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YOUTH FOR DEMOCRACY FOR YOUTH

A Council of Europe youth campaign for revitalising
democracy

INCEPTION SEMINAR

European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, 23-25 November 2021

REPORT

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Executive summary

In October 2021, the Joint Council on Youth took the decision to initiate a youth campaign to revitalise democracy in Europe. The campaign is planned for March-October 2022 and connects with the 50th anniversary of the youth sector in the Council of Europe. The campaign aims 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. It will focus on three key themes: revitalising democracy, meaningful youth participation and digitalisation.

The inception seminar was organised to start the preparations for the campaign. It was held in Strasbourg between 23 and 25 November 2021 and gathered main stakeholders in the youth sector, all prospective partners, and activists in the upcoming campaign. The participants discussed the key themes of the campaign and their relevance for young people, further developed the campaign strategy and gave valuable feedback to the proposed communication strategy and made proposals for activities to be held in the framework of the campaign at European, national, and local level. Their proposals, together with proposals stemming from other meetings, will be put forward to the Campaign Steering Committee.

The report outlines in detail the proposals made by the participants in the seminar and outlines the main discussions, while the executive summary only highlights several of them.

The seminar proved that the theme is actual for young people and their organisations, the concerns highlighted by the Secretary General 2021 report and the Joint Council on Youth outline of the campaign being mirrored in the discussions of the seminar. In addition to this, participants added the two dimensions of concern and action in respect to social and economic barriers faced by young people and their impact on their participation with democratic processes and questions about intergenerational solidarity and justice. Participants also highlighted possible themes of campaigning such as ensuring a legal framework for youth participation structures, lowering the voting age to 16 and lowering the age when one can stand in elections. They highlighted the importance of education for democratic citizenship and political education at local and national level proposing this to be another theme of campaigning, capitalising on already existing work done by the Council of Europe.

The proposed slogan for the campaign "Democracy here. Democracy now" with its declinations for each of the thematic months of action was well received by the participants, as well as the proposed campaign strategy. Further work is due to make sure that the visuals and the templates are accessible and easy translatable into other languages.

The participants proposals reflect the desire to run a democratic campaign that showcases young people being able to initiate and lead public discussions about the state of our democracies, discussions that are inclusive of everyone concerned. In this sense, their proposals for structures and features of the campaign reflect this desire to allow for a youth-led campaign where the Council of Europe provides the framework.

Equally clear is that the campaign should put effort into promotion of the already existing standards, tools and resources developed by the Council of Europe and avoid duplication. This will also allow coherence with the 50th anniversary of the youth sector in the Council of Europe.

Campaigning at European level with the Council of Europe also allows youth organisations and initiatives to become better connected with other services of the institution.

In terms of activities, the focus is placed on local and national activities on the three themes with the support of the European Youth Foundation and from other sources. The activities proposed reflect the wealth of youth work and non-formal education. To support this work at national and local level participants proposed that the website of the campaign acts as a hub for information, practice sharing and action and that a campaign toolkit supports the work of activists.

The participants also proposed that the Youth Event becomes a Youth Democracy Festival held in Strasbourg and in parallel locations in Europe turning into a celebration of democracy and youth participation. This reminds us that a youth campaign for democracy should be youthful, just like democracies are as they need to constantly renew themselves to be actual. A youthful campaign, participants reminded, should also be one where participatory arts and leisure activities are incorporated allowing for different forms of expression and enjoyment. Democracy might be a commitment, it might be in danger, but revitalization should also remind society that the process of democratization holds the possibility of hope and joy.

Overview of the seminar

The inception seminar was organised to plan the newly adopted campaign of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe. The seminar aimed to bring together the main stakeholders and partners at European and regional level to look together at all aspects of the campaign.

The inception seminar expected results were:

- a shared understanding of the rationale, aims and objectives of the campaign;
- a plan of key activities at national and European levels reflecting the three themes of the campaign (revitalising democracy, meaningful youth participation, digitalisation);
- a strategy for communication at European and national levels, based on the concept being prepared for and by the Council of Europe;
- a clarification of the roles and communication channels between national partners and activists, the Council of Europe and other European partners;
- an understanding of the financial resources available and required for the campaign and the possibilities for fundraising for specific activities.

Programme and methodology

The programme of the seminar spread over 3 days starting with an exploration of participants' understanding of the key issues connecting with the backsliding of democracy in Europe, revitalising democracy, meaningful youth participation and digitalisation. The second day of the seminar was dedicated to the strategic definition of the campaign: its aim and objectives, expected results, communication strategy, as well as ways to communicate internally between the campaign and Council of Europe secretariat and the European, national, and local partners. The third day looked at planning activities in the campaign following the focus of the thematic action months, as well as at opportunities for funding offered by the European Youth Foundation.

The programme of the seminar is to be found in the appendices.

Participants

The seminar was attended by 34 participants, representatives of public authorities, European, national, and local youth organisations. A list of participants is appended.

Summary of main issues identified by the participants in respect to key themes of the campaign

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:

- increasing the capacity of youth civil society to advance participatory democracy and democratic citizenship within and beyond their memberships;
- conducting more policies and governance processes in a meaningful, participatory manner, involving diverse groups of young people and their representatives/organisations;
- strengthening youth policy and youth work in removing barriers to youth participation;
- improving institutional responses to new developments in democracy, such as the changing participation patterns of young people, digitalisation, or internet governance.

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. 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.

