



Final Report

Advancing Youth Political Participation

REGIONAL ROUND TABLE OF NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCILS

Key findings and recommendations of the Regional Round-table of NYCs

June 2019, Belgrade

Background of the project and its activity: *Advancing youth political participation through regional cooperation of national youth councils:*

A regional round table was held in Belgrade in Serbia from 16 to 18 June 2019. The event gathered representatives of national youth councils from Albania, Croatia, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia as well as representatives of other relevant stakeholders in the field of youth: Regional Youth Cooperation Office, OSCE Mission to Serbia, European Youth Forum, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, PeaceNexus Foundation, Friedrich Ebert Foundation Dialogue SOE, Centre for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA), Regional Cooperation Council, OSCE Youth Focal Points from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

Two-days-long regional round table work was done in plenary sessions, panels, small group workshops and expert guest interventions. The primary goal of the roundtable was to gather participants who will share their experience and positions of their respective organizations on the involvement of youth wings of political parties, especially with regards to work of a National Youth Councils. Participants also revisited the Action Plan drafted back in 2013, initiative that was also endorsed by the OSCE missions in the region. The importance of regional co-operation and future joint initiatives in the field of youth participation was stressed during this year's event as well.

Objectives of the project and its main activity was to foster regional cooperation of national youth councils as a way of its empowerment, advance youth political participation through regional cooperation of national youth councils and strengthen youth role in regional connectivity and peace-building. Having in mind that youth sector in the countries of the region is still underdeveloped with youth topics being very low on their social and political agendas, this type of the activity has been recognized as a way toward faster development, increased mobility and connectivity among peoples of the Western Balkan. During the two days relevant stakeholders in the field of youth had the opportunity to discuss about the best models of regional cooperation amongst NYCs and youth organizations and network and develop future joint actions.

During the round table two panel discussions were organized (I Advancing Youth Political Participation / II Regional Cooperation: Challenges and Needs) with 8 panelists in total. The round table also included working groups that made conclusions important for further cooperation of national youth councils that closely work with organized youth and youth wings of political parties.



Participants were divided into three working groups on the following topics:

- I Group - Traditional vs. digital political participation of youth
- II Group - Regional cooperation of young politicians
- III Group - Youth wings of political parties in NYCs (conclusions are in separate document - White Paper)

On the second day another Group Session was organized on topic of regional cooperation and mechanisms for overcoming common challenges and issues.

Key recommendations of panel discussions

The event was officially opened by H.E. Ambassador Andrea Orizio, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Samedin Rovčanin, Acting President of the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMMS) who warmly welcomed participants on behalf of organizers. H.E. Ambassador Andrea Orizio highlighted that the OSCE Mission to Serbia is led by the tagline “nothing about youth without youth” in order to empower young people to voice up their concerns, ideas and suggestions to decision makers and participate in decision making process equally while overcoming prejudices and intolerance that are still pertinent in societies throughout the region. Mr. Samedin Rovčanin elaborated the importance of event’s topics, listed few common challenges region is faced with and expressed willingness of KOMMS to dedicate its efforts in countering them.

After a round of introductions, first panel discussion was held on the main topic of the regional event - youth political cooperation and ways for its advancement.

I Panel: Advancing Youth Political Participation

Panel discussion was moderated by Ms. Milena Stošić from the OSCE Mission to Serbia who welcomed speakers Ms. Augusta Featherston, Youth Focal Point at the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), Ms. Jovana Majstorović, Board Member of the European Youth Forum, Ms. Bojana Bulatović, Programme Officer at the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), Ms. Ema Smolo, Project Coordinator at the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation Regional Dialogue Southeast Europe and Ms. Branka Vuković representing KOMMS’ Council of youth wings of political parties. This panel indirectly supported the value of inclusive participation and gender equality by providing significant female presence on topic which was historically been reserved for male panel speakers and politicians, especially in the Balkans.

