

# Youth for Healthy Democracy in the European Union

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"Strengthening civil society rights by information access for European youth" SIA4Y project final publication.



# Strengthening civil society rights by information access for European youth

- 5 countries involved
- 9 workshops
- code of good practice

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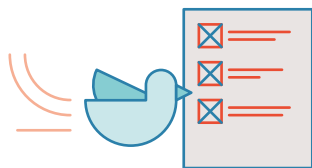
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# Introduction

The crises that have hit the European Union in the last decade have sparked a heated discussion about their origins and the possible impact of their consequences on the future of the European project. One of the methods of explaining this situation has become – not for the first time in the history of integration – the democratic paradigm.

Among many diverse opinions, there are those that raise the need to heal European democracy. Attention has turned to European youth as the group of Europeans who have the greatest potential to effect a change.

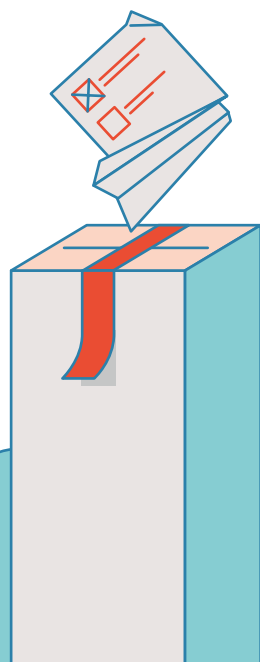
This publication is devoted to an attempt to verify the hypothesis according to which, first of all, European youth are in fact treated by the EU institutions as a *hope* for healing democracy in the EU and thus tackling its crises, and secondly young people see themselves as a potential leader of change.

The opportunity to cooperate with European youth and the organisations: WeCitizens – WijBurgers – NousCitoyens from Belgium, Sociāls Inovācijas Centrs from Latvia, Aktiivinen Eurooppalainen Kansalainen Suomi Ry from Finland, Eesti Naisuurimus – ja Teabekeskus from Estonia and Stowarzyszenie Gmin RP Euroregion Bałtyk from Poland in running the project *Strengthening the civil society rights by information access for European youth* co-financed by the *Europe for Citizens* programme and carried out in 2018–2020 by the Gdańsk branch of the Polish Economic Society, contributed enormously to verification of the hypothesis and formulation of many findings presented in the book.

The publication is divided into three parts and two equivalent annexes. To facilitate navigation, chapters are divided into several parts. At the very beginning there are questions we were trying to answer in the main content, at the end there is a short summary and a list of references.

The first part of the publication concentrates on recalling how the problem of *democracy* was conceptualised by the creators of European integration and what scientific approaches to *democracy* in the European Union exist. In order to present the latter issue, we paid attention to highlighting the position of the European Union itself, which recognises the deficit of democracy in its structures and undertakes actions aimed at counteracting and eliminating this phenomenon. Selected methods, programmes and initiatives are presented in the last section of the first part.

In the second part we demonstrate chosen methods of healing democracy by the EU. These are: increasing transparency, openness and access to information in the European Union. By adopting the institutional perspective, we will present specific policies implemented in pursuit of these goals and the results of their evaluation.



We answer the question whether the European Union has become more accessible and the processes taking place in it more understandable to Europeans as a result of the implementation of recovery programmes.

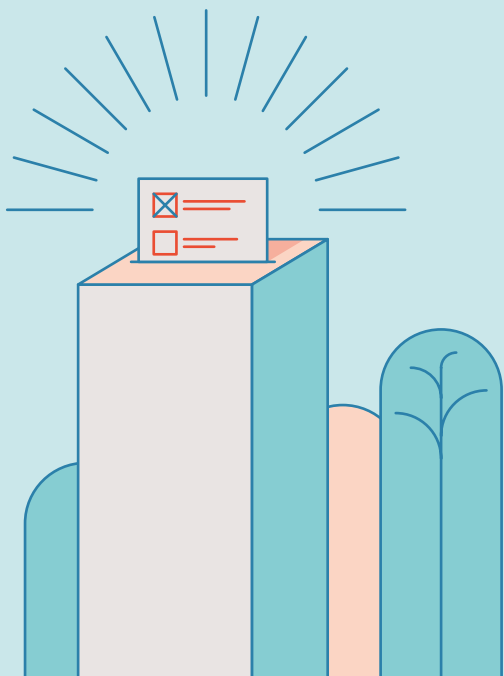
The subsequent part is devoted to European youth. Since this social group is considered to be a group with potential to heal EU democracy, we try to depict its general profile. We look for answers to the questions: who are European young people? What are their goals and attitude towards the European Union? What forms of democratic participation do the European young prefer? And finally – what does access to information in the European Union mean to European youth?

The first annex was based on the opinions of young people participating in the “Strengthening civil society rights by information access for European youth” SIA4Y project. These are suggestions, recommendations on further improvement of the European Union’s transparency policy and access to public information in this organisation. The second, in turn, is to help young people learn about the essence of youth policy implemented in their countries and the importance and methods of accessing public information.

We dedicate the work to young people with whom we had the pleasure to work during the implementation of the SIA4Y project in Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Poland.

the Authors





# Chapter I

# The European Union and Democracy

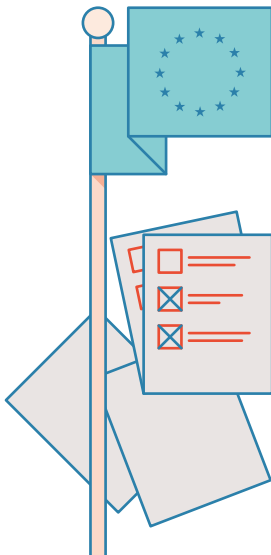
*The EU is not yet a polity and it lacks a public sphere. For this to emerge actions are needed that support trans-national mobilization and public contestation, the consolidation of a European party system, as well as emergence of a cosmopolitan identity.*

Liana Giorgi, John Crowley, Steven Ney<sup>01</sup>

- How is democracy in the European Union defined?
- What are the differences between Jean Monnet's and Robert Schuman's positions on the role of democracy in the process of European integration?
- What attitudes to the problem of democratic deficit are present in the academic discourse?
- What reasons for the democratic deficit in the EU can be distinguished?
- What is the difference between the institutional and social democratic deficit in the European Union?
- What is the attitude of EU institutions to the democratic deficit?
- How does the European Union counteract the social democratic deficit?
- What is the role of the EU information and communication policy in counteracting the social democratic deficit?

The issue of *democracy* in the European Union has been of interest to academics, politicians, European officials and Europeans themselves for years.

<sup>01</sup> L. Giorgi, J. Crowley, S. Ney, *Surveying the European Public Space – Apolitical and Research Agenda*, "Innovation: The European Journal of Social Sciences" 2001, no. 13(2), p. 81.



During the development of the integration process, the EU institutions have repeatedly tried to define what *European democracy* is, which is reflected in the Treaties. However, no consensus has been reached on what level of democracy of European structures and what level of participation of Europeans in the creation and implementation of European policies should be considered satisfactory. One expert position emphasises that *the model of democracy in the EU is evolving, but these are not dynamic changes. (...) Due to the changing nature of the occurring processes, it is impossible to grasp the current model of democracy in the EU as a measurement benchmark or to establish it as a permanently required standard. Democracy in the EU should be seen as an end*<sup>02</sup>. However, there is a widespread view that there is a democratic deficit in the EU that can generate serious problems with the future of the European project, and therefore ways should be sought to overcome it in the European structures. This does not mean that the academic discussion on European *democracy* has followed the same path. Opinions are still being expressed that transferring the debate on democracy of the nation-state political system to the supranational European level is unjustified.

### 1.1. Democracy or democratic deficit?

Several stages can be distinguished in the European Union's attempts to "deal" with democracy. The current stage, starting from the establishment of the European Union and the entry into force of the Treaty on European Union, through the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the start of activities of the European institutions newly elected in 2019 is characterised by the intensification of attempts to democratise the European Union.

In art. 2 of the Treaty on European Union<sup>03</sup>, apart from the principles of equality, respect for fundamental rights and the rule of law, the principle of democracy was recognised as one of the basic constitutional principles on which its functioning is based. The Treaty specifies the way it is implemented, underlining that in the European Union it has three forms: democratic equality, intermediate democracy and participatory democracy. The Treaty on European Union confirms the principle of democratic equality, i.e. equal treatment of citizens by institutions, strengthens indirect democracy by increasing the role of the European Parliament and the involvement of national parliaments,

<sup>02</sup> M. Witkowska, *Kryzys modelu demokracji w Unii Europejskiej – przyczyny, uwarunkowania, scenariusze rozwoju sytuacji* [in:] *Kryzysy w procesie integracji europejskiej i sposoby ich przezwyciężania*, K.A. Wojtaszczyk, J. Nadolska (eds.), Warszawa 2015, p. 121.

<sup>03</sup> *Consolidated Version of The Treaty on European Union*, „Official Journal of European Union”, 26.10.2012, C 326/13.

**THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL** The heads of state and government (i.e. presidents and/or prime ministers) of all the EU countries, plus the President of the European Commission. It is the highest-level policymaking body in the European Union, which is why its meetings are often called 'summits'.

**COPENHAGEN CRITERIA** principal rules that must be met by candidate countries to be eligible to join the European Union. They are divided into political and economic ones. The first category encompasses: the existence of institutions guaranteeing stable democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.

**ACQUIS COMMUNAUTAIRE** the EU's 'acquis' is the body of common rights and obligations that are binding on all EU countries.

**MONNET METHOD** an intergovernmental integration model which assumes that support for integration will increase when the benefits of deepening it are felt.

and supports participatory democracy by introducing new mechanisms of cooperation between citizens and institutions, such as a citizens' initiative<sup>04</sup>. Every candidate country to the European Union must prove that democracy is the foundation of its functioning. At the Copenhagen Summit in June 1993 the **European Council** established the so-called **Copenhagen criteria** dividing them into political and economic ones. The first category encompasses: the existence of institutions guaranteeing stable democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and respect for the rights of minorities<sup>05</sup>. They are a default part of **acquis communautaire**<sup>06</sup>, understood as Community acquis. The EU countries are obliged to respect **acquis communautaire**<sup>07</sup>, and each new Member State must fully adopt it.

However, at the beginning of European integration the "value" of democracy was less important. The reasons for this are explained in the memoirs of Jean Monnet – one of the "founding fathers" of united Europe, who often emphasised that the creators of the Communities wanted, especially in the initial period, to implement specific integration projects, and not to initiate political debates. Fledgling integration was to advance far away from public opinion because Jean Monnet and his colleagues feared that subjected to public debate, intercepted by politicians, the topic of European integration would be torpedoed and bogged down in endless discussions about national values and interests, sovereignty and national independence. The first decades of integration were based on the "**Monnet method**", which consisted of gradual integration, *petits pas* (in small steps) towards a not clearly defined political union. According to Monnet, whose federalism was associated with

<sup>04</sup> I. Skomerska-Muchowska, A. Wyrozumska, *Obywatel Unii* [in:] *Ustrój Unii Europejskiej*, J. Barcz (ed.), Warszawa 2010, p. IV–13.

<sup>05</sup> At the Copenhagen Summit in June 1993 the European Council established the Copenhagen criteria. They must be met by candidate countries to be eligible to join the European Union. They are divided into political and economic ones. The first category encompasses: the existence of institutions guaranteeing stable democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. See *European Council, European Council in Copenhagen – Conclusions of the Presidency*, European Council, 1993, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21225/72921.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3AlZDtWrtEGPzZilhlvcAaDT6C-Cb0C2jJXvnvqsbkXL3tJsgSTMCqi6k> (accessed: 11.02.2020).

<sup>06</sup> J. Markoff, *Our „Common Europe Home” – But Who Owns the House?* [in:] *Whose Europe?: The Turn Towards Democracy*, D. Smith, S. Wright (eds.), Oxford 1999, p. 34.

<sup>07</sup> It consists of: 1) primary (statutory) law, i.e. the founding treaties of the European Communities together with annexes and protocols, as well as subsequent amendments and supplements contained, inter alia, in the Single European Act and the Treaty on European Union, as well as the accession treaties of the new Member States; 2) secondary (derivative) law, i.e. legal acts adopted by the institutions of the Communities on the basis of primary law; 3) international agreements with third countries and international organisations; 4) agreements between the Member States regarding matters closely related to the functioning of the Communities over which the institutions of the Communities have no competence to act; 5) unwritten law, including general principles of law and customary law, referred to in judicial decisions of the European Court of Justice. Source: *Acquis Communautaire* [in:] *Encyklopedia PWN*, Warszawa, <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/acquis-communautaire;3865549.html?fbclid=IwAR3dJg-qI8XiFiG3H6VNbHrKifOBA5b-Sw55AeGd568nkk9mOdNuxACZ2FrA> (accessed: 20.02.2020).

a functional approach, you had to first convince yourself and other people that there was something more effective and better than states<sup>08</sup>.

Neo-functionalists, in turn, believed that the integration process is the result of not so much functional needs (or a technological change), but first and foremost of the interaction of political forces: pressure groups, parties, governments, international institutions, which, pursuing their own particular interests, often reach an agreement to achieve this goal<sup>09</sup>. They assumed that, step by step, legitimacy coming directly from the societies of the Member States would come into being. This will happen when citizens feel prosperity flowing from an effectively operating community apparatus. Loyalty, first of elites, and then of societies will be transferred to the new centre – the European Communities. By that time decisions were to be taken by a group of experts, and democratic procedures were added *ex post*. There was a widespread belief among the ruling elite that direct social involvement in European affairs and the resulting democratic legitimacy are issues that will spontaneously appear in the future<sup>10</sup>.

In the 1980s the low-profile tactics recommended by Monnet was changed and integration was subject to a progressive process of democratisation<sup>11</sup>. Jean Monnet said: “I have never believed that one fine day Europe would be created by some great political mutation, and I thought it wrong to consult the peoples of Europe about the structure of a Community of which they had no practical experience. (...) The pragmatic method we had adopted would also lead to a federation validated by the people’s vote; but that federation would be the culmination of an existing economic and political reality”<sup>12</sup>.

In the early period of its existence, the European Economic Community focused on quantitative issues; rebuilding Western European economies, negotiating a customs union and creating a single market to promote economic development and seek ways to make the European market more open, operate more efficiently, facilitate more competition and generate more profits. Although one of the basic assumptions of the Rome Treaties was to improve the living and working conditions of Europeans, this was a general objective rather than a basis for developing specific policies<sup>13</sup>.

08 P.J. Borkowski, *Federalizm a budowanie jedności Europy*, „Studia Europejskie” 2006, no. 2, p. 98.

09 S. Konopacki, *Neofunkcjonalistyczna teoria integracji politycznej Ernsta Haasa i Leona Lindberga*, „Studia Europejskie” 1998, no. 3, p. 107, [http://www.ce.uw.edu.pl/pliki/pw/3-1998\\_Konopacki.pdf](http://www.ce.uw.edu.pl/pliki/pw/3-1998_Konopacki.pdf) (accessed: 20.01.2020).

