



4 December 2020

**3rd European Youth Work Convention
Online event – 7-10 December 2020**

Round Table, Monday, 7 December, 1 pm – 2 pm CET

Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Director General of Democracy

Question: *The new European Youth Work Agenda is an enormous step forward to further develop youth work and youth work policy in Europe. What do you expect to achieve with the European Youth Work Agenda? What role do you see for your institution in the implementation of the Agenda and the Bonn-Process?*

Good day to all participants from the Council of Europe's headquarters in Strasbourg and a big thank you to the German Presidency, Minister Giffey, her team and all of the organisers for hosting this 3rd European Youth Work Convention, a milestone event in moving the European Youth Work Agenda forward.

Germany has made youth a priority in its Presidency of the Council of Europe and the impact of this important political support is already visible, not least thanks to this flagship youth event and its high number of participants and outreach.

Minister Giffey, we thank the German authorities for the financial contribution to the work of our European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest and to the European Youth Foundation – you can be sure that the money will be very well invested.

Youth work is perhaps a small, yet very important part of social and education policies. The two previous European Youth Work Conventions hosted by Belgium were essential in putting youth work high on the political agenda of the European institutions.

As requested by the participants in the Brussels convention, I can report proudly that the Council of Europe and its co-managed statutory bodies delivered. In May 2017, the 47 member states in our Committee of Ministers adopted unanimously the first ever European policy document solely dedicated to strengthening youth work, our recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 on youth work. This policy document has a key role in defining youth work, in embracing its diversity and in describing what youth work needs in order to be effective, sustainable and accessible to all young people.

The recommendation laid the foundation stone for youth work to become one of the four priorities in our youth sector strategy 2030. For the first time in our strategic documents, youth work is a thematic area rather than an instrument or means of achieving other objectives.

Strengthening, deepening and widening youth work is our aim.

As Commissioner Gabriel mentioned, our two institutions share this aim and the European Youth Work Agenda will give strong political impetus to the commitment of member states which is needed if the Agenda is to have a big impact.

Now to the why, the what and the how:

Why are young people and youth work so important for the Council of Europe?

We believe young people in Europe should all be able to enjoy their rights and freedoms to the full and we know that young people are most active in promoting and defending human rights and democracy. We are convinced that youth work is essential for social cohesion, it strengthens young people's autonomy and their personal development, their participation and their democratic citizenship.

Now to the what:

We will work tirelessly to promote the embedding of youth work in youth policy frameworks at all levels, and to make it more widely accessible and attractive. We will work towards quality education and training for youth workers, be they paid or volunteers, and for greater recognition of the important work they are doing.

And finally, the how:

We will do this through our intergovernmental co-operation, the co-management system and our youth policy advice to member states; through project and structural grants from our European Youth Foundation; through the training of multipliers in our European Youth Centres in Budapest and in Strasbourg; through our network of youth centres which have been awarded the Council of Europe quality label; and of course through our Partnership with the European Commission in the field of youth.

And we will do this with youth workers, as they have the 'magic potion' in their hands. Youth work is the magic potion by which youth workers can translate high-flying political ideas into practical improvements for young people. Youth workers and youth leaders are often the interpreters between young people and institutions, they know the ingredients for the magic potion. They can help to make sure that the cauldron that contains the magic potion is always at least half full.

We will be committed partners in implementing the European Youth Work Agenda and active players in the Bonn Process. The Council of Europe is and will remain a dedicated advocate for youth work in Europe and for European youth work.

Question: *With a view to the future: In your opinion, how could the field of youth work look like in five years when the next European Youth Work Convention takes place?*

Well, first of all, I do hope that in five years' time, we will no longer have to explain what youth work is! I hope it will be understood by a wider circle that youth work is neither youth employment nor child labour.

And of course I do hope that I will not only be invited to the 4th European Youth Work Convention but that I will be able to report proudly that nearly all of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe have a qualitatively and quantitatively well-defined youth work provision embedded in their youth policies. In an ideal world, I will also be able to report that they have policies to develop and to sustain youth work so that every young person can benefit from it and the many opportunities it offers. I also hope that the availability of higher education and vocational training for youth workers will have doubled and that many competent youth workers have been trained to do the magic.

And of course, I do hope that the Council of Europe will be recognised as a key player in the achievement of this.

On a more serious note, I cannot possibly answer this question without referring to the present context of the world-wide pandemic.

The challenges Europe and young people faced before the pandemic were already manifold. Many of these pressing problems have multiplied and many new challenges, caused by the pandemic, have been added to the already long list. The European Youth Forum's recent study on the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic finds that "young people are likely to suffer severe and long-lasting impacts from the pandemic" and those impacts are "systematic, deep and disproportionate" on young people in general and even more so on young women, younger youth and youth in low-income countries". These

are very worrying perspectives, also because youth work will be asked to deal with the long-term negative effects of the pandemic on young people and society long after it is over.

Youth work, youth research, youth policy, youth organisations and associations, public authorities and European institutions will all have important roles to play in the years of recovery from the pandemic. In this context, I hope we can say in five years that:

- youth work and youth workers are considered “essential professions”;
- youth organisations, youth services, youth centres and other youth work provisions have survived the pandemic. That they have survived because public authorities, European institutions and private donors have provided support and moved away from merely project-driven funding (of which we are currently seeing the detrimental effects);
- youth workers will have created larger alliances, networks, professional associations and unions to define their common objectives;
- events like this convention will be organised more widely on national and local levels;
- despite the huge development in digital youth work – the end of physical distancing will have brought a wide and deep understanding of the importance of human encounters, of social proximity and of the community, not least for everyone’s mental health. Human encounters will remain the core of youth work at local, national and international levels.

Finally, I know that the power of the youth sector also lies in its capacities to respond to societal changes and its capacity to reinvent itself over and over again. And a potential future Council of Europe youth campaign devoted to “Revitalising democracy” which the Minister mentioned, is proof of that. I trust that in five years, we will say that youth work and youth civil society has become even stronger.

Question: *What do you wish for participants at the 3rd European Youth Work Convention to happen?*

The European Youth Work Convention is not a youth gathering, but a youth work gathering – I encourage you to make use of this rare opportunity to think together of how we can strengthen, deepen and widen youth work – the young people of Europe can but benefit from the results. I am proud of you, your work, and you too should be proud of what you do.