

## **Joint Declaration of the 4<sup>th</sup> Eastern Partnership Youth Conference “Youth for Revitalisation of Democracy”**

We, the young people from the Eastern Partnership countries and the European Union member states, are determined to continue to promote democracy, freedom and justice in the EaP region to ensure its stable, prosperous, democratic future, and demand that youth be given a more prominent role in formal decision making processes.

Certain Eastern Partnership countries are witnessing a worrying degree of democratic backsliding and retrenchment. Young people have been fighting for democracy across the EaP region, leading change and simultaneously suffering great consequences for it. Ukrainian youth are fighting and sacrificing their lives to ensure Ukraine’s independence and sovereignty, and the democratic future of Ukraine that Russian invaders want to deny and destroy. All across the EaP region and the EU, youth have been at the forefront of both spontaneous and organised humanitarian aid efforts, to tend to the needs of Ukrainian refugees. Young Belarusians have been at the forefront of the protests starting in August 2020, demanding a democratic future and as a result, we have suffered persecution at the hands of the Lukashenka regime. In Georgia, youth have taken to the streets in some of the biggest protests the country has ever seen to demand democratic reforms that would bring our country closer to the EU and free it from the grip of the informal rulership. In Azerbaijan, young people are fighting systemic corruption and authoritarianism, and working towards a democratic future for our country, despite facing systemic threats from the repressive regime. Young Armenians are strongly advocating for the Armenian government to remain committed to the principles and values adopted after the peaceful transition of power in 2018. Moldovan youth are changing the political culture by directly engaging in decision-making processes.

Young people’s power and needs are often invisible or deprioritised, especially during crises. Political, legal and financial barriers continue to hinder our fully fledged democratic participation. Yet youth have repeatedly proven to be key players in building more democratic, peaceful and resilient societies, and need to be included as change agents, agenda setters, and equal participants in decision-making at national and European level, including through the channels created by the Eastern Partnership framework.

With this declaration, we commit to promoting the active participation of young people in revitalising or fostering democracy in our countries, and to encourage policy makers, leaders and fellow citizens to rethink our political systems together with youth, and to put more effort into bringing young people to the heart of the democratic participatory process.



We are committed to safeguarding the democratic progress achieved so far, and to continue fighting against authoritarianism, radicalisation, xenophobia, populism, and other antidemocratic tendencies in the EaP region, while advocating for true inclusion in political processes.

We will continue our fight until the ideals of democracy and human rights, of humanism and solidarity, freedom of expression and rule of law, triumph in all our countries. We will not stop as long as our citizens, who are fighting for these ideals, remain in prisons or other punitive institutions of authoritarian regimes who illegally restrict their freedom, while other activists are subjected to political persecution and repression.

We want youth to join the conversation and have our say on the future of our countries. We want youth to equally take part in all the decisions affecting our lives and have our voices heard by our current political systems. We demand spaces, opportunities and resources to realise our fullest potential as active citizens and to continuously contribute to shaping the future of our countries.

Towards this aim:

For each recommendation that follows, we call for a strong commitment from governments and EU institutions.

We strongly encourage policy and decision makers in our countries to involve youth organisations or youth-led structures in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes or strategies affecting young people, and in decision-making more broadly.

We commit to building on the knowledge gained during the Conference, and follow up on the recommendations made within its frame, as well as to support youth in our countries, to the extent possible, to get actively involved in public life.

We call for the creation of equally accessible infrastructure, qualitative formal education and comprehensive non-formal learning. We demand decision and policy makers in our countries to invest in education to promote informed participation of young people.

We commit to including young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in our endeavours for fostering or revitalising democracy and to ensure that our work goes far beyond our capital cities and reaches every corner of our countries. We also commit to advocating for the active inclusion of vulnerable youth in public life to policy and decision-makers in our countries.

We will work to eradicate the hatred and xenophobia that lead to violation of rights and dignity on the basis of gender identity or expression, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion; we will continue our work until the pursuit of happiness, dignity and freedom of each person is ensured.



We will carry on our efforts to strengthen state institutions by means of combating informal rulership and state capture in the Eastern Partnership countries.

We call on the EU institutions to continue to promote and encourage cooperation with youth organisations and young people from all six Eastern Partnership countries and EU member states. At the same time, EaP youth and youth organisations should be part of EU youth events in order to capitalise on best practices and lessons learned, and to identify common solutions to common challenges. We consider regional and European cooperation to be all the more important in the current context where many young people have been displaced and forced to defend and support democracy in their countries from abroad.

Taking into account the importance of the above-mentioned, we declare with full responsibility that we will make every effort and use every resource at our disposal to act according to the above-stated guiding principles as part of our daily work, and to bring the knowledge and experience gained during the Conference to our countries and local communities.

We encourage and welcome the efforts of all institutional partners, regional youth platforms, national youth councils and any other youth organisations in the implementation of the above-mentioned principles, and deeply value their constant support and dedication to promoting the active engagement of young people in democratic life.

We call upon European Institutions, EaP national governments and civil society organisations in our countries to join this Declaration in order to promote democratic development and youth participation in our societies.

We fully support Ukraine being at the frontline of European democracy and stand in full solidarity with the Ukrainian people.