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To: Delegations

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Subject: Council Resolution on encouraging political participation of young people in democratic life in Europe
- *Council resolution (23 November 2015)*

Delegations will find in the annex the Council Resolution on encouraging political participation of young people in democratic life in Europe, adopted by the Council at its 3428th meeting held on 23 November 2015.

Council Resolution on encouraging political participation of young people in democratic life in Europe

The Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council:

RECALLING THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND TO THIS ISSUE, IN PARTICULAR:

1. The Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)¹ which identifies participation as one of the fields of action and its aim to support young people's participation in representative democracy and civil society at all levels and in society at large; and which defines the general initiative of encouraging and supporting the involvement and participation of young people and youth organisations in policy making, implementation and follow-up by the means of a continuous structured dialogue with young people and youth organisations.
2. The Resolution of 20 May 2014 of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on a European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2014-2015².
3. The Joint Recommendations of the fourth work cycle on structured dialogue, defined at the EU Youth Conference organised by the Luxembourg Presidency, 21–24 September 2015. [to be completed].

¹ OJ C 311, 19.12.2009, pp. 1-11.

² OJ C 183, 14.6.2014, pp. 5-11.

UNDERLINE THAT:

4. Democracy, pluralism and active citizenship are fundamental values of the European Union. They include the values of freedom of expression and tolerance³ and aim for the inclusion of all European citizens. Democracy is not to be taken for granted and needs to be preserved and fostered constantly.
5. Young people in Europe show overall support and belief in the system of democracy and its representative bodies, but are critical of the way the system is operated in practice and the results produced.⁴
6. They often find it increasingly hard to identify with traditional channels of political participation such as political parties and trade unions but engage in alternative forms allowing for greater individual choices such as campaigns, petitions, demonstrations and instant events that aim at advocating for a specific cause and a tangible change in their life.⁵
7. Information and communication technologies, in particular social media and their mobile use offer new opportunities for involvement in and information about political processes, speed-up the diffusion of information and accelerate the development of alternative participation forms.

³ *“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”*

Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, article 2.

⁴ Youth participation in democratic life – Final Report, London School of Economics, EACEA 2010/03, February 2013.

⁵ Political participation and EU Citizenship : Perceptions and behaviours of young people, EACEA, European Commission, 2013.

REGARDING THE PROCESS OF STRUCTURED DIALOGUE, ACKNOWLEDGE THAT:

8. The structured dialogue is an instrument within the framework for European cooperation in the youth field to involve young people in the development of EU policies. The outcome of the fourth 18-month work cycle on the overall thematic priority “youth empowerment addressing access to rights and the importance of political participation of young people⁶” is based on the results achieved by the consultations with young people before and during the Italian, Latvian and Luxembourg Presidencies as well as the EU Youth Conferences in Rome in October 2014, Riga in March 2015 and Luxembourg in September 2015⁷.
9. The results of the dialogue among young people and policy representatives constitute important input for this resolution, including perspectives of young people, youth workers and other experts in the field of youth and facilitate the development of evidence-based and effective EU policies.

CONSIDER THAT:

10. The European Union relies on young people committed to the principles of democracy and to European values.
11. European policy and policy in general should be responsive to the needs and aspirations of young people. Therefore political issues have to be transparent and communicated to all citizens, including young people. Young people need to understand the issues that are at stake in order to create interest and facilitate the political engagement. Opportunities for youth participation in meaningful decision-making processes should be provided by decision-makers from different policy fields and policy levels and need to have an impact.

⁶ OJ C 183, 14.6.2014, p. 1.

⁷ Documents 14429/14, 8095/15 and 12651/15.

12. The concept of political participation includes first of all the representation of young people in the structures of representative democracy, i.e. participating in elections as voters, standing in elections as candidates and participating in political parties. political participation can also take place through membership in (youth) organisations advocating for the interests of young people, political face-to-face or online debates and other forms of opinion-shaping and cultural expression. Political participation can also be experienced in the frame of citizenship and human rights education activities and actions to bring about positive change in society.
13. By participation in political processes, young people can improve their understanding of opinion-building processes and of different interests at stake. At the personal level, they develop social skills, responsibility, self-confidence, initiative, critical attitude as well as communication and negotiation skills, sense of compromise, empathy and respect towards others' opinions.
14. Characteristics of effective and real political youth participation processes include:
 - Relevance of the issue and real impact on the lives of young people
 - Practice and experience of participation in daily life in different contexts such as family, community, school, work place, youth work and local life (political socialisation)
 - Comprehensible feedback and follow-up by decision makers
 - Inclusivity and equal access for all young people with regard to gender, ethnic, cultural, educational and social background, sexual orientation, age and specific needs.
15. Youth policy, youth work and youth organisations play an important role in this regard by the promotion of active citizenship, political participation opportunities and the prevention of marginalization and violent radicalization, especially in local areas, where open youth work and outreach youth work address young people.

