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YOUTH FOR DEMOCRACY FOR YOUTH

(working title)

A youth campaign for revitalising democracy

(On 50 years of youth participation in the Council of Europe)

PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT

Information document prepared by the secretariat of the
Youth Department of the Council of Europe

Rationale

1. The Youth sector strategy 2030 recognises young people's "considerable potential and therefore fundamental role in promoting the Council of Europe's core values" and thus aims at enabling young people across Europe to "actively uphold, defend, promote and benefit from the Council of Europe's core values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law". It also defines revitalising democracy as one of its four thematic priorities, with special emphasis on:
 - a. increasing the capacity of youth civil society to advance participatory democracy and democratic citizenship within and beyond their memberships;
 - b. conducting more policies and governance processes in a meaningful, participatory manner, involving diverse groups of young people and their representatives/organisations;
 - c. strengthening youth policy and youth work in removing barriers to youth participation;
 - d. improving institutional responses to new developments in democracy, such as the changing participation patterns of young people, digitalisation or internet governance.
2. The current concern with the health of democracies in Europe is not new, and while young people are often at the forefront of democratisation processes, these cannot be their responsibility alone, nor can it be implied that young people are responsible for them.
3. This is also what emerges clearly in the 2021 report by the Secretary General "A democratic renewal for Europe", where she points out, among others, the following symptoms of democracy in distress:
 - a growing disconnection between public expectations and political institutions;
 - historic lows of trust in public authorities and the quality of democracy;
 - dissatisfaction with weaknesses in democratic governance;
 - shrinking spaces for civil society and curbing of freedom of association and assembly;
 - decreases in the public provision of youth spaces and services.

4. All of this contributes to a climate where young people fear retribution when exercising freedom of expression and, at the same time, “show a high degree of political interest but a low degree of engagement with essential democratic processes”.¹ This sentiment is undoubtedly aggravated by the omnipresence of fake news, conspiracy theories and scepticism due to the Covid-19 pandemic which, what’s more, erodes trust in journalism.
5. Against this backdrop, delivering democracy remains certainly a key task for public authorities, but also for civil society, including young people and youth organisations. The 50th anniversary of the youth sector² is an opportunity to renew and deepen what young people bring to the Council of Europe: creativity, commitment, motivation, innovation and participation for and in partnerships for human rights and democracy. It will also be the right moment to highlight what the Council of Europe brings to young people: tailored standards and policies in different fields, drawn up in a unique co-managed fashion, education and training activities, as well as institutional and financial support through the two European Youth Centres and the European Youth Foundation (EYF).
6. Crises are probably inherent in democracy as an imperfect political system that combines individual autonomy (people should be able to control their own lives) with equality (everyone should have the same opportunity to influence decisions). Despite a broad consensus on the importance of youth participation, it is doubtful that practices for involving young people are improving. The case of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education is also symptomatic: with few exceptions, the time and resources allocated to it in education programmes are being reduced, not increased.
7. The effects digitalisation has on democratic participation are still too unknown. Through digital tools, democratisation processes have become accessible in new ways to more people, while shutting others out. Digitalisation of life – in different areas such as democracy, communications, work, culture, education etc – has placed digital environments at the core of an increasing part of people’s lives. Young people have been significantly affected by this trend, being the ones who typically use and integrate digital technologies at the fastest pace. However, this also makes young people most exposed to the challenges emerging from such technologies. Digital tools, including artificial intelligence (AI) systems, open up opportunities for young people, such as access to personalised services and communication tools, but also raise challenges such as behaviour tracking and discrimination due to possible algorithmic bias and poor quality of data sets. Equally challenging is the lack of access of certain groups of young people to digital tools and services and the effects it has on such groups and on our societies (the so-called “digital divide”). The impact on democratic participation and on young people’s rights needs to be closely examined with a view to determining possible measures to maximise opportunities and reduce risks for young people.
8. The only response to problems of democracy is more democracy; *democracy as a process of democratisation* should thus be present in all processes of the campaign.
9. In comparison with other campaigns, this one is different as it is characterised by being limited in time and by its open aim with regard to what may come after as a follow-up: such follow-up being *if and how young people want (if and how national governments can)*. In this regard, having young people and member States define together the core of the follow-up corresponds fully with the central role of youth participation and co-management in the Council of Europe’s youth policy and the intrinsic role of the current generation of young people in revitalising democracy.

