Youth Action Week:
Democracy Now!

European
Youth Centre, Strasbourg, France
28 June – 1 July 2022

Description of thematic plenaries and workshops

A. **Revitalising democracy and access to rights** ●

What are the links between democracy and access to human rights? Which human rights are at stake often in a democracy? What are the key issues that endanger democracies and the protection of human rights? In this strand, participants will explore the intersections of democratic processes and human rights. Key human rights issues will be addressed through the lenses of democracy, exploring the essential connection between protection and access to rights and healthy democratic systems. Furthermore, we will also explore democracy and rights through the perspective of those belonging to marginalised or discriminated groups or minorities. From the workshops, we will collect proposals for actions by participants, by institutions, including the Council of Europe, to revitalise democracy and human rights.

A.1 The right to vote and stand in elections, facilitated by MARINELA ŠUMANJSKI (trainer) – English and French with simultaneous interpretation

Electoral processes are key pillars of democratic systems, involving the exercise of fundamental rights such as the right to vote and the right to stand in elections. The last decade has been marked by a decline of participation of citizens in elections, with young people being notably absent both from the candidates, the political programmes proposed and the voters. Low levels of trust towards politicians and political parties, lack of representativity of electoral lists, programmes that do not take into account the needs and interests of young people, lack of recognition to the new forms of political participation and engagement of young people are some of the reasons identified at the root of this situation. Several initiatives all over Europe have showen some success in motivating young people to take part in electoral processes, such as lowering the voting age at 16 years old or campaigns to increase youth participation in EU Parliamentary elections.

In the workshop, we will discuss youth's political participation nowadays, the current trends, we will examine initiatives that aimed to increase the interest in traditional electoral processes and will make proposals for joint actions to be undertaken in the framework of the campaign and beyond to advance youth political participation.

A.2 We are all equal: the right to non-discrimination and democracy, facilitated by DARIUSZ GRZMENY (trainer) - English

Equality in rights and dignity is the fundament of our human rights system and a key promose of our democracies. While a lot of progress has been achived at European level in terms of legal and policy developments, the lived reality of many minority groups is harsh. Daily experiences of discrimination, marginalisation, exclusion and violence are also result in structural inequality and barriers to participate in democratic debates and processes. How functional are our pluralistic democracies if only the voices of majority are heard? Human rights offer a platform to advocate for the respect of rights of everyone and many movements have achieved success. The workshop will explore also the specific democratic representation of groups such as refugees and migrants, people with disabilities, and LGBTQI people. The workshop participants will learn more from good practices of inclusion of discriminated groups in democratic life, and learn from each other's realities, challenges and solutions. The participants will also come up with ideas for how to make the right to non-discrimination real in a democracy for everyone.

A.3 Gender equality and democracy, facilitated by MARYAM MAJIDOVA (Advisory Council on Youth) – English

In Council of Europe member states, men still represent on average approximately three quarters of members of national governments and parliaments. The realisation of a balanced participation of women and men in decision-making requires co-ordinated action in a wide range of areas and has been high on the Council of Europe agenda for decades. This includes the implementation of existing standards, but also supporting policies to achieve parity democracy. Gender based violence remains a reality for many girls and women in our societies in general, while political involvement is likely to have one more exposed to such harmful behaviours. In this workshop we will explore why true democracy can not exists without gender equality from the human rights perspective. Consequtively, the workshop will also offer opportunities to present practicices evidencing how the support for gender equality is not just a consequence of democratization but rather a part of a borader cultural change. The workshop will be a space for participants to share, relfect and debate on the topic of gender equality and democracy. Participants will also propose their ideas on how to support gender mainstreaming in practicing democracy at local, national and international levels.