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. As the Secretary General points out in her report: "The danger is that our democratic culture will not fully recover."²

This sense of urgency for action in restoring and revitalising the democratic culture in the Council of Europe member states was also reflected by the discussions in the inception seminar. What motivates most of participants is both a commitment to the core values of the council of Europe, but as well as deep sense of worry and need to act to counter this trend,

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 Ibidem.

to revitalize, to reaffirm commitment to democratic values and to improve our democratic institutions.

The inception seminar was marked from the beginning by the circumstances in which it was organised: the restrictions imposed by governments to stop the spread the COVID-19, the protocols to be respected to ensure the maximum amount of safety for all participants, but also the fear that the very manifestation of humanity in connecting and engaging with each other can be the biggest peril.

The current sanitary crisis cannot be blamed for all the backsliding in our democratic culture. As Matjaž Gruden, Director of Democratic Participation, Council of Europe, highlighted in his opening speech, the effects of the previous crises are not to be ignored when looking at how we have got here: the economic crisis that marked the last decade, the rise of populism and the constant shrinking of the space for civil society, the challenges posed by the refugee crisis, the climate changes, the persistence of fake news and the unknown effects of digitalisation of our societies. In the times of crisis, young people tend to be the ones that pay the highest prize, they must live with the consequences of action or inaction the longest.

Yet, crisis is not unknown in democratic societies, but one of the causes of the current situation can be found in the fact that our European societies have been guided by “the politics of inevitability - a sense that the future is just more of the present, that the laws of progress are known, that there are no alternatives, and therefore nothing really to be done.”³ As Matjaž Gruden highlighted: we have believed that democracy is a given, that nothing can actually contest it, therefore making all of us – citizens, decision-makers, etc. – ignorant to the signs of backsliding.

Furthering the discussion, participants identified dimensions and aspects of the challenges to democracy as experienced by young people.

The low trust in the democratic institutions expected to deliver democracy is complemented by a low engagement with basic democratic processes, notably voting. The causes for this low trust can be found in ‘failed’ experiences of participation of young people who have mostly been used for decoration to legitimise such processes, but as well in the anti-system narratives and the demise of ‘the political’ as something worthwhile to be engaged with. Young people are engaged with political issues as shown by their persistence in placing climate change on the agenda of the governments, but they are reluctant to get involved in voting, getting elected and with political parties in what are more traditional forms of participation. The suitability and sustainability of democratic institutions also relies in the functioning of the mechanisms. If young people feel disenfranchised and are not using the mechanisms of democratic participation, the risks are hard to mitigate.

Our democratic system is also very complex and requires a certain level of literacy of the citizen to properly engage with it in ways that can be found satisfactory. This literacy is generally ensured through programmes of democratic citizenship and human rights education provided through both formal and non-formal education. Effort to make provisions and set quality standards can be seen in the Council of Europe Charter on education for democratic citizenship and human rights education or in the Framework of competences for democratic culture, but the actual access to quality EDC/HRE remains problematic in all member states.

³ Timothy Snyder, *The road to unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*, Tim Duggan Books, New York, 2018.

The pervasiveness of corruption adds up to the lack of trust in democracy and its system. Questions relating to the rule of law and its application in member states further disenfranchise young people and contribute to a feeling of hopelessness regarding actions taken. This is further capitalised by populist parties with or without an anti-system narrative in place.

Already before the pandemic, a trend of curtailing the rights to assembly and association was worrying civil society worldwide. This was highlighted by youth civil society in several occasions: laws limiting the freedom to associate, the scope of the work of youth organisations, but also practices aiming to intimidate (e.g., financial controls) or to freeze the work of associations at local, national and sometimes European level. The participants also emphasized the continuation of this trend, accentuated by the restrictions imposed by the public health situation.

Economic and social injustice remains an important barrier for young people's participation and trust in democracies. The latest reports and studies show the high impact that the pandemic had on young people in terms of unemployment and their overall economic and social situation. Eventually, the challenges experienced before in the access and exercise of social and economic rights have been amplified by the ongoing crisis and the resultant and foreseen measures that will address the economic consequences of the sanitary crisis. If anything, the pandemic also revealed the cleavages in our societies and the need for solidarity manifested also in economic terms.

Against this background affecting all young people, the challenges of racism and discrimination faced by minority youth are at an all times high. Intergenerational justice issues were also brought up against the background of discussions around climate change, but as well in the broader sense. Young people are already a vulnerable and discriminated social category in our societies, those who are also belonging to minority groups are facing multiple and intersectional discrimination.

Any discussion about democratic citizenship will also need to allow the space to discuss the ways to participate for those who are not having citizenship rights, particularly when it comes to asylum seekers, refugees, and undocumented persons (migrants or not). The ways in which we reconcile the exercise of human rights with the limitations posed by nationality will need to be particularly addressed by any exercise to revitalize democracy.

Digitalisation remains a key issue affecting young people. While it is not clear what the effect of digitalisation on democratic participation, some processes have become more accessible in new ways to more people, while others are shutting down or are becoming opaque. While young people are at the forefront of integration and use of digital technologies, this is not valid for all of them. As more and more services require both access and literacy, the digital divide increases. Artificial intelligence provides for additional challenges when looking at algorithmic bias, poor quality of data sets and opacity of the system. While there is potential in any technological advance, the promise of liberation through technology does not hold truth and that critical and careful assessment needs to be done every time new developments are adopted. As Sherry Turkle highlights in her work it is time to reassess why and if we do not expect more from technology than we expect from each other.⁴ This will entail that the campaign looks at both the impact of digitalisation on democratic processes, but also how to

⁴ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, Basic Books, New York, 2017.

make processes connected with digitalisation (i.e. Internet Governance, algorithm transparency) more democratic and inclusive when it comes to young people and will require more education for young people to be able to participate fully in these processes.

