

#StrongerTogether #EaPYouthForum

5TH EASTERN PARTNERSHIP YOUTH FORUM

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

REPORT

23-24 NOVEMBER 2021 | ONLINE EVENT



Due to the fact that the Eastern Partnership Youth Forum 2021 took place online, this report contains the images from the previous Eastern Partnership Youth Fora.

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INTRODUCTION



The 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum was organised by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in cooperation with the European Commission, the European External Action Service and the SALTO EECA Resource Centre under the title of "Youth participation in democratic processes". The forum took place online on 23-24th November as a side-event of the subsequent Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels on the 15th of December 2021. It brought young people, youth workers, and policy-makers together to discuss key achievements, challenges, and opportunities for youth participation in the context of the post-2020 priorities for the Eastern Partnership initiative.

Over 150 youth workers, active and critically-minded young people and youth policy-makers from the Eastern Partnership countries, the European Union, and EU member states had a unique opportunity to discuss achievements and challenges regarding the youth policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood region and the European Union. Participants were encouraged to share good practices, experiences, and proposals in the field of youth participation in democratic processes with the aim to enhance an inclusive platform for youth participation in line with the 9th EU Youth goal - "Space and participation for All". Linkages to ongoing initiatives were promoted, such as the upcoming EU Action Plan on Youth in External Action and the "New Deal for Youth" of the post-2020 policy agenda of the Eastern Partnership. A recording of the 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum can be accessed through this link - <https://www2.beyond-events.eu/index.php?eventid=118&roomid=302&lngid=1>

The 5th Eastern Partnership Summit took place after a 4-year gap and after the COVID-19 pandemic that plagued Europe and the world in 2020 and 2021. The March 2020 Joint Communication "Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020" set out the next generation of policy priorities, stating also that, "The EaP Youth Forum will play an even greater role and become better integrated into structured youth policy dialogue within a network of EaP youth councils, modelled on the EU-internal youth structured dialogue." After the July 2021 Joint Staff Working Document on "Recovery, Resilience and Reform: post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities", the summit confirmed the new policy framework with a new set of common objectives for the future of the Eastern Partnership process.



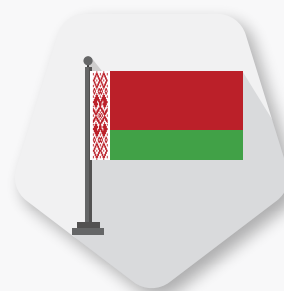
BACKGROUND



ARMENIA



AZERBAIJAN



BELARUS



GEORGIA



REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA



UKRAINE

The Eastern Partnership is a joint policy initiative launched in 2009 to deepen relations between the European Union and the six Eastern neighbours: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. The Eastern Partnership is based on shared values, fundamental freedoms, democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law, as well as common commitment to the market economy and sustainable development.

With the New Deal for Youth, EU Youth Strategy for 2019-2027, upcoming EU Action Plans, and ongoing flagship programmes such as Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 and Creative Europe, European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries should seek enhanced cooperation also in the field of youth. A stronger emphasis should be put on youth policy in the framework of EU and Eastern Partnership cooperation.

¹ As of 28 June 2021, Belarus has suspended its participation in the Eastern Partnership (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/>)



OBJECTIVES

It is widely acknowledged and continually emphasised that youth involvement in political, social, and economic processes is an essential element of citizenship in a democratic society, and has a strong and positive impact on ensuring effective and sustainable socio-economic development. Youth participation is a strategic tool of a functioning democracy and a prerequisite for future-oriented policies. As an endless source of energy and innovative solutions, young people bear enormous potential and transformative power. Removing obstacles and facilitating active civic engagement of young people is essential to the benefit of the whole of society.

The main **theme** of the 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum was centred around establishing an inclusive environment and adequate conditions aiming to achieve the meaningful participation of young people in democratic processes..

The main **objectives** of the forum included:



- engaging young people in a dialogue on best practices, challenges, and opportunities in enabling youth participation in democratic processes;
- enabling mutual learning, inspiration, and motivation for future actions for the participants;
- fostering dialogue and exchange of views between the EU institutions, EU member states, and Eastern Partners in support of youth participation;
- feeding the discussion on the future role of youth in the Eastern Partnership.

The key **topics** of the 5th EaP Youth Forum included:

- perspectives on implementing the Youth Goal #9 "Space and participation" for all EaP countries;
- state-of-play and future prospects of youth policy under the Eastern Partnership;
- political participation of youth as means to upholding European values & democracy;
- establishing conditions for meaningful youth participation.



Outcomes of the Youth Forum included:

- Providing a summary of developments and outcomes from previous EaP Youth Forum events;
- Delivering conclusions and recommendations in line with four thematic workshops to be shared with the relevant stakeholders after the event.

Looking ahead, the 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum has several opportunities to explore: the New Deal for Youth, the EU Youth Strategy 2019 - 2027, the EU Youth Dialogue, and The EU Youth Dialogue support measures.



PARTICIPANTS

Where are you from?



The Forum brought together over 150 people from 24 countries.

The participants were a mix of young people, youth workers, grassroots youth work representatives, donor agency representatives, journalists, activists, and those from the field of education, social entrepreneurship, and the digital world. Policymakers and researchers from local to international level, staff from SALTOS and Erasmus+ National Agencies, representatives of international youth organisations, the Eastern Partnership Young European Ambassadors Network, and representatives of the EU4Youth Alumni Network were present. Officials from the Council of Europe, and representatives of different governments, the European Commission, and the European External Action Service participated too.



150
people



24
countries

Participants came from all six Eastern Partnership states and seventeen Erasmus+ programme countries. The majority of participants were young people, thus strengthening the youth character of the event and its final outcomes.