10 K. Klaus, *Pojęcie i źródła deficytu demokracji w UE*, „Studia Europejskie” 2004, no. 2, p. 55.

11 U. Kurczewska, *Wstęp. Deficyt demokracji w Unii Europejskiej a europejskie grupy interesu*, U. Kurczewska (ed.), Warszawa 2008, p. 7.

12 J. Monnet, cyt. za: S. Konopacki: *Dylematy federalizmu europejskiego*, „Studia Europejskie” 1998, no. 4, p. 86.

13 J. McCormick, *Zrozumieć Unię Europejską*, Warszawa 2010, p. 268.

**SUPRANATIONAL DECISIONS** The Member States of the European Union have agreed, as a result of their membership of the EU, to transfer some of their powers to the EU institutions in specified policy areas. Thus, the EU institutions make supranational binding decisions in their legislative and executive procedures, budgetary procedures, appointment procedures and quasi-constitutional procedures.

Supranational institutions<sup>14</sup> were created in Europe in order to oversee integration in many sectors of the economy. Their powers have been gradually expanded, and the Union's competences have covered wider and wider areas of economic and political regulation. As the number of the members have increased and competences expanded, the Member States have waived their right of veto in the decision-making process to ensure effective management. However, it was noted that the development of the supranational legal order is based on the needs of economic integration, but is not the result of a clear political integration programme<sup>15</sup>. The existence of a democratic deficit is the manifestation of this situation<sup>16</sup>. The supranational level is considered by Europeanists as ideally demonstrating non-state processes. Hence, the statements that *democracy manifesting itself at this level means that it is not assigned to the state and – importantly – proves in practice that it does not have to be national in nature*<sup>17</sup> and the state is not the only entity in which democracy can be effectively built<sup>18</sup>.

Democracy of the European Union is a complex topic. As it is defined and valued differently by EU decision-makers, representatives of the Member States, interest groups, political parties and Europeans themselves, it is difficult to reach a consensus as to what it is and what its determinants should be.

Józef M. Fiszer notes that the dispute over the EU's political system and its final constitutional (institutional) shape, including the democratic principles of its functioning in practice, and about the place and functions of states in international relations has a long history and rich literature on the subject. A matter of this dispute are also such issues as the place of the nation-state in the integration process, the transfer of sovereignty to the Community and then the EU level, intergovernmental and supranational structures, national and European identity, and democratic legitimacy of European integration. A still valid question about how to reconcile the national interest of a given state with the need to give up some or even most of the attributes of its sovereignty entering into supranational structures has been asked many times. Answers to these types of questions vary as they are determined by the adopted specific theoretical approach or research paradigm<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> J. Ruzkowski, *Ponadnarodowość w systemie politycznym Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa 2010, p. 411.

<sup>15</sup> *Globalizacja polityki światowej. Wprowadzenie do stosunków międzynarodowych*, J. Baylis, S. Smith (eds.), Kraków 2008, p. 725.

<sup>16</sup> W. Wouter van der Werf, *Democracy in the European Union. An Analysis of the Democratic Deficit in the European Union*, Lambert Academic Publishing 2010.

<sup>17</sup> J. Ruzkowski, *Demokracja ponadnarodowa w Unii Europejskiej. Wstępna analiza teoretyczna*, „Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej” 2015, no. 9, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> J.M. Fiszer, *Czy państwo demokratyczne może być wzorem dla przyszłej Unii Europejskiej?*, „Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna” 2014, no. 1(44), p. 110–111.

**LEGITIMACY** popular acceptance of a government, political regime, or system of governance.

As in the case of the issue of the **legitimacy** to democracy in the European Union, there are similarly divergent positions on the democratic deficit. In the Polish literature on the subject, we meet views according to which democracy is one of the sources of legitimacy, and therefore *it is more appropriate to raise the problem of the legitimacy deficit in relation to the EU, and only within it – of the deficit of democracy. In this way, with this approach, the legitimacy deficit in the EU would be a broader concept that would somehow include the problem of the democratic deficit*<sup>20</sup>. Research shifting the analysis of democratic deficit in the context of legitimacy to the administrative level is very interesting in this respect. It directs attention to administrative personnel involved in policy making. Research results indicate a statistically significant positive correlation between the political preferences of EU administrative staff and the population of their home country. The authors of these studies claim that this is an element of the legitimisation of administrative decisions taken at the EU level<sup>21</sup>.

The academic approach to democracy and its deficit in the European Union has led to the development of various, often contradictory views on this subject<sup>22</sup>. Among them there are those that claim that it is impossible for the EU to be democratic or that deficit is of little significance in the development of European political integration (an attempt to defend the democratic deficit) or that it cannot be eliminated or that the institutional system of the European Union is as democratic as it is possible in the reality of a supranational organisation<sup>23</sup>. Another standpoint, in turn, emphasises its presence on many planes, and indicates that the democratic deficit has been present in the European Union from the very beginning.

A representative of this approach is Andrej Moravcsik<sup>24</sup>, who, when speaking in a discussion about the presence or absence of the *democratic deficit*, puts forward critical arguments, citing substantiation of libertarian, pluralist, social democratic and deliberative theories.

The **libertarian** concept of democracy sees the democratic political order primarily as a means of protecting individual freedoms against the interference of the state apparatus. International organisations and the clerical apparatus are perceived as paying insufficient attention to existing individual or local interests and values.

**LIBERTARIANISM** political philosophy that takes individual liberty to be the primary political value i.e. rights to life, liberty, private property, freedom of speech and association, freedom of worship, government by consent, equality under the law, and moral autonomy.

<sup>20</sup> T. Kubin, *Legitymizacja systemu instytucjonalnego Unii Europejskiej*, Katowice 2014, p. 69.

<sup>21</sup> Z. Murdoch, S. Conolly, H. Kassim, *Administrative Legitimacy and the Democratic Deficit of the European Union*, "Journal of European Public Policy" 2018, vol. 25, no. 3, p. 389.

<sup>22</sup> See [in:] T.R. Szymczyński, *Horyzonty sporu wokół istoty zjawiska deficytu demokratycznego w Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa 2013.

<sup>23</sup> R. Grzeszczak, *Problem deficytu demokracji w strukturach wspólnotowych*, "Sprawy Międzynarodowe" 2000, no. 4.

<sup>24</sup> A. Moravcsik, *Is there a 'Democratic Deficit' in World Politics? A Framework for Analysis*, "Government and Opposition", 2004, no. 39.2, p. 336–363.



**PLURALISM** the view that in liberal democracies power is dispersed among a variety of economic and ideological pressure groups and is not held by a single elite or group of elites.

**Pluralism** assumes that the heterogeneity of society leads to a variety of interests arising within it. This fact, in turn, affects the formation of permanent socio-political divisions, which are manifested in political behaviour and public life organisations<sup>25</sup>. According to the pluralistic concept, systems are democratically justified to the extent to which they provide active people with a significant and equal chance to influence political decisions and results, e.g. within interest groups. On this basis, Robert Dahl expresses doubts about the possibility of this mechanism working at the level of international organisations<sup>26</sup>. According to him, the main obstacles are the size of the organisation and its remoteness from the citizens.

The social democratic concept of democracy, in turn, sees political institutions as a measure of balance between market liberalisation and social protection. International organisations are not able to fulfil this function because they lack instruments that inhibit shaping policy in the neoliberal direction and at the same time strengthening activities aimed at social protection. International organisations focus primarily on trade liberalisation (WTO, NAFTA, EU) and social protection is the responsibility of national governments.

**SOCIALDEMOCRACY** a political, social and economic philosophy that supports state interventions in the economy and social support to promote social justice as part of liberal democratic politics and the capitalist economy.

On the other hand, the deliberative concept of **democracy** sees political institutions as a means not only to ensure equal opportunities for participation and representation, but also to improve the political capabilities of citizens. According to this concept, political institutions must not only provide opportunities for participation, but must be designed in such a way as to encourage and promote citizens' active involvement in political life. Therefore, the democratic system must have not only representative institutions, but also political parties and interest groups. In addition, it should be characterised by a transparent system of information and communication between citizens and the authorities and enable discourse on public matters. Proponents of the deliberative concept of democracy do not have a good opinion about the isolated decision-making process, both domestic and international. That is why they are particularly suspicious of international organisations. In their opinion, even if international organisations are democratic and promote methods of involving society in decision-making

25 J. Nocoń, A. Laska, *Teoria polityki. Wprowadzenie*, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, Warszawa 2005, p. 164.

26 *My argument is simple and straightforward. In democratic countries... It is notoriously difficult for citizens to exercise direct control over many key decisions on foreign affairs. What grounds do we have for thinking, then, that citizens in different countries engaged in international systems can ever attain the degree of influence and control over decisions that they now exercise within their own countries?* Source: R. Dahl, *Can International Organizations Be Democratic? A Skeptic's View* [in:] *Democracy's Edges*, I. Shapiro, C. Hacker-Cordon (eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999, p. 19–36. Cit. [cited in:] A. Moravcsik, op. cit., p. 340.

processes, they have no chance of gaining democratic legitimacy without citizens' interest and activity. Due to the distance and weakness of social organisations, international organisations make decisions in a technocratic rather than a democratic way.

Jerzy Kranz also emphasises that *democracy is not a leading category in international relations, although modern international law does a lot to promote and strengthen it. The view about the contradiction between democracy and sovereignty seems to be incorrect, just as the contradiction between sovereignty and international law is apparent. The thesis about the deficit of democracy in international relations, including in international organisations, is misleading, because it is based primarily on comparison with democracy in the state*<sup>27</sup>.

Giandomenico Majone says that the European Union should focus mainly on regulatory policy that contributes to the well-being of Europeans. The regulators should give reasons for their decisions, and be subject to legal control, their goals should be clearly defined and outcomes measurable<sup>28</sup>.

Researchers assuming that the democratic deficit is present in the European Union note that the Community institutions have taken a number of important decisions affecting the lives of citizens of individual Member States as well as national political processes. At the same time, the same institutions suffer from a democratic deficit on many levels:

1. at the level of legitimacy related to decision-making processes, since no real universal involvement of all citizens in the political process has been achieved;
2. at the level of legitimacy connected with the course of decision-making processes (complicated institutional procedures, incompatible with democratic procedures, not very transparent, distant from citizens;
3. at the level of legitimacy related to the outcomes of decision-making processes (limited powers and benefits actually gained by the general public, low regulatory effectiveness in important sectors)<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> J. Kranz, *Deficyt demokracji w Unii Europejskiej?*, „Sprawy Międzynarodowe” 2012, no. 3, p. 10–11.

<sup>28</sup> G. Majone, *Europe's "Democratic Deficit": The Question of Standards*, “European Law Journal” 1998, no. IV(1), p. 5–28.

<sup>29</sup> G. Nevola, *Nie ma demokracji bez unifikacji. Analiza procesu integracji europejskiej i rzeczywistości politycznej* [in:] *Do jakiej Unii zmierzamy. Polityka i gospodarka Unii Europejskiej*, A. Mania, B. Piłonka (eds.), Kraków 2001.

Box 1

## The reasons for the democratic deficit in the EU

- The growing importance of the executive at the expense of control exercised by national parliaments in important sectors
- The weakness of the European Parliament
- The lack of “genuine” European elections (European-wide parties do not participate and the European Parliament has no influence on the executive)
- The European Union is too “distant” from its citizens
- EU policy is not in line with the expectations of citizens of many Member States

**Source:** Own study on the basis of A. Føllesdal, S. Hix, *Why There is Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik*, “Journal of Common Market Studies” 2006, no. XLIV(3), p. 533–562.

**INSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT**  
an insufficient level of democracy in political institutions and procedures in comparison with a theoretical ideal of a democratic government.

## 1.2. Institutional and social democratic deficits

Two categories of democratic deficit in the European Union are differentiated in the literature on the subject: **institutional** (Box 2) and **social**. In the institutional approach stress is placed on the need for democratic sharing of power that could increase the role of the European Parliament or national parliaments in the European legislative process or the accountability of other institutions to elected bodies.

From this perspective, the democratic deficit is identified with the imbalance created by the supranationality of European structures in the face of the problem of democratic accountability and the lack of legitimacy of power.

The institutional democratic deficit is believed to have two forms. The first one refers to the de-parliamentarisation of national political systems and the growing importance of the executive. The other focuses more directly on the transfer of decision-making competences from the national (and even regional) level to the supranational one<sup>30</sup>. Generally, a shift of power from the national to the European level is pointed to, which has taken place at the expense of parliamentarians and in favour of decision-makers in the executive authorities<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> D.N. Chrysoschoou, *Demokracja Unii Europejskiej i jej deficyt* [in:] *Unia Europejska. Organizacja i funkcjonowanie*, M. Cini (ed.), Warszawa 2007, p. 509.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem.

Box 2

## What the institutional democratic deficit means

- imbalance created by the supranationality of European structures in the face of the problem of democratic accountability
- legitimacy dissonance between the growing powers of Community institutions and the decreasing powers of national legislatures
- the lack of legitimacy of power
- too many competences of non-elective institutions
- the growth of expertocracy
- oligarchisation, bureaucratisation, deformatisation of decision-making processes
- the lack of structures at the political level to aggregate citizen participation
- the lack of free access to information
- insufficient public debate

Source: Own study.

In the discussion about the deficit of democracy, the example of the European Parliament has been most often cited as an institution that is not very important in the EU decision-making process and has weak public support. The process of expanding the competences of the EP is outlined in **Table 1**.

**Table 1 The process of expanding the competences of the European Parliament**

year	Event	The scope of new competences
1970	Changes in the treaty pertaining to the budget	Greater budget competences.
1975	Changes in the treaty pertaining to the budget	Greater budget competences. A significant impact on expenditure, with the exception of expenditure on the common agricultural policy.
1980	Judgment of the European Court of Justice on isoglucose	Extension of the right to consultation.
1987	Single European Act (entry into force)	In the case of some legal acts, a cooperation procedure was introduced, giving the EP more possibilities to delay, amend and block them.
1993	Maastricht Treaty (entry into force)	Introduction of the co-decision procedure for certain legal acts. The European Parliament obtained the right to approve nominated Commissioners.
1999	Amsterdam Treaty (entry into force)	Change of the co-decision procedure in favour of the EP and extension of its scope. The European Parliament was given the formal right to veto nominations for President of the Commission.
2003	Treaty of Nice (entry into force)	The target number of seats in the EP was increased (for EU-27 to 732). The EP obtained the right to consult the Court of Justice on the compatibility of international agreements concluded by the Community with primary law contained in the Treaties.
2009	Lisbon Treaty (entry into force)	Extension of the scope of the co-decision procedure (over 40 new areas). Increased role in creating the budget. The Parliament will decide on the entire EU budget together with the Council. MEPs will have to give their consent to the whole range of international agreements negotiated by the EU in areas such as international trade. Members of Parliament will play a new role in relations with other institutions. The results of the EP elections will be related to the selection of the candidate for President of the European Commission. The EP obtained a new right to propose treaty changes.