Connected with the effects of digitalisation and the effects of social media platforms on ways of communication in our societies, participants also shared a deep concern with the tendency of polarization in our societies, backed by the effects of fake news and conspiracy theories, all in all affecting our capacity to hold public debates on sensitive themes.

As concluded by the participants of the seminar, democracy is about power, and the ways power is distributed and exercised by all members of society. Democracy is about the power to shape, influence, participate in the public debate and in the decision making that stems out of it.

Defining the campaign

The second day of the seminar was dedicated to further developing the campaign with the input of the participants and starting from the proposals made by the Joint Council on Youth and Tomato, the company selected to develop further the communication strategy of the campaign. Discussions were held around aims and objectives, expected results and key messages proposed for the campaign.

In respect to the aim and objectives of the campaign, a slight reformulation of the aim of the campaign was proposed by the participants:

"To increase young people's role in the process of revitalising participatory democracy **in the Council of Europe and its member states.**"

Participants considered the proposed objectives relevant in their essence, they have suggested the addition to the objectives of the campaign of one pertaining to access to education, particularly to education for democratic citizenship and human rights education. In addition, particularly in respect to objectives and themes it was suggested to campaign also for concrete outcomes such as the lowering of voting age to 16 and the lowering of the age when people can stand in elections.

It was also suggested to ensure the campaign addresses young people from member states from an early age as possible, with a proposed age range of 15-30. Potential articulations could include the age of 13 as starting point, being also the age used in the NHSM campaign and the age when young people gain access to social media accounts.

Additional objectives suggested aimed to address questions of intergenerational dialogue and justice and questions of social justice as a key barrier to meaningful participation.

In respect to target groups, primary or secondary, it was highlighted that those who work with young people (i.e., teachers, youth workers) should also be targeted by the campaign along with decision makers/institutional representatives. Particular attention is to be paid to local authorities as they are one of the first encounters with democratic institutions and processes.

In respect to **expected results of the campaign**, groups have proposed:

- A focus on connecting young people with politicians and public servants with an aim to reduce the trust gap
- Propose a definition of democracy that can be used as reference in the campaign
- Develop a toolkit for the campaigners that prompts them to the already existing content developed by the Council of Europe (i.e., chapter on democracy in Compass).
- Develop materials in respect to the three themes of the campaign and ensure that they support and guide the work of campaigners at local and national level.
- Develop guidelines for communication that are easy to follow and ensure coherence of the overall campaign.
- Ensure visibility of practices and research on the website/platform of the campaign.

Particular attention was also given to questions of organisation and involvement in the campaign. In respect to the involvement of national partners and their role, notably national youth councils and members of the European Steering Committee on Youth:

- urgent communication (to be done still in December 2021) about the campaign, the planned activities, and the ways to join should be sent to CDEJ members, the national youth councils, and international organisations so that they can include the campaign into their annual plans of work.
- information meetings should also be organised to support the partners understand what can fit in and how they can best make the preparations for the campaign. These meetings could take place online in December and January.
- once the call for applications for activities in the framework of the campaign is launched by the European Youth Foundation, information should be sent as widely as possible and possibly several information/training meetings should be made available for both content related questions and technical parts of the applications.
- EYCA, ERYICA, EuroDesk are open to cooperate and be useful through their channels and partners. They can reach out many young people through public institutions and civil society Organisations in different countries and to inform about the Campaign. The later can be done also by having the campaign logo in their productions and informative materials produced for and during different events.
- there were mentioned several times about fears related with the slow communication and that information is not provided sufficiently and time wisely. Those organizations that plan their annual plans or upcoming strategies should be informed during December, as the year is getting to an end while would be good to be informed about the Campaign and secure some time in their upcoming programmes or planned activities for the next year.
- National Agencies for Erasmus and European Solidarity Corps programme can also contribute by informing their beneficiaries about the campaign. Synergies with the 2022 European Year of Youth (also under planning) are to be thought particularly at national level.
- regarding organisation of the campaign, it was suggested that it will be complicated to organise in such a short time national campaign committees. It was suggested that a more flexible approach should be taken for the campaign. Wherever possible, national contact points should be established with a role to forward information in national language, support translations, as well as inform the national and local organisations and keep track of the activities realised in the

campaign. These national contact points will also make the national priorities and issues visible both at national level and at international level.

In respect **to expectations from the campaign secretariat**, proposals included:

- attention to the needs for information of different partners should also be reflected at website and internal communication level.
- the secretariat should act like a hub and be able to facilitate information flow, networking and mobilize people.
- creation of monthly information and update meetings should be organised online on a regular basis already from the preparation phase.
- internal channels of communication such as Slack, Discord and a cloud space for common files should be established.
- creation of a mailing list/newsletter already in the preparation of the campaign/ possibly also in video format.
- make contacts of people involved in the campaign visible on the website, including partners at European, national, and local level and contact points.
- ensure a calendar on the website, focus on activities held at local and national level
- pay attention to motivation building and keeping up the motivation of people throughout the campaign.
- ensure a map of what is to be found where, with a particular attention to templates and resources necessary.

