

Motion

# Promoting and supporting the work of the Council of Europe

signed by: German National Committee for International Youth Work (DNK)

co-signed by: European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS), Don Bosco Youth-Net (DBYN), National Youth Council of Ukraine (NYCU), Rural Youth Europe (RYE), Belarusian National Youth Council (RADA), Danish Youth Council (DUF), National Youth Council of Moldova (CNTM)

The Council of Europe is celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2024. It was founded on 5th May 1949 and its fundamental principles and objectives include the protection of human rights, defending pluralist democracy and observing the rule of law.

Youth work is an indispensable part of the CoE's work. It is based on the European Cultural Convention, which was signed in 1954. This laid the legal and political foundation for European youth work. The first European Youth Centre was founded in Strasbourg in 1972, followed by a second youth centre in Budapest in 1995. The centres are important places for meetings, exchanges, training and further education for young people and youth work professionals. The European Youth Foundation, founded in 1972, promotes activities and the development of youth organisations throughout Europe.

The Council of Europe and its bodies, including the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and the Secretariat, notably the Youth Department, play an essential role in promoting and protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe. This is necessary to secure the future of the Council of Europe and to strengthen civil society forces.

On the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe, however, it must be noted that the values of the Council of Europe are increasingly being questioned or restricted by member states. Violations by member states of the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights must be specifically addressed, critically monitored, with corrective measures by the Council of Europe and its institutions. Young people expect a future in which they can invoke their rights, where being involved as a volunteer to support these values is possible and trust in democratic institutions can grow. The Council of Europe must stand for this now and in the future.

## Relevance of the CoE for YFJ and its members

The CoE plays a pivotal role in supporting youth organisation, youth exchange and promoting young people's involvement in multilateral decision-making. The European Youth Centres are a key place for young people across Europe to connect and engage with decision-makers and for youth exchange to have a home in Europe. The European Youth Foundation

(EYF) is often the only way especially for young people and organisations in Europe from beyond the EU context that supports networking between young people from different countries and fosters exchange between them and decision-makers.

The Council of Europe is a pioneer in matters of youth participation: there is no other political institution where youth participation is as active and effective as here. In the Council of Europe's "Joint Council on Youth", all decisions on youth issues are made jointly and on an equal footing by government representatives and young people. Across Europe, the Council of Europe is an important source of inspiration and an anchor of hope for young people and youth organisations. Additionally, the youth sector works with the CoE member states to develop common standards for European youth work.

In many European countries we are seeing the rise of extremist and populist movements. Independent youth organisations are under political pressure in many member states of the Council of Europe. In the countries affected, governments are increasingly restricting the space for civil society ("shrinking spaces"), with young civil society actors being particularly affected. For them, the Council of Europe is an important partner in enabling educational work and international youth exchange as well as networking with other European structures. The Council of Europe is committed to strengthening civil society and youth structures, particularly in countries where human rights and democracy are threatened by anti-democratic forces.

In summary the Council of Europe plays a key role for member organisations of the YFJ in supporting their efforts to foster international exchange, upholding human rights and democracy and providing good and effective examples for youth engagement in political decision-making.

The YFJ and its member organisations reiterate their commitment to the Council of Europe, its work and values by...

- advocating in front of political decision-makers to strengthen the co-management practised in the Council of Europe as an example of successful participation by young people.