Source: Own study on the basis of R. Scully, *Parlament Europejski* [in:] M. Cini, op. cit., p. 241.

**THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION** Executive arm of the EU and initiator of legislative proposals, seeks to uphold the interests of the Union as a whole.

**THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION** this institution consists of government ministers from all the EU countries. Legislative arm of the EU, as the main decision-making body represents the individual member states.

**THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT** Directly elected legislative arm of the EU, represents the EU's citizens.

Analysing the process of expanding the competences of the European Parliament, one can agree with the increasingly common opinion that thanks to this process the deficit understood as insufficient competences of the elected institution is gradually overcome. Examining the behaviour of the electorate in elections to the European Parliament, Robert Wiszniowski confirms that the European Parliament is currently playing a slightly more important role in the Community legislative process, and in the Lisbon Treaty reforming the EU it was given an even broader scope of competence, while accepting the existing *acquis*. However, until recently, it was considered a rather auxiliary body, without major powers, which was to support the activities of **the European Commission** and **the Council of the European Union**. This unnatural state, from the point of view of solutions found in national democratic systems, disorganised the European Union system so much that it put citizens in a state of general confusion. Since the EP is neither comparable nor “compatible” with the commonly known tasks and competences of national legislatures, its understanding, and therefore, and social approval are hampered. This is a reason not so much of frustration but certain “upset” of society<sup>32</sup>.

In addition to the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions are often mentioned as EU advisory bodies that present themselves as guarantors of a more democratic Union<sup>33</sup>.

The EESC was established pursuant to the Rome Treaties of 1957 as a medium of opinion of organised interest groups in the European legislative process. This committee is a tripartite body made up of individual members representing employers, employees and other interest groups. The establishment of the committee gave interest groups an institutional possibility to submit opinions to the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and **the European Parliament**. The tasks of the committee encompass fulfilling an advisory function; working for a broader involvement of civil society organisations in European integration and for enhancing the role of civil society organisations in third countries. In addition, the Committee expresses its view on matters which are insufficiently taken into account or completely overlooked by the Community institutions, expressing opinions on its own initiative and publishing information reports. However, the significance of the EESC as a representative of interest groups in the structures of the European Union is considered marginal as a result of,

<sup>32</sup> R. Wiszniowski, *Europejska przestrzeń polityczna. Zachowania elektoratu w wyborach do Parlamentu Europejskiego*, Wrocław 2008, p. 370.

<sup>33</sup> F. Skawiński, *Reprezentacja interesów regionów w Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa 2008, p. 162–163.

**THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS** an advisory body composed of representatives of Europe's regional and local authorities. It ensures that these authorities have a say in EU policymaking and that regional and local identities and prerogatives are respected.

among others, a systematic increase in the activity of European interest groups and their formal and informal contacts with the Community institutions, which are considered more effective than the activities of the EESC. The committee has ceased to be the only representative of civic organisations in Brussels, and probably in connection with this its role has begun to gradually decline<sup>34</sup>.

**The Committee of the Regions** is another advisory body whose activity is related to the pursuit of “bringing the citizen closer to the European Union”. It was established in the Maastricht Treaty. The task of the Committee of the Regions is to express views on EU legislation from a local and regional perspective. The Committee does this by assessing legislative proposals of the Commission. The Commission and Council are required to consult the Committee of the Regions on issues that directly affect local and regional authorities. However, they can also seek its opinion on any matter. The Committee can also propose new laws on its own initiative and present them to the Commission, Council and Parliament<sup>35</sup>.

Its creation is treated as the recognition of the right of regional authorities to participate in the EU decision-making process. The Committee is not an institution and its powers are limited to fulfilling an advisory function. Its importance is formally assessed as minor. In the early days of its existence, the CoR was a place of certain internal tensions that undermined its credibility. It has also been criticised for the poor quality of opinions given. Nevertheless, there is evidence that, in particular, the Commission takes its assessments seriously. Another source of the CoR strength is the fact that some of its members are experienced politicians influential in their countries, which increases the political significance of the Committee's opinions<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, the CoR should be also appreciated as a forum for discussing various issues of interest to regions and an instrument for publicising them<sup>37</sup>. An example can be the CoR's striving towards empowering regions in EU law and the extension of the subsidiarity principle to the regional level.

Another issue analysed in the context of the democratic deficit is the question of the importance of national parliaments in the process of European integration. The role of the national parliament is seen primarily in the area of the “complementary” function of the state in the process of European integration – in the “process of cooperation” between the European Union and its Member States. The national

<sup>34</sup> L. Graniśzewski, C. Piątkowski, *Grupy interesu w Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa 2004; K. Jasiecki, M. Mołęda-Zdziech, U. Kurczewska, *Lobbing. Sztuka skutecznego wywierania wpływu*, Kraków 2006; U. Kurczewska, M. Mołęda-Zdziech, *Lobbing w Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa 2002.

<sup>35</sup> [http://europa.eu/institutions/consultative/cor/index\\_pl.htm](http://europa.eu/institutions/consultative/cor/index_pl.htm) (accessed: 15.02.2011).

<sup>36</sup> M. Cini, *Unia Europejska. Organizacja i funkcjonowanie*, Warszawa 2007, p. 394.

<sup>37</sup> F. Skawiński, op. cit., p. 186.

parliament can play a crucial role in strengthening the Union's democratic legitimacy at the national level, i.e. at the most important level closest to the citizen, controlling the activities of the government in the EU (especially in the Community institutions), to some extent monitoring the decision-making process at the EU level, finally contributing to increasing the significance of national regional and local structures in the decision-making process at the level of a given country<sup>38</sup>.

The solutions of the Lisbon Treaty formally have the potential to bring power closer to the citizen. First and foremost, the Lisbon Treaty: strengthens the position of national parliaments by giving them early-response possibilities and competences in the area of subsidiarity principle control at regional and local level; enabling them to use a "yellow card" if they wish to express their doubts as to the compliance of the act with the principle of subsidiarity; conferring the right to participate in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice and to assess the implementation of the Union's activities in this area; offering the possibility of the political monitoring of Europol and Eurojust activities; inclusion in the procedure of amending the existing Treaties; being informed about new applications of candidates applying for accession to the European Union<sup>39</sup>.

However, an in-depth analysis indicates that these changes are not very radical. It is believed that the Treaty has not brought about significant mechanisms to inhibit possible legislative overactivity of the Community; it also has not really strengthened the position of national legislatures; the subsidiarity dynamics has not been significantly adjusted<sup>40</sup>.

The other depiction of the democratic deficit draws attention to too many competences of non-elective institutions, the growth of expertocracy, which is not subjected to any control and remote from citizens, as well as **oligarchisation**, bureaucratisation and the deformation of decision-making processes, the lack of structures that at the political level aggregate citizen participation in the framework of the Union's political system, the lack of free access to information in the Union.

In the social approach the lack of European *demos* is stressed and elements necessary for the creation of a community of Europeans as a pre-condition for the democratisation of the European Union are

**OLIGARCHISATION** gradual seizure of power by a small group of people coming from privileged strata

<sup>38</sup> J. Barcz, *Traktat konstytucyjny – umocnienie roli parlamentów narodowych w procesie integracji europejskiej*, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, 2008, p. 2, <http://www.msz.gov.pl/files/docs/umocnienie.pdf> (accessed: 17.01.2009).

<sup>39</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, *Skutki zmian systemowych UE po ratyfikacji Traktatu Lizbońskiego* [in:] *Traktat Lizboński. Co po Irlandii?*, M.M. Brzezińska, R. Zenderowski (eds.), Warszawa 2009, p. 32.

<sup>40</sup> M. Giercz, *Zasada pomocniczości w Traktacie z Lizbony – źródło i znaczenie modyfikacji* [in:] *op. cit., Traktat Lizboński...*, eds. M.M. Brzezińska, R. Zenderowski, p. 53.



## Box 3

## What is the social democratic deficit

- the lack of European *demos* (European citizen identity)
- condition of congruence not met
- remoteness of an ordinary citizen from EU communities and institutions
- decreasing turnout

Source: Own study.

enumerated<sup>41</sup>. Reviewing various views on what *demos* is or is not, Jacek Czaputowicz emphasises that some researchers of the problem indicate that when there is no *demos*, there is no national model of democracy and losers in the elections will not accept decisions of the majority. In the European Union, however, citizens do not feel members of one nation, but of almost thirty. Another group of researchers claims that political institutions do not grow out of *demos* but create and represent it. Therefore, the existence of democratic institutions in the European Union will in the long run lead to the emergence of European *demos*. Without a sense of belonging to one nation, the introduction of democratic institutions at the European level will not bring people's rule, and the minority will not recognise majority rule<sup>42</sup>.

However, in response to the criticism that there cannot be such a thing as European *demos*, it can be argued that “*demos*” is obviously conflated with people in the sense of a nationally, territorially based community<sup>43</sup>. From many perspectives, it is now argued that European civil society and European citizenship are evolving along with the growing competence of the Union and the Union's efforts to strengthen its legitimate foundations<sup>44</sup>. Thus citizenship in the transnational European case cannot be conceived in the same way as national citizenship. It

<sup>41</sup> J.H.H. Weiler, *The Constitution of Europe: “Do the New Clothes Have an Emperor?” and Other Essays on European Integration*, Cambridge–New York 1999, p. 337.

<sup>42</sup> J. Czaputowicz, *Demokracja a suwerenność w Unii Europejskiej* [in:] *Polska w procesie integracji europejskiej. Dekada doświadczeń (2004–2014)*, K.A. Wojtaszczyk, M. Mizerska-Wrotkowska, W. Jakubowski (eds.), Warszawa 2014, p. 151–152.

<sup>43</sup> *E-public, e-participation and e-voting in Europe – Prospects and Challenges. Final Report*, European Parliament – Science and Technology Options Assessment, IP/A/STOA/FWC/2008–096/LOT4/C1/SC2, 2011, p. 25.

<sup>44</sup> K. Eder, *The Public Sphere and European Democracy. Mechanisms of Democratisation in the Transnational Situation* [in:] *The European Union and the Public Sphere: A Communicative Space in the Making?* J. Fossum, P. Schlesinger (eds.), London 2007, p. 44–64.

THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE  
an instrument of participatory democracy  
in the EU.

is not based on common language and traditions or ethnicity, nor on a common culture, but in the consciousness of belonging to a political community with shared political values that provide for democratic rights and protects and respects the cultural diversity of the Union<sup>45</sup>.

Ethos is another assessed criterion of the democracy of European structures. The position that something like European ethos did not exist, does not exist and will not exist is common as the European continent is characterised by multiple ethnic and cultural pluralism. In Europe there are also no truly European socio-political organisations operating in a supranational space, expressing supranational, genuinely European aspirations. Similarly, European political parties are European more by name than in activity. There is also no authentic European public opinion<sup>46</sup>. We can often encounter an opinion that, without the basis for creating a strong civil society across the European Union, it is difficult to expect effective democratisation of EU decision-making processes. The weakness of social policy actors, the lack of European identity and common public opinion are considered to be the problems of democracy in the Union which inevitably lead to lame legitimacy of power. Moreover, in the discussion on the creation of an EU civil society certain conditions are characterised, the fulfilment of which would increase grassroots pressure on democratisation of the Union institutions. They include: building the awareness of the will of the collective entity in the functioning of citizens – organisations, movements and coalitions, attachment to common democratic values, social awareness of participation in transnational political processes, the will to democratically shape the future fate throughout the Union, and the ability to create a counterweight to the domination of economic interests<sup>47</sup>.

Another approach is an attempt to indicate that transnational democracy examined in relation to the European Union has developed new forms of democratisation solutions and processes and that there are substitutes for national democracy at the supranational level. Janusz Ruskowski enumerates their three determinants. The first determinant of transnational democracy located above the Member States precludes their participation in it. An example is the [European Citizens' Initiative](#). The second determinant of transnational democracy is located "outside the states", and allows the states the possibility of

<sup>45</sup> *E-public, e-participation and e-voting in Europe – Prospects and Challenges. Final Report*, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> F. Draus, *Integracja europejska a polityka*, Rzeszów 1999; C. Lord, *Democracy in the European Union*, London 1996; R. van Schendelen, *Machiavelli w Brukseli. Sztuka lobbyingu w Unii Europejskiej*, Gdańsk 2006;

<sup>47</sup> K. Jasiecki, *Deficyt demokracji w Unii Europejskiej – oczekiwania społeczne* [in:] *Deficyt demokracji w Unii Europejskiej a europejskie grupy interesów*, U. Kurczewska (ed.), Warszawa 2008, p. 39.

**POLITICAL GROUPS** The Members of the European Parliament sit in political groups – they are not organised by nationality, but by political affiliation. There are currently 7 political groups in the European Parliament.

participating in it. Countries participate in such democracy to varying degrees, although the issues dealt with do not concern them. An example of state participation in democracy “outside” the states may be the referendums on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe or national electoral laws. The third determinant of transnational democracy located outside a specific nation (*demos*) means that the source of such democracy and a sovereign is not *demos*, i.e. a population that would identify with the EU, but other actors (Member States, European institutions, European society)<sup>48</sup>.

Another method is an attempt to find substitutes for national democracy at the supranational level. Researchers of the *supranationality* of the European Union point to substitutes of three important elements in transnational democracy: the nation, accountability to the nation and democratic political representation. They indicate that civil society is a substitute for the European nation (*demos*). Although – in their opinion – the lack of European *demos* and ethnicity is obvious, the existence of a European civil (civic) society allows it to be associated with public space, even of a particular type and with a scope limited to the European Union. In turn, in transnational democracy, a substitute for the lack of direct accountability to the people is indirect accountability to the European Parliament and to the Court of Justice of the European Union. In the case of the substitute of democratic political representation in the European Union, they point to an equivalent of the hierarchical system of institutions which in classical democracy characterise such representation in a nation-state (democratic self-government, political parties, democratic government, democratic parliament). In the EU there is neither self-government nor government generated as a result of democratic elections. However, regions can be represented in the EU by their representations to the EU or by the Committee of the Regions. Another element of political representation, which are political parties, is reflected by **political groups** in the European Parliament and parties at the European level. The last element of this representation in the EU is almost equivalent to classical democracy, because the European Parliament is a democratic representation, although with some limitations in terms of accountability<sup>49</sup>.

The discussion about democracy, its lack and its consequences for the future of the European integration process is still ongoing. The European institutions have not been indifferent to it. The official position points to the recognition of the need to overcome the democratic

<sup>48</sup> J. Ruzkowski, *Demokracja ponadnarodowa w Unii Europejskiej. Wstępna analiza teoretyczna*, „Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej” 2015, no. 9, p. 20–22.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, p. 26–27.

**SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT** remoteness of the citizen from institutions, a sense of the lack of influence of citizens on the authorities. It is manifested, for example, by a decrease in voter turnout.

deficit. Over the past twenty years, the EU has launched a number of initiatives, programmes and activities aimed at counteracting the democratic deficit or lessening its effects. The most important ones as well as the assessment of their effectiveness will be presented in the next section.

### 1.3. Methods of overcoming social democratic deficit in the European Union

The European Union has adopted the position that without a European public sphere it will be extremely difficult to strengthen democracy at the supranational level. Extending the interaction between European policy and Europeans has thus become the starting point for the formulation of many programmes, initiatives and procedures intended to contribute to overcoming the highly articulated problem of the social democratic deficit. Among them there were those that resulted from problems with the acceptance of European policies and those that were designed to achieve specific indicators as a result of their implementation.

#### First of all: better information and communication with European Union citizens

The right to information and freedom of expression are at the heart of European democracy. The European Commission declares that all Europeans have the right to full and reliable information on the European Union in their own language and to express their views. Information and communication play a special role in preventing and reducing the **social deficit** in the European Union. Their main legal basis is contained in the *Charter of Fundamental Rights*<sup>50</sup> (**Box 4**).

The European Commission is the main institution responsible for implementing information policy in the EU. Other EU institutions also undertake information activities. Intensification of activities in this area began in 2001<sup>51</sup>. Interinstitutional agreements are signed in order to coordinate them. The EU institutions cooperate with the governments of the Member States in the creation and maintenance of European information centres, conducting information campaigns, etc.

<sup>50</sup> *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, "Official Journal of the European Union" 2012, C 326/391.

<sup>51</sup> Communication on a new framework for co-operation on the information and communication policy of the European Union, COM(2001)354; Communication on an information and communication strategy for the European Union, COM(2002)350; Communication on implementing the information and communication strategy for the European Union, COM(2004)196.

Box 4

## Communication as a right in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

### Article 11

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.
2. The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected.

### Article 41

Right to good administration 1. Every person has the right to have his or her affairs handled impartially, fairly and within a reasonable time by the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union.

2. This right includes:
  - a the right of every person to be heard, before any individual measure which would affect him or her adversely is taken;
  - b the right of every person to have access to his or her file, while respecting the legitimate interests of confidentiality and of professional and business secrecy;
  - c the obligation of the administration to give reasons for its decisions.
3. Every person has the right to have the Union make good any damage caused by its institutions or by its servants in the performance of their duties, in accordance with the general principles common to the laws of the Member States.
4. Every person may write to the institutions of the Union in one of the languages of the Treaties and must have an answer in the same language. Right of access to documents Any citizen of the Union, and any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State, has a right of access to documents of the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union, whatever their medium.

### Article 42

Right of access to documents. Any citizen of the Union, and any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State, has a right of access to documents of the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union, whatever their medium.

### Article 44

Right to petition Any citizen of the Union and any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State has the right to petition the European Parliament.

The main goal of the European Union's information policy<sup>52</sup> is to inform Europeans about its activities and shape a positive attitude to the EU. Starting from 2005, these objectives have been focused on the following areas: listening to public opinion and taking into account the views and concerns of citizens; explaining the impact that European Union policies have on the everyday lives of citizens in various areas; establishing contacts with citizens at the local level by reaching them in their national or local environment through the most popular media among them. In general, the objectives of information policy are based on the premise that, having access to clear information, EU citizens can better exercise their right to participate in the democratic life of the EU, in which decisions are to be taken as transparently as possible, at a level as close to citizens as possible and in accordance with the principles of pluralism, participation, openness and transparency<sup>53</sup>.

The communication tools used include websites, social media accounts, visitor facilities, contact offices and local offices in all EU countries, as well as special services for the media. There are also contact centres (such as Europe Direct and Ask European Parliament) to which citizens can turn to in order to obtain necessary information.

In practice, it turns out that conducting communication satisfactory for Europeans is a serious challenge. Europeanists cite the example of the referendums on *the Constitution for Europe* in support of the thesis that ignoring the role of information and communication policy can lead to grave problems with the legitimacy of the European Union. In 2006, the reasons for the need to improve communication about the European Union and for reaching Europeans directly were pointed out. These include the following: a general decline in confidence in politicians and governments in all modern Western democracies; basing the European Union on a unique and peculiar (*sui generis*) decision-making system that is difficult to understand, which translates into a lack of interest in national curricula; a lack of understanding and limited interest due to the complexity of EU policies; language barriers; the absence of influential European media in a situation where national media present the European Union in the context of the internal policy of a given country; the tendency to blame Brussels by the representatives of the Member States (politicians) when unpopular decisions are made and crediting themselves when these decisions can improve their ratings; no real pan-European political parties; underestimating the role of the Member States in the process

<sup>52</sup> In official documents of the European Union, it also appears as an information and communication policy (strategy).

<sup>53</sup> *Communication Policy*, European Parliament, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/pl/sheet/144/communicatiebeleid> (accessed: 10.02.2020).

**THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC COMMITTEE** is an advisory body representing employers, trade unions, farmers, consumers and the other interest groups that collectively make up 'organised civil society'. It presents their views and defends their interests in policy.

of informing about the European Union; giving EU information and communication strategies PR forms of centralised and institutional activities rather than addressed to EU citizens<sup>54</sup>. At the time, it was pointed out that European policy was for *the initiated* and that only massive information and communication activities could rectify this situation and bring Europe closer to Europeans.

In order to achieve this purpose a commissioner responsible for communication was appointed in 2004 and in 2005 the European Commission presented *Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate*<sup>55</sup> and a year later the *White Paper on a European Communication Policy*<sup>56</sup>.

The premise of Plan D was to create a mechanism for organising debates on the future of Europe through governments in twenty-five countries. The main goal was to achieve new political consensus on proper policies that would enable Europe to respond to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Margot Walström, responsible for institutional relations and social communication strategies, repeatedly pointed to the functions of Plan D as a mechanism for debate, dialogue and listening to the opinions of others. The basic elements of Plan D are: a stimulating debate; the feedback collection process; key initiatives to intensify the dialogue. The latter were to encompass: Commissioners' visits to the Member States, support for European projects initiated by EU citizens, support for openness in the procedures of the Council of the European Union, greater involvement of Commissioners in the Member States, greater involvement of Commissioners in the work of national parliaments, creation of networks of European Goodwill ambassadors to raise the prestige of the European debate and resume efforts to increase voter turnout. The plan was initiated in six transnational European civic projects managed by civil society organisations. The aim of these projects was to examine innovative consultation methods and enable representatives of various national social groups as European citizens to communicate and debate on the future of the EU. In 2007, the European Commission presented the effects of implementing Plan D in the form of a communication to the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the Committee of the Regions and **the Socio-Economic Committee**. The summary of the course of the implementation of the first stage of Plan D stated that within its framework attention was paid to communication in personal contacts and in virtual space,

<sup>54</sup> Z. Gniatkowski, *Komunikacja społeczna w Unii Europejskiej – refleksje po odrzuceniu Traktatu Konstytucyjnego*, „Studia Europejskie” 2007, no 2, p. 60–61.

<sup>55</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – The Commission's contribution to the period of reflection and beyond – Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate, 494 COM (2005).

<sup>56</sup> *White Paper on a European Communication Policy*, COM (2006).

**EUROPE FOR CITIZENS** a programme to strengthen remembrance of recent European history and to enhance civic participation at EU level.

targeted consultations and opinion polls, as well as consultations at national, supranational and pan-European levels. The citizens' projects included: a European website devoted to a debate and connected to a network of national discussion sites, national consultations on the same issues held in all Member States at the same time; a pan-European opinion poll combined with a debate; local discussion events. The next phase of Plan D was called "Debate Europe". Within its framework, interinstitutional, political and media projects are implemented. An example is the "Europe for Citizens" project, the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue of 2008, e-participation activities. "Debate Europe" is linked to pilot information networks (PINs); European public spaces; citizens' fora; visits to the Member States and online debates. Another activity aimed at bringing the EU closer to citizens was proclaiming 2013 the year of citizens.

Box 6

### Selected tools of informing about the European Union

- The "Europe for Citizens programme"
- Communicating Europe in Partnership
- Communicating about Europe via the Internet – engaging the citizens
- Debating Europe
- Europa website
- European radio network/audiovisual platforms

**Source:** Communication Policy. Fact Sheets on the European Union, European Parliament, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/pl/sheet/144/communicatiebeleid> (accessed: 01.02.2020).



In January 2004, The European Council introduced the first action programme to promote active European citizenship. It has its continuation in the current programming period 2014–2020. The main goal of the scheme is to bring the Union closer to its citizens by contributing to better understanding of issues related to the Union, its history and diversity, promoting European citizenship and improving the conditions of social and democratic engagement. The specific objectives include, firstly, developing civic awareness regarding memory of the past, shared history and values, and the Union’s goal of promoting peace, Union values and the well-being of its peoples by stimulating debate, reflection and creating a contact network and, secondly, encouraging democratic and citizen participation of Europeans at the Union level by building their knowledge of the Union’s policy making process and promoting opportunities for social and intercultural involvement and volunteering at the Union level. “Europe for Citizens” supports non-governmental organisations and local governments, as well as other non-profit organisations and institutions operating in the area of civil society, culture and education in the implementation of projects related to the subject of European citizenship, local initiatives, social and democratic involvement and European remembrance. For the years 2014–2020 “Europe for Citizens”<sup>57</sup> included funding in two thematic areas: 1) “European remembrance” – a thematic area focused on the historical aspect of creating the European project and 2) “Democratic engagement and civic participation” – an area serving better understanding of EU policies by citizens, and in particular ensuring the active participation of civil society in the European law-making process. On 30 May 2018, the Commission published a proposal for a regulation establishing the “Rights and Values” programme (2021–2027), whose component “Citizens’ involvement and participation” replaces the current “Europe for Citizens” programme.

The above-mentioned programme is just one example of how the EU institutions seek ways to draw Europeans’ attention to the issue of involvement in the process of European integration. It has been pointed out many times that the lack of coherent information transmitted from the European Union to its citizens discourages the latter from taking part in decision-making processes. A step forward towards the coordination of information on the European Union level by its institutions was the adoption in 2009 by the Parliament, the Council and the Commission of interinstitutional communication priorities in the form of the joint declaration “Communicating Europe in

<sup>57</sup> The official website of the programme: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/europe-for-citizens\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/europe-for-citizens_en) (accessed: 02.02.2020).

**HORIZONTAL CIVIL DIALOGUE** The EU institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations an opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action.

Partnership”<sup>58</sup> signed in December 2008. The priorities included the European elections, energy and climate change, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of democratic changes in Central and Eastern Europe, and support for economic growth, employment and solidarity, with particular regard to the connection with the European Year of Creativity and Innovation. The main objective of this initiative was to improve consistency and synergy between actions taken by different EU institutions and the Member States to ensure better access to information and better understanding of the effects of EU policies at the European, national and local levels<sup>59</sup>.

### Secondly, increasing the participation of Europeans in decision-making

Participation is a key element in EU representative democracy. This is provided for in Article 10 paragraph 3 of the TEU: “every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union. Decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen.”

As EU citizens’ willingness to engage in traditional forms of political participation is diminishing, the EU institutions are turning to digital technologies and tools that are supposed to ensure more direct participation to ultimately increase the legitimacy of law-making. Art. 11 of the Lisbon Treaty devoted to the issues of participatory democracy is a reflection of the aspirations of the European institutions to increase the participation of Europeans in decision-making. It indicates the preferred forms of citizen participation in decision-making processes, and mentions: **horizontal civil dialogue**, vertical civil dialogue, consultations of the European Commission, and the European Citizens’ Initiative. Civil<sup>60</sup> dialogue means cooperation between the government and civic organisations. Its purpose is to improve the functioning of the political and social system. It is a concept close to social participation and participatory democracy<sup>61</sup>.

The concept of civil dialogue was developed in 1996 at the First European Social Policy Forum, initiated by the then 5<sup>th</sup> Directorate General for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Issues. Civil dialogue involves consultation with and between representatives of a broader range of social interests. Consultations with the European Social and Economic Committee are its institutionalised form.

<sup>58</sup> Communicating Europe in Partnership, “Official Journal of the European Union”, 15.01.2010, C9E/65.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>60</sup> This is a broader concept than *social dialogue*.

<sup>61</sup> B. Jagusiak, *Wymiar narodowy i ponadnarodowy dialogu społecznego w Unii Europejskiej*, Poznań 2016, p. 159.

**VERTICAL CIVIL DIALOGUE** The EU institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.

In its opinion of 1999 on the role and contribution of civil society organisations to the building of Europe, the European Social and Economic Committee used the term civil society organisations for the sum of all organisational structures whose members have objectives and responsibilities that are of general interest and who also act as mediators between the public authorities and citizens<sup>62</sup>. It enumerates the following as the main actors of civil society: the so-called labour-market players, i.e. the social partners; organisations representing social and economic players, which are not social partners in the strict sense of the term; NGOs (non-governmental organisations) which bring people together in a common cause, such as environmental organisations, human rights organisations, consumer associations, charitable organisations, educational and training organisations, etc.; CBOS (community-based organisations, i.e. organisations set up within society at grassroots level which pursue member-oriented objectives), e.g. youth organisations, family associations and all organisations through which citizens participate in local and municipal life; religious communities<sup>63</sup>. A common feature of civil society organisations at the EU level is their intermediary role taken in relation to the national level.

Civil dialogue is treated as a supplement to social dialogue, the basic feature of which is focusing on labour relations and making decisions based on consensus. Civil dialogue covers wider social issues.

Article 11 paragraph 1 of the TEU states also that “the institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action.”

One of the objectives of this instrument – known as **vertical civil dialogue** – is to create European public opinion.

Article 11 paragraph 2 of the TEU is devoted to vertical civil dialogue: “The institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.” One of the instruments of vertical civil dialogue is the “Agora” created by the European Parliament.

The aim of creating the “Agora” was to combine aspects of participation in public affairs with indirect democracy, the manifestation of which is the European Parliament. Participation is understood as the activity of representatives of European civil society: networks of associations, trade unions, etc. The intention of the “Agora” creators was to combine voices of European citizens with voices of their elected representatives. Participants in the discussion would have

<sup>62</sup> *The Role and Contribution of Civil Society Organisations in the Building of Europe, Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee, CES 851/99 D/GW, Brussels 1999.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

an opportunity to extend the European debate and present specific political strategies based on everyday experiences in order to solve problems facing the Union<sup>64</sup>. The “Agora” was to provide the European Parliament Members with material that they would use in their further work. Debates taking place in its framework were to focus on issues that were a priority on Parliament’s agenda and had a clear impact on the daily lives of citizens. As far as their organisation is concerned, 500 participants of the “Agora” were to be able not only to express their opinion, but also to participate in the preparation of reports from the debates. The role of interdisciplinary working groups was to facilitate dialogue between various civil society organisations. The difference between agoras and civic forums existing in the past, organised in all EU Member States, was that they would be open to participants from different countries.

