

## Current Affairs Committee

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### Conference

## **It's not just about consultation: How can local and regional authorities promote youth participation that leads to a real impact on society?**

**Promoting active citizenship and engagement of young people through representative institutions and other means**

**12 June 2014, room 5, Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg (France)**

### **Background**

The Congress's 2012 report on "[Youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement](#)" and other recent studies show that, contrary to popular belief, young people have not disengaged from democratic and civic behaviour. Their democratic values are still strong, but they engage today in different forms of democratic activities appropriate to their own understanding of democracy and citizenship, in a society in which they feel marginalised from the political process. The recent demonstrations, protests and riots in many European countries could be seen as young people's answer to a political system that they feel does not give them their share of power and full citizenship. Feeling insufficiently listened to by politicians, young people have found other ways to make their voices heard.

The active participation of citizens in democratic structures and representative institutions is decisive in guaranteeing the legitimacy, credibility and operation of democratic systems. A well-functioning, transparent democracy reduces citizens' mistrust. "The quality of democracy ... depends on the trust that citizens place in their institutions and on their participation in the democratic process. As local authorities are closest to the grassroots, they are best placed to take positive action and encourage participatory democracy."<sup>1</sup> The Congress is convinced that increased public participation and direct involvement in local and regional governance could give citizens a sense of empowerment and more confidence in the democratic process.<sup>2</sup>

As the Congress has long believed that young people must be stakeholders in local and regional democracy,<sup>3</sup> its concern that the current political offer does not match young people's preoccupations is only natural. As such, it has decided the time is ripe to take a new look at youth participation to determine how young people are engaging today, the tools and methods they are using, and to explore how local and regional authorities can tap into these tools to develop a youth participation culture whereby young people are allowed and encouraged not only to express their opinions but also to participate fully in policy and decision making to bring about actual change in society. The Congress also feels it important to consider how to include those young people who are systematically excluded, for example because they do not enjoy full access to their social and civic rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution 341 (2012), Priorities of the Congress 2013-2016.

<sup>2</sup> Resolution 326 (2011) on citizen participation at local and regional levels in Europe.

<sup>3</sup> See the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.

The contents and conclusions of this conference will inform a new report on youth participation being prepared by the Congress's Current Affairs Committee, in cooperation with the Council of Europe Youth Department and Advisory Council on Youth, the EU/CoE Youth Partnership and the European Youth Foundation.

### **Aims and objectives**

Bearing in mind the above, the aim of this conference is to explore the realities of youth participation and democratic citizenship today and to discuss how local and regional authorities can engage with all young people, in all their diversity, so as to develop a youth participation culture whereby young people are not only allowed to express their opinions but also to participate fully in policy and decision making to make an actual impact on society.

The specific objectives are to:

- learn why the democratic participation of young people is important in shaping policy;
- compare how local and regional elected representatives and young people understand and interpret the concept of youth participation and how to improve the interaction of these two groups;
- showcase different models of how young people participate today and present successful models of them participating in cooperation with local and regional authorities;
- explore how to ensure all young people, including those who are economically and socially excluded, have their say in decision-making processes;
- gather information for the Congress's report on youth participation.

### **Participants**

Local and regional elected representatives, representatives of youth organisations and networks, researchers, other interested parties.

### **Working languages**

Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in English, French, German, Italian and Russian.

### **Venue**

Room 5, *Palais de l'Europe*, Strasbourg (France).

NB prior registration is essential in order to obtain access to the building.

For further information about the conference, please contact:

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## Conference

### **It's not just about consultation: How can local and regional authorities promote youth participation that leads to a real impact on society?**

**Promoting active citizenship and engagement of young people through representative institutions and other means**

**organised by the  
Congress Current Affairs Committee**

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#### **Draft Programme**

08.30 - 09.00 Registration

***Moderator: Andrew BOFF, United Kingdom (R, ECR)***

09.00 - 09.10

#### **Opening session**

***Farid MUKHAMETSHIN, Chair of the Current Affairs Committee***

09.10 - 09.30

**Keynote speech: What does the term "youth participation" mean to young people and why is it so important?**

***Liam PRESTON, Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth***

Participation of young people in decision-making at local and regional levels is crucial to develop young people's feelings of ownership and responsibility in community life, their democratic citizenship skills, and more importantly to empower them to take active charge of their lives and communities. The reality in Europe shows that it is a real challenge to increase the level of young people's participation in decision-making processes, even the basic issue of voting.

Local and regional authorities' sometimes tokenistic perception of youth participation is an essential hurdle to overcome in order to bring about wholesale change in how young people participate in democracy. Involving young people in the political process helps strengthen their bond to their local community - it should be seen as an investment that will assist them to remain involved in the political process in the long term.

