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#### INFORMATION NOTE

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Council  
Subject: EU Youth Democracy Project "Young Europe - Rethinking Democracy"  
- *Information from the German delegation*

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Delegations will find attached an information note from the German delegation on the above subject, which has been put on the agenda under "Any Other Business" for the next Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 12 December 2014.

## **Declaration**

### **„Young Europe – Rethinking Democracy“**

25 years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall / the Iron Curtain and the associated extensive political changes in Europe, a continuing repression of the achievements of that time is arising and Eurosceptic forces are increasing. This is why the young generation especially ought to learn about and experience democracy and participation, tolerance and diversity as well as convey the values of democracy in Europe in order to defy extreme and anti-democratic arguments. Similarly important in a common Europe is the understanding that these developments are not exclusively national phenomena and we need to work on European solutions.

In cooperation with organisations from all EU Member States, the project “Young Europe – Rethinking Democracy” has brought together young people from 28 EU countries to discuss the development of democracy in past, present and future.

The project included the following phases/steps:

- Preparatory meeting (August 8-10, 2014) in Berlin
- Youth event (September 27-October 1, 2014), Berlin-Vienna-Prague
- Online consultation (October 2014)
- Youth conference (November 3-7, 2014) in Lutherstadt Wittenberg & Berlin

Young people from following organisations were involved:

Austria: akzente Salzburg (Salzburg); Belgium: Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend Belgiens (Eupen); Bulgaria: Active Bulgarian Society (Blagoevgrad); Croatia: Udruga IKS (Petrinja); Cyprus: NGO Prosvasi (Limassol); Czech Republic: European Youth Centre Breclav (Breclav); Denmark: Randers Produktionshojskole (Randers); Estonia: NGO Youth Club Active (Tallin); Finland: Hyvärilä Youth Centre (Hyvärilä); France: Region Centre (Orleans); Germany: GOEUROPE.lkj (Magdeburg); Greece: Praxis (Serres); Hungary: Sustainable Ormansag Non-profit (Kemes); Italy: Mine Vaganti (Perfugas); Ireland: EIL Ireland (Cork); Latvia: Club The House - Youth for United Europe (Riga); Lithuania: Center of Creative Expression (Kursenai); Luxembourg: Conference Generale de la Jeunesse du Luxembourg, Malta: Marsaxlokk Youth (Marsaxlokk); Netherlands: Breakthrough Foundation (Dordrecht); Poland: Common Europe Foundation (Warschau); Portugal: ECOS - Cooperativa de Educação (Faro); Romania: Centrul de Voluntariat Resita (Resita); Slovakia: IUVENTA - Slovak Youth Institute (Bratislava); Slovenia: TIPOVEJ (Ljubljana); Spain: Asociacion Cazalla Intercultural (Lorca); Sweden: Europe Direct Fyrbodol (Åmål); United Kingdom: Naughty Cheese (London)

This declaration is based on the results of the workshops and interviews that took place during the Youth Event, the Online Consultation and the adaptations made during the Youth Conference.

**We declare to the Council of the European Union, the Member States, the European Parliament, European Commission and the Committee of the Regions the following:**

### **Transparency**

We claim that there is a growing trust deficit in Europe due to a perceived lack of transparency which may lead to corruption and underrepresentation of public interests. Transparency is essential to restore trust in democratic processes.

Therefore we recommend the following:

1. Transparent reports on electoral promises from both parties and individual politicians, will help the public to hold their representatives accountable.
2. Transparency about the connections between politics and the business sector should be established to avoid corruption and unequal power balance in lobbying.
3. Political parties should declare their finances according to an established party-financing law.

### **Equality**

We claim that many people in the EU are still treated unequally including women, LGBT groups, minority and migrant groups. Equality is essential for a functioning democratic society.

Therefore we recommend the following:

1. Equal payment and structural equality between men and women must be ensured.
2. Equal employment opportunities among men and women must be guaranteed. This can be done through forbidding practices such as social egg freezing that puts pressure on young women.

3. Citizens and non-citizens need to be treated equally and have same access to rights and the labour market.
4. Marriage should be open and possible for all adult people in all EU countries, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation.

### **Education & Participation**

We state that there is a decreasing interest and willingness in participating in democratic processes. This may be due to insufficient political education concepts.

1. Learning about political systems on all different levels, mobility programmes, and developing creative and critical thinking should be an integral part of formal and non-formal education.
2. The political and personal recognition of non-formal learning should be fostered in order to empower young people to participate in political processes
3. Official information channels of governments should be diversified and made inclusive with regards to the accessibility and target group orientation (e.g. Social Media).

### **EU Structures**

We claim that EU institutions suffer from a lack of democratic accountability and that smaller Member States are less able to voice their opinions. Political reforms of EU structures are necessary.

Therefore we recommend the following:

1. The EU institutions need to be democratically accountable by increasing cooperation between European bodies and the influence of elected representatives.
2. Mechanisms that ensure equal representation of the interests of Member States regardless of economic situations should be established.

## **Mobility**

We have deduced that there is a lack of information and awareness about benefits and chances of mobility, especially among people with fewer opportunities. Mobility is a crucial tool for the development of personal and professional life as well as society.

Therefore we recommend the following:

1. Pro-active and efficient programmes to inform and emphasize benefits of mobility opportunities should be set up and implemented in cooperation with formal and non-formal educational structures.
2. Peer to peer education needs to have financial and structural support in order to create a flexible, open and effective dialogue about experiences and information on mobility.
3. The needs of people living in rural areas and those who do not have easy access to mobility information need to be considered.
4. European recognition systems of formal and non-formal educational achievements have to be strengthened to facilitate cross-border mobility.

## **Voting System**

We understand that the current voting systems should be revamped to ensure higher participation in the decision making processes and to increase democratic accountability for the representatives.

Therefore we recommend the following:

1. To establish an online voting system while keeping traditional voting in order to reach more people all over the EU and to adapt to existing life realities of EU citizens.
2. The European Commissioners and Members of the European Parliament should be elected directly by the voters and not chosen by the political parties.
3. The election of the European Parliament and the European Commission should be held on the same day.

## **Inclusion**

We state that young people with fewer opportunities and people with disabilities do not have equal chances to be active in society. Inclusion of all people would lead to increased participation and solidarity in Europe.

Therefore we recommend the following:

1. Youth work and community work need more financial and structural support in order to enable young people with fewer opportunities and people with disabilities to actively participate as citizens of their own country and citizens of the EU.

## **Migrant integration**

We claim that immigrant integration is not properly organised. This results in the discrimination of migrants from our societies and a negative reaction from local communities which should be seen as a resource for integration.

Therefore we recommend the following:

1. The immigration process needs to be more effective. This can be achieved by allocating arriving non-EU migrants among all EU countries evenly.
2. Governmental and non-governmental organisations should set up programmes to provide access to information and face-to-face assistance.
3. A dialogue on immigration with EU citizens should be started and local communities need access to adequate resources and knowledge, in order to reduce racism against immigrants and promote intercultural understanding.

## Media

We state a growing tendency that the current media is losing the trust of the public due to unreliable or biased reporting and ambiguous sources of information.

Free media is a central pillar for ensuring democratic accountability.

Therefore we recommend the following:

1. It is needed to initiate programs concerning media awareness, benefits of social media and ensuring improved access to information.
2. The law of “conflict of interests” should be strengthened: this would prohibit government functionaries from acquiring any share of any media outlet.

*This declaration is a result of the project “Young Europe – Rethinking Democracy”, which is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth as well as the EU-Programme Erasmus+ and the State of Saxony-Anhalt.*

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