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

### Report<sup>1</sup>

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

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### Summary

The participation of young people in democratic life should be promoted, in particular that of 16- and 17-year-olds who already have responsibilities within society, but do not have the right to vote.

Member states are invited to create the necessary preconditions for the participation of young people in civic life, through education and the promotion of community involvement, and to look into the possibilities of lowering both the voting age to 16 and the minimum ages to stand for different elections.

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1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 11895](#), Reference 3564 of 29 May 2009.



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## A. Draft resolution<sup>2</sup>

1. The Parliamentary Assembly has discussed the issue of lowering the minimum age for voting on various occasions, most recently in its [Resolution 1630 \(2008\)](#) on refreshing the youth agenda of the Council of Europe.
2. The demographic evolution in Europe could lead to the increasing marginalisation of young people in the political process, which risks being dominated by issues primarily of interest to older people. Such a development could endanger the stability of democracy at a time when social cohesion is more important than ever.
3. The increasingly low turnout at elections throughout Europe, in particular of the 18 to 24 age group, is also worrying for the future of democracy. Research indicates that the longer young people have to wait to participate in political life, the less engaged they are in their adult life.
4. In 2007, Austria became the first member of the Council of Europe and of the European Union and the first of the developed world's democracies to adopt a voting age of 16 for all municipal, state and national elections. Germany has also lowered the voting age in some *Länder*. The canton of Glarus in Switzerland has lowered the voting age to 16 for local and regional elections. The issue is being debated in the parliaments of several other member states.
5. Recalling the numerous initiatives that already exist to promote the participation of young people, whether by means of specific institutions or by means of the co-management system, as laid down by [Recommendation 1019 \(1985\)](#) on the participation of young people in political and institutional life, the Assembly stresses the need to prepare young people for their participation in civic life and emphasises that:
  - 5.1. the larger the share of society taking part in elections, the greater the representativeness of those elected;
  - 5.2. 16- and 17-year-olds already have responsibilities within society, but without having the right to vote;
  - 5.3. a better participation in voting will help to make young people more aware of their responsibility for defining their position and role in society;
  - 5.4. better education for democratic citizenship must be provided by education systems to enable future, fully-fledged citizens to exercise their new rights;
  - 5.5. schools can constitute a model for democratic participation if students are involved in their decision-making process;
  - 5.6. a voting age of 16 would be more conducive to a higher turnout of first-time voters, and thus to an overall higher turnout.
6. Particular emphasis must also be placed on the principle of democracy, which calls for the participation of the largest possible number of people in policymaking and in politics, on the constant concern of all democrats to extend and improve the democratic functioning of our societies, on the possibility of bringing new blood into the electorate and thus giving greater expression to the concerns of the younger generation, and on the importance of effectively combating the growing danger of the exclusion of young people and the concern to do everything possible to facilitate their integration into the structures of society.
7. The Assembly therefore calls on member states to:
  - 7.1. create the necessary preconditions for the participation of young people in civic life through education and the promotion of community involvement;
  - 7.2. investigate the possibility of lowering the voting age to 16 years in all countries and for all kinds of elections;
  - 7.3. examine the possibility of lowering the minimum ages to stand for different kinds of elections (local and regional bodies, parliament, senate, presidency) whenever advisable.

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2. Draft resolution adopted by the committee on 9 March 2011.

## B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Aligrudić, rapporteur

### 1. Introduction

1. A motion for a resolution entitled “Expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16” was tabled with the Parliamentary Assembly in May 2009.<sup>3</sup> It was referred to the Political Affairs Committee, which appointed me rapporteur.
2. The Political Affairs Committee discussed this issue at its meeting in Belgrade on 6 and 7 September 2010 and held an exchange of views with a representative of the European Youth Forum at its meeting in Paris on 14 and 15 December 2010.
3. The Assembly has long been concerned with youth participation in politics. In its [Recommendation 1019 \(1985\)](#) on the participation of young people in political and institutional life, the Assembly declared 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”. In [Recommendation 1286 \(1996\)](#) on a European strategy for children, the Assembly urged member states “to enable the views of children to be heard in all decision-making which affects them” and “to reconsider the age at which young people can vote”.
4. In June 1996, the Assembly adopted Order No. 523 on the situation of young people in Europe: marginalised youth, following a report submitted by Mr Mikko Elo, in which the Assembly noted that: “key areas for policy discussion at national level ... [include] whether or how to ... lower the minimum age for voting”. In [Recommendation 1315 \(1997\)](#) on the minimum age for voting, the Assembly did not recommend the lowering of the voting age to 16 but called on member states to rapidly harmonise the age for the right to vote and stand for election at 18 years in all countries and for all elections and to create the necessary preconditions for the participation of young people in civic life through education and the promotion of community involvement. Finally, [Resolution 1630 \(2008\)](#) on refreshing the youth agenda of the Council of Europe underlined that the encouragement of the active participation of young people in civic and institutional life had been a key element in the youth policy of the Council of Europe.
5. In parliaments throughout Europe, the issue of lowering the age of voting to 16 is being increasingly discussed and this change is already being adopted in certain Council of Europe member states.