A.4 Freedom of expression, the right to information and democracy, facilitated by MARIYA YASENOVSKAYA (trainer), English

How often do you fact check the media? Or believe everything you read on social media or see on television? Could you be a victim of propaganda? Do you have access to reliable media and information? In a fast-moving world where numerous events are being reported on every minute, it is getting harder to fully grasp the sources behind a news piece. It is even harder to understand the importance and relevance of every piece of information. While some are overwhelmed of the wealth of information, sometimes victims of mis- and dis- information, others have no And while one part of the world is under the influence of disinformation, there are still certain communities completely cut off from the informed reality and independent media outlets, stripped from their right to access to information, because they are presented with selective information used to steer the public narrative. So, how does media influence the general public opinion and where do we draw the line of ethical reporting? We often witness the domino effect of fake news leading to (un)intentional disinformation among wider audiences. This workshop aims to explore our access to rightful and verifiable information, and how media influences the general public opinion, as well as the framework of ethical reporting for the sake of countering fake news and disinformation. Moreover it will identify steps which young people can take towards raising awareness of the importance of critical thinking, fact-checking skills and countering fake news. It will also look into the ways different actors use propaganda and controlled media to falsely promote democratic values and steer the public opinion towards misleading conclusions.

A.5 Learning and Living Democracy: the role of education, facilitated by NIKA BAKHSOLIANI (trainer), English

The 2022 Review of the implementation of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education states " Democratic citizenship and human rights are still very loaded, sensitive and "highly politicised" within some European societies. Often, they require to introduce controversial topics in the curriculum, and teachers need additional training to address them..." In this workshop we will discuss why education for democracy is a human right to which everyone is entitled to enjoy. Moreover we will also analyse what makes education for democracy "loaded, sesnitive and highly politisised" and how can we promote it as a human right for eveyone. Consequently, the workshop will also offer participants with the possibility to get to

know interesting practices in the field, including the Human Rights Education Youth Programme or the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.

A.6 The right to a healthy and sustainable environment, facilitated by SELMA LEVRENCE (Cooperation and Development Network Eastern Europe)

It all started with Fridays for Future and quickly spread to whole Europe and the world. In 2021, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution recognizing "the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment", marking the very first time this was declared a human right. Care for the environment and conditions in which generations live today have become one of the core interests among young people across nations, but recent events have shown it has not been supported evenly by different governments. Despite many institutional promises and high-level political commitments made, young people still find themselves in an active battle for a heathly environment and preserving the natural resources today for future generations. What has environmentalism have to do with human rights and how has the right to a healthy environment become one of the key human rights for young people? What are the connections between democratic youth engagement and the right to a healthy environment? How can young people more actively partake in shaping green policies? What methods apart from lobbying and protesting can be applied to advocate for a healthy environment? These questions will be explored in the workshop that will discuss measures for green/environmental advocacy by analyzing different European and national practices of young people's democratic engagement for environmental protection. Moreover, the workshop will tackle access of young people to climate decision-making circles to explore their active role in it.

A.7 Hate speech as a threat to democratic spaces, facilitated by ALEXANDRA VIDANOVIC (trainer), English

In this workshop, we will explore the right to freedom of expression as a key human rights that allows for pluralism of opinions in the public space, as well as one examples of its limitations, hate speech and the threats it poses to democratic spaces. The key challenges to be explored are the misconceptions around freedom of expression as an absolute right, the challenges hatred pose to the voices of the groups targeted, and also how to ensure prevention and combating hate speech, while safeguarding pluralism of opinions. The workshop participants will share good practices and get inspiration from different campaigns developed to combate hate speech, and learn also about the recent work of the Council of Europe in this domain. Finally, participants will also make proposals on tackling hate speech and allowing for freedom of expression.

A.8 The right to peace and democracy, facilitated by Julia Woźniak and Maciej Rotowski, English

The Council of Europe mission is to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law, understood as the key pillars for peace in Europe. Article 1 of the UN Declaration on the Right to Peace states that, "Everyone has the right to enjoy peace such that all human rights are promoted and protected and development is fully realized." War against Ukraine is a stark reminder that the "Never again!" call that motivated the international cooperation after the Second World War does not belong to history. Democracy might be challenged as a system, but it is the most peaceful way of solving conficts within our societies. As a paradox, democracy cannot thrive in times of war. The workshop will explore the connection between democrac and peace, and how young people can

take action in the framework of the campaign to respond to the challenges posed by the war and confict-afflicted communities all over Europe.