The Advisory Council on Youth is part of the Council of Europe's co-management system whereby representatives from youth NGOs sit down in committees with government officials who together work out the priorities for the youth sector and make recommendations for future budgets and programmes.

09.30 – 09.50

**Keynote speech: What does the term “youth participation” mean to local and regional authorities and is it important?**

***Natalia PILIUS, Russian Federation (L, ILDG), Congress Rapporteur on Youth Participation***

The Congress’s Revised European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life details three different aspects of youth participation: sectoral policies – policies create the right conditions and infrastructure for young people to participate in their communities; instruments and tools that can enhance youth participation – for example training, information, support to youth projects; and institutional participation – the structures that are needed as a vehicle for young people’s viewpoints.

Thousands of local and regional youth councils and parliaments have been set up across Europe by local and regional authorities to enable young people to have their say in policy and decision making. Numerous policies have been devised to support youth organisations, set up youth information services and provide other support to young people.

The Congress’s Rapporteur on Youth Participation will describe her own experience and understanding of youth participation and how it is implemented at local and regional levels.

09.50 - 10.20

**Discussion**

The participants are invited to share their views on the two keynote presentations.

10.20 - 10.45

*Coffee Break*

10.45 - 12.30

**Round table: And never the twain shall meet? Young peoples’ and politicians’ interpretation of youth participation**

- ***Mairi EVANS, Chair of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions’ Committee of Young Local and Regional Elected Representatives and member of Angus Council, Scotland, UK;***
- ***Thomas LEYS, member of the Board of Directors of the Local Agency for Youth Work, municipality of Leuven and former President of the International Federation of Liberal Youth (ILFRY);***
- ***Lilla MERABET, Regional Councillor, Région Alsace, Assembly of European Regions’ Rapporteur on Youth Participation;***
- ***Igor MUŠIĆ, Municipal Councillor, Vracar City Council (Belgrade);***
- ***Emma Victoria MUSTALA, Allianssi – Finnish Youth Cooperation;***
- ***Lloyd RUSSELL-MOYLE, vice-President, European Youth Forum.***

***Moderator: Dmitri MARCHENKOV, Secretary to the Congress Current Affairs Committee***

Local and regional authorities make large and small decisions every day that affect the young people living in their communities. To what extent do they involve young people in their policy and decision-making procedures? How do politicians feel about inviting youth to become partners in these processes? How many local and regional authorities “do” youth participation well? Do all local and regional authorities share the prevailing adult view that young people are a problem that needs to be solved? Or do they see them as a resource and, more importantly, a valuable partner in shaping society and bringing about

positive change in the community? And what are they doing to ensure young people's participation is genuine and not tokenistic?

Have all young people disengaged from society? Why don't young people vote anymore? Are young people even interested in playing a role in decision making? Young people today are having to cope with unemployment, social and economic exclusion and difficult transitions to adulthood. They have little reason to be hopeful. Some would say it is not surprising that young people have lost faith in traditional politics and abstain from voting. Why should they be given opportunities to participate when they are so concerned about getting a job? And yet research indicates that young people are engaging in different forms of democratic activities appropriate to their own understanding of democracy and citizenship, in a society in which they feel marginalised from the political process.

The aim of this round table is to bring youth representatives, local and regional elected representatives and other stakeholders together to discuss their opinions on youth participation and how they can cooperate to ensure an active role in policy making for young people.

12.30 - 14.00

*Lunch*

14.00 - 14.45

**Keynote speech: How can local and regional authorities ensure all young people, in all their diversity, are involved in decision-making processes?**

***Biljana VASILEVSKA TRAJKOSKA, Youth Social Rights Network***

**Ensuring the full participation in society of young people with disabilities**

***Donata VIVANTI, Vice-President of the European Disability Forum (EDF)***

**Barriers to participation in public and political life for young LGBT persons**

***Juul van HOOFF, MOVISIE, Netherlands Centre for Social Development, Project manager Local LGBT policy, Coordinator Rainbow Cities Network***

The transition of young people to adult life is not always an equal and smooth process: some benefit from new opportunities whilst others experience vulnerability and exclusion. Some young people are excluded from decision and policy-making processes because they are excluded from society, such as young people from marginalised and vulnerable groups: those living on the fringe of society or with disabilities, LGBT persons, migrants, Roma, young women. The active participation of young people as actors and not just objects of youth policy is key if these policies are to hit the mark. However, whereas motivated and organised youth will readily participate in the formulation of policies, it is more difficult to engage young people who are excluded from society. To convince such young people of the capacity of policies to improve their situation requires more time, effort and imagination. If no effort is made, the marginalised and excluded will not be heard.

