is Valeria, I am 15 years old, and I am passionate about playing the piano. I also love singing. Music has been with me for many years and is an important part of my life. I also love languages because they open up new worlds for me. I am currently learning English and German. In addition, I take part in a tandem partnership, and I am very happy to have this opportunity.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. I can see that all of you have already learned German extremely well. It is genuinely impressive. Did you learn it as part of the project, or had you already learned some German at school? Are your German skills mainly from school, or have they also developed through ILEU and your contact with your senior partners?

Sofia Tkachuk:

At our school, we have been learning German since the first grade, and we are very pleased to have this opportunity, because it means we can later study in German-speaking countries. We are also very grateful for the opportunity ILEU has given us, because it allows us to improve our language skills and get to know very kind people. We can broaden our horizons and continually learn something new. We take part in the tandem partnership and can improve our language skills through it. But it is not only about language skills; genuine support and friendship have also grown out of it.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. There are three of you here from Ukraine. Have more young people from Ukraine travelled with you to the Danube Festival, or are you here as a group of three?

Sofia Tkachuk:

There are more people from Ukraine—perhaps ten or eleven.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. So the three of you are a small delegation within a larger group.

Carmen Stadelhofer:

One group comes from Odesa, and two participants come from Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi, which is Ulm's solidarity partner city. Some participants also come from Kyiv and others from Kharkiv. In addition, we have school students from Romania, this time from Cluj and Braşov. We have also invited teachers who are interested in the project. Some already support it—your teacher, for example, who does a wonderful job—while others would like to establish something similar in the future. They are here to see, from both perspectives, that of the students and that of the senior partners, how such a project can work.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Did the three of you already know one another? In other words, did Sofia know that Georgi and Valeria were also participating in the ILEU partnership project, or are you meeting one another for the first time? Had you already been in contact with one another?

Sofia Tkachuk:

We attend the same school, so we already knew one another. I have already finished school, while Valeria and Georgi will enter the eleventh grade and finish school afterward. In the eleventh grade, they have to take their school-leaving examinations, and then they will also graduate.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

So the three of you already knew one another, and you also know some of the other children and young people from Odesa. But you are probably meeting the participants from Kyiv and the other cities for the first time. Or did you already know them too?

Sofia Tkachuk:

No, we met them for the first time here.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Yes, I see. So you also travelled separately: those of you from Odesa together, while the children and young people from Kyiv and from the other northern group—

Speaker unclear:

Kharkiv.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Yes, that was the other city I was trying to remember.

Speaker unclear:

Yes, Kharkiv.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

All right. So each group travelled separately, and you met here.

Heike Brzuske:

Perhaps I can add something about the project. We occasionally organise small online sessions in which everyone can meet. That means some participants had already seen one another online before. We offer these additional sessions from time to time, so you may already have seen some of the people online whom you met in person for the first time yesterday.

Georgi:

Yes, that was wonderful. I can also say that my partner was not only there yesterday, but also the day before, when I was acting. He watched everything, and we took some photos together. It was wonderful, and I was very happy.

Carmen Stadelhofer:

Yes. Georgi is speaking about his senior partner Andreas, who travelled all the way from the Münster area specifically to meet him. The same applies to Valeria: your partner was staying in the Allgäu region with his wife and came so that you could meet in person. This shows the great quality of these encounters. Sofia, you already knew your partner, but she also came yesterday and travelled from the Ulm area. Those were truly moving moments when you stood face to face. There was no awkwardness at all.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Understood. Very good. In a moment, we will talk about how you found one another, how the partnerships work, how many people are involved on your side, Heike, and how it all came about. We will also discuss whether you are in contact daily or weekly, how often you meet and how it all works. We will continue after the break. First, we will play some music: Lavin and Jones from 1994, "Wildwood Park." Then Plattform will continue, so please stay tuned.

This afternoon on Radio free FM's Plattform, we are talking about encounters within Europe between people who live in Ukraine or other European countries and people from Ulm and the surrounding area. They establish contact or enter into a partnership. In the past, we might have called it a pen-pal relationship; today, it is an online partnership. Senior partners from Ulm are in contact with young people from the Danube countries. They exchange views on different topics and communicate in a way that also supports education and language learning. Heike, you are participating here as a senior partner—is that the right term?

Heike Brzuske:

Yes, I think "senior partners," both women and men, is a good term.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

You are here today as a senior partner. How many senior partners are currently involved with ILEU altogether?