Thematic focus, aims and objectives

10. Revitalising democracy, youth participation and digitalisation are interconnected and can be articulated in a variety of aims and objectives and even campaigns. The common denominator is the values underlying these issues: human rights, democracy, rule of law, solidarity, non-discrimination, intergenerational responsibility.

¹ State of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, A democratic renewal for Europe, Report by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe 2021.

² In this respect, it is worth recalling that the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg and the European Youth Foundation were established in 1972.

11. The focus and theme of the campaign will be revitalising democracy, youth participation and emphasising the impact of digitalisation on young people. This implies that:
 - a. revitalising democracy is also a process of addressing the immediate and long-term concerns and reasons for the democratic distress or disillusionment of young people (e.g. shrinking civic spaces, young people's concerns in respect of digitalisation, intergenerational injustices, etc.);
 - b. the Council of Europe, and its member States, take note of the conclusions and proposals emerging from the campaign;
 - c. the follow-up measures reflect those proposals and are implemented by and with young people at the centre and are carried out by youth organisations and interested public/national authorities.

Aim

12. To increase young people's role in the process of revitalising participatory democracy in the Council of Europe and restore mutual trust between young people and democratic institutions and processes.

Specific objectives

13. Specific objectives are as follows:
 - a. To create and strengthen partnerships with youth organisations and movements for a renewed agenda for democracy through youth participation;
 - b. To renew the commitments of the Council of Europe and national governments to young people and youth participation, showcasing co-management as an approach and example of meaningful participation;
 - c. To adjust the youth sector's youth policy and programme to the challenges faced by the current generation(s) of young people, in relation to democracy, youth participation and digitalisation, and make sure that the Council of Europe's instruments, policy and programme are further used by youth policy stakeholders and young people;
 - d. To ensure that public authorities, at all levels and together with young people and youth organisations, design and implement quality policies and practices, both online and offline, which ensure participatory democracy and take into account young people's views of governance;
 - e. To improve mutual trust between young people and public institutions and revive a culture of democracy in which the use of digital practices and artificial intelligence uphold our shared values.

Expected results

14. Expected results to be achieved at the end of the campaign are as follows:
 - a. To identify/voice young people's opinions, concerns and proposals about the state of democracy and youth participation and digitalisation, as well as the threats to them; to create spaces for young people to discuss the deficits and backsliding of democracy and the effects of digitalisation in their own terms, thereby revitalising youth participation and expression at the national and European level;
 - b. To explore the impact, opportunities and threats that digitalisation has on democracy and youth participation together with young people, within youth organisations, member States and other key stakeholders, notably online engagement, informal participation structures, political engagement under the voting age;
 - c. To strengthen the capacity of young people and youth organisations to develop, or renew, their attachment to the values of democracy and human rights, as well as to essential democratic processes, and of advocating their application in and by States Parties to the European Cultural Convention;
 - d. To increase the capacity of youth civil society to advance participatory democracy and democratic citizenship, in particular by initiating dialogue, or otherwise engaging with national authorities on these subjects.

Message/title

15. The draft working title of the campaign in this concept note – Youth for Democracy, Democracy for Youth³ (working title) – which could be shortened to Youth for Democracy for Youth – is meant to reflect a *process* of campaign activities, a *positive* approach to the current generation of young people (as with generations Z or Alpha), a generation which is digitally connected. It suggests associating young people with the revitalisation of democracy, of the Council of Europe and of youth participation. It is a working title which needs to be associated with the sub-title: *A youth campaign for revitalising democracy*.