In respect to the ways **to involve young people in the campaign and the role of youth organisations** it was suggested that:

- to produce and provide promotional materials produced for the campaign in different projects which are not specifically financed by the Council of Europe. The latter will help to promote the campaign in different upcoming and already in ongoing youth initiatives and might boost local and national campaigns in grassroots level.
- to provide small grants to organizations which are eligible to translate the campaign materials from English into their national and/or local languages and produce these materials.
- to organize training for trainers (ToT) from different countries who would obtain certain knowledge, attitudes, and skills to be competent to run educational activities related to democracy, specifically in the way the Council of Europe sees that it needs to be done.
- to organize wide range of online competitions and online awareness rising activities on topic related issues to involve by that many young people and cause interest on the campaign.
- to involve influencers from different social media platforms, who can promote the campaign among their followers and peers by youth friendly language-based messages.
- to have an annual call to conduct training courses on the theme of democracy in local and national levels like Compass national training courses and Local Peace Camps.
- to have a special newsletter only for the campaign activities which will give structured overview about the Campaign updates.

The work on defining the campaign also included the presentation of the draft communication strategy proposed by Tomato, the selected company and the draft visuals developed for the campaign. The presentation of the draft strategy and the visuals was well received by the participants.

The campaign proposed a slogan for the campaign "Democracy here. Democracy now." – where here is anywhere where people are and they democratically organise, and now is anytime as democracy requires an everyday commitment.

A general note for the communication of the objectives of the campaign was made to use more youth friendly language in the overall communication.

In respect to the key messages of the campaign, participants discussed the proposed slogan of the campaign: "Democracy here. Democracy now" with its various articulations (i.e. "Democracy here. Human rights now."). They have suggested further reflection on:

- the existence of a platform Democracy now particularly dedicated to debates, cinema production on questions of democracy and the eventual overlap.
- to be careful in respect to some of the suggested articulations to ensure they do not sound too imperative and generate the counter-effect than intended.
- to reflect at the use of the word "revitalization" with a suggestion that the subtitle of the campaign is "A youth campaign for boosting democracy."

In general, key messages will need to be translated in national languages and further reflection was given to this. It was concluded that in general the slogan translates well, but it might be required that in certain contexts it is further adapted to better convey the key messages.

Several principles and questions were raised in respect to the ways the campaign should be carried out online:

- the campaign communication strategy and the campaign tools should be inclusive and accessible. Wherever possible checks should be done against already existing standards (e.g., universal design);
- templates for the slogan and the visual design should be made accessible in editable forms, so they can be translated and used in national and local languages;
- it would be good to have a logo available to provide a unitary and recognisable symbol for the campaign;
- some of the visuals require additional work because the symbols used are pointing out to imagery of liberation and breaking free, which might not be suitable in the context of debates on restrictions on the

Activities in the campaign

Particular attention was given to the activities to be organised in the framework of the campaign. A presentation of the European Youth Foundation outlined the upcoming possibilities for funding of activities at local level (through pilot projects) and at international level. The call for activities in the framework of the campaign is expected to be public in the aftermath of the meeting of the Programming Committee in December 2021.

Further discussions in the third day of the campaign articulated and made proposals around the key three themes and the activities to be organised in the framework of the thematic action months. Participants worked in three groups to discuss what should be done in the framework of each thematic month:

- Objectives of the action month
- Focus themes for campaigning
- Activities and support from the Council of Europe.

Revitalising democracy

Under the theme of revitalising democracy, the Joint Council on Youth has proposed two thematic action months on the following themes:

- March-April: Democracy and access to rights online and offline;
- April-May: Democracy, equality and non-discrimination.

The group discussed the foci of these action months and their temporal position in the campaign and proposed that the following articulation.

Both months should have the objective to campaign for quality education for democratic citizenship and human rights education and should associate with the work around the HRE Youth Forum. This also signals that while we act on these themes during these three months, this will not solve issues, rather just bring them in the spotlight.

Democracy and access to rights online and offline

This is the first thematic action month in the campaign; therefore, it also plays an important role in mobilising and associating partners and young people to the campaign. It builds on the premise that respect for human rights is a pre-requisite for democratic societies and that the right to participate is understood as a condition for both human rights and democracy.

The focus of the first month is to raise awareness of young people about their rights and that the access and exercise of their rights are essential in democratic societies.

Democracy, equality and non-discrimination

The second thematic action month should focus on:

- giving voice to the experiences of discrimination and racism faced by young people;
- associate and give visibility to associations of minority youth with a view of making participation in democratic processes equal;

- initiating dialogue between young people and institutions, with a particular attention given to the youth policy and youth related institutions, Equality bodies and National Human Rights Institutions.

Proposed activities

Several suggestions are made for possible activities to be realised in the framework of the action months:

Online activities

1. Photo competition/call

Invite young people to share photos of the places where they experience democracy, be these places youth clubs, schools, parliaments, voting polls, homes. This will allow us a large visualisation and inquiry into where and how democracy is experienced by young people.

2. Young people talk democracy

Young people from each of the states party to the European cultural convention are invited to do a video where they discuss and explain to their peers in Europe about democracy issues and debates in their country, human rights issues. This should be chain videos/insta talks/etc.

3. Influencers

Invite different types of influencers, from known vloggers to renown writers to discuss with young people issues of their concern in respect to human rights, education for democratic citizenship and human rights education to generate media attention and public debate.

4. Mainstream media

Make partnerships with mainstream media (newspapers, television) at national and European level to feature every month the voice of young people debating/discussing the theme of that specific action month. This could be also youth representatives from national youth council or simply active young people.

Offline and hybrid activities

5. Democracy week

Around the 9th May (Europe Day) or possibly at the same time with the European Youth Event in Strasbourg, activities at national and local level are organised – creating a big European festival of democracy and human rights. The week could also allow for hybrid and online activities.

6. Coordinated international activities

International youth networks or national youth organisations could cooperate to organise international activities held in the member states, applying where the case is for support to the European Youth Foundation.