Heike Brzuske:

We began last July, and the development has been very exciting. The pilot project started in July with eight people. We then continued, and by November there were 16. Today, we have 48 participants. It has grown extremely rapidly. The project has been very well received, and a genuinely vibrant community involving different countries has already developed. Today, we have these three students from Odesa with us, but we are also working with many other cities in Ukraine, as well as Romania, Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many other people are interested in participating. I can say more about that later. The project has developed enormously, and it began with the idea of giving one hour of your time each week.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. How did you organise that? In other words, how did you and the other senior partners become involved? Did you specifically approach people who had worked in education and might be particularly well suited to communicating German language and culture? How did you proceed? Not everyone necessarily has the right instincts or experience to exchange knowledge and information with young people in a constructive way.

Heike Brzuske:

We used several mailing lists that were available through the large network, and some people were approached directly about the project. We also advertised it to a certain extent. We launched it as a voluntary commitment under the motto "one hour of your time per week." We then began receiving enquiries and asked the senior participants to complete a short personal profile. We prepared a template so that we could obtain some information about them. At the same time, the students also completed profiles. Through the schools and teachers, we knew which students were interested in an online partnership. In this way, we matched interested senior participants and students with one another.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

So you acted as intermediaries and matched people—

Heike Brzuske:

Exactly. We now have a range of profiles from both the students and the senior participants. We have to consider which people might be a good match, because we do not know them personally at first. We carefully reviewed every individual profile and tried to bring together people with shared interests. We looked at what they had written, what interested them, their hobbies and perhaps the professions of the senior participants. As you have already told me today, the matching has worked very well. We considered who was interested in sport, who was interested in IT, who perhaps

wanted to become a doctor, and who enjoyed literature. We received a great deal of information and used it to create the matches.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. Yes.

Carmen Stadelhofer:

The partnership is initially advertised for a period of four months, so participants can try it out for themselves. Sofia, however, has already been in her partnership for two years.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

So you made a suggestion, the selected partners met for the first time, and everyone decided whether it could work. Both the organising team and the young people—such as Sofia, Georgi and Valeria—could say whether they were happy with their proposed partners.

Heike Brzuske:

Exactly, but the whole process takes place online. It is important to keep mentioning that. Once the match had been made, you met for the first few times via Zoom. We provided a link, although other media can also be used, such as Teams or WhatsApp video. We offer a Zoom link because it provides a protected space, which is very important to us. Everything takes place within a safeguarded framework. The teachers and schools are also involved in the background. The partnerships are therefore well supported and organised.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Let us briefly ask each of you who your partner is. Heike, I understand that you have a partner on the student side. Perhaps you can start. I thought you had a young man—is that correct?

Heike Brzuske:

No, my partner is a 17-year-old schoolgirl. She has also just completed her school-leaving examinations, and I have been accompanying her for a year. She has become very dear to me. She has now taken a major step forward: she received a scholarship and passed her German examination at C1 level, in addition to completing school.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Oh yes, that is excellent.

Heike Brzuske:

Yes, she completed her school-leaving qualification, as Sofia did, I believe. She has now been at a university in Frankfurt an der Oder for about a week.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Oh, I see.

Heike Brzuske:

Yes.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

All right. Aha.

Heike Brzuske:

And our partnership is continuing despite that, beyond her time at school.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Very nice. So there is no fixed limit under which the partnership ends when school is over.

Carmen Stadelhofer:

No, it can certainly continue for longer. That is up to the participants themselves. If they wish, they can maintain the relationship on a friendship basis for as long as they like. Sofia is a good example of that.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. Before everyone speaks about their partner, one quick question: do all of you already have a German language certificate? We have just mentioned C1. Have you all already taken a language examination?

Sofia Tkachuk:

Because I have finished school, I have already taken an examination. It is called the DSD examination, and I passed it at C1 level, like Julia. This gives me the opportunity to study at a German-speaking university, and I think that is extremely important.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Of course. Do you two also have C1, or do you still need to take another examination because you are younger and have not yet reached the same stage of school as Sofia?

Georgi and Valeria:

We have passed the B1 examination so far. In November, we will take the C1 examination.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

C1—yes, all right. That is already very good. I have some idea of what people have to learn for those examinations, and I think you all speak excellently. You have my greatest respect. Now, of course, we would like to hear a little more about your partnerships. Sofia, who is your senior partner?

Sofia Tkachuk:

My conversation partner is called Astrid Winkle, and we talk about a great variety of topics. Because we are both interested in IT and computer science, we discuss those subjects quite often. We talk about the development of artificial intelligence and advances in technology, but we have also discussed all kinds of other things, including psychology and completely ordinary everyday topics.

Whenever I have questions, I can ask Astrid, and she gives me very good suggestions and advice. That is very important to me. I have always been interested in talking to people from another country and to someone older than I am, because it is important for me to hear a different perspective when we discuss various topics.

Astrid also helped me with my German examination. For the oral communication section, we had to prepare a presentation, and Astrid is an expert in this field. She has a great deal of experience and gave me many useful tips—for example, about the technical aspects of a presentation, what I could improve or add, and how I could improve the text. My topic was echo chambers, and we discussed it in detail so that I could understand a great deal of information. Because she is an expert in this area, she was able to teach me a lot.