The Forum's participants addressed the future of youth policies and made recommendations for their comprehensive and inclusive development. Closing the event, Slovenian State Secretary Stanislav Raščan underlined the constructive conclusions of the Forum, which represented a substantive contribution to the Eastern Partnership Summit, scheduled for 15 December 2021 in Brussels.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information about the 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum, see:

- ◆ **Annex 1** - Programme of the 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum
- ◆ **Annex 2** - Team of the 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum
- ◆ Webpage of the Forum: <https://www.eap-events.eu/ehome/5th-eap-youth-forum/>



TOP 5 CONCLUSIONS
FROM THE 5th EASTERN
PARTNERSHIP
YOUTH FORUM 2021

1

All EaP Youth Forum stakeholders are united in agreement that youth participation in democratic processes is fundamental, and that its importance is evidenced by achievements and best practices both in the EU and in EaP countries. Youth participation as a precondition for a healthy democratic society should be promoted in various forms, including political, social, cultural and economic participation.





Evidence shows an increase in the interest of youth towards politics and public affairs in general across EaP countries. It should be noted that this does not reflect all cohorts of youth and in some cases, there is even stronger exclusion of some disadvantaged youth groups. Also, evidence indicates shrinking spaces for the participation of youth and an increased risk of compromised participatory processes as a result of COVID-19 induced limitations or restrictive legal frameworks for civil society in some countries.

3

Young people need support to understand and use opportunities for participation. This should be done in a continuous manner, providing education to children and youth to build necessary competences for meaningful youth participation. This process should also consider rapidly changing contexts (including the digitalization of participation) and use both formal and non-formal educational environments.





Good practice examples of large- and small-scale youth programmes implemented in collaboration between the EU and EaP, or individually by EU and EaP countries, should be captured and widely disseminated for replication and to be built upon. In the context of the future EaP partnership architecture, mechanisms should be agreed to better channel the views of the EaP Youth Forum, and a platform / non-formal space should be built for sharing good practices in youth policy, youth participation and youth programming.



5

Youth councils are a key mechanism for youth participation and should be empowered in EaP countries to become stronger actors in youth dialogue at the local, national and international levels. Continuous capacity building should be provided to youth councils for more effective advocacy, independent financing, improved internal transparency, and competences to engage more groups of youth in a wider range of policies relevant to youth.

WELCOME ADDRESS AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS



Dr. Anže Logar

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia

In his opening speech, Dr. Anže Logar welcomed all participants and organisers. He elaborated on the importance of youth participation for Slovenia:

“

Slovenia attaches great importance to youth engagement and its participation in democratic processes. I firmly believe that an empowered youth is a key driver for strengthening democracy and public accountability. Youth participation has a positive impact in ensuring effective and sustainable socio-economic development. This is also in coherence with Slovenian Presidency priorities and the Union's roadmap for the future of Europe.

“

He expressed confidence that the Youth Forum will provide further steps to increase youth participation in democratic processes, pave the way to strengthening the Union's relations with the Eastern partners and deliver progress and numerous benefits to the citizens of Eastern Partnership Countries.



Dr. Mitja Slavinec

State Secretary at the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia

Mr. Mitka Slavinec highlighted the importance of youth participation in democratic processes, the need to strengthen it on all levels.

“

I believe that the youth dialogue process is a good example of cooperation between the EU and the Eastern Partnership and it has to be further strengthened. The whole process of youth dialogue and youth recommendation points to the fact that you - young people want to be involved in decision-making processes and rightly so, as they will live longest with the decisions that are now being made. And we must further support their participation at both the political and institutional levels.

“

Mr. Slavinec expressed the interest of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia to strengthen cooperation in the field of youth with the Eastern Partnership countries.



Mr. Lawrence Meredith

Director for the European Union Eastern Neighbourhood and Institution Building, European Commission DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations

Mr. Lawrence Meredith shared his excitement regarding the number of achievements reached in the field of youth in EU and EaP countries, such as 2022 being announced as the European Year of Youth, having over 1,000 young people in the Youth European Ambassador's network, the EU's commitment for over €340 million for the New Deal For Youth, the European School in Georgia, etc. He elaborated on the challenges that young people face and the struggles they have to go through to claim their rights, as in the case of Belarus. Mr. Meredith restated the EU's readiness to support the countries of Eastern Partnership in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic and constituted results already achieved with this support.

Mr. Meredith summarised:

“

... youth is at the top of the European Union's agenda and the heart of the Eastern Partnership policy. We are excited about the Eastern Partnership summit in just three weeks, that youth want to engage strongly with. I am confident that you will see a New Deal for Youth coming out of that partnership. I'd like again to thank the Slovenian Presidency for organising this Youth Forum on youth participation in democratic processes.

“

IMPRESSIONS FROM PAST

EaP YOUTH FORA

A glance at the previous Youth Fora was made to explore the themes, recommendations, and results achieved during these years. As a short reminder, the past Youth Fora organised were:

1

20
13

The 1st Eastern Partnership Youth Forum took place during the Lithuanian presidency of the Council of the European Union in October 2013. The main topic of the Forum was “Recognition of youth work and non-formal learning”, with a focus on social inclusion, quality, and visibility of non-formal learning and youth work, highlighting opportunities of the Eastern Partnership Youth Window.

2

20
15

The 2nd Youth Forum took place during the Latvian presidency in February 2015. The main theme was “Young people’s employability” with a special focus on cross-sectorial cooperation in the field of youth, youth policy development, mobility and cooperation programmes for young people and exchange of good practices and innovative ideas.