Methodology for action

16. This campaign will be limited in time to 2022, the year that will mark 50 years of the Council of Europe youth sector. The campaign will kick-off on the occasion of the 46th meeting of the CMJ in March 2022 and will close at the 47th meeting in October, which will provide an opportunity to take stock provisionally and to decide whether any follow-up is needed. Between March and October 2022, both governmental and non-governmental youth partners will be invited to organise national and local activities and events according to a thematic monthly calendar that could cover the following issues.

Monthly subjects:

17. On the theme of revitalising democracy:
 - a. March-April: Democracy and access to rights online and offline;
 - b. April-May: Democracy, equality and non-discrimination.
18. On the theme of meaningful youth participation:
 - a. May-June: Democracy and youth participation at national and European levels (Europe day), including mechanisms to improve them such as co-management;
 - b. June-July: Democracy and young people's freedom of expression and association.
19. On the theme of digitalisation:
 - a. August-September: Democracy and digitalisation: the opportunities and risks digital technologies offer to young people, notably as regards democracy and democratic participation;
 - b. September-October: Young people's rights and digitalisation: opportunities and challenges.
20. The activities will be connected through a dedicated Internet site and disseminated on social media. They will be organised at the initiative of national youth councils and national/local governments, coalitions of youth organisations or groups can express interest to the Council of Europe and receive institutional, financial or educational support (for financial support see § 42).
21. Amongst activities which will take place at the national level, a key European event could be outsourced to the above-mentioned stakeholders, to be organised in partnership with the Council of Europe and the Campaign Steering Group, thereby encouraging a decentralised approach to the implementation of the campaign. Each thematic month, a list of relevant, existing resources will be published, a common reporting and evaluation grid made available. At the end of each month, the results will be published and compiled so as to create a collective meaning and sense of movement.
22. The Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth could also provide support to the campaign by carrying out research on the monthly themes of the campaign. The Council of Europe could also develop a full, ready-to-use communication pack to distribute to national, regional and local levels to encourage local/regional and national authorities to launch/support activities.

What is expected from national and local levels?

³ For information, GENERATION DEMOCRACY was proposed however a large global network with the same name and run by the International Republican Institute exists (<https://www.iri.org/web-story/generation-democracy-vision-advancing-youth-leadership-2020>). In addition, a project of the CoE Education Department, and which won the WfD award, also shares the same name (https://www.coe.int/en/web/world-forum-democracy/youth-for-democracy/-/asset_publisher/pzZAdlsKacmp/content/generation-democracy?_101_INSTANCE_pzZAdlsKacmp_viewMode=view).

23. The Steering Group proposes that, between March and October 2022, governmental and non-governmental partners, at both national and regional/local levels, organise activities and events according to the thematic calendar above.
24. Youth sector partners – young people, youth civil society, activists, academics, but also elected representatives and public sector stakeholders – are invited to explore the monthly topics, discussing issues, scrutinising different standpoints, seeking solutions or compromises, debunking myths or confirming facts, all with the aim to contribute a constituent to the process of revitalising participatory democracy in the Council of Europe and restoring young people’s trust and role in democratic institutions and processes.
25. Activities may be organised online or in person. They may be, for example, debates, web/seminars, interviews, living libraries, hackathons, cartooning, rapping or poetry events. The essential elements are that they are inclusive and interactive, and that they contribute ideas and concepts to be explored in greater depth by the flagship youth event in the summer 2022.
26. National and regional/local authorities are encouraged to organise and/or finance events; youth organisations and networks registered with the EYF may apply for support for activities organised at local level (pilot activities) or in response to targeted calls.

