

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH

Wednesday, 1 March 2023

English only

Introductory text

This statement by the Advisory Council on Youth has been issued in the course of the open consultation process for the Council of Europe's Summit 2023, organised within the Presidency of Iceland, and served as the official contribution to this open call. In short, the Advisory Council on Youth urges the following calls to the Council of Europe in regard to the Summit 2023:

- Invest more in this Organisation;
- Allow more young citizens to participate in the decision-making structures;
- Take ownership as the central institution for peacebuilding in Europe;
- Prioritise accessible, modern, and citizen-friendly outreach;
- Strengthen the support for young people who protect the core values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

YOUTHLESS POLICY IS USELESS POLICY

To truly live up to the role of being the leading organisation on democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the Council of Europe needs to increase its efforts to reach and stay relevant to the European population. **Young people are a consistently underrepresented group** seeing to the Organisation's structure. Young people are not present when discussing the decisions affecting our lives, and the lives of future generations of young people. This leads to detachment from the vital work of the Council of Europe, and ultimately weakens the relevance and influence of the institution.

In the current setup of the Council of Europe, a youth perspective is only included when invited by the body leading each work of the Organisation.

Co-management is consistently praised, in Member States and beyond the borders of the Council of Europe. The structure has been recognized to be one of the most inclusive practices of participatory democracy in use. From the experience of the Advisory Council, we see the upcoming summit as an extraordinary opportunity to enhance the use of the co-management system, spreading it to more committees throughout the Organisation.

Introducing co-management in more parts of the Council of Europe will ensure fairer representation of the people of Europe in the Council of Europe's work, and ultimately leading the organisation to stay up to date, fast-responding and responsive to the challenges Europe is facing.

DEFINING LEADERSHIP FOR PEACEBUILDING

Young people have the right to live in peaceful societies. The Council of Europe needs to take ownership for leading Europe's joint response regarding the core values of the institution.

When the Russian war on Ukraine 2022 was initiated, many doubted the role and capacity of the Council of Europe, claiming it was not within its mission to work in war zones or with what could be considered as humanitarian efforts. This past year has shown us that it is simply not true. The work of the Council of Europe is more relevant than ever, supporting and protecting defenders of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, even though the ongoing war.

The response to military aggression is more peace. Though there has been valuable work on Youth, Peace and Security on a global level, there is still a distinct gap in a European context. Youth

organisations and networks actively seek recognition of, and support to amplify, their peacebuilding capacity in supporting our fellow young people living through the consequences of war.

Through the Council of Europe, young people are still supported through trainings, contacts and project funding. What works needs to be amplified - the Council of Europe needs to clearly take ownership of the leadership role for resilience in Europe, and give strong support to young people in their efforts in peacebuilding.

HOW MUCH IS DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW WORTH?

For 2022, the Council of Europe budget made out 0,26 percent of the EU budget. This summit is the time to restructure the balance between the leading European institutions. **An increased budget to the Council of Europe** will multiply the effects on the European response on current challenges facing democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and allow the institution to continue in the capacity of pioneering comprehensive European youth policy. The leaders of Europe have to invest in democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

AN ORGANISATION FIT FOR MODERN REALITY

The Council of Europe structures its departments by a silo approach, where issues are divided, risking leading to limitations of the impact of the work. This needs to change. Everything the Council of Europe works on affects young people. The organisation needs to adopt a stretching intersectional approach where human lives are valued in their totality, admitting the possible interconnectedness over multiple conditions for identity, background and perspective.

Young people also bring ideas, perspectives and solutions to our common challenges. The Advisory Council on Youth initiated the latest Council of Europe campaign Democracy Here | Democracy Now, where hundreds of young people and youth organisations joined the campaign, and are still committed to the main call of revitalizing democracy. These are the types of results a strong investment in youth brings – and it is only one of many examples of the unique responses the Council of Europe brings to tackle the challenges Europe is facing.

GROUND-BREAKING SUPPORT TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

The Council of Europe needs to focus on the core of the organisation, and see the capacities within the Organisation that no one else can fill. The Council of Europe sets ground-breaking standards and implements innovative methods for meaningful youth participation. Those standards are only valuable as long as they are upheld and continuously recognized. With the soft law-practices of the institution, there needs to be an increased commitment to follow up on the implementation and evaluation of the standards adopted.

In a further perspective, the Council of Europe should re-examine its non-legislative character on youth. A potential creation of a convention on youth has been discussed before in the Council of Europe, though at the time the need to protect young people's rights was deemed covered by the European Social Charter. Though the Advisory Council on Youth agrees on the importance of the Charter, and the call upon increased efforts to ensure young people's access to rights, there are still considerable challenges uniquely existing to young people. The Council of Europe should therefore **reassess its position on a Convention on Youth**, launching a new feasibility study covering particularly - but not limited to - young people's rights to social inclusion, participation and expression, and independence.

AN ORGANISATION FIT FOR PURPOSE

From a youth perspective, the Council of Europe is the leading institution to connect, develop and support youth organisations - but only for the youth who know about the institution's existence. The Organisation will lack recognition of the important work conducted if the outreach is not accessible and easily understood by the European public. Information and material from the Council of Europe needs to be presented in an approachable manner that is helpful in the everyday life of Europeans.

We often hear outbursts that the Council of Europe's communication strategy needs to enter the 20th century. The Advisory Council on Youth wants to see a dramatically **more innovative approach to the modernization of the Organisation's outreach** - we urge the Council of Europe to start working beyond what is expected in today's context and adopt a future-oriented approach.

Modernizing the Council of Europe means to evolve the organisation, which requires investments. If we truly want to build an organisation that can answer to the challenges Europe is facing, in a citizen-accessible way, there needs to be a combination of re-commitment and restructuring.

As youth civil society representatives, the way of working of the institution is far more rigid than what we are used to. Many of the policies for practices of the Organisation can be reworked to make the Council of Europe a more inclusive, accessible, environment-friendly, and open, Organisation.