3

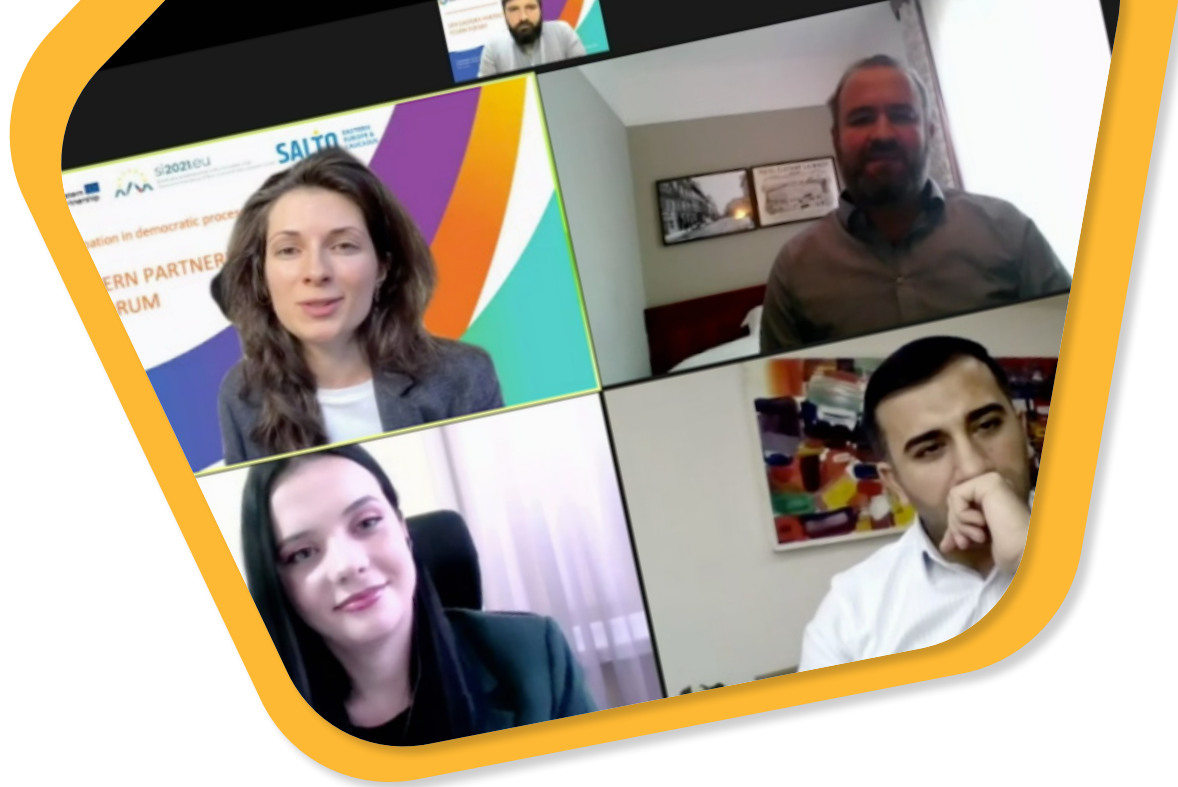
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17

The 3rd Youth Forum took place in Poland, it was hosted by national stakeholders and SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus in June 2017. The main topic was “Participation and active citizenship of young people and their involvement in decision-making process”, with a focus on active citizenship, entrepreneurship, and education through formal, non-formal and informal methods.

4

20
19

4th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum was hosted by the Lithuanian National Agency for the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme and was under the patronage of President of the Republic of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė. The 2019 Forum marked the 10th anniversary of cooperation between the European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries. The theme of the 4th Youth Forum was “Critical thinking through media literacy and active participation”.



A short brief of the recommendations from past Youth Fora can be accessed by this link: https://eu.eventscloud.com/file_uploads/6c33020e3048e53c81cc1b5e21c0bf5f_EasternPartnershipYouthForum.pdf



Mr. Michał Pietrzak, Head of the European Institute of Outsourcing, highlighted the human aspect of the Youth Fora - the importance of emotions from the Forum gathered throughout the event. Unfortunately, online meetings do not offer the same capacity to create such connections and memories. Mr. Pietrzak also presented the 4th Youth Forum as an effective preparation and entry point into the digitalization of youth work, especially considering the current reality and modality of youth work.



Ms. Anastasia Esanu, Young European Ambassadors Communication Coordinator, shared her path as a member of the Young European Ambassadors network. She stressed the importance of the last Youth Forum's theme - "Media literacy and critical thinking" - and how it prepared all sides for the upcoming pandemic. Other key results of the Youth Fora for her include meeting new people and hearing their positions on the needs of young people, often common across borders, and discussing possibilities for bringing about the desired change.



Mr. Artur Najaryan, President of the Youth Initiative Centre in Armenia, recalled the first EaP Youth Forum and what impression it left on him. After that first Youth Forum, together with a few other participants from Armenia, he collaborated with the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs of Armenia and, as a result, youth work gained the official status of a profession.

PANEL SESSION:

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP: STATE-OF-PLAY AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

The session started with the input from panellists:

- Mr. Nika Bakhsoliani, Bureau member, Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth,
- Mr. Miha Zupančič, President of Slovenian National Youth Council,
- Ms. Maryna Popatenko, Deputy Minister for Youth and Sports, Ukraine,
- Mr. Farhad Hajiyeu, Deputy Minister of Youth and Sport, Azerbaijan,
- Ms. Shorena Tsitsagi, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Acting Head of International Relations Department, Georgia,
- Ms. Dolores Kores, Director, Governmental Office for Youth, Slovenia,
- Mr. Lawrence Meredith, Director for the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood & Institution Building, DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission.

The discussion covered the future of youth participation in EaP countries, especially in the context of dialogue with the EU, how Youth Dialogue and EU Youth Goals can be used in EaP countries, and in general the importance of youth having a voice in all policy areas. Mr. Bakhsoliani emphasised that participation is right and should be viewed from that perspective, especially in the context of shrinking civic spaces. Mr. Zupančič brought examples of exchange between EU and EaP countries in participatory mechanisms for youth, and suggested project-based and strategic partnerships as a way to go.