- being actively engaged in the Council of Europe and other collaborating institutions and fostering the view of the CoE as an important institution and to use its offers and tools to protect the rights of civil society and promote opportunities for participation.
- critically monitoring the development of the Council of Europe, actively integrating the Council of Europe's topics into work on democracy and human rights and also using bilateral and multilateral meetings as an opportunity to address the Council of Europe. In doing so we support making the Council of Europe tangible as an institution.
- participating together with the Advisory Council on Youth in processes for the future development of the Council of Europe. We actively participate in the thematic work of the committees, encourage members from our structures to stand for election and provide information about important developments.
- supporting the spread of opportunities offered by the CoE and its youth centres to young people and youth organisations for engaging with decision-makers. To do this, we actively draw Member Organisation's attention to the Council of Europe, its institutions and its offers. The aim is to inform young people and to strengthen their work on the topics of democracy, human rights and the rule of law about the dimension of the Council of Europe.
- supporting the work of the Council of Europe's youth department and encouraging it to continue to carry out information campaigns and educational work to encourage young people to act confidently and to stand up for democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Further strengthening the youth department is a key component of young people's participation. The youth centres in Strasbourg and Budapest are effective places for youth work. We encourage youth organisations to advocate towards member states to increase their voluntary contributions to CoE to strengthen this work. continuing to speak up for the European Youth Foundation's broadening opportunities for funding for youth exchange.
- actively cooperating with YFJ member organisations and the Advisory Council on Youth on Council of Europe issues. This includes substantive debates on the Council of Europe, which should be held on an ongoing basis, particularly during the six-monthly meetings of the Council of Members and the General Assembly of the YFJ.
- encouraging the Council of Europe to see youth as a cross-cutting issue and to extend the participation of young people to all areas of the Council of Europe. So-called co-management is already practised in the Council of Europe's youth sector. This form of policy-making must be transferred to other areas of work. The 'Youth Perspective' builds on the existing principle of co-management. It was set out in the Reykjavik Declaration and must be implemented with the understanding that every policy area should include the perspective and voice of young people in shaping the future.
- calling upon the Council of Europe and its member states to strengthen youth participation in ongoing processes and to act on recent decisions made such as the Reference Framework on Youth Perspectives, New Democracy Action Plan, European Youth Work Convention and Ministerial Conference.

### The role of YFJ MOs in further promoting and supporting the CoE

The work of the Council of Europe must be supported through active participation and development in the member states. Youth organisations and associations play a special role in this. As youth organisations, we want to support the work and importance of the Council of Europe and raise awareness of it. Therefore we are making sure our past and future work is in line with the values of the Council of Europe and we want to highlight these even more in order to demonstrate and strengthen the potential of the Council of Europe.

As Member Organisations of the YFJ we

- support the efforts to bring the Council of Europe back into public awareness in European countries and to strengthen its political importance.

- support active partnerships beyond the borders of the European Union. The Council of Europe serves as a common framework that we will increasingly integrate and address in our international work.
- support the important role of the European Youth Foundation in the work of youth organisations in Europe, are actively involved in the reform process of the European Youth Foundation and provide information on funding opportunities. The European Youth Foundation provides advice and resources for youth activities. It enables youth organisations in Europe to breathe life into the values of the Council of Europe and is an important support, especially for young civil society in states with authoritarian tendencies.
- actively engage in the project 'Democracy Here | Democracy Now' of the Council of Europe coordinated by the Youth Department and aiming at revitalising democracy through strengthening trust between young people and democratic institutions and processes.
- reach out to and advocate in front of PACE delegations to implement the plan of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to work more closely with National Youth Councils to bring in perspectives and solutions from the lives of young people. In order to take the concerns of young people into account more comprehensively, this intensified cooperation between young people, the democratic organisations that represent them and the PACE committees is necessary.
- call on CoE member states across Europe to strengthen their financial commitment for programs and projects which promote human rights and the participation of young people. In view of the increasingly difficult situation for youth groups and organisations in Europe, financial commitment to the Council of Europe is particularly important.

Membership in the Council of Europe continues to be a commitment to multilateralism and the common values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The Council of Europe is little known or present among the public in many European countries as well as their decision-makers. With its core values of democracy, the rule of law and human

rights, it deals with the pressing issues of our time. As the oldest intergovernmental organisation in Europe, the work of the Council of Europe and its bodies must continue to be supported and developed by non-governmental parties like us as youth organisations across Europe.

The Council of Europe plays a central role in the dissemination of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) brings together the largest number of member states in Europe and is therefore the largest parliamentary forum in Europe.



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