### 2. Current state of play: the voting age across Europe

6. At the present time, the voting age across the democratic world is typically 18, following widespread reform in the 1970s which lowered the voting age from 21 in a large number of countries. There have since been calls, particularly by civil society groups, to lower the voting age further to 16.
7. Today, the great majority of Council of Europe member states have 18 as their minimum voting age. The only European country where the voting age is higher is Italy, whose nationals are not allowed to vote in elections for the Senate until they are 25 (however, they may vote for the *Camera dei deputati*, the Lower House of Parliament, as from the age of 18).
8. In 2007, Austria became the first member of the Council of Europe and of the European Union and the first of the developed world's democracies to adopt a voting age of 16 for all municipal, state, national and European elections. Three Federal states had made the change by 2003 (Burgenland, Carinthia and Styria) and, in May 2003, Vienna became the fourth. Salzburg followed suit, and so by the start of 2005 the total had reached five states out of nine. The lowering of the voting age for municipal elections in Burgenland, Salzburg and Vienna resulted in the reduction of the voting age for state elections in those states as well. Following the legislative elections in 2006, the winning SPÖ-ÖVP coalition announced that one of its policies would be the reduction of the voting age to 16 for all elections in all states in Austria. The policy was set in motion in March and a bill proposing an amendment to the constitution was presented to the legislature in May. In June 2007, the National Council approved the proposal following a recommendation from its Constitution Committee. During the passage of the bill through the chamber, relatively little opposition was raised to the reduction, with four out of five parties explicitly supporting it; indeed, there was some dispute over which party had been the first to suggest the idea. A further uncontroversial inclusion was a reduction in the candidacy age from 19 to 18. The Federal Council approved the bill on 21 June 2007, with no party voting against it.

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3. Assembly [Doc. 11895](#).

9. Germany has also lowered the voting age to 16 in some *Länder*. In 1995, Lower Saxony did so for municipal elections. The *Länder* of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, North-Rhine Westphalia, Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein have subsequently followed suit.

10. Similarly, in 2007, the canton of Glarus in Switzerland lowered the voting age to 16 for local and regional elections.

11. Moves to lower the voting age to 16 were successful in each of the three British Crown dependencies from 2006 to 2008. The Isle of Man was the first to amend its law when, in July 2006, it reduced the voting age to 16 for its general elections. Jersey followed suit in July 2007, when it approved in principle a reduction of the voting age to 16. The law was brought into force in April 2008, in time for the general election in late 2008. In October 2007, a proposal for a reduction, made by the House Committee of the States of Guernsey, and approved by the States' Policy Committee, was adopted by the States of Deliberation. An Order-in-Council sanctioning the law was made in December 2007. It came into force immediately, and the voting age was accordingly reduced in time for the Guernsey general election in 2008.

12. In Hungary, there are certain circumstances in which young people are permitted to vote at the age of 16. For instance, those persons who marry before reaching the age of 18 enter into full adult legal rights and can therefore vote.

13. In Slovenia, young people can vote at 16 if they are employed.

14. In Norway, the government has given 16-year-olds the right to vote in 20 selected municipalities at the 2011 local elections, as part of a greater effort to get young people interested in politics.

### 3. European countries considering lowering the age of voting

15. A number of countries are actively considering lowering the age of voting. In July 2010, the Irish Parliament's joint committee on the constitution recommended that it be amended to allow 17-year-olds to vote in the elections for the Dail Eireann (Lower House of Parliament).

16. The Finnish government has decided to investigate the possibilities of lowering the voting age to 16, as part of its government programme 2007-2011.