Agora’s meetings were to be held every six months in the EP plenary hall in Brussels. Their structure consists of three stages: preparation of working documents by means of the website; a two-day debate in the EP during which conclusions will be reached; submitting the final report to all parties. The decision on the work schedule and the choice of issues for the agora was to be the task of the Conference of Presidents. Each of the debates was to be summarised by two moderators: one selected from among MEPs or representatives of other EU institutions, the other from invited organisations. An important role was assigned to the secretaries selected from all participants. Two or three secretaries were to be elected for each of the five workshop sessions. In turn, the rapporteurs were to be responsible for preparing materials for discussion before the meeting and drawing up a two-page document summarising the debate. Conclusions from the Agora on a given topic were to be used by MEPs (in the form of amendments), parliamentary committees and/or other EU institutions<sup>65</sup>.

One of the examples is *Citizens’ Agora on climate change* which took place on 12–13 June 2008 in Brussels. Its main topic were issues related to climate change and the attitude of various European Union policies (on energy, transport, agriculture, trade, environmental protection, development, social, science, education and industry) towards it.

In 2020, in the motion for the resolution of 15 January 2020 on *the European Parliament’s position on the Conference on the Future of Europe* the European Parliament returned to using this instrument in the debate on the future of the European Union.

<sup>64</sup> [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu) (accessed 19.05.2010).

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem.

**CITIZENS' PANEL** citizens' consultations convened by the European commission, the aim was to develop 12 questions for an online survey on the future of Europe – created by EU citizens for EU citizens.

The Parliament proposed that several thematic Citizens' agoras reflecting the policy priorities should be held during the Conference, and that they should be composed of a maximum of 200300 citizens with a minimum of three per Member State. Moreover, it stressed that these agoras should be held in different locations across the Union and that they should be representative (in terms of geography, gender, age, socio-economic background and/or level of education) and proposed that the selection of participating citizens from among all EU citizens be made by independent institutions in Member States in accordance with the abovementioned criteria, and that criteria be defined to guarantee that elected politicians, senior government representatives and professional interest representatives could not participate in Citizens' agoras. The European Parliament proposed also that, in addition to the Citizens' agora, at least two Youth agoras be held: one at the beginning of the Conference and one towards the end, arguing that young people deserve their own forum because young generations are the future of Europe and it is they who will be most affected by any decision taken today on the future direction of the EU. Participants of youth agoras should be aged 16–25.

Another instrument of participatory democracy are consultations of the European Commission<sup>66</sup>. They have a long tradition and are positively assessed, both by the EU institutions and by parties involved in consultations. This instrument is a confirmation of existing practice.

The essence of the consultations is an opportunity to comment on the scope of new initiatives, the priorities presented in them and the added value of activities at the EU level in a given field. The consultations can also be used to evaluate existing policies and binding regulations.

Internet consultations were held primarily via the *Your voice in Europe* website. Social consultations held in this form did not, however, meet all expectations of active citizens. It was pointed out that in the course of consultations it was only possible to express opinions on given topics and evaluate submitted proposals. It was impossible to ask questions or raise issues.

So-called **citizens' panels** organised by the Commission were an answer to these deficiencies. A limited number of people from various Member States take part in them to discuss important issues related to the public interest. In 2009, in order to implement the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon, The European Parliament adopted a resolution

<sup>66</sup> European Commission, Consultations, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations_en) (accessed: 12.03.2020).

**WHITE PAPER** documents published by European Commission containing proposals for EU action in a specific area. The purpose of a White Paper is to launch a debate with the public, stakeholders, the European Parliament and the Council in order to arrive at a political consensus.

in which this type of public consultation was called civil dialogue<sup>67</sup>, as mentioned above.

In 2015, the European Commission published better regulation guidelines<sup>68</sup>, the aim of which was, among others, to review stakeholder consultation procedures established in 2002<sup>69</sup>. These guidelines fit in with the Union's model of "good governance" presented in the **White Paper** on governance in Europe<sup>70</sup>, binding since 2001.

Europeanists' research into the role of the new guidelines in reducing the social deficit leads to positive conclusions. Progress in applying the principle of citizen participation in shaping sectoral policies (thanks to mandatory inclusive consultations) and in the principle of openness and accountability (by increasing the transparency of the consultation process) has been noted. Standards of the Commission's information policy (in particular communication regarding planned consultations) and the appropriate definition of the target group (the issue of ensuring balance of interests of consultation participants) have been improved<sup>71</sup>.

The European citizens' initiative, introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, is the most extensively discussed instrument of participatory democracy. This instrument enables European Union citizens to co-create legal regulations at the European level. The Treaty declares that "not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States may take the initiative of inviting the European Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties"<sup>72</sup>.

The breakthrough of the European Citizens' Initiative is that citizens were granted the right to actively participate in decision-making processes. The aim of this solution was to take into account the new dimension of European democracy, to complement the set of rights related to Union citizenship, and to expand the public debate on European Union policy in the quest to create a real European public space. The implementation of this initiative was expected to contribute

<sup>67</sup> M. Witkowska, *Udział reprezentacji społeczeństw państw członkowskich w kształtowaniu treści polityki w wielopoziomowym systemie Unii Europejskiej*, "Społeczeństwo i Polityka", 2013, no. 4 (37), p. 46.

<sup>68</sup> European Commission, *Better Regulation Guidelines*, Commission Staff Working Document, SWD (2015) 111.

<sup>69</sup> European Commission, *Towards a Reinforced Culture of Consultation and Dialogue – General Principles and Minimum Standards for Consultation of Interested Parties by the Commission, Communication from the Commission*, COM(2002) 704.

<sup>70</sup> European Commission, *European Governance. A White Paper*, COM (2001) 428; OJ C 287, 12.10.2001.

<sup>71</sup> A. Vetulani-Cęgiel, *Nowe procedury konsultacji Komisji Europejskiej jako czynnik niwelujący deficyt demokracji w UE*, „Przegląd Europejski”, 2017, no. 3 (45), p. 132.

<sup>72</sup> Art. 11.4 of the Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007, OJ C 306.

significantly to the greater involvement of citizens and organised civil society in the development of various EU policies.

In accordance with the requirements of the Treaty, at the request of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council adopted in 2011 a regulation laying down the rules for the functioning of this new instrument and a procedure of its management<sup>73</sup>.

However, from the moment the regulation on the citizens' initiative became binding, serious concerns were expressed about the functioning of this instrument. The Parliament repeatedly called for reforming it to simplify and streamline the procedures. Finally, on 13 September 2017, the Commission presented a legislative proposal to review the European Citizens' Initiative<sup>74</sup>. As a result of interinstitutional negotiations conducted from September to December 2018, the Parliament and the Council reached a political agreement. The new provisions on the European Citizens' Initiative (Regulation (EU) No 2019/788) of 12 December 2018 replaced Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 and have been valid since 1 January 2020<sup>75</sup>.

It will be possible to assess the effectiveness of the European Citizens' Initiative in some time. In March 2020 there were 72 registered applications, 96 applications were waiting for registration, and 5 initiatives were successful.

*The Conference on the Future of Europe* is the latest initiative to debate with citizens of the European Union. The conference is scheduled to start on 9 May 2020 and last for two years. Its chairwoman Ursula von der Leyen announced the conference as a project that aims to provide Europeans with more opportunities to influence what the Union does and how it serves its citizens. The conference will be based on the experience of civil dialogues with the introduction of new elements the aim of which is to increase the range and opportunities for citizens to shape action at the EU level. Its goal is defined as enabling an open, pluralistic, transparent and structured debate with citizens from different backgrounds and representing different social groups. The Commission made a commitment to follow up on the results of the conference.

The proposal pertains to organising debates on two parallel topics. The first is to concern EU priorities and what the Union should achieve in the fight against climate change and environmental challenges, an economy serving people, social justice and equality, Europe's digital

<sup>73</sup> Regulation No. 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative, OJ L 65/1.

<sup>74</sup> Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European citizens' initiative (COM(2017)0482).

<sup>75</sup> Official website of the European Citizens' Initiative: [https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/home\\_en](https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/home_en).

transformation, promoting European values, increasing the EU's importance in the international arena, and strengthening the democratic foundations of the Union. The other theme is to focus on issues related to democratic processes and institutional issues.

The Commission is encouraging other EU institutions, national parliaments, social partners, local and regional authorities and civil society to participate in the conference.



## Conclusions

The level of democracy in the EU is associated with the classic dilemma of European integration regarding the choice between democratisation and efficiency.

This issue became particularly important when the phenomenon of the social democratic deficit in the European Union was noticed. It was defined as the remoteness of an ordinary citizen from the EU institutions, the occurrence of a lack of a sense of citizens' connection with the European integration process, awareness of the lack of impact on decisions taken at the European level. The crux of the social democratic deficit lies in the fact that the European Union makes decisions on a wide range of matters directly affecting citizens, but they are only indirectly and not fully entitled to influence these decisions.

The effects of the existence of the social deficit include: low turnout in European Parliament elections, ratification crises, a decrease in citizens' interest in and knowledge of EU topics.

An attempt to reform the European Union and bring it closer to the citizen has brought the concept of "new governance". Among the reasons for the development of this concept are the following: the increasing complexity of issues that the European Union must solve; the crisis of traditional government administration in general; the complexity of the division of competences between the national and EU levels; the need for better legitimacy of EU law through the participation of civil society in its creation.

Actions taken by the European Union to improve communication between citizens and the Union, increase the transparency of decision-making processes, and finally involve citizens in these processes are multi-faceted and have been consistently carried out by the EU institutions for a long time. However, they have not brought the expected success yet.

The initial opinion on the introduction of new forms of "participatory democracy" to the Treaty of Lisbon, including the European Citizens' Initiative, was that these solutions could significantly change the current situation. However, the evaluation of these instruments is not satisfactory. The EU institutions, being aware of how difficult it is to lead to the creation of a European public space, continue to undertake various activities in this direction. *The Conference on the Future of Europe* is an example of the activities of newly elected European institutions in the pursuit of "involving" Europeans in deciding on integration processes.

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# Chapter II

# Transparency, openness and access to public information in the European Union





*The notion of transparency has moved to the frontline of the public debate and is now high on the European political agenda. It is due first and foremost to the fact that public institutions which have sound transparent practises perform better and are valued more highly. Transparency is not an end in itself. Its aim is to promote the long term success of sound, time-tested policies by acquiring general public support. This may sound easy, but it is increasingly difficult because the public tends to become more demanding and less patient. Citizens want to have value for money. They pay taxes and demand good government in return. Whenever high expectations are shattered, citizens express outrage and dismay at the ballot box. Therefore, each political institution should be aware that transparency must be an integral part of its policy.*

Siim Kallas<sup>01</sup>

- How has the social democratic deficit in the European Union contributed to launching schemes for increasing the transparency of EU decision-making processes?
- What is the European Transparency Initiative and what elements does it contain?
- What is the transparency register?
- What are proactive and reactive information activities of the European institutions?
- How to understand the concept of e-democracy in relation to the European Union?

<sup>01</sup> S. Kallas, *The Need for a European Transparency Initiative*, Friedrich Naumann Foundation, Berlin 17.03.2015, Speech/05/180, p. 2–3.

**TRANSPARENCY REGISTER** a database that lists organisations that try to influence the law-making and policy implementation process of the EU institutions.

**LOBBYING IN THE EU** is the activity of representatives of diverse interest groups or lobbies who attempt to influence the executive and legislative authorities of the European Union through public relations or public affairs work.

The institutional and social deficits of democracy in the European Union have been recognised by the European institutions as serious obstacles to the further development of the European integration process. Due to the democratic deficit in the European Union and the decreasing support of Europeans for deepening integration as well as the increasing number of Eurosceptic and populist movements in the Member States, ways have been sought to counter these trends. Increasing the transparency and openness of the EU decision-making process, making use of available tools such as e-democracy has become one of the strategies to counteract this phenomenon.

Starting in 2005 a long-term campaign for transparency, openness and access to information, the then Vice-President of the European Commission, Siim Kallas, mentioned three reasons for starting it. Firstly, he noted that the decision-making process should be open, as it cannot remain deaf to the needs of the addressees of decisions taken in Brussels. Secondly, *transparency* is necessary to win social trust. Thirdly, *transparency* protects decision-makers against themselves and is a preventive measure against fraud and abuse of public money. Siim Kallas pointed mainly to the necessity to regulate the activities of interest groups lobbying high-ranking European politicians and officials. He explained his position as follows: *There is nothing wrong with lobbies because each decision-making process needs proper information from different angles. At the moment there are about 15,000 lobbyists established in Brussels, while around 2,600 interest groups have a permanent office in the capital of Europe. Lobbying activities are estimated to produce 60 to 90 million euro in annual revenues. But transparency is lacking*<sup>01</sup>.

## 2.1. European Transparency Initiative

In response to the need to increase the right of European citizens to information on the impact of interest groups on the European institutions, a **transparency register** of interest group was established. The purpose of the obligatory registration of lobbyists was to get to know who influences EU policy and what interests are represented at the EU level. The genesis of the transparency initiative is related to the negative perception of lobbying efforts of interest groups.

**Lobbying in the European Union** has a specific genesis and specificity. As an organisational strategy of interest groups, it evolves in Europe together with the process of European integration and changes occurring in the interest groups themselves.

<sup>01</sup> Ibidem, p. 4.

**COMMON MARKET** The European single market, the next stage of European economic integration established in 1986, ensuring the free movement of persons, capital, goods and services in the member and associated countries.

Factors affecting the specifics of lobbying in the EU include: expansion of areas in which decisions are taken at the supranational level and decision-making procedures enabling exerting influence. Lobbying is also subject to Europeanisation processes. As a consequence, the researchers of the phenomenon notice complex relations between the transfer of competences from the nation-state level to the supranational level, adaptation mechanisms and the Europeanisation of the lobbying activity.

The thesis that European integration affects the way interests are represented in the EU is associated with the emergence of a new, multi-layered system of interest group that reflects the EU's multi-level institutional set-up. Although the EU makes interest groups face a dilemma resulting from many possible ways to access its structures, it also offers these organisations a significant impact on the European legislative process, because it wants to make decisions by consensus. In addition, the development of the system of articulation and representation of interests at the European level is related to the fact that non-state actors have increasingly demanded their admission to the EU political process, and the availability of officials working in EU structures is relatively high compared to the state level. Pressure groups pursue political results that are close to their interests, and EU officials want to have a more influential position in EU decision-making process<sup>02</sup>.

