Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1826 (2011)[1]
Final version

Expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16

Parliamentary Assembly

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. 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 among the 18-24 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 when they are adults.

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 through specific institutions or by means of a 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 ensure that young people are well prepared 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. 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 a higher turnout overall.

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1. Assembly debate on 23 June 2011 (26th Sitting) (see Doc. 12546, report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Aligrudić). Text adopted by the Assembly on 23 June 2011 (26th Sitting).

6. Particular emphasis must also be placed on the principles of democracy, which call for the participation of the largest possible number of people in the political and decision-making process, 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 room for the expression of the concerns of the younger generation, on the importance of effectively combating the growing danger of exclusion of young people and on the desirability 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 age of eligibility to stand for different kinds of elections (local and regional bodies, parliament, senate, presidency) wherever this would seem appropriate.