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To:	Delegations
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Subject:	Council Conclusions on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe, adopted by the Council at its 3617th meeting held on 22 May 2018.

Council Conclusions on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

RECALLING:

1. The political background to this issue as set out in the Annex to these conclusions.

TAKES NOTE OF:

2. The Youth, Peace and Security agenda, as set out in UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015), which recognises the important and positive contribution of young people in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and affirms the important role young people can play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts.
3. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) adopted by the United Nations in September 2015 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which constitute, at their core, a transformative political framework to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. They balance the economic, social and environmental dimensions, including the key issues of governance and peaceful, harmonious and inclusive societies, and recognise the essential interlinkage between their goals and targets.
4. The Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, which envisages nurturing societal resilience also by deepening work on education, culture and youth to foster pluralism, coexistence and respect.

5. The European Consensus on Development, which provides that young people are agents of development and change and, as such, are essential contributors to the 2030 Agenda, including through their ability to innovate, and asserts that the EU and its Member States will also aim to strengthen the rights of young people and their empowerment in the conduct of public affairs, including by promoting their participation in local economies, societies and decision-making, notably through youth organisations.
6. The White Paper on the future of Europe¹, emphasizing the important role of 'European values'.
7. The European Regional Consultation on 'Youth, peace and security' held in Brussels, Belgium, from 25-27 September 2017, organized by the European External Action Service in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office and key civil society stakeholders.

RECOGNISING THAT:

8. The number of young people in the world is rising – there are 1.8 billion children and young people (aged 15-24) in the world today, and there will be 72 million more by [2025].
9. The number of young people in the European Union is currently 88.9 million (2016).²
10. 'Participation' and 'youth and the world', among other subjects, were included as two priority areas of action in the renewed framework for European cooperation in the area of youth policy (2010-2018).

¹ Doc. 6952/17

11. The 'Youth, peace and security'² agenda, as set out in UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) has relevance at both global and European level. Europe is one of the most secure parts of the world. Nevertheless, structural issues, such as climate change, natural disasters, human trafficking, limited employment opportunities, and marginalisation, that affect young people in the European Union - together with the growing threat of violent radicalisation - challenge the idea that Europe is a secure and peaceful continent.
12. There is a need to recognise young people as key actors in building democracy, creating peaceful narratives, building social cohesion, and promoting European values. It is important to engage and recognise young people and stakeholders in the field of youth as key allies in building the resilience to combat such issues, to sustain peace and prevent violence, and to work towards an inclusive and peaceful society. In this context, youth work can play an important role in highlighting young people's potential to play a positive role in building a secure, cohesive and peaceful society.

STRESSING THAT:

13. Throughout the world today, more than 600 million young people live in fragile and conflict-affected contexts³. They are among the most affected by the multiple and often interlinked forms of violence - from minor acts of violence to the organised crime and violent extremism terrorist attacks that plague their communities - and suffer enormous and long-lasting human, social and economic consequences. Therefore it is of the highest importance to design and implement policies and programs that give them opportunities to develop resilience and help their inclusion in society.

² United Nations Development Programme, UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future (New York, 2014)

³ Council of Europe charter on education for democratic citizenship and human rights education.

14. Many European countries have recently experienced high youth unemployment rates and issues related to social exclusion. As a result groups of young people are increasingly embracing outlets such as negative expressions of populism, propaganda, hate speech, and xenophobia, that have the potential to lead to violent extremism, damaging our multicultural identity as Europeans. Therefore, it is crucial that young people are supported in embracing new opportunities such as new technologies and digitalisation, and tackling new challenges such as fake news and globalisation.
15. It is crucial to bear in mind that Youth, Peace and Security is not just a global agenda - it is also a European agenda. In general young people have a holistic understanding of sustaining peace and thus they have a crucial role in addressing the different types of violence, discrimination and injustice that affect them, including domestic violence, gender-based violence, propaganda, all forms of bullying, early and forced marriage, ethnic discrimination and disrespect, through different instruments such as intercultural dialogue through mobility, youth work, volunteering and non-formal and informal learning.
16. Young people are valuable innovators and agents of change, and their contributions should be actively supported, solicited and regarded as essential in building a peaceful society and supporting democratic governance. Moreover, young people's participation promotes civic engagement and active citizenship. In addition, education for democratic citizenship, including digital citizenship along with human rights education, including education for peace and critical thinking, play a key role in their development. In that context, the cooperation between the European Union and the Council of Europe can make a valuable contribution.