Deputy Minister for Youth and Sports of Ukraine Ms. Popatenko provided an update on youth policy in Ukraine and committed to creating more space, means, and support to rightfully participate in policy-making processes. The Youth Foundation will be established in Ukraine by the Government as a mechanism for youth policy implementation. Mr. Farhad Hajiyeu, Deputy Minister of Youth and Sport of Azerbaijan introduced the state of the national youth policy and its implementation in Azerbaijan, highlighting mechanisms for youth participation in policy formation at the national level and various forms of support offered by the Government to youth and youth CSOs. Ms. Shorena Tsitsagi, Acting Head of International Relations Department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia introduced the recent developments of the youth policy in Georgia and how the youth participation is tackled at the local level in partnership with local self-governments.

Ms. Dolores Kores, Director, Governmental Office for Youth of Slovenia, once again elaborated on the importance of dialogue in policy-making, specifically in the youth dialogue in cross-sectoral directions, e.g. education, employment, health. She suggested establishing structures, mutual exchange, and cooperation

as a way to strengthen youth participation in the EU and its neighbouring regions, particularly the EaP region, and looking beyond Europe.

Mr. Lawrence Meredith underlined the importance of structures, such as youth councils, in engaging youth in a meaningful dialogue. At the same time, the engagement of governments in a regular youth dialogue is necessary to ensure youth voices are heard during the formulation and implementation of relevant policy. With all its challenges, the COVID-19 induced crisis creates an opportunity to ‘build back better’, further exploring renewable energy and increasing energy efficient economic development. Mr. Meredith also highlighted the importance of reaching rural areas with Young European Ambassadors and engaging youth from a wider range of groups.

WORKSHOP 1:

BUILDING BRIDGES: SPACE AND PARTICIPATION FOR ALL IN EU AND EaP COUNTRIES

The idea of the workshop was to present the outcomes of the recent EU Youth Conference in Maribor, Slovenia, on the implementation of the Youth Goal #9 “Space and Participation for all”. Moreover, participants explored the challenges, opportunities, and best practices for the implementation of this goal in the Eastern Partnership countries. The Youth Goal #9 “Space and Participation for all” aims at strengthening young people’s democratic participation and autonomy, as well as providing dedicated youth spaces in all areas of society. Young people are underrepresented in decision-making processes that affect them. At the same time, their engagement is crucial to democracy. They need access to physical spaces in their communities to support their personal, cultural, and political development.

The topic of the workshop was addressed in 3 groups as follows:



SUB-GROUP 1

Challenges



SUB-GROUP 2

Opportunities



SUB-GROUP 3

Existing/best practices



Existing participation mechanisms are not always reaching their aim. With lack of accountability, democratic processes, and trust between stakeholders, it is difficult to expect meaningful participation. Along with the establishment of participation mechanisms, their operations should also support the meaningful and democratic participation of young people. Additionally, disadvantaged youth should also be engaged in such mechanisms, even through measures such as setting quotas for their representation. Youth programmes and initiatives should be designed in a participatory manner and youth advisory bodies at the local and/or national levels are effective mechanisms for this purpose.

Throughout the workshop, participants mentioned that available opportunities are often not disseminated enough among the target groups, especially among disadvantaged youth. Information about available opportunities frequently remains unknown beyond limited circles of youth that are already active and benefitting from existing opportunities. Workshop participants highlighted the importance of engaging disadvantaged groups of youth and providing them with additional support to ensure their involvement in existing participation mechanisms, programmes, and initiatives. Previous online and offline campaigns proved to be effective tools, increasing youth engagement.

Language often poses a challenge for youth, especially disadvantaged youth. Using local language and engaging local stakeholders in the process proved to be effective throughout the EU and EaP countries.

Micro-grants proved to be effective mechanisms for the engagement of youth. However, complicated processes of funding are not attractive nor manageable for most young people, hence simplified options work better for the engagement of youth.

There are still untapped opportunities in cooperation between youth CSOs and formal education institutions, e.g. schools or universities. It will be useful to share information with youth and to build competencies of youth for more active participation.

Similarly, National Offices / Info Centres of the Erasmus+ programme should be more focused on the local level information dissemination and engaging youth from wider groups. There can be mutual learning opportunities between formal and non-formal education providers. Based on participants' observations, only the formal education system doesn't encourage participation and engagement of children and youth, hence more dynamic and competence-oriented models of education should be explored in addition to formal education. One example of such initiatives are youth clubs.

The inclusion of inexperienced young people, particularly from rural areas and from disadvantaged groups should be mainstreamed into the development and implementation processes of both policies and programmes implemented by the public and civil society sectors. Practice shows that the systematic and proactive approach used towards the youth programmes are essential for quality impact, and results are very visible, tangible quantitatively as well as qualitatively, e.g. Erasmus+, ESC programmes.

WORKSHOP 2:

THE FUTURE OF THE EAP YOUTH POLICY

The idea of the workshop was to present the state-of-play of the upcoming documents/initiatives relevant for the future of the EaP Youth Policy and to invite participants to provide input/feedback to the draft proposals/concepts. The topic of the workshop was addressed in 3 groups as follows:



SUB-GROUP 1

Action Plan on Youth in External Action



SUB-GROUP 2

The New Deal for Youth - youth participation and leadership



SUB-GROUP 3

The New Deal for Youth – economic dimension

The Youth Action Plans were presented as the next step for the development of cooperation between the EU and its neighbouring regions on a number of policy areas, including youth, education, peace and security, climate change, etc. Such plans will consider the specifics of each neighbouring region. A number of consultations are planned to make these Youth Action Plans more tailor-made for each region, and this workshop served as such too.

Workshop participants discussed the importance of inclusion and ensuring meaningful participation as prerequisites of success for the Youth Action Plans. Young people and local stakeholders should feel ownership over these Plans, thus having a more active stake in them. Of course, there are challenges to accomplish this, including the political situation, conflicts, communication channels, etc.

Along with the regional context and priorities, the Youth Action Plans should also take into account the national realities and specific cases, such as the situation in Belarus or Syria.