B. Meaningful youth participation ⬤

Youth participation is about having the rights, the means, the space(s), the opportunity and, if necessary, the support to influence the decisions and actions which concern the lives of young people. Do all young people know how to participate? Or how to participate meaningfully? Who are the young people that have the right? Where does youth participation starts? How one can learn how to participate? The formal schooling in most places in Europe is still based on "frontal" or input-based pedagogy where teacher has the power and grades the success of each student. If young people are not offered the opportunity to participate in democratic process during their school years, they are completely not prepared to participate meaningfully in democratic processes after school. What schools can do to prepare youth? What is the role of youth organisations? And what about numerous protests like "Fridays for future" or other civic disobedience actions, what makes them meaningful? These and many other questions will be discussed during the workshops within the strand of "Meaningful Youth participation". Moreover, from the workshops we will extract recommendations for future actions of participants within the campaign "Democracy Here, Democracy Now" and for the Council of Europe and its member states.

B.1 Ensuring structures for meaningful youth participation (learning from co-management), facilitated by SPYROS PAPADATOS (Advisory Council on Youth) and MARY DROSOPOULOS (trainer), English

European Revised Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life defines participation as having the rights, the means, the space and the opportunity and support where necessary to participate and influence the decisions and actions which affect their lives. The co-management system of the youth sector of the Council of Europe is a unique system of co-decision between youth civil society and governmental representatives. The workshop will investigate existing practices of youth participation, will reflect what makes it meaningful within the existing structures and come up with a set of the recommendation for the Council of Europe and for the Campaign to focus on.

B.2 Minority youth participation, facilitated by DZHAFER SAATCHA (trainer), English

Meaningful participation of youth belonging to minorities can occur when they have the right, space, opportunity, means, and support to participate, when the right to participation is protected, and when states take measures to create these conditions. The workshop will explore the conditions for and barriers preventing minority youth to participate in the decision-making process. The workshop will also investigate the ways how minority groups could be better represented within different structures, share existing good practices, and come up with a list of recommendations for the Council of Youth and Democracy Here, Democracy Now campaign.

B.3 The role of youth work in removing barriers to participation, facilitated by TAMAR TSATSKRIALASHVILI (trainer), English

Youth participation can bring very concrete and visible benefits, not only to young people themselves, but also to the organisations/institutions and communities they are involved in. We cannot assume, however, that participation will always bring positive results. Evidence shows that if it is dealt with in an inappropriate way (represented, for example, by the lower rungs of the ladder of participation), it might actually have a negative impact on those involved. In this workshop we

will explore the role of youth work in removing barriers for youth participation, share the successful practices and will develop a list of the recommendations for future.

B.4 Securing an enabling environment for youth civil society, facilitated by DRAGANA JOVANOVSKA (European Youth Forum), English

In this workshop, we will explore the freedom of assembly and association and its central role in pluralistic democracy. The barriers faced by youth civil society in recent years have been addressed by the newly adopted recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on protecting youth civil society and young people, and supporting their participation in democratic processes (CM/Rec(2022)6).

Within this, the workshop will also explore the added value of youth civil society in a democracy and the importance of encouraging, supporting and allowing for civil society to grow. We will discuss how we can follow-up the adoption of the recommendation and how to address specific challenges faced by youth civil society in the framework of the campaign.

B.5 Democratic schools and student participation, facilitated by KATERINA ZIEZULINA (trainer), English

Democratic society starts with civic competences obtained in school. Young citizen should have an opportunity to learn about democratic values, institutions, and procedures not only "in theory", but through practice in their younger age. Democratic principles and participative approach are the basis of citizen upbringing in schools. Together with students counselling bodies they give an opportunity to develop skills of active participation and decision making. In this workshop we would share good practices of existing democratic schools and develop recommendations for systemic changes in school upbringing process.

B.6 Local youth participation in decision-making, facilitated by BOGDAN IMRE (trainer), English and French with simultaneous interpretation

Local youth participation is a comprehensive, available, and result-oriented process of active youth involvement in the decision-making process. Young people is a relatively large group of society, which needs should be met and fulfilled on different levels. Inviting young people to co-operate in solving the local problems that concern their needs can stimulate finding a creative solution, changing perspectives, and bringing new ideas for the fruitful development of local community. During the workshop we will share some best practices of local youth participation and generate ideas for their further development and integration in local communities' structures.