UNDERLING THAT:

17. Youth mobility is crucial for exchanging ideas, spreading innovation, tackling unemployment and social issues, establishing strong relationships between people, assisting personal development, encouraging the acquisition of soft and transversal skills, as well as promoting intercultural competences and fighting prejudices and discrimination. Therefore, it should be promoted to achieve inclusive, cohesive and secure society for all.
18. Youth work and non-formal and informal learning have a significant role to play in addressing youth marginalisation and radicalisation. In addition, youth work helps to combat youth marginalisation and radicalisation and enable young people to better understand human rights and democratic values in practice.
19. It is of great importance to further develop and promote the international cooperation of all stakeholders including young people, youth workers, youth leaders and youth organisations from the European Union and beyond, as this constitutes a contribution to building confidence and shaping future relations in and outside Europe.

STRESS THE FOLLOWING AREAS FOR ACTION:

A. Cross-sectorial cooperation based on innovative methods of communication, sharing of good practices and effective dialogue

20. The youth, peace and security agenda cuts across the EU's internal and external policies on promoting sustainable development, peace and security and human rights. Optimising synergies and ensuring coherence between policy responses to challenges straddling the internal and external policies of the Union can only be achieved through the combined efforts of many different stakeholders.

IN THIS CONTEXT THE COUNCIL INVITES MEMBER STATES, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE TO:

21. Promote cross-sectorial cooperation based on innovative methods of communication, sharing of good practices and effective dialogue between the youth sector and different policy fields and relevant authorities so that they consider including young people, youth organisations and organisations working for youth as valuable partners in reinforcing societal and state resilience and building cohesive society.
22. Mobilise expertise, promote innovation, and deepen multi-stakeholder partnerships between the EU institutions, Member States, civil society, young people and stakeholders in the field of youth and beyond by strengthening the young people's role in sustaining peace.

Promote dialogue, cooperation and good practices exchange related to the Youth, Peace, Security agenda between key stakeholders, through reinforcing the global cooperation chapter of the Erasmus + Programme, and other mechanisms to exchange good practices. This should also mobilise young people and create a link between decision-making authorities, youth organisations and organisations for youth that work to sustain peace and build a cohesive and harmonious society.

B. Striving for cohesive and harmonious societies: building on the evidence-based approach

23. At a time when Europe is attempting to address hate speech and reduce all forms of violence it is important to develop peaceful discourse that promotes common values⁴ of the EU of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

⁴ See Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union

IN THIS CONTEXT THE COUNCIL INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE TO:

24. Promote, review and highlight good practices regarding young people's role in sustaining peace and preventing violence as a source of knowledge production and a valuable tool with which to change 'negative narratives' on young people. Qualitative results and evidence-based examples of young people's contributions to sustaining peace and solidarity should be mapped and systematically collected in Europe, including in co-operation with Member States within the Youth Wiki.

C. Ensure active and meaningful youth participation in building peaceful and inclusive societies

25. Active and equal participation (supported through capacity building) of young people, especially the ones with fewer opportunities at all levels of civil and political life is an essential condition for building peaceful, cohesive and equal societies. It is also important to eradicate poverty and social exclusion leading to marginalisation of young people.

26. There is a growing recognition that young people are agents of change in conflict prevention, promoting inclusion and social justice, and sustaining peace. Promoting peace and stability requires a global partnership between all stakeholders, young people and organisations for youth have a vital role to play in this respect. Youth work also has an important role to play in building peace and promoting solidarity.

IN THIS CONTEXT THE COUNCIL INVITES MEMBER STATES, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE TO:

27. Increase opportunities for meaningful participation of young people in maintaining and promoting peace and security at all levels, when and where possible, through participatory mechanisms.
28. Facilitate easier access to data and knowledge from the recent studies and research outputs on youth participation in democratic life in Europe among young people, youth organisations and other stakeholders.
29. Promote active participation of young people in society, including young people with fewer opportunities, and cross-border mobility and contacts between people, thereby facilitating the exchange of ideas and the spreading of innovation through the current and future programmes.

IN THIS CONTEXT THE COUNCIL INVITES THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE TO:

30. Take forward work on EU engagement with the youth, peace and security agenda, as well as key inter-regional engagements⁵, in partnership with the United Nations and other international organisations, including the progressive framing of a strategic EU-UN partnership on youth in peacebuilding.

⁵ The Youth Track of the 5th AU-EU Summit and the Young Mediterranean Voice Initiative

D. Maintain and foster the intercultural dialogue between youth in and beyond Europe

31. Intercultural dialogue has multiple functions and may be recognised as contributing to peace and security in the EU and neighbouring countries. Participating in intercultural dialogue provides various opportunities for young people to take a leadership position, to advance reconciliation processes and reduce prejudice, misunderstandings and discrimination among diverse groups as well as to combat hate speech and violent extremism using a human-rights based approach.