And finally, Youth Action Plans should have incentives and support mechanisms in place, such as special youth windows for funding youth programmes, monitoring, and support structures.

During this workshop, the New Deal for Youth was discussed, with a special focus on youth participation and leadership. There is still a lot of work to be done for the recognition of Youth Dialogue by different stakeholders, and there are various challenges to improve this situation, including lack of political will. The capacity of youth, youth workers, and policy-makers should be continuously built to support their active participation in Youth Dialogue.

To increase the effectiveness of the Youth Dialogue it is also possible to explore the possibility of having a separate Eastern Partnership Dialogue. In any case, there is no need to create youth participation mechanisms from scratch, but rather existing best practises should be captured, institutionalised and developed for better impact. Among others, the School of Youth Facilitators under the Youth Dialogue in Ukraine and the Youth Policy Labs of the EU4Youth Youth Engagement Roadmaps project were mentioned as best practices of youth engagement mechanisms.

Eventually, the workshop participants discussed youth employment challenges and opportunities. Digitalization across all sectors is considered an opportunity for employment for young people. This emphasises the importance of digital competencies and requirements to develop them within formal and non-formal learning environments.

Information about existing employment possibilities can be disseminated widely through new tools and channels. It is possible to create (on a national or regional level) the knowledge network to enhance employment service for youth in order to bring young people into employment.

Developing the green economy is a priority for the European Union. Youth programmes should explore opportunities to engage more youth in this process. Also, traditional employment opportunities are less attractive for young people. Creative industries and non-traditional employment forms should also be considered in employment support programmes.

Workshop participants also highlighted best practices developed under different EU programmes, including Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, EU4Youth, and the Youth Guarantee.

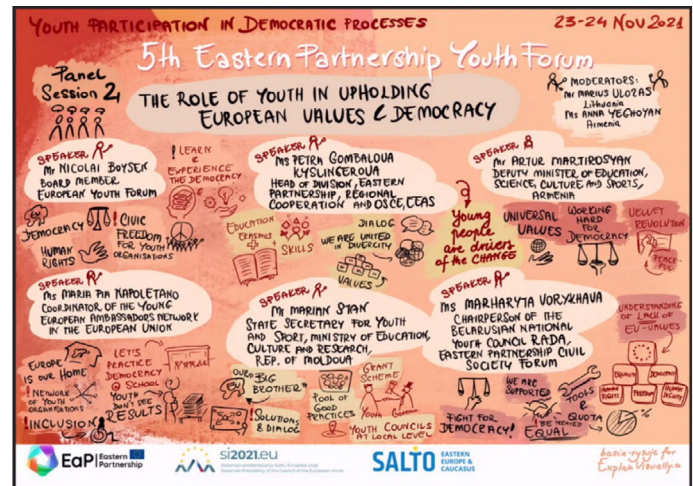


PANEL SESSION:

THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN UPHOLDING EUROPEAN VALUES & DEMOCRACY

The session started with input from distinguished panellists:

- Mr. Nicolai Boysen, Board Member, European Youth Forum,
- Ms. Maria Pia Napoletano, Coordinator of the Young European Ambassadors network in the European Union,
- Ms. Marharyta Vorykhava, Chairperson of the Belarusian National Youth Council RADA, Eastern Partnership
- Mr. Artur Martirosyan, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, culture and Sports, Armenia,
- Mr. Marian Stan, State Secretary for Youth and Sport, Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, Republic of Moldova,
- Ms. Petra Gombalova Kyslingerova, Head of division, Eastern Partnership, Regional Cooperation and OSCE, EEAS.



Mr. Nicolai Boysen, Board Member of the European Youth Forum explained his perspective of Europe as a Union built on democracy, human rights, and rule of law, and thriving to protect and ensure those values through instruments such as the European Convention on Human Rights and institutions such as the Council of Europe. Mr. Boysen mentioned the importance of transferring democracy from generation to generation and the importance of experiencing democracy through citizenship education but even more through practising it.

Ms. Maria Pia Napoletano, Coordinator of the Young European Ambassadors network in the European Union explained that from their perspective Europe includes also Eastern Partnership countries. They have a feeling of belonging to their countries as much as to Europe. Young European Ambassadors have the opportunity to experience Europe, to travel, and learn from people from diverse cultures - working towards their slogan "stronger together". Ms. Napoletano highlighted the importance of non-formal education to develop competencies and react to the educational gap to prepare youth for youth dialogue.

Ms. Marharyta Vorykhava, Chairperson of the Belarusian National Youth Council RADA, Eastern Partnership described Europe as an example or inspiration to work towards a more democratic Belarus, especially in the light of massive human rights violations throughout the country. Europe, according to her, is an example to show how democracy can work. What follows, learning from European values and practice, as well as providing space to develop competencies required for democratic processes, are crucial for Belarusian youth.

Mr. Artur Martirosyan, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia highlighted the influence of Europe on the development of universal values. Mr. Martirosyan reminded the audience of the Velvet Revolution and how democratic processes brought about a peaceful transition of power, and how challenging it is to keep this practical side of active citizenship and democratic processes through everyday life and also at the decision-making processes, especially at the local level. This was a vivid example of how young people can be committed to the future of their country and how their consistent steps can bring about change in their countries. Mr. Martirosyan highlighted the importance of youth dialogue in building a democratic society that is built on respect for human rights, rule of law, and inclusivity.

Mr. Marian Stan, State Secretary for Youth and Sport, Ministry of Education, Culture and Research of the Republic of Moldova, described Europe as a “big brother” to look up to, replicate best practices, and to follow an example of decision making through dialogue. Mr. Stan introduced participatory mechanisms for the implementation of youth policy in Moldova, such as partnerships with youth CSOs, councils of young people, funding schemes, and other instruments. Unfortunately, there is a lack of interest from young people to participate in the decision-making processes at the local level and this challenge should be addressed by policymakers, and achievements should be extrapolated into new communities in Moldova.

