

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH (CCJ)

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English only

The Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe welcomes the Secretary General's 'Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe' report

The Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) welcomes the new report of the Council of Europe Secretary General, Alain Berset, titled 'Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe'. The report outlines the alarming decline of democracy in Europe and a vision for democracy that resonates profoundly in today's geopolitical climate. In this vision of a new Democratic Pact, we are particularly encouraged by the report's emphasis on the importance of incorporating youth perspectives and agency of young people in the commitment to a democratic present and future.

The Secretary General identifies pressing challenges that youth-led organisations face, noting that "shrinking civic space has made self-organisation more difficult" alongside the declining funding for youth organisations over the past three years. We echo these concerns, as raised by many of our colleagues across Europe, and stress the urgency of fostering an environment where youth can thrive and contribute actively to society, free from repression and political pressure. In a political landscape where many young people and students fighting for democracy and their rights across Europe—including in Serbia, Türkiye, Georgia and across other member States—are met with repression and pushbacks, renewed commitment to these freedoms is crucial. In this light, we are pleased to see the Secretary General's firm affirmation of the freedom of association as a 'cornerstone principle of democracy'. This is key to the guarding of healthy and resilient democracies.

Youth civil society and activists are instrumental in revitalising Europe's democratic spirit. The Council of Europe's Youth Department, through its Statutory bodies' initiatives, has been committed to strengthening the mutual trust between young people and institutions for decades, through a range of initiatives including the flagship ['Democracy Here. Democracy Now'](#) campaign. The report highlights the vitality of youth work and reaffirms the Reykjavik Declaration and the 10th Ministerial Conference on Youth as key political commitments to youth participation shaping democracy.

The report recognises the need to uphold and advance social rights, in line with the Council of Europe's revised European Social Charter, with specific attention to marginalised groups in society. The Advisory Council on Youth actively advocates for young people's access to rights CM/Rec(2016)7, including in rural areas through CM/Rec(2025)3 as well as from disadvantaged neighbourhoods through the review of Enter! CM/Rec(2015)3. Young people's social rights and needs require concerted attention, not only to ensure civic and social protections but also to their role in safeguarding the core values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. This is of particular importance as the Venice Commission embarks on a process to revise the Council of Europe's Rule of Law Checklist.

The Secretary General also presents a clear vision on the Council of Europe's continued support to Ukraine as Russia's illegal war of aggression rages on. The Joint Council on Youth, through the European Youth Foundation, is taking proactive steps such as maintaining a special grant for Ukraine and organising on-the-ground activities in Ukraine to unite activists, youth workers, and government representatives. These activities contribute to supporting young people and youth work and adapting European youth policy in wartime. With Lviv holding the 2025 European Youth Capital title, the Advisory Council on Youth calls on the Council of Europe to embody the city's motto: "Not easy, but move," as it champions democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in its mission to assist Ukraine, and ensure that young people remain at the heart of its vision for a future recovery.

Elsewhere, the report acknowledges education as a key factor for fostering and shaping democratic values and active citizenship in light of some groups' detachment and disengagement from politics as a consequence of rising barriers and challenges. Responding to such trends and anticipating future challenges calls for increased collaboration across themes, generations and member States to face common challenges. The Joint Council on Youth aims to advance this mission through drafting

recommendations on topics such as peace education, and working on artificial intelligence and digital youth work, collaborating with the Committee on Education (CDEDU) and the Committee of Artificial Intelligence (CAI), respectively.

The Advisory Council on Youth welcomes the Secretary General's report outlining the status of European Democracy as a call to action for change and recommitment to the Council of Europe's values of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law. We hope that the message of the report will contribute to both member States and the Council of Europe taking concrete action, and we look forward to further collaboration to ensure that young people are key actors in shaping the present and future of our democracies.

The statements of the Advisory Council are published for the purpose of informing the public about the activities of the statutory bodies of the Council of Europe youth sector. The statements reflect the opinions and positions of the Advisory Council and its members. The views expressed therein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council of Europe.