There is no Future of Europe without youth participation in European democracy

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Schools and universities are key players in building a feeling of belonging to the democratic processes and in strengthening democracy in the European Union.

The academic world plays a crucial role in educating and forming future decision-makers, as well as generating the knowledge on which to build inclusive and cohesive societies. In this context, and to deepen the foundation for future cooperation with the European academic world, the CoR-Universities Exchange “What Future(s) for European Democracy” event held on January 28, aimed at creating a deeper link between the Conference of the Future of Europe (COFE) and the Future of European democracy.

Representing the CoR, its President and Governor of Central Macedonia, Apostolos Tzitzikostas, stressed that “European universities have a central role to play in fostering inclusiveness, promoting Europe's common values and transnational debate, supporting respect, evidence-based decision making and critical thinking”, and cited the example of the region of Central Macedonia, where five major universities and 150.000 students and academics made a crucial contribution to building resilience from the bottom up.

“European democracy is democracy at EU, national and sub-national levels, and should be analysed through both its inputs and outputs: the inputs being related to how people participate in decision making, the outputs being the results of EU policies”, said Herman van Rompuy, President emeritus of the European Council and chair of the CoR High-Level Group on European Democracy, during the CoR-Universities exchange that also allowed building connections between the CoR High-Level Group on European Democracy and Aurora, the European University Association, the European University Institute, and UNA Europa – the alliance of nine European universities.

But students and future generations cannot take part in European democracy if there is no inclusion in the Future of Europe. A workshop prepared by students at the UNA Europa university network was a clear example of how younger generations can be part of decision making by collecting their proposals and ideas for the Conference on the Future of Europe (COFE). The 'Students' input for the Future of Europe' workshop held on February 18, was an occasion to share not only the input from the several student groups of the UNA Europa network, but it was also an occasion to exchange ideas with the CoR Young Elected Politicians (YEP's). This virtual workshop helped the students prepare the 2-pages document 'A better Europe for the youth' with their proposals submitted to the 9th European Summit of Regions and Cities held in Marseille last week on 3-4 March.

During the Summit, the Marseille Manifesto of local and regional leaders was also adopted and states that "to win back citizens' trust we need to renew the functioning of democracy and European values through education and citizenship, in particular within young people and in cross-border regions while promoting the respect of equal opportunities". The Manifesto also aims at ensuring that citizens receive feedback on their ideas and concerns, especially involving young people in the impact and outreach of the Conference on the Future of Europe (COFE).

Finally, it is essential to continue a joint work between the CoR and the academic world to enhance the voice of younger generations in building a democratic Europe. The future of Europe's regions and cities cannot be a fair and bright one without youth participation, and events like these show a clear image that more voices – young voices – want and need to be heard. Their future is directly linked to active and inclusive participation where all ideas are considered to contribute to a better Europe.

UNA Europa is an alliance of nine European research universities which aim at creating a truly European inter-university environment, a University of the Future.

Every two years, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) holds the European Summit of Regions and Cities. These summits bring elected representatives from regional and local authorities together to discuss the main challenges facing the European Union. The 9th European Summit of Regions and Cities was held in Marseille on

March 3rd and 4th, as part of the French Presidency of the EU. This time, the Summit aimed at increasing the impact and outreach of the Conference on the Future of Europe. It invited citizens and their elected representatives to help design a more resilient, cohesive, and democratic European Union.

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