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04 May 2009

## Expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16

### Motion for a resolution

tabled by Mr Mogens JENSEN and other members of the Assembly

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This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

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Twelve years have passed since the Assembly adopted [Recommendation 1315 \(1997\)](#), recommending to “rapidly harmonise the age for the right to vote and stand for election at 18 years in all countries and for all elections”. Since then, we have witnessed a significant development in issues concerning the minimum age for voting. It is therefore time to re-evaluate the Assembly’s position on this very important topic.

The trend of lowering the voting age has spread throughout Europe: In Austria the voting age has been lowered to 16 years for all elections. In Germany and Switzerland, 16-17 year olds can vote at local elections in some of the constituent states. Current knowledge on the experiences from elections in these countries is very promising in terms of 16-17-year olds level of participation.

In Great Britain, Finland, Norway and the Czech Republic the possibility of lowering of the voting age to 16 is currently being evaluated by the governments. The primary reason hereof has been a deep concern over young people’s reluctance to participate in democracy. Despite a widespread interest in political issues amongst the 16-17 year olds, they apparently do not show up at the ballot boxes or register as voters. According to IDEA, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, voter turn-out amongst young people in the age from 18-29 years in Western Europe is systematically lower than the average level of turnout in the population (see Voter turnout since 1945, a global report – IDEA, 2002).

Furthermore, there is a fear that the demographic development in many European countries will worsen the problem. According to EUROSTAT statistics we will for instance see a 44,5 percentage increase in the 65-79 year olds and a 24,3 percent decline in the 15-24 year olds by year 2050. There is a real risk that young people will be marginalised in the political process, both on a specific level as they will be numerically outnumbered, but also because the political agenda risks becoming dominated by issues that are primarily interesting for older people. This is particularly problematic in a time, when societies more than ever will need the commitment and work efforts of young people in order to keep up economical growth, social security systems and social cohesion.

Needless to say, this development is dangerous for the future stability of European democracy. We need to find means to make young people engaged in democracy. Lowering of the voting age could be a part of that solution.

Recalling [Recommendation 1019 \(1985\)](#) on the participation of young people in political and institutional life, the Assembly said that it was “convinced – if democracy is to survive and develop – of the importance of the active and effective awareness, understanding, participation and commitment of young people in political and institutional life at local, national and European levels.”



Recalling [Resolution 1630 \(2008\)](#) on *Refreshing the youth agenda of the Council of Europe* that underlines that in the youth policy of the Council of Europe: “A key element has been encouragement of the active participation of young people in civil and institutional life.”

The Assembly recommends an investigation on the advantages and drawbacks of engaging and securing young people’s participation in democracy by lowering of the voting age to 16 in all member countries of the Council of Europe.

*Signed (see overleaf)*

*Signed*<sup>1</sup>:

JENSEN Mogens, Denmark, SOC  
AYVA Lokman, Turkey, EPP/CD  
BELLEN Alexander, van der, Austria  
BILOZIR Oksana, Ukraine, EPP/CD  
BRASSEUR Anne, Luxembourg  
DUESUND Åse Gunhild Woie, Norway  
DZEMBRITZKI Detlef, Germany  
FREIRE ANTUNES José, Portugal  
HANCOCK Mike, United Kingdom, ALDE  
MELO Maria Manuela, de, Portugal, SOC  
MUTTONEN Christine, Austria, SOC  
NEUGEBAUER Fritz, Austria, EPP/CD  
O'HARA Edward, United Kingdom  
POULSEN Jørgen, Denmark, ALDE  
WURM Gisela, Austria, SOC

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1. ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe  
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party  
SOC: Socialist Group