16. Physical and mental well-being and the safeguard of the basic needs including aspects of education and training, health, employment, financial security and social integration are necessary for thorough and effective participation of young people.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE AND WITH DUE REGARD FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY TO:

17. Establish, implement or further develop national, regional and/or local strategies, programmes, structures or other relevant mechanisms for enhancing the political participation of all young people, especially young people with fewer opportunities. These mechanisms should be knowledge and evidence based, built on cross-sectoral cooperation and include all relevant stakeholders. The design of effective participation strategies should encompass the involvement of the target group during the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases. The strategies could include the following priorities.

Formal education and non-formal learning

18. Foster and promote cross-sectorial cooperation and partnerships between formal education providers, youth organisations and youth work providers in order to develop integrated approaches of citizenship education programmes while involving young people, teachers, youth workers, parents and other relevant actors.

19. Enhance sustainable participative structures in formal education and non-formal learning settings in order to promote the development of social skills and competences related to democratic values and human rights such as the freedom of expression and the respect of diversity, through the day to day practise of democratic principles.
20. Promote the establishment and the development of organisations and/or structures at national, regional and local level representing the interest of students vis-à-vis formal education institutions.
21. Promote the development of programmes on media literacy promoting the capacity to critically analyse information in today's knowledge society as well as programmes on ICT literacy aiming at the development of technological user skills that allow to access, manage, assess and create useful online information.

Local and regional participation opportunities

22. Enable and facilitate the development of participation processes such as youth councils in close collaboration with local and regional public authorities in order to give young people the opportunity to have their say in local and regional decision-making processes.
23. Develop and provide information and training opportunities for policy-makers on suitable and youth tailored communication and participation methods and tools in order to facilitate openness and receptiveness towards young people.
24. Consider the appropriateness of lowering the voting age for the elections of local and regional public authorities to 16 years with respect to national circumstances and national legal frameworks.

Alternative forms and e-Participation

25. Recognise and support young people, youth work and youth organisations in developing diverse forms of political participation including petitions, demonstrations, campaigns as well as the use of culture, arts and sports, given that these instruments allow for a diverse expression of opinions and diverse access to political participation, especially when addressing young people with fewer opportunities.
26. Develop digital tools for political participation of young people combined with face to face elements and develop adequate trainings for teachers, youth workers, trainers and multipliers that work with different target groups within formal education and non-formal learning settings in order to reach out to young people at all levels; recognise and involve existing channels of youth information and youth information providers at European, national, regional and local level.
27. Involve the youth field in the implementation of the digital single market strategy for Europe, tackling topics such as digital skills and expertise, safer online use and the fight against illegal contents such as racism, xenophobia and calls for violence.

Dialogue with political decision-makers

28. Support, where appropriate, information and communication processes and tools that enable young people's understanding and appropriation of public policies, highlighting the aspects relevant for young people and making effective use of different media tools and ICT.
29. Explore and expand opportunities for dialogue at local, regional and national level between young people and policy makers from all policy fields that affect young people.

30. Encourage the participation of young people in elections and within the formal structures of representative democracies, such as political parties, so that political parties have a greater interest in developing policy proposals that respond to young people's needs.
31. Support information campaigns and events for young people at the occasion of local, regional, national and European elections by using interactive online and streaming tools as well as specific outreach programmes targeting first time voters and young people with fewer opportunities.
32. Develop a decision-making culture at all levels of government that supports youth-led bottom-up participation processes and is responsive to informal youth initiatives.
33. Promote and ensure that EU programmes supporting young people, such as Erasmus+ support:
 - the dissemination of youth-friendly information on current political developments that affect young people at local, regional and national level,
 - the realisation of youth targeted information campaigns during national and European elections,
 - the creation and development of youth advocacy platforms and youth organisations that represent and lobby for the interests of young people,
 - the involvement of operational information providers such as national youth information structures and European platforms like ERYICA, EYCA, Eurodesk and the European Youth Portal,
 - the transnational youth initiatives and the Structured Dialogue.

Youth work and youth organisations

34. Support and further develop tailor-made youth work initiatives that focus on citizenship education, human rights education, intercultural and interfaith education, by the use of non-formal learning and peer to peer methods, in order to foster young people's integration into society and to counter extremist tendencies, violent radicalisation and hate speech; exploit good practices resulting from existing cooperation networks in the field of youth policy, such as the European knowledge centre for youth policy (EKCYP) and the SALTO Youth Participation Centre.
35. Strengthen the capacity of youth information providers in order to enable the dissemination of information regarding political participation opportunities especially for young people that do not belong to organised youth movements or youth organisations.

