

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 387 (2015)¹ Voting at 16 – Consequences on youth participation at local and regional level

1. Enhancing active political participation is a topical issue at the moment, particularly with regard to motivation and inclusion of young people in political decision-making processes. Elections have been broadly recognised as a main “transmission belt” for citizens’ political participation. Against the background of socio-political developments over the last decades and growing disenchantment with politics, lowering of the voting age has become an issue of public interest. This reflects, in principle, a desire to expand the recognition of citizen authority and strengthen political inclusion and participation as basic principles of representative democracy.

2. While most countries have set the minimum voting age at 18, demographic shifts, education, greater access to information, notably through new technologies, and increased political awareness have significantly improved the decision-making capacities of young people and their ability to make informed choices. Since the voting age delineates the starting point of a person’s participation in democratic decision making, and the right to vote is recognised as a fundamental human right, despite resistance, a general trend seems to point to the lowering of the voting age to 16 years.

3. In addition, it is believed that lowering the voting age to 16 might have a positive effect on election turnout in the long run, as young people are given an opportunity to exercise their civic rights at an early age, which may generate interest also in the broader sense of civic, social and political engagement as an integral part of an individual’s personal and social development.

4. Furthermore, decisions taken at the grassroots’ level cover a scope of concrete matters which are close to citizens and thus more easily comprehensible. Therefore, local and regional elections seem to be a particularly good “test case” and initial step for a reduction of the voting age to 16. This

has been also confirmed by the domestic practice of several Council of Europe member countries, which have lowered the voting age only for local and/or regional elections.

5. In the light of the above, the Congress welcomes the development in member States and regions with legislative powers regarding the lowering of the voting age to 16 at the territorial level, which is considered as conducive to the engagement and inclusion of young people at an early age, to the broadening of electoral representation and the legitimacy of those elected and the political mandates stemming therefrom.

6. Against the background of its ongoing activities and strategy to foster youth participation at the local and regional level, the Congress:

a. calls on its committees to assess the practice and developments of age requirements in local and regional elections and promote the issue of lowering the voting age to 16, in the framework of its priority action to ensure the engagement and inclusion of young people;

b. asks its appropriate committee to undertake the preparation of a report and recommendation inviting Council of Europe member States to further harmonise the age for the right to vote, more specifically, to use local and regional elections as a “starting point” and “test case” for the lowering of the voting age to 16;

c. requests its appropriate committee to prepare a report and recommendation to Council of Europe member States on the situation regarding civic education and compulsory political education in schools in member States, as adjacent tools to the introduction of voting at 16;

d. encourages local and regional authorities, notably regions with legislative powers, to pursue strategies to expand democracy at the grassroots’ level by lowering the voting age to 16 in respective elections, in countries with a higher minimum age;

e. invites associations of local and regional authorities in Council of Europe member States to engage in awareness-raising campaigns for the encouragement of active participation of young people through the lowering of the voting age to 16 at the local and regional level.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 20 October 2015, 1st Sitting (see Document [CG/2015\(29\)8FINAL](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Liisa Ansala, Finland (L, ILDG).