7. Youth Ambassadors Network

To create a network of young people/activists in the campaign that will support the work at national level and that could further the work of the coordinators. These young people could be trained online/offline and could run awareness raising activities.

Cooperation with existing networks of multipliers/ambassadors should also be thought.

8. Dialogue with institutions

Meetings with institutions that have a role in the protection of equality and human rights (Equality Bodies, National Human Rights Institutions, youth ministries, etc.) to discuss the way young people can exercise their human rights, how can these institutions become more youth-friendly and accessible, how they can support particularly young people in accessing their rights, as well as fighting discrimination.

In addition, it should be foreseen to have meetings with local and regional authorities, also with the support of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and their network of Youth Delegates. In addition, collaboration with the Parliamentary Assembly on Youth and members of the assembly from each country should be looked for.

9. Living libraries

Should be organised at local level to support the dialogue activities, but as well to promote equality and non-discrimination. Connections with the members of the networks of Living and Human Libraries organisers should be ensured.

10. Call for artists and artistic expression on the themes of the campaign

To launch a call for artists to submit music, paintings, drawings on the key themes of the campaign.

11. Toolbox for the campaign

A toolbox/toolkit for the campaign should be available on the website with:

- information about the focus of the action month, concepts used and additional resources;
- how-to do proposed activities;
- key messages and visual templates to support the communication work online and offline.

Support from Secretariat

- create a toolbox/kit for the action month;
- ensure coordination and information meetings;
- support networking and coordination among organisations;
- ensure visibility on the website of the activities at local level;
- support the activities with resources (content and methodology, materials of the campaign);
- create connections between the people active in the campaign and other initiatives of the Council of Europe.

Digitalisation

The group further looked at the question of digitalisation in relationship with democracy and challenges faced. The group identified several key issues that can be addressed about the campaign and proposed activities to this end.

Digitalisation as a tool to engage young people

Activities: compendia and research knowledge on social media and youth (activity); workshops on impact of digitalisation on mental health and debates on this topic; videos to address different issues (example: what happens when people participate in online courses).

Potential partners: national research centres, Youth Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission, universities, local practices & local level organizations.

Secretariat role: materials, collecting data from countries (like Ministry of Digital Transformation),

Using e-democracy tools and services

Under this theme further attention should be given to e-democracy tools and their use by both young people and governments with further cooperation with organisations that have already worked on the topic.

Polarization, addressing the social bubbles

Activities: online resource and information about data collection and safety online; workshop on addressing disinformation.

Potential partners: EUvsDisinformation.

Media and digital literacy to address the disinformation, media literacy and critical thinking:

Activity: online courses how to use internet properly.

Partners: NGOs and government involvement (Ukrainian practice).

Council of Europe to offer support to implement and offer visibility.

Data safety and security online:

Activities: online courses; workshops, an app or a platform to address directly to the government their concerns.

Hate speech online

Activities: creating videos on "no hate speech"; online cultural events (concerts) combined with national and local activities; another idea of an activity could be a debate with partners/ participants from: ECHR, youth NGOs, IT companies.

Council of Europe should provide the internet space concerts that can be online.

Access to internet as a right

Activities: discussions with lawyers on internet as a human right.

Health and wellbeing online

Possibility to connect with COVID-19 pandemic issues.

Meaningful youth participation

The action months under this theme should focus on clarifying that when we talk about youth participation this means first and foremost participation in decision-making, and therefore should not be reduced to participation in various activities (youth work, projects, etc.). The action month should pay attention to explaining the relation between democracy and participation and to instil a sense of power that young people can take part and can change.

The action months should also highlight the different types and examples of participation in decision-making besides voting and should promote the benefits of co-management.

The action months should also address the pre-conditions for participation: education and support required by young people in learning participation.

In respect to political participation, particular attention could be given to:

- Lowering the voting age to 16 years old. This seems to be the interest in at least several countries where such campaigns are planned and could be the topic of the start of a national debate in others.
- Lowering the age at which one can stand in elections.
- Ensuring a legal framework (or other type of provision) for representative youth participation structures at national and local level.

Proposed activities at European, national, and local level

1. Youth-led democracy festivals – bringing together youth NGOs, youth initiatives, elected representatives, and other decision makers. Transform the European Youth Event into a Festival that celebrates democracy.
2. Organise a Council of Europe seminar on the importance of youth participation for decision making.
3. Make a call to gather people who want to be involved in meaningful activities (grants, projects, opportunities).
4. Information campaign about co-management and how it can be applied at national and local level.
5. National gathering of local youth councils to share their experiences, as well as conferences at national level with representatives of local authorities.
6. Study session of DYPALL "Climbing the ladder" foreseen for 2022 programme of the European youth centres.
7. Organise European/regional/national training courses on youth participation in decision making processes. Also consider the organisation of a MOOC on youth participation, following the model of the MOOC on youth policy (could be called the "Academy of Democracy").
8. Develop educational materials to support the organisation at local/national levels of simulations of decision-making processes that would help young people better understand.

9. Local workshops on the theme of youth participation and even participation in general done through youth clubs, youth centres, but as well through schools and involving teachers.
10. Addressing the municipalities through various associations of municipalities existing at national and European level to take part in the campaign and in dialogue activities with young people.
11. Regional training courses on direct participation and democracy.
12. Ensure space in the campaign for participatory arts which would allow for the
13. Music for democracy – call for local bands, musicians.
14. Exchanges between NGOs of good practices.
15. Online – collect and share good practices of youth participation, as well as make research and data available in youth-friendly format so it can be used for campaigning.
16. Associate influencers/known personalities to share information/campaign about the importance of youth participation.
17. Online activities should include podcasts with people that contributed to democracy, videos with “real cases and results of youth participation”, research and reflection on research, documentary “Stories of democracy”.