Exclusion of any form goes against all principles of citizenship and is a direct threat to the democratic system. So how can local and regional authorities ensure the full participation of all young people in policy and decision-making mechanisms? And how can youth organisations help them in this task? How can they communicate, consult and create opportunities for dialogue with all young people? What conditions are required to enable all young people to participate? How can they contribute to the development of a feeling of ownership and responsibility for policies and the future? What should local and regional authorities do to ensure all young people, in all their diversity, have equal access to decision and policy-making procedures?

## **Discussion**

14.45 – 15.45

### **Presentations of successful examples of participation of all young people**

#### **Trajectory - Youth Work for Citizenship and Democratic Participation in Political Transition contexts (Estonia)**

*Ljubov LISSINA, Project coordinator*

The project "Youth Work for Citizenship and Democratic Participation in Political Transition contexts" aims to gather 24 young participants already active in politics and / or civic life for training sessions in order to implement concrete local projects. Organised in stages, the project lasts one a long time (one year) with a preparatory phase, a project development phase and a monitoring phase. Two training sessions, one in Egypt and one in Estonia, help the participants to take their ideas further and to develop their competences to promote democratic participation through youth work.

#### **ECOS – Cooperativa de Educação, Cooperação e Desenvolvimento Youth Takes the Floor: A training course on how to increase youth participation in decision making (Portugal)**

*Sofia MARTINS, member of the national Bureau of the Portuguese Family Planning Association, responsible for youth issues. Project manager and board member of ECOS*

This project trained young people in the development of participation projects at the local level. The training was based on the acquisition of theoretical knowledge but was intended to create specific projects tailored to the young participants' respective local reality. At the end, 23 projects had been implemented. They consisted either in the restructuring of existing initiatives, or in new approaches, all of which were designed to increase youth participation in decision-making processes at the local government level.

#### **Funky Dragon (Draig Ffyn-ci) - Your Assembly – Your Say, Your Way – Consultation**

*Joyce WATSON, Member of the National Assembly of Wales, and Tricia Jones, Chairperson of Funky Dragon*

Funky Dragon (Draig Ffyn-ci) is the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales. It was created by young people of Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government in order to help under-25s ensure their rights under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are respected. It is a peer-led organisation which provides opportunities for young people to have their voices heard on issues that affect them. It works closely with the Welsh Assembly Government and youth forums, enabling it to influence decision making at different political levels.



In 2013, the Welsh Assembly lead a consultation which asked 11-18 year olds how the Assembly could better involve them in its work. The Welsh Government travelled across Wales to speak to young people in their communities. Their views were gathered on Facebook and Twitter. A new website ([www.yourassembly.org](http://www.yourassembly.org)) and a Twitter address (@YourAssembly and using #YourAssembly) were launched to encourage young people to tell the Assembly what they care about and how they want to get involved.

Research shows there is no crisis of democratic participation among young people. They may vote less than older generations but they take part more often in alternative forms of political participation such as demonstrations, signing petitions, sit-ins, etc. They engage through social media, civil society organisations and volunteering.

Different mechanisms for engaging with the voice of young people carry different strengths and weaknesses, and all approaches are likely to attract both praise and criticism. The important issue is to see how local and regional authorities can make use of these new methods of participation to ensure young people's opinions find their way into policies.

### **Discussion**

15.45 - 16.00

*Coffee break*

16.00 - 17.00

**Youth participation in the digital age: are virtual tools effective in influencing decision making?**

***Tomi KIILAKOSKI, Finnish Youth Research Network***

The Finnish Youth Research Society is a non-profit organisation founded in 1988, for the purpose of promoting multidisciplinary youth research in Finland. The goal of the society is to develop youth research and to provide information and expertise on matters relating young people.

***Daniel POLI, Head of Department, IJAB – International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany***

Ypart.eu is an interactive portal where young people can autonomously initiate projects and provide local solutions. For example, young people can suggest projects that, in their view, improve their neighborhoods such as the construction of a skate park or swimming pool. Ypart.eu is based on the wishes of young and youth initiatives, it is not a system that young people use to report deficits or to complain about gaps in the system. In the medium term, it is planned to offer Ypart.eu in several languages.

In 2006, the Congress recognised that information and communication technologies can be very powerful tools for arousing young people's interest in public life and that they "offer huge scope for new forms of youth consultation and participation".<sup>4</sup>

Many young people are making use of the Internet and social media to make their voices heard. But how effective are these media in bringing about change in society at local and regional levels? And how can local and regional authorities make use of these tools? How can they ensure these newer tools, such as social media, are accessible to all groups of young people?

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<sup>4</sup> Resolution 207 (2006) on young people and new information and communication technologies: a new opportunity for local democracy.

**Discussion**

17.00 - 17.30

**Closing session**

Summing up by **Ilaria PITTI**, Congress expert on youth participation