

Final Declaration of the Youth SPACE Conference Berlin 2024

“Celebrating 75 Years of the Council of Europe - Challenges and Opportunities in Shaping Europe's Future”

Introduction

From 13 to 15 November 2024, over 50 youth representatives from National Youth Councils met in Berlin to participate in the Youth SPACE Conference “Celebrating 75 Years of the Council of Europe - Challenges and Opportunities in Shaping Europe's Future”. They represented 21 countries and were joined by the European Youth Forum and the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe. The conference was initiated and hosted by the German Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in close cooperation with the German Federal Youth Council and the Youth Department of the Council of Europe.

Key element of the Youth Space Conference 2024 were three workshops dealing with important topics of the Council of Europe: **democratic backsliding, inclusive governance and youthful institutions**. Young people and the democratic organisations that represent them are particularly aware of developments in these areas; as experts on the realities of their own lives, they can provide important impulses for shaping the Council of Europe for the future.

In this final declaration, the participants recall that all processes to strengthen democracy and to build the future of the Council of Europe as an institution must actively include the participation of young people and their representative bodies, such as the Advisory Council on Youth, the European Youth Forum, and the National Youth Councils.

In the workshops, the participants from the national youth councils contributed actively, they discussed the work of the Council of Europe on the topics mentioned and then jointly developed outcomes for this final declaration.

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Conclusions from the workshop on *Democratic Backsliding*

- **Housing**
Ensure that independent youth councils are recognized by governments and involved in decision-making processes that involve social justice issues such as housing.
- **Citizenship**
Improve democracy by enabling more people to have a say in matters that affect them. We ask the Parliamentary Assembly to examine existing pathways to citizenship and voting rights in member states and to make recommendations to reduce existing barriers to democratic participation for non-citizens.
- **Corruption**
Fighting against corruption by encouraging governments and administrations to publish transparency reports on their activities, ensuring increased support from the CoE following the results of external monitoring missions to local & national actors, and ensuring that judicial systems enforce adequate consequences to corruption cases.

Conclusions from the workshop on *Inclusive Governance*

- **Youth Test**
Ensure the adoption of the Youth test/ perspective at local, regional and national level. The implementation needs to involve youth structures at the respective level, such as national youth councils, local youth councils, etc.
- **Sensibilise institutions**
Institutions need to be open to learn about how to be more inclusive and accessible; and about the history, effects, and lived experience of discrimination and racism. This should be done and

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implemented on a regular basis. Youth civil society can act as partner in such initiatives.

- **Access to information**

Access to information needs to be the first step in reducing barriers to participation. The Council of Europe, and its institutions needs to redefine its strategy and approaches in communication with diverse young people across Europe. This includes youth friendly language, various channels used by young people, diverse and accessible formats.

Conclusions from the workshop on *Youthful Institutions*

- **Vote 16**

We recommend that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to engage more with young people structurally by proactively advocating for the reduction of voting age to 16 and campaigning for better representation of youth at national Parliament and PACE level.

- **Training for decision makers**

We urge the Council of Europe to introduce mandatory educational trainings for the so-called "adults" - meaning politicians and other institutional representatives & decision makers - on the importance of youth engagement, both OF and WITH youth (ideally followed by a final exam and some practical exercise, e.g. internship).

- **Representation of all**

We recommend addressing the lack of information, as well as cultural, language, financial and infrastructure barriers, to ensure equal and inclusive representation for all communities.

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- **Co-Management**
Encourage harmonising legislature on the national level by looking up to the documents adopted by the CoE ensuring inclusive, participative, and genuine youth participation in institutions based on the principle of co-management in youth policy.

Remarks on Meaningful Youth Participation

Participation in the democratic life of any community involves more than just voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Young people are motivated and interested in political issues within our societies; however, they find that traditional ways for participation are not fulfilling their promises. Youth civil society has been particularly affected by the shrinking civic space, yet continues to provide crucial support in times of crisis.

Discrimination of all kind, along with a general othering and infantilisation of youth, keeps adding barriers to youth engagement with democratic processes and institutions, creating an atmosphere of mistrust and disenfranchisement.

With co-management, the Council of Europe sets an example of good practice for youth participation and is involved in the development and implementation of standards for meaningful youth participation. This example of good practice should be applied especially when it comes to the future of the Council of Europe. The conference demonstrates that young people need the Council of Europe, but the Council of Europe also needs the young generation.

Final remarks

The representatives of the participating National Youth Councils welcome the fact that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is turning to the topic of youth as a partner in order to reflect the importance of youth participation in PACE.

The conference organised by the German PACE delegation in the German Bundestag showed that the cooperation of national parliamentarians and youth representatives can succeed with corresponding initiatives. This connection between

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national delegations, the youth councils and the Council of Europe should be further strengthened.

The Youth Department of the Council of Europe makes a decisive contribution to this effort. Further strengthening this department is a central component of the involvement of young people and advancing their interests.

National Youth Councils and representative youth bodies that participated in the Youth Space Conference 2024:

National Youth Council of Albania – KRK	National Youth Council of Belarus – RADA	National Youth Council of Bulgaria – NMF
National Youth Council of Cyprus – CYC	National Youth Council of Czech Republic – CRDM	National Youth Council of Denmark – DUF
National Youth Council of Ireland – NYCI	National Youth Council of Lithuania – LijOT	National Youth Council of Luxembourg – de Jugendrot
National Youth Council of Malta – KNZ	National Youth Council of Moldova – CNTM	National Youth Council of North Macedonia – NMS
National Youth Council of Poland – PROM	National Youth Council of Romania – CTR	National Youth Council of Serbia – KOMS
National Youth Council of Spain – CJE	National Youth Council of Sweden – LSU	National Youth Council of Switzerland – SAJV
National Youth Council of Turkey – GoFor	National Youth Council of Ukraine – NYCU	German Federal Youth Council – DBJR
Advisory Council on Youth – AC-CoE	European Youth Forum – YFJ	