

**ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH**

**Speech Anja Olin Pape, Chair of the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ)  
and of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ)**

**Informal exchange of views on “strengthening democracy through youth  
engagement in the Council of Europe and its member States”**

**Thursday, 23 January 2020**

Beautiful people, excellencies. Thank you dearly for the possibility to have this exchange with you. For me, today marks a historic day of the Council of Europe and the youth sector.

Yesterday, the Committee of Ministers adopted the youth sector’s strategy for the next decade. 47 member states agreed that the sustainability of democratic and inclusive societies relies on the creativity, competencies, social commitment, and contribution of young people as well as on their confidence in the future. These are words that I have carried with me over the past couple of years, for they showcase a very specific viewpoint where young people are set at the centre of the search in finding the solutions to the challenges we face in our shared society.

It is a testament to, and proves that the Council of Europe is committed to and has closely worked with young people who have stood up and fought for our right to have our voices heard and a seat at the table where the decisions are taken that affect us today, but also the generations to come. Precarious working conditions, high thresholds to housing, expensive educational systems,

corruption and last, but certainly not least, the climate crisis are all factors that put young people at a greater risk of inequality, discrimination and disadvantage.

This is why I'm very proud to be a part of an organisation that views young people as a resource and as a part of the solution, not as the problem. It is also true, that in an organisation such as the Council of Europe, where multilateralism, co-operation and consensus are the foundation for all of its work, it is vital to ensure support for these values over time and for future generations. Indeed, it is a prerequisite for the survival of the organisation itself. Put in other words, the Council of Europe needs young people more than young people need the Council of Europe.

It is also a historic day for me personally. I have spent almost my entire life with working to strengthen social rights for young people. My personal journey truly took off after my neighbouring country, Norway, and the young political activists at Utöja, were attacked in the summer of 2011.

The attack did not just hit Norway or the specific group of people who were on the island. The attack was aimed at the foundation of the beliefs that we in the Council of Europe, and within the Youth Sector, have at our core. The idea of a free and open society, where young people have safe spaces to organise themselves, dream and act for a better society, and engage as active citizens. This idea was viciously attacked, and the world as I knew it growing up was changed. My very first speech as Chair of the Advisory Council on Youth was at the closing conference of the No Hate Speech Movement youth campaign, a flagship project that had its roots in an idea from the Advisory Council, in the light of that attack at Utöja. It is a concrete example of how the Council of Europe is revitalised by innovative ideas that respond to current challenges, and this is

possible because you invest in youth and give the space to young people to contribute.

Over the decades, the Youth Sector of the Council of Europe has been supporting thousands of young people to become active European citizens who advocate for human rights, rule of law and participate fully in democratic life. Many became multipliers of these values in their countries and communities. They and we are living proof of the deep and lasting impact of the learning and life-changing encounters in the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest. The Council of Europe youth sector is unique in its working method of co-management where young people are at the heart of the decision-making. It is the most advanced democratic system in the world when it comes to working with young people and youth organisations on a wide scale in an international organisation. We even won the 2019 Future Policy Bronze Award from the World Future Council.

Youth organisations and young people who are enabled and empowered to care for, take part in and develop the society that they live in is a crucial part in sustaining a democracy throughout time and generations. In youth organisations young people learn and take part in the fundamentals of a working democracy, everything from co-deciding a budget with other people, electing and demanding responsibility from elected representatives, developing activities and projects that benefit more people than just themselves. It guides you in civic participation and it creates agents of change.

We are living in a time when the core values of the Council of Europe must be emphasised and strengthened further in order to revitalise our democracies, increase social inclusion and further democratic participation. The work of the

Council of Europe youth sector in instilling those values in the hearts and minds of young people is crucial.

Our new strategy takes us into the new decade with renewed energy and high spirits. I want to take this opportunity and thank you for the determined support the member states showed the youth sector last year. It is with equal determination and engagement that we launch this strategy and give our hard work an extra push. My hope for this strategy is that it will be the foundation from which this century's new flagship-projects can rise; the source of more recommendations and policies that will advance the possibilities young people have to contribute to our shared society, and to strengthen our rights as citizens.

I want to conclude by thanking the Secretary General for your support in launching our Youth sector strategy 2030, the Georgian presidency for organising this exchange of views, and my most heartfelt thanks go to my dear colleagues for the countless hours of work and passion you all bring to the young people of Europe.

I will no longer be in the new mandate of the Advisory Council on Youth. Thirty democratically elected young people will meet next week to start their two-year mandate to contribute to the Council of Europe's work and impact. Please remember that young people and the members of your Advisory Council are your best allies in standing up for the values and principles of this beautiful organisation. They will be here to both push the agenda forward and to spread widely the incredible work that's being done by this organisation.

Thank you.