Ms. Petra Gombalova Kyslingerova, Head of Division for Eastern Partnership, Regional Cooperation and OSCE at EEAS shared having a similar experience as EaP country representatives. Before joining the EU, other countries also echoed values and processes considered appropriate in the European Union. Currently, Europe can be described as united in diversity, working towards a common goal, among its opportunities and obligations. The EU supports youth in Eastern Partnership countries through various programmes, e.g. Erasmus+. Formal and non-formal education opportunities are offered to young people to learn and share experience. The Young European Ambassadors network, Civil Society Fellowships, EU4Youth programme, EU4Youth Alumni network, and other measures are there to support young people’s development. And finally, Ms. Kyslingerova highlighted the importance of the European Youth Forum.



WORKSHOP 3:

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH AS MEANS TO UPHOLDING EUROPEAN VALUES AND DEMOCRACY

The workshop was inspired by the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership study on young people’s political participation; and stemmed from the recognition of young people’s role in upholding European values and democracy. The rationale behind the workshop refers to the respect for shared fundamental values as the basic concept and foundation of the partnership between the EU and Eastern Partners. The EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership study highlights the fact that political participation today is taking place within the context of a shrinking space for civil society, the rapid development of digital technologies, the rise of populist ideologies, increased inequalities, changing role of media, and the dissemination of fake news. The aim of the workshop was to explore and identify ways and practices of youth’s political participation as means to uphold European values and democracy in a rapidly changing environment.

The topic of the workshop was addressed in 3 groups, along with levels of participation (local, national and regional):



SUB-GROUP 1

Political participation of young people at local community level - challenges and opportunities,



SUB-GROUP 2

Political participation of young people at national level - challenges and opportunities,



SUB-GROUP 3

Political participation of young people at the international level as means to upholding European values and democracy.

The workshop participants discussed challenges and opportunities for political participation at the national and local levels. Support for young people's political participation should start from awareness-raising as early as in the school environment. This will prepare them for active participation in youth dialogue.

Digitalization and shifting many processes online create both challenges and opportunities. Of course, it limits access to those with digital competencies and access to technology. However, it also opens avenues to engage larger numbers of youth in the decision-making processes.

There are great examples of local youth CSOs doing an amazing job with developing young people. Such local youth initiatives should be connected to local authorities for mutual benefits.

Identifying disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of young people and finding ways to reach and engage them should be a constant priority both for youth CSOs and for policymakers at the national and local levels.

Youth and youth CSOs often lack advocacy skills to influence the decision-making processes at the local and national levels. The latter should be designed in a youth-friendly manner. This is even more relevant considering the shrinking space for civic participation, specifically in activist forms. Young people should be empowered to advocate for their rights and beliefs and to make decision-makers accountable. With many consultative events held, it is also important to follow up with recommendations developed to observe the extent to which they were considered.

Inclusion and representation are always challenging. It is difficult to ensure the participation of all disadvantaged groups of youth, especially unorganised youth. There should be a transition from the representation model of youth to a more inclusive and participatory mechanism for ensuring more meaningful participation and avoiding tokenism. And again, it was mentioned that information on existing mechanisms and opportunities for participation remain in relatively closed circles of already active youth, not allowing for true inclusion and diversity.

For young people not interested in political participation, the economic domain, such as impacting their local community through social entrepreneurship, could be an interesting alternative.

The workshop participants discussed what European values mean: with human rights in the centre of discussion, these values include freedom, democracy, equality, inclusion, unity, and climate accountability as an emerging priority.

Common challenges, such as climate change, require cooperation at the international level. And this concerns young people as well - international cooperation is needed to address global challenges. The European Youth Forum is a great example of such a participatory space to address challenges faced by many. Additionally, international experience supports young people to open their horizons and bring new perspectives.

And finally, the workshop participants discussed the steps after / in-between Youth Fora, recommending the EaP youth dialogue platform to be established for more regular discussions.

WORKSHOP 4:

CONDITIONS FOR MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The idea for the workshop, inspired by the Council of Europe's RMSOS² (Right, Means, Space, Opportunities, Support) model, was based on five key conditions and on the principle that meaningful youth participation can only take place when the right conditions have been created and all actors involved in participatory work have been given the responsibility to ensure that these conditions are in place. The workshop therefore aimed to identify missing/weak conditions and discover how they can be improved, addressed, or enforced. As a result, priority areas can be jointly identified where better support might be needed to ensure full participation of young people in the Eastern Partnership.

The topic of the workshop was addressed in 3 groups along with priority areas with possible intersections:



SUB-GROUP 1

Rights



SUB-GROUP 2

Means & Space



SUB-GROUP 3

Opportunity & Support

² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-roma/participation-and-this-publication>



Workshop participants discussed the topic from the perspective of rights, at the same time highlighting the RMSOS model of the CoE stating that along with Rights, youth participation is ensured with Means, Space, Opportunities, and Support.

Like other groups, participants of this workshop also highlighted the need to educate young people about meaningful participation. Building their capacity to participate, to advocate for their needs and rights is essential. Informing youth about the existing structures and mechanisms for participation is still needed in many areas. In addition to this, mobility programmes will also bring a new, international perspective and support the replication of best practices across borders.

There are countries with legislation limiting the participation and voice of minority groups, such as LGBTQ+ youth. Legislation and practice should support the inclusion of all groups of youth with no exception.

Diversification of instruments for financial support for youth organisations and initiatives will increase the independence of youth organisations. Structural funds are also needed since youth CSOs are the ones reaching out to youth at the field level. On the same note, support for programmes/platforms that proved their efficiency at national and international levels should be increased.

Existing programmes and opportunities are effective in engaging young people, but unfortunately, there are not enough opportunities for all young people, and more should be done in this area. Frequently, the language and tools used for youth participation are not youth-friendly, thus limiting “newcomers” from participating or benefiting from opportunities.