17. In Denmark, motions have been put forward in the Folketing (the Danish Parliament) for a suffrage commission on how to engage the youth in democracy and the possibility of lowering the voting age to 16, as well as a turnout commission to examine the declining turnout in local elections. The suffrage commission, which consists of representatives of all major political parties, trade unions, think tanks, youth organisations, experts and the media, was established in the autumn of 2010 and is expected to deliver a report by late 2011. At the 2009 local elections, 31 municipalities organised shadow elections for the 16- and 17-year-olds.

18. In September 2008, the Minister for Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities of the Czech Republic put forward a motion to lower the voting age to 16 at local elections as part of a wider programme to motivate young people to participate in democracy and acknowledge them as a part of society.

19. Discussions have taken place in Malta about lowering the age of voting. The Labour Party proposed to lower the age of voting to 16, in the framework of the June 2009 European Parliament election.

20. In the United Kingdom, the reduction of the voting age to 16 was first given serious consideration in December 1999, when the House of Commons considered in committee an amendment to the Representation of the People Bill. This was the first occasion that the question of a voting age lower than 18 had ever been put to a vote in the Commons. The government opposed the amendment, and it was defeated by 434 votes to 36.

21. In 2004, the Electoral Commission conducted a major consultation on the subject of voting and candidacy ages, and received a significant response. In its conclusions, published on 19 April 2004,<sup>4</sup> the Commission recommended that the voting age remain at 18. In November 2005, the House of Commons voted by 136 to 128 (on a free vote) against a Private Member's Bill for a reduction in the voting age to 16. Parliament chose not to include a provision reducing the voting age in the Electoral Administration Act during its passage in 2006.

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4. The Electoral Commission, "12 month review considering the age of the electoral majority".

22. In February 2006, the report of the POWER Inquiry called for a reduction to 16 of both the voting age and the candidacy age for the House of Commons. On the same day, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, indicated in an article in *The Guardian* that he favoured a reduction, provided it was made concurrently with effective citizenship education.

23. The Ministry of Justice published, in July 2007, a Green Paper entitled *The Governance of Britain*,<sup>5</sup> in which it proposed the establishment of a "Youth Citizenship Commission". The Commission would, among other things, be tasked with examining the case for lowering the voting age. The Green Paper was put into practice and a Youth Citizenship Commission was set up in July 2007. It was also asked to carry out a consultation on whether the voting age should be lowered to 16. A consultation paper was published in October 2008 and responses were sought by January 2009. The Youth Citizen Commission published a summary of the responses in April 2009. In June 2009, the commission published its recommendations following the consultation but did not recommend a reduction in the voting age, leaving the political decision to the politicians.

24. More recently, the Labour Party, in their 2010 General Election manifesto, promised to improve citizenship education for young people and a free vote in parliament on reducing the voting age to 16. The Liberal Democrats followed suit by pledging to do the same if they were elected.

25. The Scottish National Party's conference voted unanimously in October 2007 for a policy of reducing the voting age to 16, as well as in favour of a campaign for the necessary power to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. The Minister for Parliamentary Business said:<sup>6</sup> "the Scottish Government agrees that the lack of consistency with other legal rights on entering adulthood such as paying taxes, getting married or serving in the armed forces, leads young people to believe that their views are not valid or important." He went on to say: "We plan that the bill will extend the franchise for the pilot health board elections to include those aged 16 and over. If the government is successful, young people will have their vote in an area in which the Scottish Parliament has competence ... I would like to extend voting at 16 to local government elections as a next step but, unfortunately, as with so much of Scotland's electoral legislation, reduction of the voting age for elections is a matter reserved to Westminster." In February 2008, a debate in the Welsh Assembly showed significant support for lowering the voting age to 16.

26. At the level of civil society across Europe, there is gathering support for a reduction of the voting age to 16. One such movement is the "Votes at 16" coalition, set up in 2003. The Votes at 16 coalition gathers major United Kingdom youth organisations, political parties and other supporters. The coalition is led by a steering group of active members, which includes the British Youth Council, which hosts the secretariat, the Co-Operative, the Children's Rights Alliance for England, the Scottish Youth Parliament and the National Union of Students, which have been campaigning for votes at 16 for a number of years. The Trade Union UNISON has also voted to support Votes at 16.

