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Strengthening a youth perspective in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly

Committee Opinion¹

Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media

Rapporteur: Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK, Ukraine, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

A. Conclusions of the committee

1. The Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media welcomes the report by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy and fully supports the establishment of a PACE-Youth Participation Mechanism to promote youth inclusion and representation in the Parliamentary Assembly's work. It is crucial to reflect the needs and aspirations of the younger generation, start bridging the democratic gap and promote age diversity and intergenerational leadership in national parliaments and within the Assembly.
2. The committee wishes to strengthen the draft resolution through some amendments which are intended to further clarify the functioning of the mechanism in practice, the role of Youth Rapporteurs, the action expected by national delegations and political groups as well as the special situation of young women in politics and of young parliamentarians in war zones and frozen conflict regions.
3. The committee also refers to its current work on "The role of youth in revitalising democracy", and wishes to stress that meaningful and impactful youth policies are not only about promoting participation in electoral and decision-making processes but also about creating democratic space for youth organisations, especially in non-democratic environments, and fostering access to social, economic and cultural rights, which in turn have a strong correlation with youth's engagement and trust in democratic institutions

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 3, at the end of the first sentence, add the following words:

“, and increase the political engagement of young people and their legislative representation”.

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 8.5, add the following words:

“with the participation of the Youth Rapporteurs from each committee;

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 15262](#), Reference 4582 of 28 May 2021. Reporting committee: Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. See [Doc. 15871](#). Opinion approved by the committee on 10 October 2023.



Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 8.7, after the first sentence, insert the following sentence:

“This should include a yearly exchange on current priorities and issues for future work in each committee, for example at the beginning of the year”.

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

At the beginning of paragraph 10.1, insert the following words:

“ensure and”

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 10.2, replace the words “consider reserving” with the following word:

“reserve”

Amendment F (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 11.1, add the following words:

“and supporting and facilitating their participation.”

Amendment G (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 11.2, insert the following paragraph:

“actively calling on their correspondent national political parties to undertake institutional reforms to increase youth representation, in particular young women, including by devising new recruitment strategies, allocating funding to young candidates and actively supporting them in running for election, and empowering party youth groups.”

Amendment H (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 12, after the words “young people”, insert the following words:

“in particular young women”.

Amendment I (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 13, insert the following words:

“and encourages them to carry out a feasibility study to this aim.”

Amendment J (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 13, insert the following paragraph:

“The Assembly refers to [Resolution 2378 \(2021\)](#) “Strengthening the role of young people in the prevention and resolution of conflicts”. It acknowledges the challenge that young people and young parliamentarians must face in countries where they suffer from the devastating consequences of a war and in frozen conflict regions. It also recognises that they must be given a stronger role in promoting dialogue and mutual understanding, and will thus seek to provide all of the Assembly’s young parliamentarians with greater opportunities to work together and contribute to the Assembly efforts towards conflict prevention and resolution”.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Yevheniia Kravchuk, rapporteur for opinion

1. Crisis of representation equals youth paying the highest price for current and future crises

1. The report by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy rightly underscores that youth inclusion and representation in political life are crucial to building stable societies and democratic institutions that reflect the needs of the younger generation. It points to recent statistics showing that young people are not adequately represented in local, regional and national elections on candidate lists and that there are significant differences from country to country. Also, the gap between the average age of parliamentarians and the average age of the voting population is often very large.²

2. Political systems should mirror society and represent the best interests of all citizens. Parliaments must be exemplary in this regard and promote age diversity and intergenerational leadership.

3. Young people have been among the hardest hit by the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. The rising cost of living due to war, energy crisis and inflation throughout Europe is exacerbating the pressure on youth. They are the first ones to pay when new reforms and budgetary cuts are implemented at all levels. The climate emergency has increased levels of uncertainty – often leading to fully-fledged anxiety and other mental disorders – about their future.

4. Feelings of uncertainty, vulnerability, frustration, anger, disempowerment, and intergenerational rivalry may partly explain the disengagement with politics and the lack of trust in politicians and in the political system. This does not necessarily signify political apathy as social media gains importance as a means of political activism which is diverse and often incompatible with traditional forms of engagement.³ [Resolution 2498 \(2023\)](#) “Youth and the media” pointed to a substantial disconnect between institutional politics and the daily lives of young people, who do not feel listened to or represented in institutional politics. Youth’s unprecedented mobilisation, around the world, both online and on the streets, on issues such as climate change shows the power they can have to hold policy makers accountable.⁴

5. Young people are better educated and more connected than ever. However, if existing democratic processes continue to fail them, young people may reject the core values of democratic governance, such as consensus, dialogue, accountability, and inclusion. Populist authoritarian leaders will amplify this dissatisfaction to their own selfish advantage.⁵

6. At a hearing organised by the Sub-Committee on Education, Youth and Sport on 12 October 2021, in Lisbon, on “Youth and post-pandemic recovery and resilience”, some youth representatives called for policies that promoted radical youth imagination, re-thinking capitalism, individualism, and competitive societies. The real challenge in a democracy is about young people not turning their back on representative democracy, and finding ways for democratic institutions, including international organisations, to engage with youth’s aspirations. This requires their active involvement in shaping institutions and policies which reflect these aspirations.

7. Young people must be given the capacity to participate in the political process in a meaningful way and at all levels, from city council level to the level of national and international organisations. This would increase the political engagement of young people and their legislative representation (amendment A).

2. PACE-Youth Participation Mechanism

8. I fully support the establishment of a PACE-Youth Participation Mechanism relying on the participation of members of the Assembly and young Europeans, as well as the appointment of Youth Rapporteurs in the Assembly’s general committees, giving due regard to the age of the candidates to ensure an appropriate representation of young members.