There is a popular opinion that lobbying organisations contributed to the creation and functioning of the Communities, the introduction of most Community policies and the common market, as well as the implementation of the Economic and Monetary Union<sup>03</sup>. Already in 1958, E. Haas in his book on the integration of Western Europe<sup>04</sup> suggested that it was the activity of interest groups that could lead to the unification and development of the then European Economic Community and pointed to the transfer of competences of transnational interest groups<sup>05</sup> from national centres to the level of the European debate.

T.G. Grosse confirms that the fusion of geopolitical interests of the Member States and their economic interests supported the development of **the common market**, especially at the beginning of European integration. It also contributed to the delegation of state powers to technocratic institutions to improve the efficiency of the functioning of the common market and to maximise benefits for both government

<sup>02</sup> S. Hix, *System polityczny Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa 2010, p. 270.

<sup>03</sup> U. Kurczewska, M. Mołęda-Zdziech, *Lobbing w Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa 2002, p. 15; J. Greenwood, *Representing Interests in the European Union*, London 1997, p. 2.

<sup>04</sup> T. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe. Political, Economical and Social Forces, 1950–1957*, California 1958.

<sup>05</sup> R. Wiszniowski, *Grupy interesy w Unii Europejskiej* [in:] *Grupy interesu. Teorie i działanie*, Z. Machelski, L. Rubisz (eds.), Toruń 2003, p. 413.

elites and economic interests. As a result of the development of integration processes, there was a gradual increase in the importance of trans-European economic interests and the crystallisation of the objectives of the EU bureaucracy. Both types of interests contributed to further institutionalisation of the common market and strengthened technocratic management mechanisms. At the same time, the strongest economic interests were constrained by national regulations to a smaller and smaller degree, and also identified less and less with national political elites and social concerns<sup>06</sup>.

Initially, the so-called *fusionnel lobbying* was characteristic at the level of the European Union, when cooperation priorities were focused on specific goals, largely aimed at averting the subject of war and developing a common agricultural policy and abolishing customs duties. Then came *diplomatique lobbying* focusing on promoting a specific person or company; lobbyists were mainly employed by individual political parties. We have been dealing with *stratégique lobbying* since the late 1980s. At that time, lobbying offices were moved to Brussels, assuming that the possibility to influence EU decision-making processes was a condition for effective lobbying.

The European Commission clearly expressed its attitude towards interest groups in December 1992 in a communication “An open and structured dialogue between the Commission and special interest groups”<sup>07</sup>. It was explicitly stated that regular exchange of views with stakeholders can have a positive impact on its policy and the quality of its legislative proposals. In the next communication – “Europe 2010: A partnership for European renewal” – strategic goals for 2005–2009 were set stressing that European citizens must be able to actively participate in the process of building the European structure and that the concepts of consultation and participation are inextricably linked with the idea of partnership. In the context of the European Transparency Initiative, it was decided to define a minimum framework for these relationships. It is contained in three documents: “the Green Paper on the European Transparency Initiative” of 3 May 2006<sup>08</sup>; “Follow-up to the Green Paper ‘European Transparency Initiative’” of 21 March 2007<sup>09</sup>; the Communication “European transparency initiative – A framework

<sup>06</sup> T.G. Grosse, *Europa na rozdrożu*, Warszawa 2008, p. 463.

<sup>07</sup> European Commission, *An Open and Structured Dialogue between the Commission and Special Interest Groups* (93/C63/02). [http://ec.europa.eu/civil\\_society/interest\\_groups/docs/v\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/civil_society/interest_groups/docs/v_en.pdf) (accessed: 20.08.2012).

<sup>08</sup> European Commission, *The Green Paper on the European Transparency Initiative* (presented by the Commission) COM(2006) 194 final, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0194:FIN:PL:PDF> (accessed: 20.08.2012).

<sup>09</sup> European Commission, *The Communication of the Commission – Follow-up to the Green Paper European Transparency Initiative*, COM(2007)127 final, [http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/eti/docs/com\\_2007\\_127\\_final\\_pl.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/eti/docs/com_2007_127_final_pl.pdf) (accessed: 20.08.2012).

for relations with interest representatives (Register and Code of Conduct” of 27 May 2008).<sup>10</sup>

The European Commission Communication (“Follow-up to the Green Paper ‘European Transparency Initiative’”) was issued on 21 March 2007. Its purpose was to define a framework for lobbyists’ activities; feedback on the Commission’s minimum standards for consultation and mandatory disclosure of beneficiaries of EU funds under shared management.

The specificity of the Green Paper consisted in holding extensive consultations with European interest groups and EU citizens from May to August 2006, the opinions of the Committee of the Regions and the Socio-Economic Committee were also collected.

When starting the topic of lobbying<sup>11</sup>, the European Commission cleared up misunderstandings about terminology and clearly defined its understanding of lobbying as “*activities carried out with the objective of influencing the policy formulation and decision-making processes of the European institutions*”<sup>12</sup>; put forward proposals for creating a new lobbying framework that would include: motivational system of voluntary registration, incentives for registration; a common code of conduct for all lobbyists or common minimum requirements, and a system of monitoring and sanctions to be applied in the event of incorrect registration or breach of the code of conduct.

The activity referred to as “representing interest groups” that should be registered means activities the aim of which is to influence policy making and decision-making processes of the European institutions. Representation of interest groups does not cover activity consisting in legal and specialist consultancy if it concerns the client’s fundamental right to a fair trial, including the right to defence in administrative proceedings, done by lawyers or other specialists; activities of social partners as part of social dialogue (trade unions, employers’ organisations); activities resulting from the Commission’s direct recommendations, such as one-off or regular requests for information, access to data or preparation of an expert opinion, invitations to participate in public hearings, consultative committees or other such forums. Entities that should register include only those that carry out activities aimed at representing interest groups, not individuals. Public local,

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, *The Communication of the Commission – European Transparency Initiative – A Framework for Relations with Interest Representatives (Register and Code of Conduct)* – COM(2008)323 final, [http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/docs/323\\_pl.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/docs/323_pl.pdf) (accessed: 20.08.2012).

<sup>11</sup> See more [in:] S. Mrozowska, *Lobbying a wyzwania regionalne w Unii Europejskiej*, Gdańsk 2014; U. Kurczewska, M. Molęda-Zdziech, *Lobbying w Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa 2002; D. Dialer, M. Richter (eds.), *Lobbying in the European Union*, Springer 2019.

<sup>12</sup> European Commission, *The Communication of the Commission – Follow-up to the Green Paper...*, op. cit., p. 3.

regional, national and international authorities are not liable to registration.

Registrants should operate in accordance with the code of conduct drawn up by the Commission as a result of discussions with interested parties and public consultations. The Code was adopted by the European Commission following public consultations that took place between December 2007 and February 2008. It specified basic principles, such as transparency, honesty and integrity that lobbyists should follow in their dealings with the European Commission.

The Code contained the rules that the signatories of the Code were to observe:

1. identify themselves by name and by the entity(ies) they work for or represent;
2. not mislead third parties or EU employees regarding entry in the register;
3. declare the interests, and where applicable the clients or the members, which they represent;
4. ensure that, to the best of their knowledge, information they provide is unbiased, complete, up-to-date and not misleading;
5. not obtain or try to obtain information, or any decision, dishonestly
6. not induce EU staff to contravene rules and standards of behaviour applicable to them;
7. if employing former EU staff, respect their obligation to abide by the rules and confidentiality requirements which apply to them.

In the event of a breach of one or more of these rules, the Commission, as a result of an investigation procedure (based on a complaint that anyone can lodge to the Commission), could temporarily suspend the entry in the register for a limited period or until the registered entity rectified the situation. During the suspension period, all benefits of registration were also suspended. The Commission could also exclude an entity from the register in the event of a serious and prolonged violation of the Code.

In October 2009 the number of registered entities exceeded 2,000, in April 2010 – 2,657, in August 2012 – 5,219, in March 2020 – 11,669.

The problem of cooperation of EU institutions was solved, among others, by the establishment of a working group on interest groups by the European Parliament and the European Commission, which was tasked with setting up a joint register for these two institutions and reviewing a common code of conduct for interest groups.

In 2009, a website was launched that provided access to separate EC and EP registers. In 2011, a joint register of the Commission and Parliament<sup>13</sup> was created, in which the categories of lobbyists were changed, thus expanding the previous list of groups described with this term.

There is a single code of conduct in the common transparency register which is not identical to the earlier Commission's code. It contains the following rules for lobbyists:

- (a) always identify themselves by name and, by registration number, if applicable, and by the entity or entities they work for or represent; declare the interests, objectives or aims they promote and, where applicable, specify the clients or members whom they represent;
- (b) not obtain or try to obtain information or decisions dishonestly or by use of undue pressure or inappropriate behaviour;
- (c) not claim any formal relationship with the European Union or any of its institutions in their dealings with third parties, or misrepresent the effect of registration in such a way as to mislead third parties or officials or other staff of the European Union, or use the logos of EU institutions without express authorisation;
- (d) ensure that, to the best of their knowledge, information which they provide upon registration, and subsequently in the framework of their activities covered by the Register, is complete, up-to-date and not misleading; accept that all information provided is subject to review, and agree to co-operate with administrative requests for complementary information and updates;
- (e) not sell to third parties copies of documents obtained from EU institutions;
- (f) in general, respect, and avoid any obstruction to the implementation and application of, all rules, codes and good governance practices established by EU institutions;
- (g) not induce Members of the institutions of the European Union, officials or other staff of the European Union, or assistants or trainees of those Members, to contravene the rules and standards of behaviour applicable to them;
- (h) if employing former officials or other staff of the European Union, or assistants or trainees of Members of EU institutions, respect the obligation of such employees to abide by the rules and confidentiality requirements which apply to them;

<sup>13</sup> Transparency Register, <https://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/homePage.do?locale=en#en> (accessed: 01.04.2020).

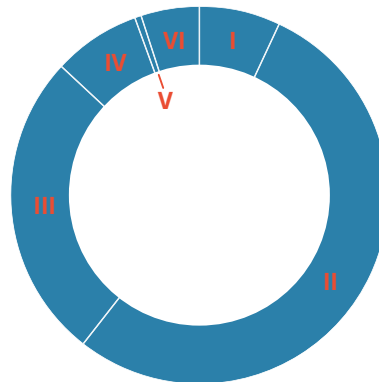
- (i) obtain the prior consent of the Member or Members of the European Parliament concerned as regards any contractual relationship with, or employment of, any individual within a Member's designated entourage;
- (j) observe any rules laid down on the rights and responsibilities of former Members of the European Parliament and the European Commission;
- (k) inform whomever they represent of their obligations towards the EU institutions<sup>14</sup>.

**THINK TANKS** public-policy research analysis and engagement organisations that generate policy-oriented research, analyses, and advice on domestic and international issues, thereby enabling policy makers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy.

“Transparency register” – the joint register of lobbyists of the European Commission and the European Parliament divides organisations and self-employed people involved in the development and implementation of European Union policies into six groups, together with the characteristics they must meet to be included in one of [them](#).

#### On 23.04.2020, there are **11632** registrants in the register

I Professional consultancies/law firms/self-employed consultants	836
II In-house lobbyists and trade/business/professional associations	6208
III Non-governmental organisations	3077
IV Think tanks, research and academic institutions	877
V Organisations representing churches and religious communities	59
VI Organisations representing local, regional and municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.	575



<sup>14</sup> Annex III: Code of Conduct, Agreement between the European Parliament and the European Commission on the transparency register for organisations and self-employed individuals engaged in EU policy-making and policy implementation, “Official Journal of the European Union” 2014, L277/11.



Its purpose is to register and control organisations and self-employed individuals involved in the formulation and implementation of European Union policy. It was created on the basis of existing registration systems established and launched by the European Parliament in 1996 and by the European Commission in June 2008. It covers all types of activities undertaken to exert a direct or indirect influence on the processes of policy development or implementation and decision making by the EU institutions, regardless of the used means or channels of communication, for example outsourcing of services, the media, contracts with professional intermediaries, analytical centres, platforms, forums, civic campaigns and initiatives. These activities include, among others contacts with Parliament Members, officials or other employees of the EU institutions, preparation and submission of letters, information materials or documents for discussions or containing positions, organisation of events, meetings or promotional activities and social events or conferences to which Members of the Parliament, officials or other staff of the EU institutions are invited. The above activities also include voluntary contributions and participation in formal consultations or hearings on envisaged EU legislative or other legal acts and other open consultations.

After the creation of the transparency register, civic organisations working to increase transparency have repeatedly stressed that the weakness of the register is that it is not binding for all EU institutions, and that meetings between lobbyists and EU politicians and officials are not limited to only registered users.

On 25 November 2014, the Juncker Commission already gave a boost to transparency by adopting two Decisions requiring publication of information concerning meetings held by Commissioners, members of their cabinets and Directors-General with organisations and self-employed individuals. A new version of the EU Transparency Register was launched on 27 January 2015. This *second generation* of the Register implements the provisions of the revised Inter-institutional Agreement signed between the European Parliament and the European Commission in April 2014<sup>15</sup>. The new system brings changes to the way human resources invested in lobbying are declared, requires additional information about involvement in EU committees, forums, intergroups or similar structures, and legislative files currently followed; it also extends the requirement to declare estimated costs related to lobbying to all registrants.

<sup>15</sup> European Commission, *Commission and Parliament Implement New Rules on Transparency Register*, Press Release 27.01.2015.

Additionally, a streamlined “alerts & complaints” procedure allows for greater scrutiny and more efficient treatment of allegedly misleading information, and new incentives are given to increase the added value of registering, such as a requirement to register for all those seeking to meet with Commissioners, Cabinet Members or Directors-General or for any organisation wishing to speak at hearings organised by the European Parliament.

On 1 March 2016, the Commission launched a 12-week public consultation to gather input on the regime for registration of interest representatives who seek to influence the work of the EU institutions and on its development into a mandatory lobby register covering the European Parliament and Council of the European Union as well as the Commission. The justification for the decision to start work and a joint mandatory register for the most important European institutions was presented by then first Vice-President Frans Timmermans. He said then: *This Commission is changing the way we work by consulting stakeholders more and by being open about who we meet and why. We need to go further by establishing a mandatory register covering all three institutions, ensuring full transparency on the lobbyists that seek to influence EU policy making. To help us get this proposal right, we hope to receive as much feedback as possible from citizens and stakeholders from across Europe on how the current system works and how it should evolve. A European Union that is more transparent and accountable is a Union that will deliver better results for citizens*<sup>16</sup>.

On 28 September 2016, the European Commission proposed an Inter-institutional Agreement establishing a mandatory transparency register covering the Parliament, Council and Commission, with a view to ensuring the transparency of lobbying activities across the three institutions, and building on the existing transparency register of the Parliament and Commission<sup>17</sup>.

The Conference of Presidents nominated Sylvie Guillaume, Vice-President responsible for the Transparency Register, and Danuta Hübner, Chair of the Constitutional Affairs Committee, as Parliament’s lead negotiators.

