Conference on the future of Europe: regions mobilise to increase youth participation in democratic processes

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The European Committee of the Regions, Régions de France and the Grand Est region discussed on 9 May with 200 young people their expectations of the Conference on the future of Europe and how to encourage the participation of young people in public debate

In the framework of the European Year of Youth 2022 and as the Conference on the Future of Europe has just handed in its work to the French President Emmanuel Macron, President of the Council of the European Union, to the President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola and to the President of the European Commission Ursula van der Leyen, the European Committee of the Regions, the Grand Est region and Régions de France invited on 9 May, Europe Day , more than 200 young students, apprentices and members of regional youth parliaments to Strasbourg to discuss their participation in the public debate and to listen to their demands on the place they wish to occupy in the Europe of tomorrow.

After listening to proposals from young people in five European countries, including Ukraine, the debate with policy makers at local and European level focused on how to strengthen young people's participation in public life and decision-making processes, especially through changes in practices that could encourage them to be more involved in democratic processes.

To this end, the European Youth Forum, the voice of Youth in Europe and the European Committee of the Regions launched a process of co-creation of a European Charter on Youth and Democracy on 4 March at the European Summit of Regions and Cities in Marseille. The conclusions of this meeting in Strasbourg will feed into this process, which will lead, by the end of the year, to the formulation of recommendations on youth participation in democratic spaces. This

Charter will seek to build and consolidate a youth-friendly democratic space to ensure that their voice is formally, continuously and permanently represented in the European Union.

Apostolos Tzitzikostas, Governor of Central Macedonia, President of the European Committee of the Regions and head of the delegation of local and regional elected representatives to the plenary session of the Conference on the Future of Europe, said: "Together with the Grand Est Region and Régions de France, we celebrated Europe Day 2022 - the year dedicated to youth - with a dialogue between young people and local and European elected representatives. For the European Committee of the Regions, youth is a political priority, whether it is in terms of access to high quality education, environmental protection, access to the labour market, or participation in democratic life. We work every day to bring Europe closer to its citizens, especially the younger generations, and to strengthen their confidence by showing Europe's added value on the ground".

Carole Delga, President of Régions de France, stated: "I am delighted that young people from all the French regions, from Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur to Normandy, from Grand Est to Brittany, from Corsica to Centre-Val de Loire, via Ile-de-France, have mobilised to make proposals at this pivotal moment in European construction. At a time when our national institutions are being renewed and the voice of young people has not been heard much during the elections, I am proud that our young people have seized this opportunity to make their voices heard and to make our democracies more effective and closer to the expectations of our fellow citizens".

Jean Rottner, President of the Grand Est Region, said: "I am happy to be able to celebrate Europe on this very special day, 9 May. What we want to offer young people is a real debate on democratic life and the future of Europe. They have huge challenges to face, such as curbing global warming, promoting equality, working towards greater social justice, rethinking our mobility and consumption patterns. Above all, this generation will have to face a threat that we sincerely hoped we would never have to face again: that of war. The simmering Ukrainian conflict reminds us that we are fragile, that our desires, our dreams and our possessions are fragile too. Above all, it makes us aware that democracy must be cherished because it is the foundation of our lives, of our individual and collective trajectories. It is precisely in its favour that I encourage every young person to get involved, whether

in the world of politics, associations, education, sport, whatever, as long as they share these values which are ours and which are those of Europe”.

Anne Sander, First Quaestor of the European Parliament, commented: "The place of young people in public life and in decision-making processes is more important than ever today. The challenges we face are crucial and will have a huge impact on the new generations. So, in order to meet these many challenges, we need young people. We need their energy, their talents, their ambitions, their ideas, so that we can move forward together in a world that is fairer, more social, more sustainable and more united. Young people must therefore take their rightful place and I invite them to get involved, to mobilise, to speak out, so that they can defend their vision of society, their values, their dreams, with the aim of building the Europe of tomorrow".

Silja Markkula, President of the European Youth Forum, added: "Throughout the Conference, young people have enthusiastically shared their hopes, dreams and ideas for the Europe they want to see. They want to tackle youth labour market challenges, address intergenerational inequalities and enhance youth participation in democratic life. The institutions must ensure that these aspirations are implemented and that there are mechanisms through which young people can continue to have their voices heard across all future policies. Bringing in an EU Youth Test - an impact assessment tool that would see all new legislation through a youth lens including through a consultation with young people - is one of the proposals that would allow this ambition to be achieved in a concrete way. We look forward to working on the Youth Test and other proposals with the institutions, and to co-creating this Democracy Charter to strengthen this youth participatory objective further with our partners in the Committee of the Regions".

Earlier in the afternoon, at the invitation of the President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola, the 200 young people were able to exchange views with the President, the French Secretary of State for European Affairs, Clément Beaune, the President of the Grand Est Region, Jean Rottner, the President of the European Committee of the Regions, Apostolos Tzitzikostas, and the whole team of the "Parlement" series, whose second season was launched the same day. The debates revolved around the involvement of young people in the European public sphere through culture and cinema.

Watch the youth event

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