

Chamber of Local Authorities – 26 March 2025

Speech by Roxana Chiritoiu, Congress youth delegate from Romania

“Environmental protection: How can local elected representatives make a difference”

Esteemed President of the Chamber, honorable members of the Congress, fellow youth delegates,

My name is Roxana Chiritoiu, and I am honoured to speak on behalf of the 46 youth delegates present here today.

I come from Romania, a land of quiet strength, of green forests, golden fields, and blue rivers. A place where nature has always been close; and now calls out for protection.

In September 2024, Storm Boris devastated parts of my country.

In Galați and Vaslui, entire communities were submerged.

Military helicopters had to be deployed to rescue people trapped in their homes.

But what came after the storm was just as hard: the silence, the uncertainty, and the realization that this might happen again.

And we are not alone in this fear.

Across Europe, young people are growing up with natural disasters as the new normal.

Floods in Spain.

Wildfires in Greece.

Heatwaves in Portugal.

Droughts in Italy.

Climate breakdown is not a distant threat. It’s already here. It’s where we live.

And yet, even in the face of crisis, we are still struggling to bring people on board.

That’s why I want to start with something simple but essential: **trust**.

When we talk about environmental protection, we must remember this: **Policy will only succeed if people believe in it.**

We must build popular support. And to do that, we need to tell a better story.

Not just a story of risks, but a story of rewards:

✓ Lower energy bills

- ✓ Cleaner air
- ✓ Less waste
- ✓ More and better jobs

That's the story we need to tell.

We must frame climate action as something that helps families save money, communities breathe easier, and workers find new opportunities. Let's talk not only about sacrifice, but also about solutions that make life better.

And let's be clear: none of this happens without you.

When disaster strikes, it is not Brussels or Strasbourg that arrives first.

It is the mayor who knows every street.

The firefighter who shows up instantly.

The school principal who opens the gym as a shelter.

You are the first responders, and the first rebuilders.

But no one can rebuild alone.

Not in the face of a crisis this vast, this complex, this deeply human.

That's why we need everyone at the table—especially those who will live longest with the consequences.

Young people feel this crisis in our bones.

We are told to recycle, but not invited to energy meetings.

We're asked to volunteer after floods, but not consulted when cities plan drainage systems.

This is not just unfair. It's a missed opportunity.

Because young people have ideas.

We have the energy.

And we know what it means to build trust in a world of uncertainty.

So include us.

Not just in the photo, but in the policy as well.

Not just at the end, but from the beginning.

So I ask you—those closest to the people—to lead in two bold, practical ways:

1. Communicate the benefits.

Make the economic case for action. In Milan, the city's climate plan links sustainability to better transport, cleaner air, and healthier

neighborhoods—showing that going green improves daily life.

2. Involve citizens and youth in real decision-making.

My fellow youth delegate from **Slovakia** told me about the **Youth Parliament in Trnava**, which is not just symbolic. It's an official consultative body recognized by the City Council. They regularly advise on issues that affect young people in the city, from education to sustainability.

My fellow youth delegate from **Norway** told me that, in her country, every municipality is legally required to have a **Youth Council**. These councils choose which topics they want to influence—whether it's public transport, urban planning, or climate policy. They hold meetings, organize consultations, and even engage with local media to make their voices heard.

My fellow youth delegate from **Austria** told me that, in **Vienna**, young residents **aged 5 to 20** are given a **real say** in shaping their city. They debate policy, propose projects, and vote on how to allocate the city's first-ever **€1 million participatory budget**—dedicated entirely to youth-led ideas.

Let's follow their lead:

- **Establish youth climate councils** that meet regularly with local leadership.
- **Involve young people in participatory budgeting**, especially for green projects.
- **Offer training and mentorship** so young voices are confident, informed, and empowered.

In Romania, the message is clear:

97% say climate adaptation is necessary.

90% believe we must act now.

Nearly half say they may need to move due to climate risks.

That's not a warning.

That's reality.

So I leave you with this:

Be the leaders who plant trees you will never sit under.

Be the ones who protect homes you will never enter.

Be the ones who choose courage over short-term comfort—because the future is watching, and history remembers.