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PRESS RELEASE

Young European of the Year 2020 fights for participation of Young Roma in Europe

Every year, the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe, together with the European Youth Forum, awards the prize "Young European of the Year" to a young person who has shown a particularly strong commitment to a Europe of solidarity. This year's winner, Maria Atanasova, comes from Bulgaria and fights for more visibility and participation of young Roma people.

Since 1997, the award has been supporting young committed Europeans with prize money of €5,000 for an internship in a European institution or to create their own project. The award is given to young adults who are committed to European integration and intercultural understanding.

Maria Atanasova (23) is awarded as Young European of the Year 2020 for her efforts to increase the visibility of young Roma people. At the age of 23, she is already a mentor supporting children and young people from the Roma community and a member of the Roma Youth Volunteer Network. As a young Roma in Bulgaria, Maria experienced discrimination at an early age. *"Romani women are often placed in separate maternity wards - segregated from non-Romani women. Discrimination against Roma begins literally at birth"*, explains the midwifery student.

"As a young Roma woman, I believe in my community and in the fact that young Roma are among those who make a difference. Mutual support within our community is the path to social change. I am delighted to be honoured as Young European of the Year and I would like to use the award to make Roma and especially young Roma in Europe more visible", says the awardee.

A jury consisting of the Executive Director of the Schwarzkopf Foundation, a representative of the European Commission Representation in Germany, a representative of the European Youth Forum and a former award winner decided who should receive the award. *"Maria is committed to helping children and young people from her community. In doing so, she contributes to the visibility of an underrepresented and discriminated minority and to a better Europe"*, says Anne Rolvering, Executive Director of the Schwarzkopf Foundation, explaining the jury's decision.

Benjamin Günther from the European Youth Forum adds: *"With almost twelve million people, Roma and Sinti represent the largest minority in Europe. Their situation is precarious in many countries, but especially in South-Eastern Europe. We would like to support Maria Atanasova in her work against discrimination and for more visibility of young Roma."*

On the International Roma Day on 8 April 2020, the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe and the European Youth Forum would like to draw attention to the prejudices, exclusion and discrimination of young Roma in Europe.

For interview requests to Maria Atanasova, please contact the press office of the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe.

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