Conclusions and recommendations from the panel discussion:

- Future participation of young people might be transferred to online sphere, since there is evident world-wide trend of investment in the online world. Internet and social media in



- particular should provide young people with free of charge, creative space where they will be able to express and research their interests.
- Topics such as volunteerism and media literacy should be covered through formal education because that would provide young people with tools that could impact their political awareness and knowledge leading to significant advancement of youth political participation. Concrete programmes should be developed, political literacy, usage of the Internet and access to information are just some of the key steps that need to be improved in order to increase voter turnout rates among youngsters and their overall knowledge about the topic.
- Young people in politics are often been negatively labeled and perceived as followers instead of actors and policy changers. Young politicians should be encouraged to engage more with their peers, propose new ideas and suggestions for the improvement of the position of youth instead of following the same patterns of their political leaders.
- Participants and panelists agreed that youth issues are not been included in the agenda of political parties.
- Political parties are not and should not be the only choice for political engagement. Some participants pointed out that protests and single-issue movements are emerging world-wide as new forms of youth political participation.
- Education on meaningful political participation are needed both for young politicians and youngsters. Improvement of skills – media and digital literacy as well.
- Joint programmes and initiatives of political parties in the region should be encouraged and supported. RYCO is one of the stakeholders who can support such initiatives.
- Areas for joint intervention are diverse and numerous: from socio-economic issues, corruption, education, media and digital literacy, sustainable development, activism and democratic values to brain drain and migration.
- One of the recommendations was that NYCs should have significant role in leading the change by creating joint curricula on civic education.

During the first day of event, representatives of national youth councils presented their national and local contexts in the field of youth political participation and elaborated on their practices and models of cooperation with youth wings and young politicians.

Conclusions of working groups – Youth Political Participation

I Group on traditional vs. digital political participation of youth

After a fruitful discussion it was concluded that there are several important benefits of digital participation and new tools that are at disposal to young people:

- Internet provides great opportunities for participation of young people and it offers different sources for necessary information.
- Digital media therefore can directly contribute to the development of direct democracy and increased turnouts.
- Since it is important that there is a two-way communication in order to have meaningful communication and build trust between politicians and voters, online space facilitates this change of opinions easier.
- There are good examples of using digital tools to increase political participation: “Report a problem” and “Start the changes”



However, there are several issues and challenges that new technologies have brought to the table:

- Information gets much faster to a large number of people and that can pose a threat to youngsters without necessary media and digital skills developed.
- We do not know what technology and development will bring.
- There is a lot of doubt about privacy protection that can bring privacy and control issues.

II Group on regional cooperation of young politicians

This working group concluded that regional field is good ground to connect political parties with opposite agendas. This can be done by selecting common crucial topics which can be discussed.

Recommendations:

- Establish regional school on Youth Policy.
- Need for long-term capacity building programmes on specific topics/skills that would enhance regional cooperation.
- Proposed topics to be covered: migration - brain drain, economic cooperation, youth mainstreaming, democratic values.
- Additional target group should be identified: media markers, local level actors (non-mainstream youth), young women.
- Promote political participation (in political parties) among youth by NYCs.
- Advocate for the establishment of youth caucuses in parliaments.
- Develop programmes for senior party officials in order to sensitise them for youth participation
- Advance inter party policies/mechanisms which promote substantial role of young politicians.
- Develop specific indicators on youth participation in political parties
- Promote/advocate evidence-informed approach to youth-related issues among/towards political parties
- Need for research on position of youth within political parties

II Panel Discussion: Regional Cooperation - Challenges and Needs

The second panel discussion was held on the second day of the event. Discussion was moderated by Ms. Marija Bulat, RYCO Local Branch Officer in Serbia. Current regional initiatives challenges and planned activities for overcoming them were tackled by key speakers: Mr. Đuro Blanuša, Secretary General at the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), Ms. Ivana Petričević from Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and Lisa Ibcsher representing PeaceNexus Foundation.