First political meeting ahead of Transparency Register negotiations took place on 06.09.2017, the second on 12.12.2017. In turn, inter-institutional negotiations began on 17.04.2018, the second meeting was held on 12.06.2018, and the third on 14.02.2019.

<sup>16</sup> European Commission, *Commission Launches Consultation on Transparency Register, inviting Stakeholder Views on a Future Mandatory System for all EU Institutions*, Press Release 01.03.2016.

<sup>17</sup> European Commission, *Proposal for a Interinstitutional Agreement on a mandatory Transparency Register*, COM(2016) 627 final.

In January 2019, the European Parliament adopted provisions increasing transparency<sup>18</sup>. The key actors of the legislative process – MEPs steering legislation through parliament, known as rapporteurs, shadow rapporteurs and committee chairs – will be required to publish online all scheduled meetings with interest representatives named on the Transparency Register. Other MEPs are nevertheless also encouraged to publish online any meetings they hold with interest representatives.

In February 2019 negotiators agreed to continue discussions on the technical aspects of the instrument package for the transparency register in order to reach a political agreement between the three institutions as soon as possible.

## 2.2. Access to public information

Transparency and involvement of society in decision-making is implemented through two types of information activities: information proactive and reactive (on request) disclosure. Proactive Disclosure means sharing information by public institutions without a request, while reactive means sharing information on a citizen's request in an application mode (**Box 1**).

### Box 1

#### Access to information is a right with two parts:

##### I. Proactive (Active Transparency)

The positive obligation of public bodies to provide, to publish and to disseminate information about their main activities, budgets and policies so that the public can know what they are doing, can participate in public matters and can control how public authorities are behaving

##### II. Reactive (Responding to Requests)

The right of all persons to ask public officials for information about what they are doing and any documents they hold and the right to receive an answer. The majority of information held by public bodies should be available, but there are some cases where the information won't be available in order to protect privacy, national security or commercial interests.

ATI/ATPI access to information/access to public information.

Source: B. Orme, *Supporting Access to Information: A Practical Guide for EU Delegations*, Brussels 2018, p. 95.

<sup>18</sup> European Parliament, *European Parliament Approves More Transparency and Efficiency in its Internal Rules*, Press Release, 31.01.2019, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190123IPR24128/ep-approves-more-transparency-and-efficiency-in-its-internal-rules> (accessed: 12.02.2019).

RTI wright to inform.

Proactive publication of information means that public institutions publish information on the legal basis of their operation, their competences, persons or bodies responsible for contact with them, action plans and strategies, legal provisions regulating their operation, forms and amounts of financing (spending public money) and public participation mechanisms and procedures. Proactive information publication increases the institutions' (governments') effectiveness in information management, it provides feedback on issues that are socially relevant, which in turn should result in better, more factual decision-making within each institution, and improves the efficiency of communication between public bodies.

Active publication of information and access to documents is an essential element of the transparency policy of the European institutions. Under Article 15 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union<sup>19</sup>, citizens and residents of EU countries have a right of access to the documents of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission. This means citizens can obtain documents held by the Commission and other institutions, including legislative information, official documents, historical archives and meeting minutes and agendas. The treaty recognises the citizen's right to seek and receive information. Freedom to receive information prevents public authorities from interrupting the flow of information to individuals and freedom to impart information applies to communications by individuals<sup>20</sup>.

In 2017 the European Parliament issued a statement signed by non-governmental organisations, the scientific and journalistic community to strengthen openness and transparency in the European Union, recognising four issues as essential<sup>21</sup>:

### Decision-making should be accountable and accessible

Every EU citizen should be able to check who is responsible for decisions taken in the European Union, how the interactions between the EU institutions and Member States work, and how citizens can actively participate in the development of policy and legislation. The decision-making process is recorded and published, in particular meeting minutes, briefings, legal advice and research materials that

<sup>19</sup> Consolidated Versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2012/C 326/01, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C\\_.2012.326.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2012:326:TOC#C\\_2012326EN.01004701](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2012.326.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2012:326:TOC#C_2012326EN.01004701) (accessed: 12.04.2020).

<sup>20</sup> Ch.A. Bishop, *Access to Information As a Human Right*, El Paso 2012, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> European Parliament, *Key Transparency Challenges in the European Union*, Statement, 28.09.2017, <https://www.access-info.org/wp-content/uploads/Key-Transparency-Challenges-Statement-Concluding-Right-to-Know-Day-2017.pdf> (accessed: 09.03.2020).

were the basis for making decisions. Moreover, social consultations are obligatory in the case of rulings that affect people, their rights and the environment.

### **There should be public scrutiny in the spending of public funds and the use of public resources**

Detailed and available reporting on public expenditure, including projects, information on funds spent at the national level is made public. A European institution responsible for monitoring the correct use of funds is the European Court of Auditors<sup>22</sup>, which publishes reports on its audits.

### **Transparency for the powerful to avoid conflicts of interest, corruption and other threats**

Information necessary for the public control of power or the spending of public funds including the names of individuals, salaries, allowances, and curriculum vitae is made public. Whistleblowers who reveal wrongdoing or information in the public interest are protected and regulation of lobbying ensures transparency of the activities of lobbyists when trying to influence the decision-making process.

### **Transparency is a fundamental right that should be implemented properly**

Transparency laws across Europe are a guarantor for the exercise of such human rights as the right to freedom of expression, and media freedom. Disclosure of information should be timely to enable public participation in decision-making, all requests and responses should be published. Mechanisms for appealing denials – such as information commissioners – should be available, accessible, independent, free of charge, rapid, and binding.

Since 2005, the Europa.eu domain, which groups websites of all EU institutions, has been used by the EU institutions for online communication. It contains 230 websites which were visited by 322 million unique visitors in 2018<sup>23</sup>. Out of this, one third of the visits (101,607,693) were paid to (in ascending order): EC Info and political sites, Eur-Lex, EURES (The European Job Mobility Portal) and European Union website (europa.eu).

<sup>22</sup> European Court of Auditors, [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/european-court-auditors\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/european-court-auditors_en) (accessed: 09.03.2020).

<sup>23</sup> Europa Web Guide, <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/WEBGUIDE/Europa+Web+Guide> (accessed: 01.03.2020).

**PUBLIC SECTOR INFORMATION** any content or part thereof, regardless of how it has been recorded, in particular in paper, electronic, sound, visual or audio-visual form, which is held by a public institution.

**OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS** all information recorded in any form, drawn up or received and held by public authorities.

Each of the EU institutions maintains an electronic register of documents which can be accessed directly or in an application **mode**. The application procedure concerns access to documents from before 2001, as well as few documents to which access may be restricted, which are not directly accessible in the register. Access to such documents is free of charge, and the application submitted in an electronic form does not have to be justified. After examining the request, the relevant institution will provide the applicant with an answer and justification within from 3 to 15 working days.

### Important registers of EU documents

Publications, reports, statistics and a library of reports and documents that come from EU-funded sources can be found on the official website of the European Union<sup>24</sup>. The register of documents is available in 24 official languages. The register contains the authentic electronic version of the EU Official Journal and other EU **official documents**. The search engine (<https://op.europa.eu/pl/more-search-options>) offers direct access to the documents with advanced search options and cafeteria thematic areas, EU institutions, dates, authors and formats of searched documents. Another way to select the documents you need is a list of all EU institutions on the web site ([https://europa.eu/european-union/documents-publications/official-documents\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/documents-publications/official-documents_en)) with active links to the institutions. Access to documents in 24 languages is offered by: the European Parliament – register of documents, agenda, meeting minutes, meeting reports, legal texts, resolutions; the European Council – presidency conclusions; the Council of the European Union – register of documents and minutes and recordings of meetings of the Council; the European Commission – register of documents, Green Papers, White Papers, Commission Work Program, Minutes/agenda of the weekly proceedings of the European Commission and register of comitology documents; the Court of Justice of the European Union – judgements and annual reports; the European Court of Auditors – reports and opinions; the European Ombudsman – decisions, recommendations and reports; the European Data Protection Supervisor – opinions. The following institutions can be accessed only in the English language: the European External Action Service – the annual report; the European Economic and Social Committee – the document register and opinions; the Committee of the Regions – the document register; the European Investment Bank – publications, and the European Central Bank – the annual report. The review of only the registers of documents of the EU

<sup>24</sup> Documents and Publications, [https://europa.eu/european-union/documents-publications\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/documents-publications_en) (accessed: 01.03.2020).

institutions refers the citizen to 32 collections of document databases from 13 EU institutions. In addition, positions, decisions, statements, statistical data, financial statements are published.

### Important initiatives facilitating looking for information

In order to facilitate contact and make it easier for citizens to ask questions, the European Parliament has launched the initiative “Citizens’ Enquiries Unit” (Ask EP), with a form to ask questions available in 24 official languages<sup>25</sup>. In 2019, 68 thousand citizens used this form of communication, asking questions directly, but also commenting on actions and even sharing their opinions<sup>26</sup>. Similarly, the initiative of the Council of the European Union “Ask a question”<sup>27</sup> has an electronic inquiry form and address details.

The Publications Office of the EU (Publications Office)<sup>28</sup> is an inter-institutional office based in Luxembourg, whose task is to publish and disseminate publications of the institutions of the European Union. The Publications Office manages a number of websites providing access to official information and data from the EU, including legal publications (EUR-Lex<sup>29</sup>), EU thematic publications (reports, research, studies)<sup>30</sup>, Tenders Electronic Daily (TED)<sup>31</sup> – the European public procurement register and search engine, or CORDIS<sup>32</sup> containing results of scientific and research projects funded by the EU.

Finding data is a considerable challenge. A lot of “data” are available online, but the way they are presented limits their openness. Public institutions produce and collect huge amounts of data which can be a foundation for the creation of innovative goods, services and products that stimulate the development of the economy by creating new jobs and encouraging investment in the creative industry. Access of persons interested to data or – more broadly – to information is the basic instrument of social control over the state’s activity, increases the accountability and transparency of administrative activities. Open

<sup>25</sup> The Citizens’ Enquiries Unit (Ask EP) provides information about the European Parliament, its activities, powers and organisation. It cannot provide legal advice or adopt political positions, <https://www.secure.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/askEP.html> (accessed: 02.02.2020).

<sup>26</sup> Citizens’ Enquiries to the European Parliament in 2019, <https://epthinktank.eu/2020/01/16/citizens-enquiries-to-the-european-parliament-in-2019/> (accessed: 02.02.2020).

<sup>27</sup> European Council, Council of the European Union, *Ask a Question*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/contact/general-enquiries/> (accessed: 04.03.2020).

<sup>28</sup> Publication Office of the European Union, *EU Who is Who*, <https://op.europa.eu/pl/web/who-is-who> (accessed: 07.03.2020).

<sup>29</sup> EUR-Lex, *Access to European Union Law*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html?locale=en> (accessed: 09.03.2020).

<sup>30</sup> Publication Office of the European Union, *EU Publications*, <https://op.europa.eu/en/web/general-publications/publications> (accessed: 16.03.2020).

<sup>31</sup> TED – tender electronic day. Supplement to the Official Journal of the EU, <https://ted.europa.eu/TED/main/HomePage.do> (accessed: 19.03.2020).

<sup>32</sup> European Commission, *CORDIS. EU Research Results*, <https://cordis.europa.eu/en> (accessed: 20.03.2020).

**REUSE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION** the use of public sector information by natural persons, legal entities and organisational units without legal personality for commercial or non-commercial purposes other than the original purpose for which the information has been created.

**PUBLIC DATA** numbers and individual events or objects at the lowest possible level of aggregation that have not been processed by the public administration into reports, charts, etc. and have not been given an appropriate context or interpretation.

data are the last stage in the information production chain where governments measure and collect data, process and share them internally and publish them in an open manner. Data made public can improve knowledge of legislative and executive powers and thus provide more transparent access to law. It is possible to follow the course of the public debate and information about one's representatives on the basis of data collected from the Sejm. Data also build knowledge about local and national problems and phenomena, e.g. ecological ones (air pollution with particulate matter 2.5) or social ones (the number of people entitled to carer's allowance). What is more, open access to such information increases the transparency of administration activities and enables the involvement of scientific, non-governmental and expert communities in cooperation in solving socio-economic problems and shaping public policies.

One of the best developed schemes for open access to information is the European Union Open Data Portal (EU ODP)<sup>33</sup> which provides access to data published by EU institutions and bodies. All data available in this catalogue can be freely used for commercial and non-commercial purposes. The EU ODP was set up in 2012, following the European Commission decision<sup>34</sup> on the **reuse** of documents, data and studies produced by public institutions. All EU institutions as well as the Member States are obliged to make their data publicly available on open data portals. These data can be used repeatedly by various entities (educational institutions, economic institutions, ordinary citizens) without restrictions resulting from copyrights. Data made available include geographic, geopolitical and financial data, statistics, election results, legal acts, data on crime, health, the environment, transport and scientific research. For example, since 31.12.2019 to the present, data on infection and death due to COVID-19 (Coronavirus data<sup>35</sup>), coming from 201 countries have been updated, which anyone can download and process freely. The EU ODP catalogues contain information from 35 countries, available in 84 thematic inventories and with over 1 million datasets.

The European **data** strategy<sup>36</sup> is a very prospective project at the interface of transparency and socio-economic development factors.

<sup>33</sup> European Union Open Data Portal, *Access to European Union Data Portal*, <https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/home?> (accessed: 12.02.2020).

<sup>34</sup> European Commission, *Creating Value through Open Data: Study on the Impact of Re-use of Public Data Resources*, 2015, [https://www.europeandataportal.eu/sites/default/files/edp\\_creating\\_value\\_through\\_open\\_data\\_0.pdf](https://www.europeandataportal.eu/sites/default/files/edp_creating_value_through_open_data_0.pdf) (accessed: 11.02.2020).

<sup>35</sup> EU Open Data Portal, *COVID-19 Coronavirus Data*, <https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/covid-19-coronavirus-data> (accessed: 12.02.2020).

<sup>36</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. European data strategy*, COM(2020) 66 final.



The aim of the European data strategy is to create a true single data market in which personal data as well as non-personal data of things, including sensitive business data, will be secure, but also accessible to enterprises, innovators and public authorities. Given the progressing digitisation and development of knowledge and services based on data transmission, open access to data will contribute to socio-economic development, for example the use of jet engine sensors to collect and transfer data to increase their efficiency, the utilisation of a large number of data from the operation of wind farms to maximise the use of produced energy. The Commission estimates that a real-time navigation system aimed at limiting traffic jams can save up to 730 million hours. In labour costs, this corresponds to EUR 20 milliard. The European Commission has been holding online public<sup>37</sup> consultations since February 2020 to canvass views on the single data market. The consultations will end on 31 May 2020 and the results are expected to increase the possibilities for accessing and reusing data.

