



31 January 2019

**Anja Olin Pape, Chair of the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ)**

**Meeting of the GR-C - Education, Culture, Sport, Youth and Environment**

**31 January 2019**

Chair of the GR-C, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. A warm-hearted thanks for inviting me to this exchange today.

I'm here representing the Joint Council on Youth, as well as the Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth, both of which are subsidiary bodies to the Committee of Ministers.

The Council of Europe youth sector is unique with this working method of co-management where young people are at the heart of the decision making. It is the most advanced democratic system in an international organisation in the world when it comes to working with young people and youth organisations on a wide scale. This is something that the Council of Europe should be very proud of and cherish in our common efforts and struggle to safeguard and develop the mechanisms of democracy in Europe today.

Youth organisations and young people who are enabled and empowered to care for, take part in and develop the society that they live in are a crucial part in sustaining a democracy throughout time and over generations. In youth organisations, young people learn and take part in the fundamentals of a working democracy, everything from co-deciding a budget with other people, electing and demanding responsibility from elected representatives, developing activities and projects that benefit more people than themselves. They guide you in civic participation and create agents of change.

It's stated in our priorities that "The sustainability of the Council of Europe's core values relies on the creativity, competencies, social commitment, and contribution of young people as well as on their confidence in the future." This confidence in the future is crucial for all young people, not only individually, but also for Europe on a larger scale. Young people's belief in democracy must be strengthened, but so must democracy itself. We are now seeing worrying trends towards the opposite across Europe, that pit people and states against each other even further, that limit space for open and free discussion and result in the repression of Human Rights Defenders.

The strength of the youth sector in this regard is that by involving young people directly in the decision-making processes, as well as learning and gathering experiences, expertise and knowledge from thousands of young Human Rights Defenders, the policies, practices and recommendations that we develop address, and deal with the real needs of young people in Europe today. We bring the experience of young people to the Council of Europe.

I want to share some of the things that we are currently working on in the Council of Europe youth sector.

You may have heard about the No Hate Speech Movement Campaign, which actually started out as an idea from the Advisory Council on Youth many years ago. And here, I would, if you allow me, be a bit personal. When my neighbouring country Norway, and the young political activists in Utoya, were attacked in the summer of 2011, I was 20 years old and something inside me, and many by my side, was shaken and changed forever. The otherwise generally safe space and youthful idealistic atmosphere I grew up in was exchanged for a very concrete sense of threat and shock that few of us young people in Europe had been forced to face at that time. The attack did not just hit Norway, Social Democrats or the specific group of people who were on the island. The attack was aimed at the very foundation of the beliefs that we in this room, and we within the youth sector of the Council of Europe have at our core. And that is the idea of a free and open society, where young people have safe spaces to organise themselves, to dream, to act for a better society and to engage as active citizens. Suddenly this idea was attacked, and the world as I knew it growing up was changed. This change has led to tremendous acts of

civil courage, engagement and action, but it has also left a big hole that will never again be filled, and that we must always carry with us as a reminder that every conversation matters, that every young person is relevant. Through the No Hate Speech Campaign, activists all over the world had the possibility to join, organise and step up their efforts in denouncing fake news, hate speech and excluding narratives. This is an excellent example of how the Council of Europe can really make a change in young people's lives. Even though the Campaign has now finished, the key issues still remain at the heart of what the Joint Council on Youth and the Council of Europe youth sector deal with and what they strive to positively impact on.

As I see it, a big part of our mission is to fight against discrimination and multiple discrimination that negatively impact marginalised and vulnerable groups in society. Young refugees are amongst those who are the most vulnerable in our society today, who have lived experiences that often involve violence, trauma, loneliness, exploitation - but also live with the continuing risk of violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This is why the draft Committee of Ministers' recommendation on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood on your agenda today is so incredibly important. The draft recommendation is the fruit of great and close co-operation with the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, and is our contribution to the Action Plan on Protecting Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe.

In light of the reality that young refugees are facing in Europe today, and the fact that this recommendation has been developed for and in co-operation with youth organisations working with and supporting young refugees, in combination with the expertise of the team of the Special Representative, I call on you all to support the draft recommendation.

A recommendation on this subject is very much needed, it would enhance the possibilities of young refugees to become active citizens, to be able to participate fully in society and to contribute their skills and knowledge to their communities.

Finally, I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to meet you here today, as well as express my sincere hope that the Council of Europe will continue to invest in young people – as you have been doing since 1972 – since it is incredibly important, not only for us young people, but also because our active participation in developing and shaping the future is key to preserving democracy and respect for human rights in Europe.