Speakers gave very detailed insights into previous and current trends of regional cooperation in the field of youth. Participants also contributed to a productive discussion by providing the insights of their work and experience. Main conclusions of the discussion were:



- Participants addressed the absence of representatives of national authorities and lack of political will to cooperate with youth representatives and the need to work together to ensure that such cases do not occur.
- Recognition of the NYCs in the region by their respective governments is needed having in mind that NYCs are currently relevant actors in creating and promoting enabling environment for young people in the region, structured dialogue and youth participation in all areas relevant to youth.
- Regional Cooperation Council is focusing on youth issues in the new regional project that is being developed. Project will be designed according to results of the assessment and will focus on youth issues and topics relevant for them. Dialogue between young people and decision-makers on topics that are pertinent to youth will be set as one of the priorities.
- Reluctance of governments to include young people in decision making on equal terms is perceived to be the biggest challenge in the region. Thus, it is crucial to support the initiatives created within the Berlin Process, including establishment and work of RYCO, and suggest new ones in cooperation with various actors in order to have well-tailored action that is addressing the real need of young people on the ground.
- Youth sector in the region is still facing many challenges: position of youth is worsening yearly as researches have shown, there is evident lack of political will to open up the institutions for young people and enable them to influence decision making processes, crisis of core values is pertinent in every country, co-management principle although being recognized as one of the most important principle of governance, is not being fully endorsed and implemented.
- Independence and autonomy of national youth council is always difficult to achieve, even in more developed countries like Slovenia and Croatia. Croatian representative stipulated that it is beneficial to include also regional stakeholders outside of the territory of RYCO contracting parties in discussions and project implementation since some problems are mutual and more easily solved by joint intervention.
- All forms of cooperation should be strongly encouraged - bilateral, trilateral as well not only multilateral agreements. Models of good practice should be shared among partners and on that note OSCE Mission to Serbian and in Skopje will support Study Visit in Skopje on UPR Report and UN mechanisms.
- Although there are slight differences in which topics are being prioritized in each country, core problems are mutual. Socio-economic topics, sustainable development, social inclusion and lack of resources for youth work and youth policy have been recognized by participants as important areas for improvement.
- Additional funds are needed (one of the suggestions was that RYCO should add another LOT for national youth councils from the region; other was RCC's call for proposal for the next year), but also harmonization and synchronization of initiatives currently emerging at national and regional level.
- It was concluded that capacity building initiatives are very much needed for the development of youth policy and should be prioritized over other initiatives at the moment.

Conclusions from the working group session on enhancing regional youth cooperation

As **key priorities and areas of action**, participants have identified:

- Joint advocacy:



- identifying topics relevant for all/several societies and having joint campaign;
- voicing messages of cooperation as reaction to hate speech on interethnic levels;
- building visibility through engaging on topics that are “unusual” but attractive for wider audience.
- Map priority topic and then process/develop and share guidelines for decision-makers on preferred modalities for participation.
- Youth mainstreaming – influencing policy making processes on youth issues;
- Economic issues;
- Civic Education by using non-formal education tools;
- NYCs in the region to achieve 8 Standards for a quality youth policy created by European Youth Forum;
- Support establishment and development of NYCs (where there is none);
- Capacity building; strengthening capacities, transfer of knowledge to others;
- Empower NYCs not to be politicized and encourage wider national and regional reach of activities
- Empower local youth organizations and their networking in the region;

Stakeholders that should be involved in regional cooperation on the above-mentioned areas:

- (N)YCs with solid common ground; other councils as well;
- OSCE Missions in WB6 as well as ODIHR;
- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) (local and regional offices) – opet data sets/to make policy briefs upon request;
- Olof Palme;
- Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS);
- UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund;
- Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO);
- Regional Cooperation Council (RCC);
- Governments, line ministries;
- Coordinators of key presidency events of Croatia and Slovenia;
- DG NEAR - DG for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations
- Research Institutions;
- European Youth Forum (YFJ)

Concrete activities for the next year could be:

- Analyze national/regional legislation on youth;
- Toolbox on increasing youth (political) participation for youth organizations (especially local)
- Closer networking and promotion of NYCs development in the region via YFJ/SYC/CBMA mechanisms;
- Mutual capacity building activities of NYCs on advocacy, NYCs standards and project management;



- Regional joint advocacy platform initiative – that could incite local ownership in different strategic/legislative processes which are currently lacking;
- Mentorship to achieve YFJ membership standards;
- Regular and structured regular meet-ups that are focused on concrete activities; online communication in between (Skype/Zoom calls); potential of having next meeting within Croatian presidency in 2020.
- Joint advocacy and capacity building with regards to structured dialogue process; sharing good practice and models from Croatia and Slovenia;
- More internships and exchanges in the region;
- Sharing mailing lists and timelines of foreseen regional activities of NYCs;
- Creating better institutional memory mechanisms on regional cooperation;
- Using potential of Croatian and Slovenian presidency
- Western Balkan Summit 2020 in Croatia – youth issues will be nominated as topic by MMH;
- K2 Strategic Partnership – possibility for job-shadowing programmes.



Annex 1 – Agenda of the Event

Advancing Youth Political Participation

REGIONAL ROUND TABLE OF NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCILS

16 - 18 June 2019 Hotel „88 Rooms“, Takovska 49, Belgrade

SUNDAY, 16 JUNE

20:00 – 21:00	Welcome dinner (Skadarlija, Restaurant “Tri šešira”)
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MONDAY, 17 JUNE

09:30 – 10:00	<p>OPENING REMARKS</p> <p>H.E. Ambassador Andrea Orizio, <i>Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia</i> Samedin Rovčanin, <i>National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMMS)</i></p> <p><i>Moderator: Miljana Pejić, National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMMS)</i></p>
10:00 – 10:45	Introduction of participants: Different roles, same goals
10:45 – 11:15	Coffee Break
11:15 – 13:00	<p>PANEL DISCUSSION: ADVANCING YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION</p> <p>Augusta Featherston, <i>Youth Focal Point, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR)</i> Jovana Majstorović, <i>Board Member, European Youth Forum (YFJ)</i> Bojana Bulatović, <i>Programme Officer, Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)</i> Emma Smolo, <i>Project Coordinator, Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation Regional Dialogue Southeast Europe</i> Branka Vuković, <i>KOMMS’ Council of youth wings of political parties</i></p> <p><i>Moderator: Milena Stošić, OSCE Mission to Serbia</i></p>
13:00 – 14:30	Lunch
14:30 – 16:00	<p>VOICES OF YOUTH WINGS OF POLITICAL PARTIES: PRACTICES OF NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCILS</p> <p><i>Moderator: Miljana Pejić, National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMMS)</i></p>



16:00 – 16:30	Coffee Break
16:30 – 18:30	<p>GROUP WORK:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Youth wings of political parties in NYCs (White paper) 2) Traditional vs. digital political participation of youth 3) Regional cooperation of young politicians
19:00	Dinner

TUESDAY, 18 JUNE

09:30 – 11:30	<p>REGIONAL COOPERATION: CHALLENGES AND NEEDS</p> <p>Introductory notes: Đuro Blanuša, <i>Secretary General, Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)</i> Ivana Petričević, <i>Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)</i> Lisa Ibcsher, <i>PeaceNexus Foundation</i></p> <p>Plenary discussion <i>Moderator: Marija Bulat, Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) Serbia</i></p>
11:30 – 12:00	Coffee break
12:00 – 13:30	<p>GROUP WORK: FURTHERING REGIONAL INITIATIVES</p> <p><i>Moderator: Miljana Pejić, National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMs)</i></p>
13:30 – 14:00	<p>Presentation of conclusions, recommendations and White paper</p> <p>Closing remarks: Stefan Đorđević, <i>Secretary General, National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMs)</i></p>
14:00 – 15:00	Lunch
15:00 onwards	Departure of participants