It is essential to develop digital competencies for participation among young people - also as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis can also be used for the benefit of engaging wider groups of youth.

Networks of mentors, active youth, alumni should all be supported. They prove to be effective in reaching out to larger groups of youth and supporting new generations of youth.

And finally, the youth sector and youth policy are under-recognised. As a way forward, it is important to gather evidence of the youth sector’s impact on society and promote it with key stakeholders throughout a number of policy directions.



MAIN MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 5TH EAP YOUTH FORUM

EU-EaP cooperation in the youth field has been fruitful and has had a notable impact on young people and the youth sector in the last years. The Erasmus+ Programme, European Solidarity Corps, EU4Youth Programme, Young European Ambassadors Network, the New Deal for Youth under the post-2020 EaP policy agenda, and many other initiatives are cornerstones of the collaboration between the EU and EaP countries in the youth field. EaP Youth Fora have been milestone events for this cooperation between EU-EaP in the field of youth engagement. Decisions and recommendations from previous EaP Youth Fora have affected programmes and initiatives both at the EU and national levels, various youth projects and initiatives were born through networking and cooperation between participants, and as a result of best practice exchange during the Fora. Participants of the Forum suggest putting in place additional mechanisms of dialogue in between the EaP Youth Fora for more regular youth dialogue. This will help to further develop the EaP Youth Dialogue initiative and synchronise it with the inside-EU Youth Dialogue, which is linked to the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

All EaP Youth Forum stakeholders are united in agreement that youth participation in democratic processes is fundamental and that its importance is evidenced by achievements and best practices both in the EU and in EaP countries. Youth participation should be viewed from a Human Rights and Rights-Based Approach. In many countries, young people are the drivers and key actors in forming democratic societies. Youth participation as a precondition for a healthy democratic society should be promoted in various forms, including political, social, cultural, and economic participation. In order to do so, youth should be treated as equal stakeholders in the democratic processes, and the processes should be designed in a youth-friendly manner. Such a design includes clear communication, follow-up, and accountability. In this regard, digitalization is opening new horizons and digital tools for participation have created new opportunities for youth engagement, specifically as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects. Nevertheless, digital tools for participation should be used carefully not to exclude the participation of any sub-groups of youth (e.g. youth without access to the Internet or youth lacking digital competencies), nor to turn the process into tokenism.

Young people need support to understand and use opportunities for participation. This should be done in a continuous manner, providing education to children and youth to build necessary competencies for meaningful youth participation. Practising democratic processes in both formal and non-formal educational environments has proven to be effective in building such competencies. Education for participation is an essential component of youth participation - young people need support to understand and use opportunities for participation. Furthermore, this process should create the feeling of ownership, confidence, meaning, and provide young people with the competencies necessary for participation in democratic processes. Building the necessary soft skills and competencies, e.g. critical thinking, adaptability, resilience, media literacy, etc., makes youth more prepared for participation; this type of education becomes a precondition to forming active citizens of democratic societies that will have their say at local, national, and international levels.

This process should also consider rapidly changing contexts, including the digitalization of participation and education. Youth participation should not be limited to representation and ideas generation. Rather, youth should be involved in the design and implementation of activities under national and international youth

initiatives and programmes as well as their monitoring and evaluation. Policy-makers and youth CSOs are duty bearers in this process and should create space and provide support for meaningful participation of youth in youth programmes.

Good practice examples of youth programmes and projects implemented in collaboration between EU and EaP or individually by EU and EaP countries should be captured and widely disseminated for replication and to be built upon. In the context of the future EaP partnership architecture, mechanisms should be agreed to better channel the views of the EaP Youth Forum, and a non-formal space should be built for sharing good practices in youth policy, youth participation, and youth programming.

Youth councils are a key mechanism for youth participation and should be empowered in EaP countries to become stronger actors in youth dialogue at the local, national and international levels. Continuous capacity building should be provided to youth councils for more effective advocacy, independent financing, improved internal transparency, and competencies to engage more groups of youth in a wider range of policies relevant to youth.

The inclusion of disadvantaged youth was highlighted throughout all workshops of the EaP Youth Forum 2021. European Youth Goal #9 “Space and Participation for all” aims to strengthen all young people’s democratic participation and autonomy as well as provide youth with dedicated spaces in society. Challenges that some young people face using the existing options for participation include lack of knowledge about the available opportunities, language barriers, lack of competencies to apply and participate, gender, etc. A number of suggestions were made throughout the Forum to make youth participation mechanisms more inclusive, including:

- Capacity-building of youth CSOs to reach and work with disadvantaged youth,
- Engaging CSOs already working with disadvantaged youth into youth dialogue processes,
- Engaging other relevant sectoral CSOs to work with disadvantaged youth,
- Improving youth information and counselling services, including information/opportunities in national languages,
- Building trust between decision-makers, youth CSOs, and youth,
- Creating a youth narrative that provides a structured dialogue between youth and other stakeholders/ decision-makers,
- Introducing positive inclusion measures, such as quotas for young people from under-represented groups of youth.

The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented crisis, the impact of which is yet to be fully evaluated. This impact includes limitations on many aspects of the democratic process. Forum participants are concerned about the shrinking spaces for youth participation and civil society in both the EU and EaP countries. Certain forms of participation such as group demonstrations and public gatherings are being restricted, limiting young people’s freedom of expression.



COVID-19 forced an accelerated and unexpected digitalization of many aspects of private and public life. In the youth participation context, efforts should be made to ensure the inclusion of all youth groups and youth policy-makers into a meaningful dialogue also through online formats.

Tools for receiving essential services are changing rapidly and this includes tools for participation. There is a need to promote digital participation among all youth groups. Virtual participation spaces should be designed to ensure both quality and quantity for youth to participate in relevant democratic processes. This process should duly consider the inclusion of disadvantaged groups of youth.

