

Report on the High-level Policy debate, 18th of May

“Empowering young people for political participation in the democratic life of Europe”

The Latvian Minister in charge of Youth having the Presidency of the Council of the EU opened the floor giving some contextual input regarding the Structured Dialogue (“a valuable participatory process for young people”).

She also recalled elements of the background document on political participation, notably stating that elections are the main instrument for public participation, yet acknowledging that forms of youth participation have changed and young people have found new ways to express their views.

The three questions that were given to the Member States were the following:

1. Which are the most urgent actions to be put in place at all levels to achieve greater political participation of young people in traditional democratic mechanisms (such as elections)?
2. Which are the most urgent actions to make mainstream politics more appealing and engaging for young people, as well as to overall raise youth interest and readiness to have an active role in the democratic life of Europe?
3. What specific actions are needed to engage with marginalised or disaffected young people that might be vulnerable to extremism and potentially radicalisation?

Overall, we can notice that the decision-makers have been referring quite a lot to the proposals from the EUYC in Riga, with for instance:

- The importance of **involving youth organisations in decision-making processes** and its role in representing young people was also highly supported (**12 Member States**).
- Engaging young people **at local level** also seems to be recognised by Member States as an entry point to enhance young people’s participation (**10 Member States**)
- There was an extensive mention of **citizenship education** (**9 Member States** have mentioned it) as a tool to increase young people’s awareness of political system, as well to enhance critical thinking.
- **7 Member States** were highlighting the links between **youth political participation and their access to social inclusion**, employment and social protection.
- **6 Member States** mentioned **online participation tools and ICT literacy** as key issue to shore up political participation.
- **5 Member States** shared that the **vote at 16** in local/national elections is either implemented or being discussed

Summary of all interventions:

COUNTRY	KEY ELEMENTS
European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online tools and social medias need to be exploited in order to reach out to young people - These actions need to be complemented with actions on the ground, supported by youth workers/youth organisations and local multipliers (Eurodesk) - Erasmus + & European Social Fund will be used to fight radicalism, combat poverty and social exclusion
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interest in politics among young is increasing and not decreasing - Political participation is possible when young peoples' basics well being (employment, education, health, financial security) is secured. The Commission could enhance supporting youth participation and local democracy. - Increase critical media and information literacy
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Voting age is reduced to 16 accompanied with mandatory Political Education. Young people voted more than others. - Young people need to see the effect/impact of their involvement.
Portugal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Processes of participation in public area have changed with the introduction of ICT and e-participation - Youth organisation should be integrated in national socio-economic Councils
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth and civil society organisations should provide young people with political knowledge and understanding. - Foster meetings amongst young people and Members of the parliaments - Role of parents and other educators to provide guidance to young people likely to go into radicalism
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Put in place modern civic education and develop civic competences to make young participate in traditional democratic mechanisms - Reducing digital exclusion
Lithuania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information has to be presented in a clear way and ICT should be used for that purpose. - Citizenship and political education - Young people should be allowed to observe decision-making procedures.
Malta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decreasing the voting age to 16 in regional elections was a success. - Toolbox for schools to provide information, encourage the debate and facilitate the active participation of young people on local political level - Youth local councils (14-18) to participate in the governance of local communities.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Democratic culture introduced in school - New ICT tools - Engage with young people on issues that interest them - Improve transparency and accountability of public institutions
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are policy makers offering the right support for young people to co-create youth policy? - Structured Dialogue fosters political participation, example of 'Structured street dialogue' - Online platforms need to be complemented with street actions/physical meetings

