



North-South Centre of the Council of Europe

REPORT

Round table “New Media and Youth Participation”

*Organised by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe
in co-ordination with the EU-CoE youth partnership*

1st Mediterranean University on Youth and Global Citizenship (1 -8 July 2013)

2 July 2013, Hammamet, Tunisia

1. BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

This first edition of the Mediterranean University on Youth and Global Citizenship was held at the International Cultural Centre in Hammamet, Tunisia, on the topic “**Democratic Citizenship**”.

The University was organised by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe in co-operation with the National Youth Observatory of Tunisia and in partnership with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, the EU-CoE youth partnership, the Italian National Youth Forum (Forum Nazionale dei Giovani) and other youth organisations.

The Round table on “New Media and Youth Participation” was organised by the North-South Centre in co-ordination with the EU – CoE youth partnership. It was followed by the workshop “Youth participation and social media” organised by the EU-CoE youth partnership.

Apart from the Round table, the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe held an Exchange with NGOs “Civil society actors in democratic transformations: Sharing the experience of Central and Eastern European NGOs” (3 July), an awareness raising session on Istanbul Convention (3 July) and the 4th Training Course for Youth Leaders of the African Diaspora Living in Europe (1-7 July, organised in the framework of the JMA¹). The Round table on “New Media and Youth Participation”, the Exchange with NGOs and the awareness raising session on Istanbul Convention were organised in the framework of the University by the CoE Committee of Ministers’ decision on the future of the North-South Centre (adopted on 29 May 2013).

Experts from Belgium, France, “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia (see list enclosed), as well as experts from Serbia, Slovenia, Poland, Ukraine, France, Switzerland, United Kingdom and all participants of the University (120 persons) participated in the Round table.

¹ JMA – Joint Management Agreement, signed by the NSC and the European Commission in November 2008 and renewed until 2015, covers the Global Education and Youth Cooperation. It aims at contributing to the “culture of democratic citizenship” and at building a global citizenship based on human rights and citizens’ responsibilities. An extension of this programme to neighbouring regions could be considered as from 2014.

2. OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The round table contributed to youth empowerment and democratic citizenship through a debate on the use of social media in line with Council of Europe standards and best practices.

During this round table the experts representing various dimensions of governance (“quadrilogue”) and the participants of the University addressed opportunities, challenges and risks brought by new media for the exercise of democratic citizenship by young people. Case studies on youth e-participation and engagement at local, national and international levels were exchanged. Finally the recommendations for improvement were formulated.

The activity did not aim at taking stock of the situations in different countries, but rather at observing the general trends and recommending improvements. Still references were made to relevant national good practices.

3. DISCUSSION AND OUTCOMES

The meeting was opened by Ambassador Seixas da Costa, Executive Director of the North-South Centre. He introduced the new framework for the action of the Centre following the Committee of Ministers decision of 29 May 2013, and the pros and cons of more regulation for the new media. On his side, Philipp Boetzelen from EU-CoE youth partnership underlined the synergy and complementary of the NSC round table with the Workshop on New Social Media and Participation organised by the Partnership on 1-5 July.

Leila Ghandi from Morocco moderated the session. The panellists included: Nathalie David (Belgium), Marie-Madeleine Mialot Muller (France), Jelena Janevska (“Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”) and Hanna Kreitem (Palestine).

The participants agreed that the new media constituted a powerful tool to enhance participation of youth in democratic processes and governance. Social media give an added value and opportunities for improved youth participation and empowerment (political, social and economic). Despite a considerable digital divide between and within various countries, the new media influenced developments in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean in the recent years, and young people played a central role in this trend. The number of people using social media increased considerably, and opposition and dissidents used it extensively to reach an important audience. In fact the new media contributed to form a new generation of leaders. They offer more possibilities for grass root activists compared to ordinary media. Internet in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region uses increasingly Arabic language. It appears that Tweeter is more used in Mashrek and Facebook in Maghreb.