Support from the Secretariat

- support in communication;
- support institutionally the initiatives of people;
- provide more funding options;
- organising more exchanges for people and share good practices;
- connect organisations with decision makers and make recommendations to decision makers to connect with young people;
- provide content curation and production of podcasts, infographics on the theme.

Conclusions

The inception seminar for the upcoming campaign of the youth sector “Democracy here. Democracy now” has been the first opportunity to discuss the campaign idea with actors in the youth sector outside the Statutory bodies. The participants in the seminar put forward a wealth of proposals in the three days they have had at their disposal and proved that the themes proposed for campaigning in 2022 are relevant and actual for young people.

The first day of exploration of the three topics proposed for campaigning raised questions that sound apocalyptic: “is democracy dead? Is democracy in the Intensive Care Unit?” reflecting concerns for the state of our democratic institutions and systems. These questions reflect the current reality as much as they reflect a past that brought us here. This is not a glorious past when democracy was flourishing, but perhaps a past of missed opportunities and mismanaged crises. These questions are being asked in a particularly difficult moment of the second year of a global pandemic, when a 4th or 5th wave hits. The experience of the pandemic will leave its mark on society long after the pandemic would have ended. A Romanian journalist was reflecting in the aftermath of a deadly 4th wave in the autumn of 2021 in Romania: “This fall has left me bruised [...] To live with reality as it is a good project for the rest of the ‘20s. To acknowledge the reality – of a shameful history, of a pandemic that grieved us, of a coward political class that was elected from among ourselves, of exhaustion and what brought us there, of climate change – to accept the discomfort with which it comes and to start building or rebuilding with what we have and not with what we wished we have had.”⁵

The revitalization of democracy in Europe will entail an abandonment of the *politics of inevitability* not for the *politics of eternity*, to continue referring to Timothy Snyder’s work, but to politics that recognise and nurture “the empowered demos”⁶. Both the *politics of inevitability* and the *politics of eternity* do away with history and propose versions of future based in narratives and not in facts. As Lupşa suggests, the process of revitalisation of democracy will also require an uncomfortable reckoning with the past as well as with the reality in which we find ourselves. Allowing young people to gain a sense of history and to learn the history of our democracies, imperfect as they are, will give them the necessary ability to deal with the present and plan the future in full acknowledgement.

While the wide membership of states to the Council of Europe implies a commitment to the values and standards of human rights, democracy and rule of law, participants suggested that sometimes we experience ‘surface democracy’ not in the sense that it masquerades it, but rather with the meaning that as we expand our understanding of our realities more depth is required: more equality, more means of participation in decision-making, strong rule of law, more concern about making these decisions together through dialogue. This allows in the campaign the chance to campaign for more education for democratic citizenship and human rights education at national and local level while making use of already existing standards and resources at Council of Europe level (Charter on education for democratic citizenship and

⁵ Cristian Lupşa, Realitate, recunoaştere, reconstrucţie - Editorial DoR (Reality, acknowledgement, reconstruction), no. 46, Winter 2021, accessible here: <https://www.dor.ro/editorial-dor-46-realitate-recunoastere-reconstrucie/>

⁶ Josiah Ober, The original meaning of “democracy”: capacity to do things, not majority rule, Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics, September 2007, available here: <https://www.princeton.edu/~pswpc/pdfs/ober/090704.pdf>

human rights education, Compass, the Competence framework for democratic culture, connect with the work of the Observatory on History Teaching).

Participants have also raised the question of social and economic injustice as a main barrier for participating in democratic processes. The young generation has been suffering from the effects of the economic crisis of the years '10 and will bear the brunt of the crisis that emerges from the sanitary crisis. This question reminds us that in time of crisis it seems easy to give up on social and economic rights, but that it might be our democracies in the end that suffer. Placing the questions of social and economic justice high on the agenda of the campaign remind us of the intertwinement between human rights and democracy.

Intergenerational justice and dialogue were also brought up by participants, reflecting experiences of the pandemic, but also broader questions around power and discrimination in society, intergenerational disbalances. It is in this context that the proposals made by participants to campaign for lowering the voting age, as well as the age at which one can stand in elections should be read. These proposals are viewed as ways to level the field between generations and to allow taking part in decision making that will affect in the long run the young people of today.

Proposals that participants made around the theme of meaningful participation further explore issues of disengagement in politics and with traditional democratic institutions. It is not that young people are not interested in politics, it is that their experiences of participation are either lacking or are experiences of non-participation (tokenism and decoration). The narrative around politics and political parties in many countries often discourages rather than encourages participation. Taking part in decision making involves being able to engage in dialogue and debate around sensitive topics, knowing how the democratic system functions, having realistic expectations about the outcomes of one's participation in such processes. Frameworks for youth participation and representation at various levels have been long advocated and promoted by both young people and the Council of Europe youth sector. This theme will allow to also give additional visibility to the co-management system practiced in the youth sector of Council of Europe which also involved participatory budgeting, but also instruments like the Charter on youth participation at local and regional and manuals like have your say.

Participation is also linked with the right to assembly and associate which have been hindered already before the pandemic by a process generally known as the shrinking space for civil society. This process affects the already existing youth civil society through the limitations and challenges it imposes through legal limitations, discouraging financial controls and so on, but as well through a narrative that vilifies civil society. This not only makes the life of youth civil society harder, putting at risk small and medium sized organisations, but also hinders and discourages new initiatives.