27. The Brussels-based European Youth Forum, which is an independent youth-led platform, representing 98 National Youth Councils and International Youth Organisations from across Europe, is leading the way in calling for the voting age to be lowered to 16.

#### **4. Current state of play outside Europe**

28. Europe is by no means the only continent where this issue has been raised. Iran went as far as awarding suffrage at 15, but raised the age back to 18 in January 2007 despite the opposition of the government. A request to lower the voting age to 16 was made during the consideration of revisions to the Constitution of Venezuela in 2007, but was defeated by referendum. A report suggesting that consideration be given to reducing the voting age to 16 in the Australian Capital Territory in Canberra was tabled in the territorial legislature in September 2007, but was defeated. In 2009, the Australian government launched a Green Paper on an electoral reform, including the possibility of lowering the voting age to 16.

29. Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador and Nicaragua all have a voting age of 16 and Indonesia, East Timor, Sudan, and Seychelles have a voting age of 17. In Israel, 17-year-olds can vote in local elections. In the Philippines, 16-year-olds can vote in all elections, if they are married.

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5. House of Commons library, Research Paper 07/72.

6. "SNP in move to lower voting age to 16", Herald Scotland, 13 June 2008.

## 5. Discussion of the arguments in favour of lowering the voting age

### 5.1. Increase of representativeness

30. The first argument is the expansion of democracy. An election which also includes 16- and 17-year-olds is more representative than one which includes only those over 18. Adding another section of society increases the representativeness of those elected and there is no counter argument to this. It could be argued, as one member of the Political Affairs Committee did, that we should not stop at 16. However, a threshold at 16 is consistent with the completion of compulsory school education in most Council of Europe member states.

31. Since the onset of democratic revolutions in Europe, beginning with the French revolution in 1789, there has been a continuous movement towards a more inclusive democracy by giving civic rights to more and more citizens, acknowledging that not only wealthy men but also women and the poor were capable of making democratic decisions. Lowering the voting age to 16 would continue this trend, making democracies more democratic by including more citizens in decision-making processes. European society is subject to constant change, new challenges, needs and opportunities, especially for young people. These changes need a common, pan-European, cross-sectoral, intercultural and intergenerational sustainable democratic response to make sure that youth issues and the perspective of young people are not under-represented on the European policy agenda.

### 5.2. Democratic participation

32. It is argued that earlier voting will increase the problem of low turnout. According to a report published by the United Kingdom Parliament, at the present time, 18- to 25-year-olds are the least likely to cast a vote at election time. Youth membership of political parties is falling. Lowering the voting age still further is not likely to reverse this trend. One of the major reasons for non-participation by young people is the disconnection they feel from political parties and election candidates.

33. However, the exclusion of 16- and 17-year-olds from elections is thought to fuel the disengagement of 18- to 24-year-olds. The motivation to participate actively in decision-making is lower when there is a perception of having no real influence. Lowering the electoral age would motivate the 16- and 17-year-olds to participate more in the democratic process. Lowering the voting age would also force politicians to formulate more solid and substantial youth policies.

34. The longer young people are denied involvement in the formal democratic process, the less chance there is of their ever engaging them. In the United Kingdom elections of 2005, turnout among 18- to 24-year-olds was only 37%, a drop of two percentage points since the previous election. The Electoral Reform Society has suggested that if people are given the chance to vote at a younger age, they are more likely to vote as they grow older.

35. Research in three German *Länder* on the turnout level of 16- to 18-year-olds shows that this age group is more likely to acquire the habit of voting than their predecessors, who were allowed to vote only at the age of 18. In North Rhine-Westphalia, the turnout among 16- to 21-year-olds was slightly below the average for the whole electorate, but clearly higher – by about 5% to 8% – than among those aged 21 to 30. Similar results held for Lower Saxony, where the City of Hanover, in 1996, saw turnout among the 16- and 17-year-old age group at 56.5%, compared to 49% amongst 18- to 24-year-olds, with 16- to 18-year-olds voting at a level comparable to 35- to 45-year-olds. A comparable conclusion can also be drawn for the 1999 local elections in Saxony-Anhalt.