The flagship youth event

27. The flagship event will be organised in Strasbourg at the end of June/beginning of July 2022 (tentatively four days, depending on the programme) and bring together young people having taken part in the campaign months between March and June. The event will collect and discuss the results of the national activities by thematic month and make proposals on how to take them further as part of a follow-up:
 - a. at national level;
 - b. at Council of Europe level.
28. The flagship event could be considered as a milestone or mid-term stocktaking event, with three messages delivered through the campaign: one before, one during and one after the event.
29. The flagship youth event could be organised along the lines of the Enter! Youth Week, but in an enlarged format with an average of 10 young people/representatives per country (i.e. roughly 500 young people/10 representatives from each of the States Parties to the European Cultural Convention, with national youth councils having a role in the selection of participants). Young people under 18 could be part of the delegations. The number could be reduced, but young people should remain the majority as the event is intended to be especially for mobilisation and discussion. Invitations would be also addressed to members of CDEJ and to some political decision-makers, who could be invited to attend for a shorter period.
30. It could focus in particular on the following objectives:
 - a. To celebrate the youth sector’s 50th anniversary and to serve as a launching event for the new network of youth sector alumni (a dedicated group working on this matter could be set up);
 - b. To collect and discuss the results of the activities;
 - c. To debate what young people are currently doing in collaboration with the Council of Europe;
 - d. To showcase examples of young people’s participation, including the co-management system;
 - e. To allow meaningful dialogue with decision-makers;
 - f. To mobilise and motivate young people to take the campaign’s messages further in their local/national context.
31. The International Youth Day could provide an opportunity to give visibility to the campaign initiatives, including in States Parties to the European Cultural Convention.

Governance

32. The campaign will be carried out under the aegis of the Joint Council on Youth, with the active support and involvement of the Council of Europe's institutions and secretariat. Experience suggests that a light Campaign Steering Group should be created to guide the secretariat in planning and implementing the campaign. The Steering Group should include:
- representatives of the Joint Council on Youth (up to three CDEJ and up to three CCJ);
 - European Youth Forum;
 - other experts may be invited according to the theme under discussion.
33. The Campaign Steering Group is responsible for overseeing the preparatory stages of the campaign, defining specific objectives and expected results and submitting these to the CMJ for approval, as well as all aspects of the campaign and preparation of the flagship youth event.
34. In line with the philosophy of the campaign, a process of involvement and co-decision with young activists should be designed so as to strengthen transparency and shared governance.

Resources

35. The Steering Group requests the Council of Europe to put additional resources to prepare and run the campaign, consisting of one co-ordinator and one administrative assistant (full-time positions for 2022) at least, ideally from autumn 2021. The Steering Group should have a meeting in November, and other meetings in 2022 in order to steer and supervise the implementation of the campaign.
36. The Council of Europe Youth Department as a whole should contribute to the implementation of campaign activities and actions. The EYF can help mobilise and attract additional resources through voluntary contributions from member States and other donors, other sources for funding of the campaign will be actively sought, including calls to member States to contribute either financially or in-kind to the campaign activities. The CMJ could ask the Programming Committee on Youth (CPJ) to facilitate EYF calls for grant applications, applying flexibility as regards deadlines for applications as well as project implementation methods, within the limits of the EYF regulations and available budget. Communication should go out soon for organisations to apply.
37. The activities at national level should be funded primarily by national partners, which should also cover the participation of the majority of the participants in the flagship youth event.
38. The campaign should be spread across all the expected results of the "Youth for Democracy" programme budget, financial resources for the preparatory phase of the campaign in 2021 will be secured from the unspent balance from the 2020 budget.

Calendar for implementation

| Month | Key activity/process |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| October-November 2021 | Preparation of the communication strategy |
| | Setting up of the Internet site and communication channels |
| November 2021 | 1 st meeting of the Campaign Steering Group |
| February 2022 onwards | 2 nd meeting of the Campaign Steering Group and any other meeting which might be required |
| March 2022 | Presentation and launch of the campaign at the 46 th meeting of the CMJ |
| March-October 2022 | Thematic events/action days |
| End of June – beginning of July 2022 | Flagship youth event |
| October 2022 | Conclusions, evaluation and follow-up measures to be decided by the Joint Council on Youth |