2. “Youth participation in national parliaments” | Inter-Parliamentary Union (ipu.org), 2021.

3. European Parliament study, “Young people’s participation in European democratic processes”, March 2023.

4. Recently, a group of young people accused 33 countries of insufficient action over climate change and failure to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions enough to hit the Paris Agreement target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C. The case is the first of its kind to be filed at the European Court of Human Rights and could have legally-binding consequences for the governments involved ([Duarte Agostinho and Others v. Portugal and 32 Others](#)).

5. Freedom House, “Why are youth dissatisfied with democracy”, September 2023.

9. However, this may prove to be a difficult task for the committees. As of September 2023, the presence of parliamentarians aged 40 or under in the Assembly is limited to 1 or 2 members in 25 (out of 46) national delegations,⁶ 3 members in five delegations (Bulgaria, France, Montenegro, Morocco, United Kingdom), 4 members in six delegations (Belgium, North Macedonia, Norway, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Spain), 5 members in two delegations (Armenia, Poland), 6 members in two delegations (Romania and Türkiye), 7 members in the Swedish delegation, 8 members in the German delegation and 11 members in the Ukrainian delegation.

10. National delegations must do more to ensure and increase the presence of young members in their delegation and to make sure that they are equally distributed among committees so that Young Rapporteurs can be easily appointed, and that a youth perspective and active participation is present in each policy area. Young Rapporteurs should also be invited to attend the strategic exchange of views of the Bureau with the Joint Bureaux of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) and the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) (amendment B).

11. The Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, in particular via its Sub-Committee on Youth, Education and Sport, regularly consults with the CCJ, the non-governmental partner in the co-management structure. This has proven particularly valuable not only in the preparation of youth-related reports but also during the discussions on the committee's work programme, priorities and future work. This practice could be extended to all committees, when discussing their priorities, usually at the beginning of the year (amendment C).

12. National delegations have indeed a strategic role to play to ensure and increase the presence of young parliamentarians in their delegation (amendment D). This includes the measures suggested in the draft resolution in particular by reserving a certain number of seats for young parliamentarians (amendment E), which in my view should not remain optional.

13. At the Assembly level, political groups are encouraged to regularly invite youth representatives to participate in their meetings but could also consider ways to support and facilitate their participation, in particular when it comes to youth NGOs, students or individuals with limited financial means (amendment F).

14. National political parties can also do more to make sure that young people, particularly the 18-30 age group, are on candidate lists, actively support them in running for elections, and work with them to address youth issues. The Assembly's political groups could engage more actively with their corresponding national political parties to undertake institutional reforms to increase youth representation, in particular young women, including by devising new recruitment strategies, allocating funding to young candidates and actively supporting them in running for election, and empowering party youth groups (amendment G).

15. It is essential to address the double discrimination young women suffer on account of their age and gender and national parliaments must take action to support the promotion of young women in parliament. This could include the implementation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments⁷ and other outreach activities targeting young women candidates (amendments H).

16. With a view to a possible introduction of youth quotas, political parties could also consider carrying out a feasibility study (amendment I).

17. Last but not least, [UN Security Council Resolution 2250](#) specifically urged Member States to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision making at all levels to prevent and resolve conflicts. For its part, Assembly [Resolution 2378 \(2021\)](#) "Strengthening the role of young people in the prevention and resolution of conflicts" called upon the parliaments of the Council of Europe member States to reinforce linkages with youth, in particular by removing the barriers to youth participation in political processes, lowering the voting and eligibility age, developing awareness campaigns, designing new recruitment strategies, considering specific aims or youth quotas for political parties to enhance the selection and promotion of young candidates and learning from the experience gained in advancing women's political participation. It also called on them to value young parliamentarians as mediators and promoters of dialogue in divided societies.

6. Andorra, Assembly of Kosovo, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Switzerland.

7. "Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments" | Inter-Parliamentary Union (ipu.org).

18. The Assembly should acknowledge the challenge that young people and young parliamentarians must face in countries where they suffer from the devastating consequences of war and in frozen conflict regions, recognise that they must be given a stronger role in promoting dialogue and mutual understanding, and will thus seek to provide all of the Assembly's young parliamentarians with greater opportunities to work together and to contribute to the Assembly's efforts towards conflict prevention and resolution. (amendment J).

3. Next steps: youth and democracy, the wider picture

19. In May 2023, in view of the findings of the report of the High-level reflection group of the Council of Europe (October 2022) that recommended including a "youth perspective" in the Organisation's intergovernmental and other deliberations by consulting European youth organisations when shaping public policies in any given field, which was then reflected in the Reykjavík Declaration of 16-17 May 2023, I along with other signatories tabled a motion for resolution entitled "The role of youth in revitalising democracy".⁸

20. As also discussed in the report by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, national parliaments have a significant role to play in strengthening links with young people, in particular by promoting youth participation in political processes, lowering the voting and eligibility age, and considering youth quotas for political parties to enhance the selection of young candidates. The report is taking a first step as to how representation and relevance can be strengthened within the Assembly.

21. At the same time, as pointed out in the motion for resolution mentioned above, meaningful and impactful youth policies are not only about promoting participation in electoral and decision-making processes but also about creating democratic space for youth organisations, especially in non-democratic environments, and about fostering access to social, economic and cultural rights, which in turn have a strong correlation with youth engagement and trust in democratic institutions.

22. The committee will continue analysing current trends and policy responses to increasing difficulties, disenchantment and intergenerational rivalry experienced by many young Europeans. Challenges such as political polarisation, growing inequality, the pressing climate crisis and war, require the sustained involvement of youth, not only to make a real impact on policy making in areas important to them but also to defend and re-imagine democracy itself.

8. See [Doc. 15756](#).