

4th Eastern Partnership Youth Conference

Youth for Revitalisation of Democracy

Concept note

Title: Youth for Revitalisation of Democracy

Date: 11 – 12 July 2022

Format: physical event in Prague, Czech Republic

Language: English

INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Partnership countries are witnessing a worrying degree of democratic backsliding and retrenchment. The invasion of Ukraine by Russian military forces has led to the emergence of millions of refugees and displaced people. The military conflict and attack have resulted in loss of life, human rights violations, suffering and the disruption of the future of many young people. At the same time, caught in a downward spiral of violence, Belarusian authorities continue to commit grave violations of human rights, including the rights of young people. More than 400 political prisoners in the country are considered to be young people. With the Belarusian regime's liquidation campaign against civil society organisations and activists, young people are fully excluded from any decision-making processes and confronted with unprecedented pressure.

Azerbaijan remains a country where political opposition is persecuted, and civil society is infringed. Even after the 2021 amnesty, there are still more than 100 political prisoners in the country. Meanwhile, even in the associated countries and Armenia, reform implementation in the sectors of judicial independence, anti-corruption and the rule of law, which are directly linked to the quality of democracy, has been cumbersome.

Even well-functioning democracies in the EU face challenges such as rising extremism, threats against journalists, and the spread of disinformation, which contribute to undermining the trust of citizens in democratic institutions.

To build more democratic, inclusive, resilient and peaceful societies, it is essential to ensure meaningful youth participation and make the voices of young people heard on local, national, regional and international levels.

The Eastern Partnership Youth Conference – Youth for Revitalisation of Democracy – will gather around 120 participants, including 100 young people from the Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) and the EU member states.

OBJECTIVES

Overall aim

To foster the engagement of young people in democratic life in the Eastern Partnership region and in building more peaceful and resilient societies through innovative and inclusive tools for active participation.

Specific objectives

Through participation in the Eastern Partnership Youth Conference - Youth for Revitalisation of Democracy, young people will have the opportunity to discover methods, strategies and tools to improve inclusive and meaningful youth participation in democratic processes, foster their active involvement in decision-making on all levels of policy development and political decision-making, and hold their authorities accountable to democratic and human rights standards they committed to. The conference will also focus on the important role that youth can play for a more peaceful and resilient EaP region through inspiring, leading and driving solutions in times of crisis.

Not only do we aim to strengthen the youth's ability to be actively involved in decision-making and in building more resilient societies, but also to create a platform for open dialogue with stakeholders to help young people find new innovative ways of how to become agents of change.

The event will identify new ways of how the EaP youth can better raise awareness about the need to prioritise the implementation of different reforms and actions in the EaP region linked to democracy.

Another objective is to support the knowledge transfer and strengthen cooperation among the EaP and EU youth, working on issues related to democracy and resilience building, and create a space for exchange of best practices.

Participants will also explore the impact, opportunities and threats that digitalisation brings to youth's engagement, particularly in relation to disinformation. Since young people are among the most avid and creative users of new media, the event has a prominent digital component that provides youth with the necessary knowledge and skills to evaluate online information sources, and to spot and counter disinformation. The digital cluster is all the more important considering the major role that social media has played within the frame of the war in Ukraine.

Lastly, the conference also strives to address the role of education in civic activism and in fostering leadership, notably by focusing on recent challenges for democratic, human rights and civic education providers for both non-formal and formal education.

METHODOLOGY

The conference will focus on **two** main topics: **revitalisation of democracy and youth as a driving force for change during crises**.

The two topics are founded on **two pillars** each. Under the revitalisation of democracy pillar, the event will address the issue of **shrinking space for youth participation in decision-making** and **leadership education**. The second pillar, youth as a driving force for change in crises, will focus on **peacebuilding** and countering **disinformation**.

First main topic: Revitalisation of Democracy

This topic is based on two pillars:

1. [Addressing shrinking space for youth participation in decision-making \(due to democratic backsliding\)](#)

This pillar addresses how democratic backsliding is affecting and shrinking the civic space for youth.

2. [Leadership education](#)

This sub-topic will promote leadership skills development among youth.

Second main topic: Youth power during crises

This topic is based on two pillars:

3. [Peacebuilding](#)

This pillar addresses the potential roles of youth in peacebuilding and how to promote a youth inclusive approach to peacebuilding.

4. [Disinformation](#)

This pillar will build media literacy among youth and help them acquire methods to spot disinformation.

The event has two objectives – one aimed at **inspiring and motivating** participants to take action in their countries and communities for active engagement of youth in democratic life and for more resilient societies, and one aimed at **training and empowering** participants to effectively engage and respond to the current challenges in the EaP region.

The first part will include opening speeches and panels presenting best practices from EaP and EU countries, and field trips to local organisations in Prague.

Opening speeches will briefly introduce the context, goals, agenda and expected outcomes of the event, and will discuss the importance of the conference for youth in the EaP region.

Panels will follow, showcasing best practices for innovatively reaching, educating and fostering the participation of youth in democratic life and resilience building.

Field trips to local organisations in Prague will change the conference dynamics and give participants the opportunity to tap into the host city's pool of projects addressing youth for democracy. Participants will have the chance to visit project sites, discover best practices, interact with project implementers, and even to identify potential partners for their projects.

The second part centers on capacity-building and consists of four parallel workshops on peacebuilding, disinformation, leadership and funding opportunities.

All training modules will provide youth with concrete intervention tools for addressing current challenges in the EaP region.

Based on the knowledge and skills acquired in the framework of the event and on their own experience, participants will be invited to contribute to drafting a recommendation paper for creative education and engagement of EaP youth in building resilient communities. Lastly, participants will adopt a declaration of the youth conference on the situation of democracy and human rights in the EaP region.