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15 January 2021

The climate crisis, young people and democracy

CONSULTATIVE MEETING

16-18 February 2021

The Youth for Democracy programme 2020-21 should reflect the growing concerns with the acuity of the climate crisis and its impact on the present and future of the current youth generations. A seminar initially planned to discuss this in 2020 was postponed to 2021 due to the COVID19 pandemic. The seminar was meant to look at the climate crisis through the perspective of youth participation in democratic processes.

For example, "Fridays for future", as a global "unstructured movement" has mobilised thousands of young people all over the world. It became a "first time" experience of having a say for a great number of young people. It met a limited response, if not an outright ignorance, of powers in place; putting into question the importance or relevance of youth participation in democratic processes. The World Forum on Democracy 2020 "*Can Democracy Save the Environment?*" was expected to be organised around this theme. In view of the pre-pandemic mobilisation of young people for the environment it could be equally relevant to transform the question to "*Can the Environment Save Democracy?*".

The questions may seem provocative, but both reflect deeper challenges that have to do with the nature and practice of democracy, and with the need to adopt effective rapid responses to a crisis that affects all humanity but will impact much deeper on the current youth generation. At the same time, the mobilisation and self-organisation of young people for the planet belies the portrayals of young people as self-centred and apathic to political processes. The Council of Europe youth sector cannot ignore these realities.

A thematic debate organised by the Joint Council on Youth in June 2020 reflected similar concerns and arrived at similar conclusions. Furthermore, it led the Joint Council on Youth to

set up a Task Force to, among others, *study the progress being made in the Council of Europe and identify gaps and/or opportunities for raising awareness of the principle of 'greening' the work and introducing sustainable decision-making processes.*

The 2021 programme of activities of the youth sector should link the two processes: the consultative meeting on the impact of the climate crisis on democratic youth participation process and the task force that resulted from the thematic debate.

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

The Consultative Meeting will associate a variety of stakeholders and experts on youth and the climate crisis to together reflect about how youth policy and youth participation processes should take into account needs arising from the climate crisis and the concerns of young people.

The meeting will be structured around the following objectives:

1. To reflect on the impact of the climate change on the lives of young people in relation to the right for healthy environment
2. To showcase existing practices and explore challenges for youth participation to impact political actions on climate crisis
3. To address intersections between the climate crisis and other issues including human rights, democracy, migration, health etc...
4. To discuss and explore youth policy responses to the climate crisis
5. To discuss approaches and actions for taking into account environmental issues in youth policy and programmes

The consultative meeting will result in proposals for the youth sector of the Council of Europe and the broader stakeholder groups working on these issues. As the first activity of its kind, it will also contribute to the work of the Task Force of the Joint Council on Youth and set up the foundation for the upcoming steps and future work of the Youth Department on the topic.

PARTICIPANTS

The consultative meeting will bring together experts and representatives from the following stakeholder groups:

- Members of the Joint Council on Youth
- Individual activists and members of youth movements advocating for action on climate crisis and environmental protection
- Youth leaders and youth workers active in environment and climate crisis matters
- European and international organisations concerned with the climate change
- National experts on youth and environment issues
- Researchers on climate change and democracy