The participants agreed that it is necessary to ensure the freedom of expression on line, but it is also necessary to adequately respond to challenges brought by Internet, including cybercrime, terrorism and hate speech. In this respect it was underlined that an excessive interference of States with Internet is observed in some cases and may constitute a threat to the freedom of expression. It was pointed that regulating Internet is not easy and building a consensus towards a system of self-regulation by users is necessary. A charter - ethics code for the use of Internet and mechanisms for its application - is needed. Each user has a responsibility in this respect in order to make Internet a safer space; it is required not to control excessively but rather to educate. The Internet cannot be a perfect world, it is a reflection of the real world.

It was underlined that activists mobilised people through social media to bring a political change at the local, national and ultimately regional or supranational level. However, the central question was how to go beyond and sustain systemic changes and have an impact on public policies. For that the mere expression of anger is not enough. It is necessary to formulate proposals and contribute to the decision-making process. It was agreed that organised / structured youth and civil society groups have more possibilities to influence the public policies. The new media can be an affective tool in this

respect. Challenges of communication between the civil society and authorities were mentioned in several countries.

On average, young people are increasingly willing to participate in democratic processes; they aspire to be listened to. Legislative reforms are required in many countries to improve the conditions for young to be elected; positive example of Morocco was presented where there are reportedly 30 places for young in the parliament and many young candidates for municipal elections (threshold of 18 years for being elected and create a political party) as well as the example of France where young representatives below 30 years old are increasingly elected.

It was recommended to the youth organisations to approach the authorities and conduct a permanent dialogue with them at local and national levels on concrete issues, both through new media and through direct institutional participation. It was also recommended to institute mechanisms for consultation and co-participation in decision-making processes both through new media and through direct institutional participation. Examples of youth council in Morocco and National Youth Council in France were in particular presented as well as examples of on line campaigns. Sharing good practices was underlined as an effective tool for strengthening youth participation.

It was also recommended to the authorities to build capacities for effective youth participation and improved dialogue with young people, especially through new media. These efforts contribute to an improved transparency and governance. It was underlined that building confidence with youth is needed; in some cases it requires a change of attitude/mentalities. This change aimed at fully using the youth and its energy can bring clear political benefits for political forces.

Finally, it was recalled that the 2nd edition of the World Forum for Democracy will take place in Strasbourg (France) from 27 to 29 November 2013 on the topic "Re-wiring Democracy: connecting institutions and citizens in the digital age". It will focus precisely on how social media and social networks enable individuals to exchange, plan, act and interact with politicians and activists. The Forum will look into the opportunities and risks of a number of participatory initiatives and its conclusions should help to better identify the challenges faced by democratic institutions, political parties and leaders, and to recommend action to enhance the benefits of digital participation.

Recommendations:

- To support the use of new media as a tool for improving youth participation in democratic processes and governance; take legal and institutional measures to enhance youth participation; to support capacity building for an effective youth participation and improved dialogue with young people;
- To ensure the freedom of expression on line, while adequately responding to challenges brought by Internet, including cybercrime, terrorism and hate speech;
- To promote a system of self-regulation by users – a code of rules and its effective application - to limit misbehaviour on line;
- To encourage the use of the new media by organised civil society groups as a tool of contributing to designing, monitoring and ensuring the transparency of public policies;
- To improve dialogue and institute a clear framework for consultation with and co-participation of the civil society at the national and local levels; social media can be an important vector in this respect.

4. LIST OF EXPERTS

MOROCCO

Leila GHANDI – Moderator
Reporter, Writer, Photographer
Director and TV host journalist to 2MTV
leilaghandi@gmail.com

BELGIUM

Nathalie DAVID
Journalist/Coordinator
International TradeUnion Confederation
(IUTC) - MENA region
natacha.david@ituc-csi.org
www.ituc-csi.org/?lang=en
+32 474 99 24 44

FRANCE

Marie-Madeleine MIALOT MULLER
Vice-President of the Regional Council
of the Centre, France
www.regioncentre.fr

“Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”

Jelena JANEVSKA
Knowledge and Communications Manager
Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe
<http://www.nalas.eu/secretariat.aspx>
+389 2 3090818

PALESTINE

Hanna KREITEM
Developer of the first Palestinian
Internet Exchange Point
hannaq@gmail.com

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT
roman.chlapak@coe.int