B.7 "Disruptive" forms of youth participation, facilitated by DRAGAN ATANASOV (trainer), English

The recent history of Europe had seen numerous protests and other forms of disruptive activism of young people, such as hacktivism or the Fridays for Future movement. Through these forms of disruptive dissent young people express their concerns about political, social and economic issues in their societies drawing the attention to topics ignored by mainstream politics. This workshop will provide a space to discuss the motivation behind various forms of disruptive activism and learn from the experiences of participants. We will look at the political results achieved and propose ideas for follow-up in the framework of the campaign.

C. Digitalisation ●

What are the links between democracy and digitalisation? Does digitalisation improve young people's access to democratic participation, or are some young people in fact left behind, when society becomes more digitalised? What happens with democracy when new technologies fall in the wrong hands? This strand of workshops will explore different elements of this digitalisation and democracy; including the impact of algorithms on democratic decision making, how discrimination takes place online and what can be done about it, how the internet is regulated and what the potential and concern is when youth work moves online.

C.1 Online surveillance, data protection and democratisation, facilitated by THEO LECARPENTIER (trainer), English and French with simultaneous interpretation

How are oppressive regimes/undemocratic governments using surveillance to silence youth organisations/citizens? How are they introducing restrictions to the online civic space? What is data protection, why is it important and how is it connected to democracy? How do existing data practices, including dark patterns and deceptive design, contribute to a reduction in freedom and choice for young people? How is data used in elections (e.g. Cambridge Analytica scandal), how should we approach political advertising online, when do algorithmic choices end up taking away our democratic choice?

This workshop will address the current challenges surrounding the use of data and surveillance techniques used by governments and companies, and how to reduce the influence they have on reducing young people's democratic spaces and choices.

C.2 Addressing structural racism, sexism and discrimination online, facilitated by ALESSANDRA COPPOLA (No Hate Speech Network), English

In 2020, the British government decided to base the final grades of high-school students on an algorithm rather than on the results of exams. The algorithm scored students well-off neighbourhoods higher than those from lower-income areas. What does it mean when we give power to algorithms to decide on sensitive issues? How do we decide on which issues an algorithm can decide instead of a human? How can we make the criterias on which an algorithm operates and the data sources transparent and consulted with all those affected? How can we ensure that algorithmic programming doesn't reproduce and increase human bias, prejudice or discrimination? The use of artificial intelligence in a biased manner is only one example of online discrimination. This workshop will explore how structural racism, sexism and discrimination online happens, what are the reasons behind it and how we can respond to it.

C.3 Internet governance and regulation, facilitated by VERONICA ŞTEFAN (trainer), English

Who develops and makes decisions about the internet? Who regulates the internet and can a young person have a say in this at all? Is the internet as promised a democratic space or it requires further democratisation? This workshop will look at how the internet and online platforms are governed, how different structures in place for Internet Governance such as EuroDIG or the Internet Governance Forum are ensuring that young people can take part in decision-making.

C.4 Digital citizenship and digital citizenship education, facilitated by AMAL HAMICH (Bureau international de la jeunesse), English

When smartphones and internet get combined with traditional ways of political participation like voting, petitioning and political campaigning – could it be a winning combination? Several countries have introduced e-voting and online consultations on key issues, many political parties are campaigning online, activists are harnessing the opportunities to organise and petition online. How do we integrate these new opportunities into our democratic processes and institutions? How do we make sure no one is left behind and harness the promise of democracy of engaging in dialogue

and decision making from equal positions? What is the role of Artificial Intelligence use and deployment in democratic processes? This workshop will explore the opportunities for young people to take part in digital democracy, looking at new apps and models and how they can enhance our participation in public life.

C.5 The potential of digital democracy, facilitated by Georg Pirker (DARE Network), English

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C.6 Online youth participation, facilitated by TAREK AMRAOUI, English

Technology is an integral part of the lives of young people. Digital methods, tools and platforms have created a lot of enthusiasm regarding the possibilities for engagement offered from both the perspective of democracy and of youth participation. However, in the recent years questions regarding the ethics of using some of these platforms have risen, along with debates around the effects they produce. The restrictions imposed to stop the spread of COVID19 have obliged youth organisations to review their working methods and adapt themselves to working mainly online. The experience of online work in the pandemic revealed the resilience and capacity to adapt of the youth sectorm but also put a spotlight on the gaps in terms of access and competence in accessing online tools. This workshop will examine the potential for youth participation and youth work in the online sphere – and address the challenges connected with unequal access to digital tools.