36. Although age-disaggregated turnout figures are not collected in Austria, research by the Institute for Social Research and Consulting (SORA) and the International Sociological Association (ISA) gives an insight into the effects of this change. They found that more than three quarters of the first-time voters in the 2008 general election followed political issues more than once a week, and more than two thirds of the electorate composed of 16- to 18-year-olds stated they were interested in the election campaign. This is despite only 20% of SORA's survey respondents saying they trusted major political actors and criticisms from the group that politicians were not reflecting youth-specific issues in their election campaigns. The turnout in the newly enfranchised group was estimated to be the same as the general electorate in 2008, around 73%, and the research team found no meaningful bias on the basis of age group.

37. A report written by the British political think tank Demos, entitled “A New Frontier”, about voting habits in the United Kingdom, observed that 19% of 16- and 17-year-olds would be “absolutely certain” to vote, and 65.5% of them “more likely to vote than not”. The proportion of 16- and 17-year-olds who said they “would not vote” (9%) was slightly lower than the proportion among those aged over 18 (11%).

38. The social context has proved essential in establishing a continuous interest in politics and turnout. Researcher Mark Franklin,<sup>7</sup> who has been studying election turnout in European elections for the past twenty years, concludes that a stable context in terms of school, living at home and friends has a great influence on first-time voters’ turnout. On these grounds, a voting age of 18 is not conducive for the turnout of young voters, because this is the time when young people are leaving home, beginning their university studies and making new friends. Lowering the voting age to 16 would therefore increase the chances for a higher turnout for first-time voters, and thus a continuous higher turnout.

### **5.3. Demographic changes**

39. The average age of Europe’s voters is inexorably rising year by year and the cohort of youngsters is proportionally shrinking. In 2000, 12.4% of the European population was aged between 15 and 24, whereas the group of 65- to 90-year-olds made up 16.2%. Eurostat projections show that, by 2020, the group of 15- to 24-year-olds will account for 10.9% of the population and the group of 65- to 90-year-olds for nearly twice this, 20.6% of the total. Lowering the voting age would contribute to maintaining a demographic balance between youngsters and adults.

40. There is a need for a public political platform in order to improve intergenerational dialogue. Societal shifts and demographic developments need a political answer and lowering the electoral age to 16 would allow the transfer of intergenerational discourse into parliaments and put youth issues on the political agenda. It would therefore give young people and their issues an equal voice in the public debate. Politicians tend to give more weight to the views of people who actually do hold the right to vote, and therefore are more interested in them as their prospective voters.

### **5.4. Citizenship rights and responsibilities**

41. Many 16-year-olds are already active participants in society: in many states, they are allowed to leave school and find work; those who do so therefore pay taxes; and they are also able to get married and take on civic responsibilities.

42. Although in many countries young people cannot vote at the age of 16, they can, for instance in Germany, take driving lessons, buy alcohol, and leave school if they have completed the minimum years required by the state. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, they can have sexual relations, marry with parental consent, work full-time, have children, claim benefits and obtain a National Insurance number, join the armed forces and be convicted of a criminal offence but not be given a custodial sentence. It is a similar story throughout the Council of Europe member states. In Austria, France, Spain, and Portugal, it is possible to consume alcohol without food as from the age of 16 (17 in Luxembourg). As mentioned above, 16-year-olds are able to take on more and more responsibility, yet they are still denied the vote. Arguably, they should therefore be entitled to complete their civic rights by casting their votes in local, regional, national and European elections.

### **5.5. Maturity**

43. The United Kingdom Electoral Commission<sup>8</sup> claim that their 2004 findings show that 16-year-olds are simply not mature enough to be entrusted with the vote. The large majority still live at home and go to school. A 16-year-old still requires parental permission to get married and under 18s in the military are held back from frontline duty. Rights, such as permission to buy alcohol or gamble in a betting shop or casino, are not always given at 16 and there are currently campaigns for age barriers to be raised for tobacco and fireworks. In the opinion of many, 16-year-olds may have adult bodies but their minds are still those of children. The Citizenship Foundation in the United Kingdom presented the argument that “if we were to lower the voting age from 18 to 16, so bringing in vast numbers of semi-educated and, indeed, sometimes under-educated children, we would make democracy in this country even less reliable”.<sup>9</sup>

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7. Mark N. Franklin, *Voter turnout and the Dynamics and Electoral Competition in established Democracies since 1945*, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

8. UK Electoral Commission, “12 month review considering the age of electoral majority”.

9. Citizenship Foundation, United Kingdom.

44. In a democracy, however, there is no “wrong” option, as all the options on offer (parties, lists, candidates) are legitimate. In addition, past experience shows that the voting pattern of the 16-17 age group is very similar to that of the 18-24 age group. From a psychological point of view, the moral and cognitive development of young people is completed by the age of 14; therefore, as from that age, young people are capable of knowledge-based decision-making.

