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**STRATEGIC WORKSHOP
A YOUTH AGENDA FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN
RIGHTS IN BELARUS**

10-12 April 2025
European Youth Centre, Strasbourg (France)

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Deadline: 26 March 2025



CONTEXT

Belarusian youth leaders and civil society has faced significant challenges in the recent years that limit their ability to engage in civic activities and advocate for their rights. Between September 2020 and the end of October 2023, no fewer than 1 457 non-profit organisations were liquidated, removed or forced to self-liquidate¹. Many involved in any form of independent civic activity - whether formal or informal, local or international - has either been incarcerated or forced into exile. Young people are wholly over-represented, constituting half of this group.

The youth in Belarus has never experienced democracy and is living in a constant fear of persecution. Conversely, many young Belarusians in exile are concerned about stigma, because of the actions of the regime, confronted with indifference, even disdain and discrimination, because of the seemingly more pressing needs of others to the political powers and populations of their host countries more broadly.

Despite the multifaceted challenges young people in and from Belarus are constantly finding new ways to associate, to meet, exchange, and disrupt with their creativity, diversity and inclusivity. They are also enacting leadership across the spectrum of Belarusian representation in exile, from alternative art and culture to the national revival.

The independent Belarusian National Youth Council (RADA), working in exile, with enduring contact to young people inside and outside the country, supports democratic forces in exile to understand what Belarusian young people inside and outside Belarus say about the kind of democracy they want their country to be. It attempts to rally what remains of youth-led civil society, to bridge communication between young people inside and outside the country.

WORKSHOP

The Youth Department of the Council of Europe, in cooperation with the Belarusian National Youth Council (RADA), is organising a strategic workshop titled 'A YOUTH AGENDA FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BELARUS' from 10 to 12 April, at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg.

The workshop will bring together youth leaders and activists for democracy, along with political decision-makers from the Council of Europe and other relevant European institutions, including members of the Coordination Council.

The programme of the workshop will comprise of a preparatory, capacity-building component for Belarusian young leaders and activists, as well as plenary exchanges with members of the Coordination Council, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, in view of mainstreaming a youth perspective into their work.

The strategic workshop aims to develop mutual understanding of the kind of democracy that Belarusian young people, both inside and outside the country aspire to. It seeks to include those aspirations in the development of the plans for the eventual democratic transition.

¹ Rada, "Situation of freedom of association and civil society organisations in Belarus October 2023", <https://en.rada.fm/2023/11/15/situation-of-freedom-of-association-and-civil-society-organisations-in-belarus-october-2023/>

Objectives of the workshop are following:

- To identify the challenges and priorities of the Belarusian youth, both inside and outside the country, in the context of policy discussions towards Belarus on the level of the Council of Europe and other relevant European institutions;
- To strengthen skills of youth leaders and activists, enabling them to participate in democratic processes effectively and meaningfully and to take responsibility for the democratic future of their country once the change takes place;
- To identify and analyse relevant comparative approaches and initiatives at the European and the grassroots level and translate them to the Belarusian context;
- To associate participants with the Council of Europe and its work, notably the Youth Department, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress;
- To make recommendations on how to further address the challenges of political engagement of young Belarusians, both nationally and internationally;
- To strengthen participants' links with elected officials and institutions, and to influence the European policy agenda by providing direct input to the decision-makers.

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The seminar will welcome up to 35 young Belarusian leaders and activists actively contributing to the democratic transformation of Belarus through independent civic, social, cultural or political activity, whether inside the country or from exile, to allow for meaningful follow up and result multiplication based on their participation.

The seminar is designed for participants who:

- Committed to the values of the Council of Europe, democracy, human rights and the rule of law;
- Active in youth or other civil society organisations, initiatives or youth projects in or related to Belarus;
- Motivated to learn and develop as youth leaders and multipliers and intend to support democratic youth participation in Belarus in the upcoming years based on the Council of Europe standards;
- Aged between 18 and 35 years (exceptions are possible when justified);
- Able to actively and autonomously communicate in English;
- Residing in a member state of the Council of Europe, or in Belarus.

The Council of Europe (and partners) welcomes applications from all candidates who fulfil the above-mentioned profile, irrespective of gender, disability, marital or parental status, racial, ethnic or social origin, colour, religion, belief or sexual orientation.

METHODOLOGY AND PROGRAMME

The workshop will be based on the approaches on democratic citizenship and human rights education, being designed to be an experience of mutual learning and sharing among participants. The participants will have the chance to have hands on experiences, as well as engage with experts and political decision-makers from the Council of Europe and other relevant European institutions, in order to learn how to advocate for democracy and human rights, and mainstream youth perspectives both nationally and internationally.

The strategic workshop takes place in parallel with the meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), therefore participants may be given the opportunity to attend specific sessions and engage with members of the PACE.

BACKGROUND

With an aim to provide support and expertise to strengthen Belarusian democratic society in line with the Council of Europe core values, the Committee of Ministers set up a Contact Group On co-operation with Representatives of Belarusian democratic forces and civil society, which holds regular exchanges of views with representatives of the Belarusian democratic forces and civil society, including the Belarusian Youth Council (RADA).

The importance of this work has been stressed by the Reykjavik Summit Declaration, where heads of state and government of the Council of Europe resolved to:

pursue the work of the Contact Group on co-operation with Belarusian democratic forces and civil society and will find ways to strengthen co-operation with Russian and Belarusian human rights defenders, democratic forces, free media and independent civil society.

Given the deep concern about the restrictive political environment in Belarus, the Council of Europe supports democratic youth organizations, leaders, and activists within and outside Belarus. These efforts aim to foster meaningful participation and contributions toward positive changes in the country's democratic and political life. The activities provide safe spaces for Belarusian youth to gather, discuss their concerns, and prepare current and future generations of leaders to actively shape a democratic future for Belarus.

These activities are programmatically aligned with the expertise of the youth sector on youth participation and support for youth civil society as outlined in the Council of Europe's 2030 Strategy.

The strategic workshop is a part of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and organised within the project "Democratic participation with Belarusian Youth Civil Society (2024-2025)". This activity is a direct follow-up to the training course supporting action for democratic youth participation in Belarus based on Council of Europe standards (2023), and exchange with members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Revitalising democracy in Belarus with and for young people (2024), organised by the Council of Europe Youth Department and RADA. Both events highlighted a need to bring together European political decision-makers and Belarusian youth activists to address key challenges for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Belarus and reflect youth perspective in policy discussions towards Belarus.

The workshop also complements the ongoing dialogue between the Council of Europe and Belarusian democratic forces, particularly on the level of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and Congress.

Financial and practical conditions of participation

Travel expenses

Travel expenses and visa fees for the training course in Strasbourg will be reimbursed by the Council of Europe according to the rules in place. Only the participants who attend the entire training course can be reimbursed.

Accommodation

Board and lodging for the training course will be provided and paid for by the Council of Europe, at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg. Participants are expected to arrive on 9 April and depart on 12 April in the afternoon.

Working languages

The working language of the training course is English. Additional support to participants who may not feel confident in expressing themselves in English may be provided on a needs basis.

Application procedure and selection of participants

All candidates must apply online at <https://youthapplications.coe.int>.

A group of up to 35 participants will be selected based on the profile outlined above; A waiting list may be established. Candidates will be informed whether their application has been accepted or rejected, and if they have been put on the waiting list, by 29 March 2024.

The full application form must be submitted on-line by **23:59 (CET), 26 March 2025**.

Further information

For any questions, please contact us at [**eyc.programme@coe.int**](mailto:eyc.programme@coe.int).