What I particularly like about this tandem partnership is that I have got to know a very kind and wonderful person, and a genuine friendship has developed. That is especially important because we are living through such a difficult time. Despite all these difficulties, it means a great deal to know that I have people at my side and that this person will always support me. A true friendship has grown out of the partnership, and that is very important to me.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Wow. It is already 4:34 p.m. Before we turn to Georgi and Valeria, we will play “All Over the World.” I think it fits very well, because our conversation is also about looking out into the wider world. We will be back shortly, so please stay tuned to Plattform on Radio free FM.

We are not quite “all over the world,” but today’s Plattform is certainly very international—or, more precisely, European—with a focus on the Danube countries and the Danube Festival currently taking place in Ulm. Today, we are speaking with guests from Ukraine, as well as Heike from Ulm in her role as a coordinator at ILEU, and three young people from Odesa who are currently staying in Ulm. We are discussing the partnership project Danube-Networkers for Europe. We have already heard about Sofia’s contact with her partner. Georgi, now we would like to know who your partner is, what your exchange is like, how often you talk, and how communication with your partner works for you.

Georgi:

My partner is called Andreas, and he comes from Germany. At the beginning, I was a little uncertain. I thought the language barrier would make our conversations difficult. But after the first few meetings, I realised that communication means much more than perfect grammar. We talked about our everyday lives, our hobbies, our cultures and many other topics. Over time, we became not only tandem partners but also friends.

Our first meeting in person was wonderful. Andreas and I were both very happy that we could finally speak face to face—not just live online, but in real life.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Yes. Mm-hmm. Lovely. Valeria?

Valeria:

As I already mentioned, I have been taking part in a tandem partnership since November. My conversation partner is called Stefan, and he is 82 years old.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Eighty-two? Oh wow. [clears throat] Eighty-two years old?

Valeria:

Yes. We meet regularly online and discuss many different topics. Of course, we talk about everyday life, because I think both of us are interested in how people in another country organise their daily lives. We also often discuss history, because Stefan is currently studying history at a university, and history fascinates both of us.

In addition, we discuss topics for my German examination. For example, we spoke at length about consumerism and environmental protection. To be honest, at the beginning I was a little uncertain, like Georgi. I was concerned that the large age difference and the fact that we come from different countries might make good communication difficult. I wondered whether we would find any shared interests at all. But those doubts disappeared after our first conversation. We understand one another very well, and I have improved not only my German but also my self-confidence and my feel for the language.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. Did I understand correctly that your partner is 82? You said he is studying history. Ah—62, not 82. I thought 82 seemed unlikely if he was currently studying. Sixty-two, all right. That is still a considerable age difference. Is there any particular age requirement in the project?

Carmen Stadelhofer:

No, there is no strict restriction. Even though I mentioned the age of 80, the definition of a senior woman or man is very broad. It simply means someone who brings life experience. “Old” and “young” are always matters of definition. Here, people from different age groups and with different experiences come together, but there is no fixed minimum age.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. So the main thing is that people make an effort and perhaps bring certain qualifications. Heike, do most of the senior participants come from the education sector?

Heike Brzuske:

No, they come from all kinds of professional backgrounds. When we look back at the profiles, we see almost every profession represented. That is part of what makes the project so interesting, because a person’s profession often relates to their interests or to the knowledge they can pass on. We have people from IT, healthcare, education and many other fields. The range is very broad, which is exciting because the young people also have very different interests.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Yes. How much do you learn about what is happening in Germany? From Ukraine, how closely do you look towards Europe or Germany? Do you hear about events and developments here? Many people around the world, for example, follow German football and know FC Bayern. How familiar do you feel with Germany—with its people, culture, music and current affairs—from your perspective in Ukraine? Sofia, you raised your hand, but all of you are welcome to respond one after another.

Georgi:

This is my second time in Germany. The first time, I was in Freiburg as part of a school exchange. This time, we have taken part in two projects here: the Danube Youth Camp and the partnership project. We do not know everything about Germany, but being here makes it easier for us to understand the country and its people.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm. Yes, you wanted to add something.

Sofia Tkachuk:

I wanted to add that I am interested in German culture. I listen to many songs, including German pop music by singers such as Tim Bendzko and other artists from Germany or artists who sing in German. Because I make music and sing myself, I am very interested in that.

I am also interested in politics and, as I already mentioned, computer science. I have been to Germany before. When the war began, my mother and I came to Germany and lived in Leverkusen for eight months. We could have stayed, but for various reasons we had to return home. I have also taken part in several exchange programmes, which gave me many opportunities to improve my German and meet a great many different people.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Yes. Very nice. Valeria, did you also want to say something?