45. Another problem on the issue of maturity is the lack of consistency throughout Europe regarding the age of adult responsibility. This can clearly be seen if one considers the widely different treatment across Europe for such things as the age for consuming alcohol, the age young people are allowed to marry and criminal responsibility.

46. A United Kingdom survey conducted in 2004 and published in *British Social Attitudes*,<sup>10</sup> found that there had been a significant fall since 1994 in the interest that young people express in politics and the extent to which they favour any of the British political parties. It also found that the well-established generation gap between the levels of political interest shown by the oldest and youngest age groups had widened since 1986. While interest does develop with age, current levels are so low that they “... would need to increase substantially over the next decade or so if these groups are to 'catch up' with previous generations”.

## 6. Candidacy age

47. Any discussion about lowering the voting age cannot ignore the closely related issue of minimum age for candidates. [Recommendation 1315 \(1997\)](#), cited earlier, also urged states to reduce the age that people can stand in elections. The main argument raised in support of a minimum candidacy age is that a greater degree of maturity is required to act as a political representative than to elect such a representative. Therefore, a reasonable period of time should be allowed to pass between the right to vote and the right to be a candidate.

48. The general perception among National Youth Councils working for Votes at 16 is that the age to stand as candidates for local, regional, national and European elections should also be 16. Young people have significant responsibilities towards society at the age of 16 and can have significant responsibilities in the private and voluntary sectors; this inconsistency should be rectified.

49. On the other hand, it has been suggested by the Votes at 16 campaign that there should be no minimum candidacy age at all; determining the fitness of individuals to hold elected office should rely only on the other filter mechanisms of party selection processes and the ballot box, as well as the common sense of the electorate.

50. There is a less clear picture internationally when it comes to a minimum candidacy age. For all levels of public election, the minimum age is 18 in Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden, 19 in Austria and 21 in Belgium. Eighteen is also the standard age of candidacy for elections in Australia and Canada. However, in France, candidates in local elections must be 18, but for the national legislature they must be 23 or older. To be eligible to run for the presidency, candidates must be at least 23.

51. In Italy, a person must be at least 50 to be President of the Republic, 40 to be a senator, or 25 to be a deputy, as specified in the 1947 Constitution. Eighteen years of age is sufficient, however, to be elected member of the Council of Regions, Provinces and Municipalities or Communes.

52. In Norway, a person can run for election in parliament or local councils from the age of 18, or 17 if turning 18 in an election year. On a national scale, the 2003 municipal and county election saw the election of 68 candidates under the age of 18.

## 7. Conclusions

53. This is a controversial issue. The decrease in participation in the electoral process, in particular by young people, is worrying and efforts should be made to reverse the trend. One option would be lowering the voting and candidacy age from 18 to 16. There are several possibilities:

- different thresholds for different elections (for instance 16 for local, 17 for regional and 18 for national);

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10. Park A., “Has modern politics disenchanted the young?”, *British Social Attitudes – the 21st report*, 2004.

- different thresholds for voting (for instance 16) and for being a candidate (for instance 18 for parliament);
- allowing voluntary registration (in the electoral lists) as from the age of 16;
- linking voting to employment or marital status.

54. While it makes some sense to have a higher threshold for standing as a candidate than to vote, it seems difficult to justify different thresholds for different elections. To link voting rights below 18 years to employment or marital status would be unconstitutional in many Council of Europe member states.

55. In the rapporteur's view, the most reasonable option is to harmonise the right to vote at 16 years in all countries and for all elections, on a voluntary basis, and at the same time examine the minimum ages to stand for different elections (local and regional bodies, parliament, senate, presidency,) with a view to lowering them whenever advisable.

56. There are many arguments in favour of lowering the active voting age to 16 and very few against it. In addition, the experience of countries and regions where the voting age has already been lowered to 16 shows that there are no negative effects.

57. The Assembly should therefore call on Council of Europe member states to create the necessary preconditions for the participation of young people in civic life through education and the promotion of community involvement and to undertake all possible measures to encourage such participation, including through the lowering of the voting age from 18 to 16 for local, regional, national and European elections.