France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cooperation of Formal and Non Formal Education - Citizenship Education and youth work - School is very important place to develop citizenship Education - SD is a very useful tool that helped to create participative tools - France is developing an “impact clause” for youth, highlighting the impact legislative proposals will have on youth. - It is important to have a Council Recommendation on the socio-economic factors of participation.
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Role of teachers as providers of information to young people to avoid young people finding all their information on internet - Education for citizenship falls not only to school but also parents
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local level is a laboratory for participation - Development of unique platform for online information - Youth sector is represented in pilot group to develop the interdisciplinary development plan of the government; - Transparency and feedback from decision-makers - Focus on young people’s capacities and resources, not see them as a risk
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education for active citizenship and non-violence - Make use of existing mechanism and develop youth tailored approach together with online tools and media, and direct cooperation with young people in the field - Tailor participative settings towards specific groups of young, for instance young people at risk of social exclusion.
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not only discuss about young people but with them - Youth check: look at legislation and its effect on young people and on how much they are involved in legislative measures - Programmes to foster civic engagement at different level to fight extremism
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual online registration vs paper-based system: online registration was a success with hindsight to the participation of the young. - Deliver tailored programme with Students’ Unions on involvement in democracy, youth parliament and ‘make your mark’ campaign
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhance the participation of young people in the hierarchies of the school institutions.
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transparency of public institutions and access of young people to those institutions (open days) - Role of youth organisations to represent young people
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Openness of public administration - Accountability - Equal access to education - Open and meaningful mechanisms - Obliges municipalities to set up youth councils to let the young participate in local decision-making.
Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a culture of debate - Citizenship is a pivotal issue and promote citizenship at school - Politicians should get more engaged with young people and civil society organisations
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simulation projects and game-like methodologies to increase civic awareness - Digital competence and media literacy - Online vote and e-vote - Debate on lowering voting age to 16 at national level
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth organisations have been given access to schools, which enables them to get in contact and engage with young people

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The participation of the young is crucial for social cohesion in society.
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education to political participation and discuss policies with young people - Make youth work more attractive to a wider spectrum of young people
Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young people participate if they are sure that there is a transparent and democratic system - Ensure the view of young people will be really taken into account - Local authorities are good arenas to encourage youth participation because the young can directly see the result of their involvement.
Luxembourg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Debate on lowering voting age to 16 - Local and school level are important to complement the SD - Resource centre for citizenship education - Youth work should be inclusive
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lowering voting age to 16 and age to stand for President to 21. - Young people participate when the issue at stake is relevant for them - First ever national strategy to foster participation of young people and children includes NGYO and Youth Parliaments to reach and empower people. - Youth unemployment is a major issue. Youth Guarantee is an important instrument to reach out to NEET. - Young people participate when the issue at stake is relevant for them
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political participation is more value-based than ideology-based - Role of Education and schools - European volunteering civil society

What NWGs were saying:

“We are satisfied over the different speeches what we heard from the ministers. They were connected with the problems that Structured Dialogue joint recommendations brought up. The only thing which was a bit frustrating is the lack of specificity in the speeches.” **National Working Group of Estonia**

“We think that the idea of bringing in the studies about the politics from 6th grade at the elementary school is very important. Also it was good to hear that all the ministries had a common understanding, that the civic education is important and we need to develop the formats of the learning. It was a nice to hear that many participants to the debate agreed to lower the voting age to 16 “ **National Working Group of Estonia**

“Participation was often limited to participation in elections during the debate but there is a broader perspective on participation. We found really positive that citizenship education was mentioned a lot.” **National Working Group of Flanders (BE)**

“If the “inclusion of young people” was mentioned several time, Ministers did not define it. Nobody explain how political representation of young people could be ensured” **National Working Group of Bulgaria**

“The Belgian representative mentioned the relevance of Youth Work in enhancing a culture of political participation, and explained well how joint recommendations are taken into account in his country. He also insisted on the fact that we should not fight against radicalisation, but against intolerance, racism and for human rights for all. He had a focus on common law versus specification of the youth policy, which can lead to stigmatisation of young people. We have found it really positive.”

National Working Group of France

“We liked that the Spanish representative included its speech into a larger context and have focused on topics such as transparency and on real impact of the youth policy as key element for success in enhancing youth participation.”

National Working Group of France

It is positive that the French Youth Minister sees youth participation as an objective and also as a method. We also would like to underline that the focus on the joint recommendations was quite clear, especially on cross sectorial cooperation, evaluation of youth policy impact, and on the importance to include youth in the decision making process. »

National Working Group of France