Valeria:

Yes. German culture feels very close to me because, when I was a child, I travelled to Germany frequently with my parents. I have also taken part in many different projects, including school exchanges. I was in Freiburg, attended a German school and gained many new experiences. Now I am in Ulm. Together with Georgi and Sofia, I participated in a Danube Youth Camp, and now I am taking part in this tandem exchange project. As I mentioned, Germany feels very close and familiar to me.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Yes, that is all very nice. Time is passing quickly. We have one more short track, Daft Punk's "Outlands," and then we will continue our conversation during the remaining ten minutes. This is Plattform on Radio free FM—stay tuned.

Now we are all awake again—that was real energy from Daft Punk. We are not finished yet. We still have eight exciting minutes left. As we have said, today's programme is about ILEU and one of its

projects, which creates partnerships between senior partners here in Ulm and young people who are currently visiting from Ukraine but are otherwise connected with them online.

Heike, you are one of the people who accompany young participants. In return, how much do you learn about the lives of people in Ukraine today? What insights and experiences have you gained through the person you are in contact with? What does the relationship give you, and what kind of perspective does it offer?

Heike Brzuske:

A great deal. I began in July, during the summer, and at first we talked about ordinary everyday topics. We introduced our cities and countries to one another. It was a very positive and emotional way to begin. We got to know one another through our individual interests—an initial phase of finding out about each other.

We also held several online sessions in which the students presented different topics. Julia, for example, gave a presentation on burnout, and we discussed the subject. As Sofia, Georgi and Valeria have already said, we talked about everyday matters but also about more deliberate and serious topics. We discussed the media, health and different professions.

Then, suddenly, it felt as though December arrived, and through our conversations I realised: you do not have electricity. The next examination is approaching, but you do not even know whether it will take place or where it can be held—underground, with light or without light. For the first time, I became truly aware of the conditions in which you were living. You hear about these things on television and in the media, but what does it really mean for a student taking school-leaving examinations to have no light, to sit an examination underground, or to have no water? When can you even wash your hair? These are such simple, everyday matters. I had known the situation in theory, but I began to understand its true dimensions. That made our relationship much deeper.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Mm-hmm.

Heike Brzuske:

The question became: how will we get through the winter? I learned from Julia—and from all of you—how much confidence and hope you have. I cannot put into words what I learned from you, and with how much energy and optimism you survived that winter. Every week, I looked forward to our conversation. I thought that something positive had to grow from it, that somehow we would get through it together. I was only a small part of her life during that time, but the experience brought us much closer together.

At some point, Julia told me what she did at night. She said that when it was loud outside, she wrote, because writing distracted her. Then she showed me her book, and I was completely overwhelmed by what she had written. I asked a journalist friend whether we could have a call together, and they discussed Julia's book. In this way, the relationship deepened further.

The quality and intensity of the partnership grew enormously. I now believe we have such a close bond that I would call it a friendship. At the same time, it changed my view of the situation and filled me with the greatest respect for all of you.

I also have to thank the teachers. The situation was extremely difficult for them as well, and they supported the students wonderfully. We repeatedly spoke with the teachers and understood what the circumstances were like for you. I wanted to say that here because it is also important to me.

This development has been very valuable for ILEU. In February or March, more tandems joined through the intergenerational dialogue, and the project suddenly became much larger. We were able to share the experiences we had gained with you. A project like this continues to grow, and we keep learning from it.

As both an ILEU employee and a senior partner myself, I would like to say that the project absolutely needs continued support. A small, dedicated organisation such as ILEU needs supporters, funders and sponsors so that we can continue working on these relationships, because there is a moving story behind every tandem partnership.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Yes. You would like both to continue and to expand the project. If someone listening says, "I would also like to support this project as a senior partner," where should they get in touch?

Carmen Stadelhofer:

They can go to the contact section of our website, send us an email and express their interest.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

Can people also meet you during the Danube Festival? Will you be present there with talks or other activities over the next few days? How long will you be in Ulm?

Sofia Tkachuk:

We will be in Ulm for ten or twelve days—twelve days.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

And what else will you be doing? Will you take part in discussions or have other opportunities to meet people from Ulm?

Sofia Tkachuk:

We have been in Ulm since 1 July and also took part in the Youth Camp. It was very good for us because it helped distract us from the problems in our country. We were able to meet many people from different countries. We have visited the Danube Festival and tried many dishes from different countries. Now we are participating in the ILEU project. We are very grateful that we can be here and take part in such an interesting project.

Moderator (Mr. Troost):

To conclude, we have the symposium "Democracy Needs All of Us," where tomorrow you will be able to contribute to discussions on 19 different topics relating to democracy. I have to keep an eye on the clock. We have certainly learned a great deal today. Thank you all very warmly for making this conversation possible and for joining us here on Plattform.