Digitalisation remains an area where a lot needs to be learnt and explored. The participants, as the Joint Council, see the benefits of digitalisation in terms of opening access and avenues for participation, making information available and allowing new ways of connection between people, but also the dangers. While new technologies have allowed connectivity, but the quality of the connection is doubtful. Participants recalled that part of what this technology has brought upon is a polarised world unable to discuss on sensitive topics, the proliferation of hate speech and fake news hindering our rights to information and freedom of expression

and diminishing the quality of our decision-making processes. For democratic processes, the question remains: are we expecting more from technology than we are expecting from ourselves and how can we turn the tide. The uses of technologies and their promise of liberation exploit our human vulnerabilities. If democracy is a relationship, a process in which we engage one with the other and a commitment to that process, than delegating some of the democratic responsibilities to artificial intelligence (i.e., judgements, medicine, bank loans, grading student papers) speaks less about what technology brings, but of the past failures in the relations we have with one another and with the institutions we have created. The promise of technology is a promise of control and mitigation of the disappointment and hurt that human relationship can elicit, but as the slogan of the campaign suggests this connection and engagement in the here and now without the promise of success, but with the promise of commitment to the process remains the core of our democracies. How we make best use of what technology can offer, such as tools for e-democracy and e-participation, outreach tools without compromising on the quality of dialogue and debate, on our human rights remains to be further explore through the campaign and through the work done by the Youth Department on Artificial Intelligence and young people, as well as within the follow-up to the No Hate Speech Movement.

The seminar proved, if it was necessary, that worries about the health of our democracies are shared by young people and their organisations. The campaign themes were deemed relevant and a need to have a public conversation about where we are and where we are going was felt across the three days of the meeting.

The seminar also raised valuable questions about the campaign is the time we have at our disposal enough and do we show seriousness when we only spend a month or two on such topic, what can we really achieve in the six months of campaign, how are we going to make sure the campaign reaches out to as many young people as possible and how are we going to relate with other initiatives.

The participants' expectations in respect to the work of the Secretariat and the support from the Council of Europe are considered in this report and they provide guidance for some of the campaign tools to be developed such as communication strategy, website, newsletters, visuals, and a toolkit. The seminar will require rapid follow-up to inform international youth organisations about the campaign and the ways they can get involved to support them to put the campaign in their workplans for the next year. This is equally valid for national governments and other public authorities.

The wealth of proposals for activities within the framework of the thematic action months will require additional prioritisation with the support of the Campaign Steering Group. What some of the proposals made reveal is the existence of a wealth of good practices and resources at the level of the Council of Europe and at the level of the sector. The campaign should bring these resources into the spotlight rather than duplicate work. It is also clear from the proposals that a youth campaign will involve the practice of youth work and non-formal education. It is hard to imagine it otherwise. It will be therefore essential that the campaign also brings to the spotlight the strengths, the standards and the tools of the youth sector and their contribution to the democratic processes in our societies. The Youth festival of democracy, in connection with the 50th anniversary of the youth sector of the Council of Europe, provide a good opportunity to celebrate, to showcase and to advocate for more resources and attention to be given to at national and local level.

As Antje Rothmund, the Head of the Youth Department, said in her closing speech to the seminar: "the campaign is a starting point ...", the point being to put something in the spotlight so that attention to that issue is given, resources are mobilised, and work is being done. As the proposed slogan for the campaign suggests This campaign about democracy will also need to be a democratic campaign where the structures in place (the Campaign Steering Group, the possible national contact points, the Secretariat) all work to create the framework for young people's involvement and initiative rather than to direct that involvement into initiatives already created. Mihai Dragoş from the Advisory Council recalled in his closing speech the work of Josiah Ober about the original meaning of democracy: "*Demokratia* is not just "the power of the *demos*" in the sense "the superior or monopolistic power of the *demos* relative to other potential power-holder in the state." Rather it means, more capaciously, "the empowered *demos*"- it is the regime in which the *demos* gains a collective capacity to effect change in the public realm. And so it is not just a matter of *control* of a public realm but the collective *strength* and *ability* to act within that realm and, indeed, to reconstitute the public realm through action."⁷

⁷ Josiah Ober, art.cit., p. 5.

PROGRAMME

Monday, 22 November

Arrival of participants

19:00 Dinner at the European Youth Centre

Tuesday, 23 November

09:30 OPENING

- Introduction of participants, experiences and expectations
- Practical information about the programme and the European Youth Centre
- Opening words and exchange with Matjaž GRUDEN, Director of Democratic Participation, Council of Europe
- Aims, objectives and methodology of the seminar
- Introduction to the campaign "Youth for Democracy for Youth"

11:00 Break

11:30 REVITALISING DEMOCRACY?

Exploring participants' experiences and understandings of the key themes of the campaign (working groups):

- Revitalising democracy
- Meaningful youth participation
- Digitalisation

13:00 Lunch

14:30 REVITALISING DEMOCRACY? (cont.d)

16:00 Break

16:30 Results of the group work

18:00 Conclusions and evaluation of the day

19:00 Dinner at the European Youth Centre

Wednesday, 24 November

09:30 DEFINING THE CAMPAIGN

- Introduction to the campaign communication strategy, with Ron SALAJ, Tomato Creative Studio
- Questions and answers, feedback to the proposal.

11:00 Break

11:30 Further defining the campaign: objectives, expected outcomes and outputs of the campaign

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Information about structures in place for the campaign:

- National and European partners
- European Steering Committee of the Campaign
- The secretariat.

