



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

## **Seminar on Education and Training Pathways of Youth Workers**

**Marina Congress Centre, Helsinki, Finland  
20 February 2019, 1.30 p.m to 1.45 p.m.**

**Snežana Samardžić-Marković**

Minister Terho,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear colleagues and friends,

For two reasons it is a great pleasure for me to address you on the occasion of this Seminar on Education and Training Pathways of Youth Workers here in Helsinki. Firstly, this seminar is a milestone event in the implementation of the Committee of Ministers' recommendation on youth work and I would like to thank our Finnish hosts for their unwavering support in pushing the youth work agenda forward. Secondly, I am pleased that there is no need to explain to you that youth work is neither youth employment nor child labour or some dubious way to get additional pension rights for young people active in civil society. But let me start my speech at the beginning....

Our rights – our freedom – our Europe... this slogan has been chosen to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe which we are celebrating this year. For the past seven decades, the Council of Europe has been promoting and safeguarding human rights, democracy and the rule of law on our continent. Less known – but surely of great interest to everyone here – 2019 also marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone for our European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, which is an emblematic place for many of you and an important reference for youth work and youth policy in Europe.

For half a century, the Council of Europe has been involving young people in the shaping of democracy and the promotion of human rights values. We invite young people to sit around the table, as equal partners with government representatives, to take part in our decision-making processes thanks to our pioneering co-management system. We are the only international organisation in the whole world to do this. Young people and those working with them get involved in building together more just, more democratic and safer societies all over Europe, with the support of the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest and the European Youth Foundation.

We promote human rights-based, participative and opportunity-focused youth policies that see young people as a resource, not as a problem; policies that empower young people and engage them in the development of democratic, inclusive and peaceful societies in Europe, thus helping young people to become agents of positive change – bringing real changes to their present and their future, as well as to the future of the generations to come.

In my former role as a minister responsible for youth in my home country, I often struggled to find modern, participative and state-of-the-art standards for youth policy – it was always the Council of Europe that came to the rescue and I often found my inspiration in the Council of Europe's work... Yet, when it came to comprehensive standards on youth work, there was little available then.]

The term 'youth' describes the increasingly long period of growing up from being a dependent child to becoming an autonomous adult. This time span is most likely one of the biggest adventures and challenges in a person's life time. It is also most decisive for their future. During youth, the influence and support of family, friends and school is important – but we know that most young people need additional

opportunities, support, resources and tools to develop their full potential as individuals and, moreover, as members of society and young citizens. Youth work is not the only source of support, but it is surely one of the most important, providing complementary opportunities, as well as enabling and formative experiences to young people.

This is why promoting and supporting youth work has been, is and will continue to be a priority for my Directorate General and its Youth Department for the years to come. We share this objective with the European Commission which is why youth work is also a priority for our long-standing Youth Partnership with that institution.

Minister Terho, we are particularly grateful to the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture for taking on an active and constructive role in driving forward the youth work agenda in Europe during Finland's Chairmanship of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers and, as you have announced, also during your up-coming EU Presidency.

The community of youth work and youth policy practice in Europe looks at Finland's youth sector with admiration and probably also with a little bit of envy! Youth work and youth policy hold a recognised place in Finnish public policy. The participants here will have the opportunity to study the exemplary training and education offers for both volunteer and paid youth workers. Yet, the Finnish youth sector is also respected for its modesty and sheer absence of self-righteousness and complacency, as well as its openness to learning from others.

This seminar, as part of the programme of the Finnish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, is strategically placed between two other major events – the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention, hosted by the Belgian Chairmanship in 2015, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Youth Work Convention, which will be hosted by the German Chairmanship in 2020.

In 2017, we in the Council of Europe were able to deliver on a promise I made during the closing session of the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Youth Work Convention in Brussels: we developed a recommendation on youth work which was adopted unanimously by our 47 member states. I and my colleagues are very proud of this recommendation, as we are convinced that only the Council of Europe could have done it.

It is the first, and so far the only international policy document offering reference points, benchmarks, policy and quality standards for youth work. The recommendation plays an essential role in underlining the complementarity of the youth work carried out by volunteers on the one hand and by paid youth workers on the other. The studies carried out during the drafting process showed us that the gap between definitions, provisions and the recognition of youth work in different countries in Europe is much wider than we had assumed. One of the major challenges we have identified is the existing huge discrepancy between and within training and education provisions for both volunteer and paid youth workers – this is why our high-level task force on youth work is paying particular attention to measures to address this situation.

The youth work recommendation has created very important political momentum. It has moved youth work higher up the political agenda, there is reason to be optimistic.

Yet, we should not be complacent: the recommendation should help the youth work sector to unite and to develop – within the youth work sector but even more importantly, in relation to other policy fields. One of your important tasks will be to make youth work better known and understood OUTSIDE the youth sector. The impact and role of youth work in building inclusive and peaceful societies and in upholding democracy and human rights are not widely understood.

The implementation of the youth work recommendation is a mid- and long-term task. As the Council of Europe, we commit to supporting our member states to embed youth work provisions in national policy. We will collect and disseminate examples of good practice and work towards a Competency Framework both for paid and volunteer youth workers. And of course, we will also listen to the needs of young people and those working with and for young people so that we may develop relevant measures and standards.

Seventy years ago, the Council of Europe was set up in the wake of the horrific events of the Second World War. Never again should European citizens' human rights be trampled underfoot. Never again should democracy be cast aside to give way to despotic political power. And yet today, in spite of our efforts, we see that the democracy that we thought was assured is wilting. Europe is facing a crisis of

democratic values. We are witnessing a rise of populism and illiberal democracy. That civic engagement that pluralist democracy requires has not been nurtured enough. Democracy is under threat.

Sustainable and sustained youth work provisions are crucial if we want to give young people the best start in adult life they can have. Youth work is essential if we want to keep that sense of civic engagement alive in the young people of today and tomorrow.

Young people can benefit greatly from Europe – and Europe needs its young people more than ever, so as to make sure our democratic values live on. Young people who confidently and convincingly say loud and clear:

**Our rights, our freedom, our Europe.**

I wish you fruitful discussions and look forward to reading the results.