

Acts of Young People

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, people and especially young people are moving away from politics and participation in the society and can no longer be considered as active citizens. Lack of trust in politics and the people being “not interested in politics” were the two main reasons why people absented from the EP elections of 2014, according to the 2014 post-election survey of the European Commission’s DG Communication. Besides, people do not act collectively anymore in order to solve the problems that the society is facing; something that gives grounds to political indifference and individualism.

Therefore, YEU Cyprus has set as its target to increase and promote youth participation in the society and to strengthen democratic life. In this context, it developed the project ‘Acts of Young People’. The program aimed at creating recommendations and proposals from young Europeans to policy makers in order to tackle youth absenteeism from politics. The participants of the programme were young people from 18 until 30 years old from 17 European countries.

The programme was based on the methodology of Structured Dialogue. This methodology gathers the opinion of grassroots, using a bottom-up approach and non-formal education methods and technics. The main purpose of the Structured Dialogue methodology is to produce policy papers with a set of recommendations which need to be adopted at a later stage by (official) stakeholders.

For the purposes of this project, the methodology included the following milestones:

- Online questionnaire: The online questionnaire aimed to gather the opinion of the participants from the 17 countries as well as other people interested in the topic.
- Conference: The main action of the project was a three-day conference, which took place during 25-29 April 2017, in Nicosia.

The conference gathered more than 50 young people from 17 different European countries (Cyprus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Lithuania, Romania, United Kingdom, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Slovakia, Spain, Greece, Poland and Portugal). During the conference, the participants identified the causes of this absence of youth participation in the democratic life and proposed concrete recommendations in order to increase such participation. At the end of the project, participants were asked to vote for the best proposals. Based on the votes they gathered, five proposals were selected to be included in this policy paper.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this policy paper is to gather the opinion of young Europeans from 17 EU countries concerning youth participation in democratic life and to promote their recommendations to policy makers in these countries. More specifically, it will recommend actions to be taken on different levels: Governmental, Administrative and Civil Society.

The problem description and the recommendations were both identified by the participants during the various phases of the project (focus groups, questionnaire and conference).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC LIFE

1. The Ministry in charge of Education and youth in each EU country should include youth civic engagement activities into school curriculum in order to engage youth into society by using effective educational tools, such as workshops, events and projects.

Youth civic engagement activities and programs are critical for empowering young people to develop their skills and talents; participate in political, economic and social conversations; and become agents of positive change in their communities.

2. The Ministry in charge of Education and youth of each EU country should introduce the “goal system” in schools. The system will be consisted of teaching and learner goals set by the professors and students at the beginning of each academic year, with the aim of empowering youth, enriching the students’ soft skills but also promoting youth participation. The two goals will be interrelated and interdependent. The success of the system will be measured by the performance of students in Non Formal Education activities, such as debates, workshops and events. This system will improve the performances of teachers and students and will focus on developing competences, self-improvement and participation.

3 .The Governments, with the support of NGOs, Erasmus offices and EU houses, should launch info points- in the form of multimedia stations- in popular places where young people congregate in order to inform and raise awareness about Erasmus + projects. In this way, young people will be informed about the wide range of volunteering opportunities that exist in their country but also in other EU countries.

In the recent literature there are three prevalent claims about the interconnection between volunteering and citizenship. Namely, volunteering is said to develop civic

values, enhance political participation, and improve democracy (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005: 230). It is argued that people are more likely to vote, to join political parties, and to participate in the political processes if they have been involved in volunteering (Rochester et al. 2010: 164).

4. The National parliaments could give funds to local organizations (e.g. NGOs) in order for the latter to involve more young people in various activities such as: environmental activities, activities that can raise awareness about social and political issues, informative sessions, debates, stimulations of the decision making process. In this way, youngsters will be empowered, encouraged to contribute to society but also they will become self-reliant adults.