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ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH (CCJ)

English only

CCJ statement on the Chişinău Political Declaration and the universality of human rights

Europe is facing a period of political uncertainty. Across the continent, debates around migration, asylum and security are increasingly shaping not only electoral campaigns, but also the way governments approach human rights. This is apparent from the Political Declaration agreed by ministers of foreign affairs in Chişinău, Moldova, on 14-15 May 2026. In this climate, fundamental principles that once appeared non-negotiable are now being treated as politically flexible.

This development concerns all of us, and especially young people.

The international human rights architecture was not built in times of political convenience, but rather emerged from one of Europe's darkest periods. It came grounded in the understanding that human dignity must never depend on nationality, religion or public sentiment. The very foundation of our democratic systems is the universality of human rights, which is not an abstract legal concept.

Despite this, the [Advisory Council on Youth](#) together with the wider youth sector, are increasingly witnessing attempts to frame instruments such as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the Strasbourg Court, as obstacles to national sovereignty when it comes to sensitive social issues like migration. Such narratives create a dangerous and false dichotomy. Respecting human rights and ensuring public security are not, and must not be framed as, mutually exclusive objectives. On the contrary, the undermining of human rights in the name of security often weakens the very stability those attempts claim to protect, as human rights become expendable and adjustable.

Particularly alarming is the growing normalisation of rhetoric that distinguishes between deserving and so-called undeserving rights-holders. Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are too often discussed primarily through the lens of deterrence and suspicion. Policies that push the boundaries of international human rights obligations are increasingly framed as pragmatic or necessary responses to public pressure. But Europe cannot defend human dignity selectively, without ultimately weakening it universally.

Simultaneously, judicial institutions face intensified political hostility when their decisions challenge governmental priorities. The independence of courts, especially that of the European Court of Human Rights, is essential to the rule of law. Human rights protections lose their meaning if justices are pressured into delivering politically convenient judgments.

Young people across Europe are observing these developments closely and with deep alarm. Many of these young people live in societies marked by a paradigm whereby youth civic spaces are shrinking, institutional trust is fast-decaying, and finally, they are subject to fear-driven political narratives that feed into polarisation. In such an environment, as the Human Rights Commissioner has warned in a recent op-ed, there is a risk that human rights themselves become reframed, not as shared guarantees for all people, but as conditional privileges granted to some. We must resist this trajectory. In the [words of Commissioner Michael O'Flaherty](#), "human rights are not a reward for good behaviour... they are held co-equally by everyone, by virtue of our shared humanity alone." We share this assessment and stand firm behind the belief that protecting human rights is our strength.

For young people, the future facing Europe is foundational: what kind of continent do we want to inherit? The decisions made now, in political discourse, in legislation and in the defence of our democratic institutions, will shape the future of human rights on this continent for generations to come.

The Advisory Council on Youth therefore calls for an open and structured dialogue with member states on how the Chişinău Political Declaration will be interpreted, and its vision implemented in practice. We need to discuss how member States will ensure that the declaration's language on migration, asylum and security is not used to scapegoat young people, migrants, refugees or asylum seekers, nor to justify the weakening of human rights safeguards.

The Advisory Council on Youth stands ready to share the realities, concerns, and lived experiences of young people across Europe with member states and Council of Europe institutions. We call on governments to engage with the youth sector as a democratic partner in ensuring that responses to migration remain firmly rooted in human rights, the rule of law and the universality of human dignity.

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