INVITE THE COMMISSION TO:

36. Make available information on good practices and success stories of projects in the Member States in the context of the Erasmus+ programme on initiatives aiming for the political participation of young people; take account of other research studies and initiatives in this area and disseminate their results.
37. Establish a summary report of available research studies including i.a. those of the Pool of European Youth Researchers, on e-participation and the range of different digital media and online tools as well as an analysis on how these tools are used by young people, in order to have an overview on existing and effective methodologies.

38. Define the specific contribution of youth work as well as non-formal and informal learning to fostering active citizenship and participation of young people in diverse and tolerant societies as well as preventing marginalisation, and radicalisation potentially resulting in violent behaviour.

 39. Publish through easy-to-access communication tools, youth tailored information that clarifies and/or explains developments across different EU policies and EU decisions that particularly affect young people, in order to make these transparent and comprehensible.
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POLITICAL BACKGROUND

1. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union which states in article 165 that Union action shall be aimed at “encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe”.
2. The Convention on the rights of the child of the United Nations which outlines the right of children and young people to express their views freely in all matters affecting them.
3. The Communication of 28 April 2015 of the Commission on the European Agenda on Security stating that youth participation has a key role to play in preventing violent radicalization by promoting common European values, fostering social inclusion, enhancing mutual understanding and tolerance.
4. The Paris Declaration of 17 March 2015 of the European Union Education Ministers on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education.
5. The Resolution of 20 May 2014 of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the overview of the structured dialogue process including social inclusion of young people which stated that the overall priority for the 18 months cycle from 1 July 2014 – 31 December 2015 is youth empowerment addressing access to rights and the importance of political participation of young people.

6. The Declaration of the second European Youth Work Convention (Brussels, 27-30 April 2015) which stated that participation is one of the main principles of youth work, the Convention being convinced that the development of youth work can only be taken further when young people get actively involved from the beginning at all levels – European, national, regional and local.

**PRIORITY FOR THE EUROPEAN STRUCTURED DIALOGUE IN THE YOUTH FIELD
DURING THE PERIOD 1 JANUARY 2016 – 30 JUNE 2017**

The youth field has a well-established practice of Presidency cooperation in the context of the Structured Dialogue between public authorities and young people. The overall thematic priority for European cooperation for the Structured Dialogue in the youth field for the period 1 January 2016 - 30 June 2017 will be “Enabling all young people to engage in a diverse, connected and inclusive Europe – Ready for Life, Ready for Society”. This theme reflects the EU Youth Report and takes into account the feedback of the pre-consultation phase, which the upcoming trio presidencies have conducted. This theme will be the common thread that will ensure the continuity and consistency in the work of the three Presidencies, in line with the EU Work Plan for Youth 2016-2018.

**PRINCIPLES FOR THE EUROPEAN STRUCTURED DIALOGUE IN THE YOUTH
FIELD DURING THE PERIOD 1 JANUARY 2016 – 30 JUNE 2017**

1. The simplified 18-months architecture in the framework of the trio presidencies cooperation on Structured Dialogue should be maintained and further developed to ensure continuity of the overall thematic priority and to allow for a better time management for National Working Groups in consultations with young people.
2. In order to improve the representativeness and the diversity of young people in the process, further efforts should be invested in the outreach to the different target groups that are affected by the overall priority, including the use of online consultations combined with face-to-face meetings, methods that combine different ways of expression and local consultation events involving local NGOs, youth (information) organizations, local authorities and national working groups.
3. In order to enrich the quality of the Structured Dialogue outcomes, youth workers, youth experts, academic experts, professional youth service providers and relevant youth organisations affected by the overall priority should participate in the consultations and, where relevant, in the EU Youth Conferences.
4. In order to facilitate the follow-up of the Structured Dialogue outcomes, the trio presidencies should inform young people having participated in the consultation processes and at the EU Youth Conferences, by the means of an explanatory note or other means of communication, on the extent to which the final Structured Dialogue outcome has been considered by the Council and the Commission in the third phase of the cycle.

5. In order to ensure effective impact of the Structured Dialogue, the Trio Presidencies should involve, where relevant, other EU actors, such as the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission.
 6. The overall priority for the following Trio Presidency cycle (1 July 2017 – 31 December 2018) should be defined before the beginning of its term and submitted at the appropriate time for consultation to young people and National Working Groups before its adoption.
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