15:30 World café on:

- Internal communication in the campaign and expectations from Secretariat
- Involvement at local and national level, including coordination at national level: role of the European Steering Committee on Youth members and National Youth Councils
- Role and involvement of international youth organisations in the campaign
- How do young people join and are supported to join in the campaign

Break included in the World café

17:30 Results and proposals from the world café

18:15 Evaluation of the day

19:00 Dinner at the European Youth Centre

Thursday, 25 November

09:30 ACTIVITIES IN THE CAMPAIGN

- Information about planned activities and calendar in the campaign
- Information about resources and support for the organisation of activities in the framework of the campaign, including the role of the European Youth Foundation (by Marco LEIDEKKER, Head of the foundation)

10:30 Planning activities in the framework of the campaign

On the theme of **revitalising democracy**

- March-April: Democracy and access to rights online and offline;
- April-May: Democracy, equality and non-discrimination.

On the theme of **meaningful youth participation**

- May-June: Democracy and youth participation at national and European levels (Europe day), including mechanisms to improve them such as co-management;
- June-July: Democracy and young people's freedom of expression and association.

On the theme of **digitalisation**

- August-September: Democracy and digitalisation: the opportunities and risks digital technologies offer to young people, notably as regards democracy and democratic participation;
- September-October: Young people's rights and digitalisation: opportunities and challenges.
- Other themes that might arise at the proposal of participants

Break included in the working groups

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Presentation of the campaign concept and proposals of activities

16:00 Break

16:30 Next steps in the preparation of the campaign

Practical involvement and commitments of participants

18:00 Closure of the seminar, with:

Mihai DRAGOȘ, Advisory Council on Youth

Igor JESIH, European Steering Committee on Youth

Antje ROTHMUND, Head of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe

Self-organised dinner in the city

Friday, 26 November

Departures

PARTICIPANTS

Albania

Marsela DELIJA, Albanian National Youth Network (ANYN)
Gentian GUNI, Balkans Youth Council
Klajdi KAZIU, United Nations Association Albania
Ingrid LALIKE, National Youth Agency

Armenia

Siranush GRIGORYAN, Federation of Youth Clubs of Armenia

Austria

Larissa LOJIC, Austrian National Youth Council

Azerbaijan

Lala SAFARLI, Boyuk Yol Youth Public Union

Belgium

Elias DREY, European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS)
Manel SANCHEZ GARCIA, European Youth Card Association

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Milica KOS, Youth Center Laktasi (Center for Children Youth and Family Laktasi)

Denmark

Nichita MADAN, Young European Ambassadors Initiative

Georgia

Elene KAPANADZE, National Council of Youth Organisation of Georgia
Salome KURDADZE, IDC – Institute for Democratic Changes

Germany

Robin BALZEREIT, HUSKJ – Hessian Union of Youth Parliaments
Carolyn VOGT, German National Committee for International Youth Work (DNK) / German Federal Youth Council (DBJR)

Italy

Francesco PIPPARELLI, Opera Circus UK
Gianluca ROSSINO, DYPALL Network, Europiamo ETS

Lithuania

Oksana TRESCENKO, Interdepartmental network of Experts Department of Youth Affairs, Culture and Youth Groups

Luxembourg

Beatriz TERREROS de la PENA, European Youth Information and Counselling Agency

Malta

Ruth MIFSUD, Agenzija Zghazagh

Poland

Nino GABADZE, YPAN – Youth Peace Ambassadors network
Adam LABARAN, União de Refugiados em Portugal - UREP

Romania

Marilena Valentina CIOBANU, The Romanian Youth Council Constantin

Alexandru MANDA, Group of European Youth for Change

Alma PAP, Timis County Youth Fondation (Fundatia Judeteana Pentru Tineret Timis)

Serbia

Mihajlo MATKOVIC, ARKA Foundation

Slovenia

Tine STEGER, Youth Society Bakheros

Spain

José BARRIOS SEVILLANO, Youth Peace Ambassadors network (YPAN) and the local organisation

Asociacion de Libre-Pensadores de la Sierra de Madrid (LPS)

Sweden

Giorgi JANJALASHVILI, Youth for Human Rights

Ukraine

Anna ARANZHII, Deputy Head of International Cooperation and European Integration Department of Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine

Maria IEMELIANENKO, The European Environment and Health Youth Coalition (EEHYC)

PREPARATORY TEAM

Anca-Ruxandra PANDEA, Consultant

Peter ZELENKA, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Stefan MANEVSKI, Educational Advisor, Youth Department

Nelly GISHYAN, Programme officer, Youth Department

Ida KREUTZMAN, Educational Advisor, Youth Department

Rui GOMES, Head of Education and Training Division, Youth Department

GUEST SPEAKERS

Ron SALAJ, TOMATO Creative Studio (by visio)

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Joint Council on Youth

Igor JESIH, member of the Bureau of the European Steering Committee on Youth, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth

Laurence HERMAND, member of the Bureau of the European Steering Committee on Youth (partial attendance by visio)

Mihai DRAGOS, Advisory Council on Youth

Alice BERGHOLZ, Advisory Council on Youth (partial attendance by visio)

Secretariat

Matjaž GRUDEN, Director of Democratic Participation

Cathie BURTON, Senior Editorial Adviser, Directorate of Communication

Antje ROTHMUND, Head of the Youth Department

Marco LEIDEKKER, Secretariat of the European Youth Foundation

Marie FARIGOULES, Executive Director of the European Youth Centre of Strasbourg

Sarah WALTER, Financial Support Officer and Deputy to the Executive Director of the European Youth Centre Strasbourg

Matthew FOSTER, Secretariat of the European Youth Foundation

Marietta BALÁZS, Project Officer, Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth

Nina KAPOOR, Administrative assistant