IN THIS CONTEXT THE COUNCIL INVITES MEMBER STATES, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE TO:

32. Support international youth cooperation, dialogue and mutual understanding between young people, youth workers, youth leaders and youth organisations and organisations for youth⁶ from the EU and beyond as an important tool in supporting European citizenship and the democratisation processes.

⁶ By "Youth Organisations" is meant civil-society organisations for which the coordination body is comprised mainly of young people. By "Organisations for Youth" is meant civil-society organisations who provide services for young people but their coordinating bodies do not consist of only young people.

E. Building resilience and critical thinking through non-formal and informal learning and the peer-to-peer approach

33. Young people's awareness and understanding of the common values of the EU⁷ such as respect for democracy, equality, human rights, solidarity, citizenship and diversity should be supported as well as their media and information literacy. This contributes to critical thinking and to an awareness of and knowledge about how information can be biased and exploited by violent extremist groups in order to spread propaganda.
34. As agreed and introduced within the Council of Europe, *Education for democratic citizenship and human rights education* is closely interrelated and mutually supportive⁸. This non-formal method of education and training is an instrument that focuses primarily on promoting democratic rights and responsibilities and active participation, in relation to the civic, political, social, economic, legal and cultural spheres of society.

IN THIS CONTEXT THE COUNCIL INVITES MEMBER STATES, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE TO:

35. Consider promoting and reinforcing, when and where relevant, the concept of 'Education for democratic citizenship and human rights education'¹⁰, which could be implemented in formal and non-formal learning environments and the peer-to-peer approach, respecting subsidiarity and freedom of education.
36. Enhance further cooperation with the Council of Europe within the partnership agreement.

⁷ See Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union

⁸ Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (Adopted in the framework of Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 of the Committee of Ministers)

In adopting these conclusions, the Council RECALLS in particular the following:

1. EU Global Strategy on Foreign & Security Policy, with special emphasis on resilience
2. European Consensus on Development / Council Conclusions on Sustainable Development (2016).
3. EU Comprehensive Approach on Gender, Peace and Security.
4. Revised Guidelines for the EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism (9640/16 and 14276/16).
5. Council Conclusions on the role of youth work in supporting young people's development of essential life skills that facilitate their successful transition to adulthood, active citizenship and working life (9624/17).
6. Council conclusions on the role of the youth sector in an integrated and cross-sectoral approach to preventing and combating violent radicalisation of young people (9640/16)
7. EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015 – 2019 (2015)
8. The informal meeting of the Heads of States or Government of 12 February 2015 at which the members of the European Council called for a comprehensive approach, including initiatives regarding social integration, among others, which are of great importance to prevent violent radicalisation.
9. The Declaration adopted by EU education ministers at their informal gathering in Paris on 17 March 2015 in which they provide guidance on how to cooperate at European level. The importance of efforts to prevent and tackle marginalisation, intolerance, racism and radicalisation, to promote citizenship of young people and to preserve a framework of equal opportunities for all were highlighted.
10. The Council conclusions on the Renewed Internal Security Strategy of 17 June 2015, which prioritise the specific issues of disengagement, rehabilitation and de- or anti-radicalisation as a priority for action in the coming years (9416/15).

11. The EU Work Plan for Youth 2016-2018 which focuses on increasing the social inclusion of all young people, taking into account underlying European values, and the role of youth work both in the non-digital and the digital world.
12. The 2015 Joint EU Youth Report of the Council and the Commission on 'the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)' which underlined that young people should be able to grow up in inclusive and pluralist societies based on democratic, European values. The joint EU Youth Report also illustrates the need to empower young people from all backgrounds even more, especially those at risk of exclusion.
13. Cooperation between the European Commission and the Council of Europe within the Partnership Agreement.
14. The European Agenda on Security, of 28 April 2015, in which the Commission considers participation of young people to be a key factor in preventing radicalisation by promoting European values and fostering social inclusion, also mentioning the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), an EU-wide umbrella which enables the exchange of experience and practices facilitating early detection of radicalisation and the design of preventive and disengagement strategies at local level.
15. The European Parliament Resolution of 25 November 2015 on the prevention of radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations.
16. UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security.
17. 125th session of the Committee of Ministers - The Action Plan of the Committee of Ministers (Brussels, 19 May 2015), CM(2015)74 final, on 'The fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism', and the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.
18. The UN Inter-Agency Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding's 'Guiding principles for young people's participation in peacebuilding'.