



Resolution on lowering the electoral age to the age of 16

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The European Union and the Council of Europe have for the past many years strived to install a sense of citizenship among young people in Europe. The key message put forward by the YFJ and its member organisations is that youth must be taken seriously and offered real influence in order to strengthen our democracy. Underlining our commitment to the participation of young people we now see a need to investigate the potential of extending the most central component of democratic citizenship to the younger population. Young people should be granted the right to vote at all local, national and European elections from the age of 16. Many member organisations of the YFJ have been working for lowering the voting age for some years.¹ This has resulted in numerous debates and surveys about democracy and citizens rights. There are three main arguments why the voting age should be lowered:

Argument number one: Democratic Participation

Young people today have greater knowledge of society and are more informed than previous generations. It is a myth that young people are more prone to influence from political propaganda or simply copy the political opinion of their parents. Participation in the democratic process is very important and the right to vote a key element, particularly in terms of the recognition of the views of young people.

Currently 16-17 year-olds are more reluctant than other age groups to participate in political discussions and political parties. The motivation to participate actively in decision-making processes is lower when you have no real influence. Lowering the electoral age would motivate the 16-17 year-olds to participate more in the democracy. Simultaneously lowering the voting age would force politicians to formulate solid and substantial youth policies. Documentation to this argument has been provided in Germany, where some regions have had an electoral age of 16 since 1996.

Argument number two: Demographic Changes

A few years from now the composition of voters in Europe will be much different than it is today. In general life expectancy is increasing and the proportion of young people in the population is declining. Lowering the voting age would contribute to maintaining a demographic balance between youngsters and adults.

In 2000 12.4% of the population was between the age of 15 and 24 years, whereas the group of 65-90 years made up 16.2%. Eurostat numbers show that in 2020 the group of 15-24 years will make up 10.9% of the population and the group of 65-90 years of age will constitute 20.6% of the population. This is a development that has also been noted in the Green Paper on Demographic Change from 2005.

¹ For a list of the YFJ member organisations, click here : <http://www.youthforum.org/en/organisation/members.html>

Argument number three: Citizens Rights and Responsibilities

Young people also have many responsibilities in society and they should also have the rights that go with them. Young people pay taxes when they get a job. Young people can be convicted in most countries. However, young people below the age of 18 years are not allowed to vote at elections and thereby influence the decisions that have direct consequences for their everyday life. This is why the European youth forum should:

- Establish a working party who will examine the possibilities of working with lowering the electoral to 16.
- Support members in sharing good practice on national campaigns and provide a space on the intranet for this purpose.
- Start a campaign for the lowering the electoral age before the next election for the European Parliament.