To smooth this transformation into a more digital reality, new competencies for youth and youth workers become essential, especially since youth CSOs also have an intermediary role in the participation processes. Such competencies include the ability to be more resilient, the ability not to be affected by fake news, agitation, and other negative effects that growing digitalization brings.

As a way forward, EU frameworks and policies can provide strategic guidance for EaP countries, e.g. the upcoming EU Youth Action Plan on Youth in external action, the New Deal for Youth, and the EU Youth Goals. The decades of experience of collaboration between the EU and EaP countries in the youth sector can provide both best practices and lessons learned to all sides involved. EaP countries do share many commonalities and comparable developments in the youth sector, but the individual specificity of each EaP country should be considered while designing the programmes and mechanisms for future collaboration.

ANNEX 1 :

PROGRAMME OF THE 5TH EaP YOUTH FORUM

DAY 1 - Tuesday, 23 November 2021

09h05

Opening of the Virtual Plenary Room

09h15

livestream

Welcome Address & Introductory Remarks

- Mr. Anže LOGAR, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Slovenia
- Mr. Mitja SLAVINEC, State Secretary at the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia
- Mr. Lawrence MEREDITH, Director for the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood & Institution Building, DG Neighbourhood, and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission

09h30

livestream

Impressions from Past EaP Youth Fora

Presentation of the main outcomes and developments

- Ms. Anahit MINASSIAN, EU4Youth Coordination and Support

Contributors:

- Mr. Michał PIETRZAK, Head of the European Institute of Outsourcing, Poland
- Ms. Anastasia ESANU, Young European Ambassadors Communication Coordinator, Moldova
- Mr. Artur NAJARYAN, President of the Youth Initiative Centre, Armenia

10h15	<p>livestream</p> <p>Panel Session: Youth Participation in the Eastern Partnership</p> <p>State-of-Play and Future Prospects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Nika BAKHSOLIANI, Bureau member, Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth • Ms. Shorena TSITSAGI, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Acting Head of International Relations Department, Georgia • Mr. Farhad HAJIYEV, Deputy Minister of Youth and Sport, Azerbaijan • Ms. Dolores KORES, Director, Governmental Office for Youth, Slovenia • Mr. Lawrence MEREDITH, Director for the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood & Institution Building, DG Neighbourhood, and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission • Ms. Maryna POPATENKO, Deputy Minister for Youth and Sports, Ukraine • Mr. Miha ZUPANČIČ, President of National Youth Council, Slovenia <p>Moderators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Max FRAS, Poland/UK • Ms Anna YEGHOYAN, Armenia
11h45	Break
12h00	<p>Workshops</p> <p>WORKSHOP 1: Building bridges: Space and participation for all in EU and EaP countries</p> <p>WORKSHOP 2: The Future of Youth Policy in the Eastern Partnership</p>
13h45	Plenary Session
14h15	Lunch Break
16h00	Networking Session
17h00	End of the 1 st Day

DAY 2 - Wednesday, 24 November 2021

08h50

Opening of the Virtual Plenary Room

09h00

livestream

Opening of the Day 2

09h10

livestream

Panel Session: The Role of Youth in Upholding European Values & Democracy

- Mr. Nicolai BOYSEN, Board Member, European Youth Forum
- Ms. Petra GOMBALOVA KYSLINGEROVA, Head of Division, Eastern Partnership, Regional Cooperation and OSCE, EEAS
- Mr. Artur MARTIROSYAN, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, Armenia
- Ms. Maria Pia NAPOLETANO, Coordinator of the Young European Ambassadors network in the European Union
- Mr. Marian STAN, State Secretary for Youth and Sport, Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, Republic of Moldova
- Ms. Marharyta VORYKHAVA, Chairperson of the Belarusian National Youth Council RADA, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Belarus

Moderators

- Mr. Marius ULOZAS, Lithuania
- Ms. Anna YEGHOYAN, Armenia

10h40

Break

11h00	<p>Workshops</p> <p>WORKSHOP 3: Political participation of youth as means to upholding European values & democracy</p> <p>WORKSHOP 4: Conditions for meaningful youth participation</p>
12h45	<p>Plenary Session</p>
14h00	<p>livestream</p> <p>Closing Ceremony</p> <p>Presentation of the main outcomes and recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Arsen SIMONYAN, Lead Rapporteur <p>Closing Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. David CULLEN, Head of Unit, DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, C.2 Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus & Eastern Partnership, European Commission • Ms. Dolores KORES, Director, Governmental Office for Youth, Slovenia • Mr. Stanislav RAŠČAN, State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Slovenia
14h30	<p>Official Closing of the Event</p>

ANNEX 2 :

TEAM OF THE 5TH EaP YOUTH FORUM

The 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum was led by a group of professionals from the youth field both from EaP and European Union countries.



Masters of Ceremony

- Anja Fortuna (Slovenia)
- Gubaz Koberidze (Georgia)



Moderators of the Panel Discussion

- Anna Yeghoyan (Armenia)
- Marisha Korzh (Belarus)
- Marius Ulozas (Lithuania)
- Max Fras (Poland/UK)



Workshop Facilitators

- Gergely Kiss (Hungary)
- Giorgi Agirbaia (Georgia)
- Joanna Stompel (Poland)
- Kateryna Zeziulina (Ukraine)
- Maryam Majidova (Azerbaijan)
- Maša Viršček (Slovenia)
- Nurana Mammadova (Azerbaijan)
- Olga Poddubnaya (Belarus)
- Ruzanna Ivanyan (Armenia)
- Sabina Belc (Slovenia)
- Sulkhani Chargeishvili (Georgia)
- Tanja Veber (Slovenia)



Lead Rapporteur

- Arsen Simonyan (Armenia)



5TH EASTERN PARTNERSHIP YOUTH FORUM

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

REPORT

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