The number of EU institutions, the complexity of the decision-making process and competences of individual institutions combined with issues and terms limit an ordinary citizen's possibilities to search effectively. Although the institutions fulfil the requirement of having a public register and access, this process is not easy due to the complexity of the European structure. Dedicated initiatives facilitating looking for information are a venture which is to expedite the navigation through numerous documents and registers.

### 2.3. E-democracy in the European Union

Due to the fact that interactive communication is unlimited in space and time, the Internet has become a tool enabling the creation of a new and improved public sphere that crosses national borders. It has a possibility to provide, for example, civil society entities with new opportunities to make their demands visible or to improve communication between constituencies and their political representatives. Recent years have brought a more detailed empirical analysis of the importance of the Internet for political communication. Given the widespread use of political blogs and social media by various political actors, there is no doubt that the Web has become a new space for political exchange alongside the media. Political actors can address their communities and followers directly and post comments and messages on online platforms and social media (and vice versa). The mass media have

<sup>37</sup> European Commission, *Policies, Information and Services. Online Consultation – A European Strategy for Data*, <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/online-consultation-european-strategy-data> (accessed: 12.04.2020).

created Internet information platforms and use the Internet as a source of news production<sup>38</sup>. The European Union is also not indifferent to this new space of political communication.

E-participation and in a broader sense e-democracy – the practice of democracy with the support of digital media in political communication and participation – are seen as another possible remedy for democratic shortcomings at the European level (as well as at local and national levels). From the start, and especially in the 1990s, the expectations for renewing democracy through new media were far reaching<sup>39</sup>.

The EU institutions have repeatedly pointed to the great potential of e-democracy for citizens' presence in the democratic system and that e-democracy should be extended to all aspects of citizen participation in political processes, in particular three types of interaction between administrative bodies and citizens, primarily digital information, digital consultation and decision making in digital form. In turn, e-voting could be introduced throughout Europe as a time-, effort- and money-saving alternative to traditional voting practices.

Among the barriers to implementing e-democracy, the European Parliament noted, however, such issues as: the digital divide and digital illiteracy of a large number of Europeans; the possibility of electoral fraud; a problem with the protection of privacy and personal data or the need to take into account democratic processes. In the case of the latter, the problem may be that democratic procedures involve extensive debates and reconciliation of different points of view, while the Web is not always an ideal place for rational debates and delving into arguments. It is not always possible, online, to distinguish between public opinion and viewpoints that seem to be held by the majority because of the role the most active Internet users play<sup>40</sup>. Another problem can be a growing tendency to use information and the Web to promote private interests, which may lead to a situation in which a particular interest is considered erroneously as a general interest.

At the same time, looking for justifications for the introduction of e-democracy tools, the European Parliament firstly pointed to the need for the European Union to react to the growing indifference and lack of confidence of Europeans in democracy and its functioning, and

<sup>38</sup> See more [in:] L. Hennen I. van Keulen, I. Korthagen, G. Aichholzer, R. L ndner, R.  Nielsen, *European E-democracy in Practice*, Springer 2020.

<sup>39</sup> European Parliament, *Prospect for e-democracy in Europe. Study summary, In-Depth Analysis, Science and Technology Options Assessment*, 2018, p. 5, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603213/EPRS\\_STU\(2018\)603213\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603213/EPRS_STU(2018)603213_EN.pdf) (accessed: 12.02.2020).

<sup>40</sup> R. J uregui Atondo, Report of Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament on E-democracy in the European Union: Potential and Challenges of 16 February 2017 (2016/2008(INI)), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2017-0041\\_PL.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2017-0041_PL.html) (accessed: 12.11.2019).

secondly stressed that *the wave of new digital communication tools and open and collaborative platforms has given rise to a new paradigm for communication, discussion and social participation in public affairs and swept away the monopoly of traditional media as the conduit for relations between citizens and politics*, which cannot be ignored<sup>41</sup>.

The aim of introducing e-democracy in the European Union was not to establish an alternative democratic system through electronic democracy, but to promote, ensure and increase transparency, accountability, responsiveness, participation, consideration, inclusion, accessibility, subsidiarity and social cohesion.

Box 2

## E-democracy in the European Union

**Electronic administration** means the use of ICTs by the public administration in the public sector, in particular for the electronic transmission of information to citizens and the provision of services to them (e.g. the possibility to pay a fine for a road traffic offense).

**Electronic management** means the use of ICTs by the public administration to create communication networks enabling various entities that have something to say to participate in the preparation of public strategies (e.g. electronic consultation with citizens to decide if a specific speed limit should be changed or local budget consultation).

**Electronic democracy** means the use of ICTs to create networks for citizen consultation and participation (e.g. electronic parliament, electronic initiative, electronic voting, electronic petition, electronic consultation, etc).

Source: Own study.

Looking for possibilities of the increased use of virtual space, the European Parliament systematically commissions conducting detailed studies on the future of e-democracy in the European Union.

In 2011, the study report entitled *E-public, e-participation and e-voting in Europe – prospects and challenges* was published. The results did not confirm that e-democracy could be an immediate and effective tool to counter problems with democracy that the EU had at that time.

**E-VOTING** is an election system that allows a voter to record his or her secure and secret ballot electronically.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem.

**E-BUDGETING** is used to address any ICT application or tool that is used for budgetary functions, procedures, or services across the budgetary cycle (planning, programming, budgeting, appropriations, control, and evaluation of financial resources).

The authors of the report wanted to check, among others, whether the introduction of electronic voting would increase Europeans' participation in elections. A decade ago, they found neither convincing theoretical evidence nor solid empirical evidence that could confirm this expectation. In addition, it was shown that people who would exercise the electronic voting option would still vote in elections. In the case of young people who are expected to use the Internet voting option because they are more familiar with internet technology and use it extensively for everyday purposes, no empirical evidence for this effect was found either. The argument that electronic voting is more convenient because it can be carried out from anywhere and at any time proved to be unconvincing.

The study results also noted technological issues which play an important role in the debate on electronic voting. While advocates of electronic voting were optimistic that secure and reliable systems would be available soon, its opponents argued that electronic voting would never reach an acceptable level of security and reliability, as hackers would always find ways to manipulate the system.

The report also pointed to one more issue. Elections are the foundation of representative democracy, and the main challenge is to transfer democratic principles of equality, direct, universal, secret and free electoral rights into the digital era. Electronic voting systems that cannot fully cover all these aspects should in principle be rejected.

In 2018, another report on this subject commissioned by the European Parliament was published. The study was carried out by the European Technology Assessment Group (ETAG), and managed by the Scientific Foresight Unit (STOA) within the Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services (DG EPRS) of the European Parliament. As a result, the team of researchers produced recommendations and suggestions for new forms of e-participation in the European Union. Among them were the following:

- Conduct experiments with participatory budgeting in relation to the structural funds. **E-budgeting** produces the strongest results when it comes to impacts on decision making. Among the gains identified are: increased transparency, improved public services, accelerated administrative operations, better cooperation among public administration units, and enhanced responsiveness.
- Expand online engagement with MEPs beyond petitions. More specifically, a public means of posing questions to MEPs and their staff and a blogging functionality where MEPs can share work-in-progress and receive input from interested citizens would be useful. For such additional tools to have an effect on

the relationship between European citizens and their MEPs, they would have to be both technically and strategically integrated with social media and mass media.

- Create a platform for monitoring Member State actions during Council decisions. Much of the information needed to establish such accountability is already available, either through the common EU webplatform, civil society services such as votewatch.eu, and the web portals of national governments and parliaments. However, this places an unfair, and for most people prohibitive, burden of information gathering and analysis on citizens; key information is simply not available through ordinary channels.
- Explore the crowdsourcing of policy ideas for the Commission. Early stage policy development could benefit from an open and frank sharing of ideas between citizens, Commissioners and their staff. A crowdsourcing mechanism could help to facilitate interactions between citizens and decision makers in an informal way. It would be a platform to gather ideas for policy formulation downstream by giving decision makers and their staff a forum for gaining immediate feedback on tentative ideas and considerations<sup>42</sup>.

In turn, since 2009, The European Commission, focusing on electronic participation and electronic management, has held public online consultations and impact assessments, mainly before proposing legislation, to increase public participation and improve the European governance system.

The Commission's openness to e-democracy and e-participation is related to the assumption that the development of ICTs can contribute, on the one hand, to the extension and development of electronic administration as a means of pursuing deliberative democracy with greater participation, and, on the other hand, to digital participation as part of a single digital market strategy. These types of arguments were also the basis for the creation of *PLAN D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate*, that is the decision to launch the European Citizens' Initiative.

Research shows that stimulating the creation of a European public sphere through e-participation and reaping the benefits of e-participation potential for strengthening democracy at the EU level require an integrated approach and it is forecast that this process will not be easy as it requires not only Europeans' acceptance, knowledge of and access to the technology, but also practice in the proper use of

<sup>42</sup> I. Korthagen, I. van Keulen, L. Hennen, G. Aichholzer, G. R. R. Lindner, K. Goos, R.Ø. Nielsen, *Prospect for E-democracy in Europe...*, op. cit., p. 33-34.

tools of this type. Paradoxically, the COVID-19 pandemic “forced” millions of Europeans to immediately improve their skills in using ICTs to meet basic needs. However, participation in public life is still a second-order need, which may result in lower motivation to use ICT tools in the public sphere. This does not mean, however, that technological progress will not bring solutions that will eliminate all barriers identified so far in the use of electronic communication by ordinary people, and thus contribute to the creation of a European public sphere in the dimension desired by the European institutions.

## Conclusions

In democracy, it is important that people have access to a wide range of information so that they can participate in making decisions about matters that affect them. This means not only participation in elections, but also engagement and the right to make decisions also between elections. Governments that involve citizens in decision-making serve the public interest best, but if this process is to be possible they must ensure transparency.

In the European Union, transparency is considered one of the main methods of mitigating the “democratic deficit”. That is why the European institutions have undertaken and are undertaking a wide variety of activities to increase its level and provide Europeans with access to information on European topics. To this end, open data tools and databases are also created.

The EU institutions care, among others, about publishing and updating registers and official documents. However, exercising the right to seek information is not easy. The number of EU institutions, the diversity of their competences, and the complexity of the EU decision-making process, in combination with specific issues they deal with, are a huge barrier to the effective search for information by an ordinary citizen. In this context, Internet technologies determine the possibilities of using ATPL.

The Internet as a virtual space is also seen as an opportunity to create a European public sphere understood as a space for social debate and political exchange, which at the same time enables the control of the European institutions and informs Europeans about their activities, thus satisfying their expectations and requirements. Shaping public opinion and exchanging views on European topics takes place currently almost exclusively in the national mass media. Trans-European media are of marginal importance. That is why the EU institutions’ search for an antidote to the democratic deficit also includes ICT potential.

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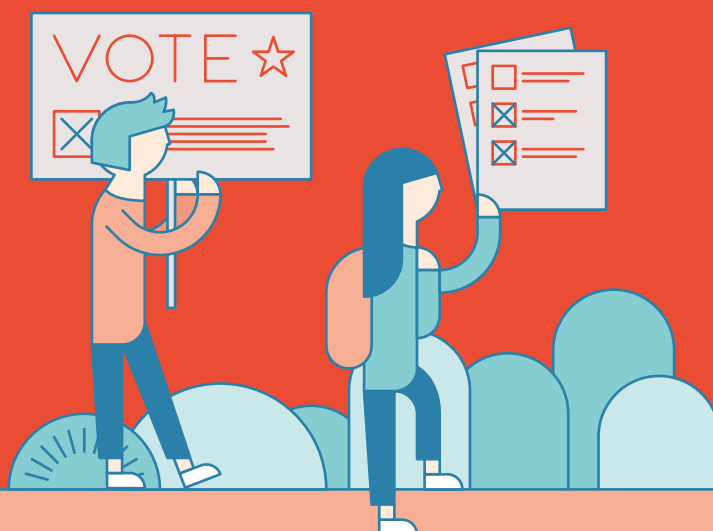
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# Chapter III

## European Youth – the citizens *in actu*



*Young people have extremely strong values of tolerance and social cohesion. They aspire to a life of dignity for all. They are committed to peace. You are champions for development and change in communities and societies. You make essential contributors to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.*

Antonio Tajani<sup>43</sup>

- Who are young Europeans today?
- What does their participation in democracy consist in?
- What forms of participation do they use most often?
- What activities, programmes and initiatives are undertaken by the European institutions to increase young people's commitment, independence and solidarity?

According to the new EU strategy for young people, *the success of European integration depends on the involvement of young Europeans. What is more, Europe cannot afford wasted talent, social exclusion or disengagement among its youth. Young people should not only be architects of their own life, but also contribute to positive change in society*<sup>44</sup>.

The engagement of young people is an element of **civic culture** which is made up of working in civil society organisations (sports, cultural associations, etc.), through “parapolitical” activities such as campaigns, volunteering and social activism, up to politics in a more formal, official sense such as party membership or participation (active or/and passive) in elections. Civic cultures – which are therefore broader than political cultures – depend on such processes as public interaction, trust and sharing of time, knowledge, information for the benefit of the community. **Civic engagement** means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination

**CIVIC CULTURE** social activities in public space for the benefit of others.

**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT** a broad set of practices and attitudes of involvement in social and political life that converge to increase the health of a democratic society.

<sup>43</sup> A. Tajani, Speech for the EU-UN Conference on Promoting Youth in Peacebuilding, 23–24.05.2018, [http://www.epgencms.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/f7bc734c-93cb-45ed-97cd-675d4b8ef10d/Speeches\\_YPS\\_conference.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2ER8NHPZ6Py2MkSWdGiqf-0NZcySKsVIXhQNgcqzqZcMhCSLnaV3uYN-AY](http://www.epgencms.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/f7bc734c-93cb-45ed-97cd-675d4b8ef10d/Speeches_YPS_conference.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2ER8NHPZ6Py2MkSWdGiqf-0NZcySKsVIXhQNgcqzqZcMhCSLnaV3uYN-AY) (accessed: 01.03.2020).

<sup>44</sup> *Engaging, Connecting and Empowering Young People: A New EU Youth Strategy*, European Commission, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0269&from=en> (accessed: 21.02.2020).

of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes<sup>45</sup>. It is these qualities, sometimes called “social capital”, that determine the strength of citizenship and the success of the community. Youth engagement is used to refer to a diverse array of activities including – but not limited to – volunteer work, charity projects, youth councils, youth media projects, voting, work on political campaigns, and social movement activity<sup>46</sup>.

### 3.1. Youth in action, priorities and social dimensions

The European Union has 513,471,676 citizens, including 86,776,713 young people aged 15–29, which means that on average youth constitutes 16.9% of the population of the entire Union<sup>47</sup>. The smallest percentage of young people is in Bulgaria – 14.9% and the largest in Iceland – 21.7%. In conformity with the demographic trends of aging Europe, we are observing a decline in the share of young people in the EU, in 2008 youth accounted for 19% of the population, in 1990 – 22% of the inhabitants of the European Union. According to the Youth Development Index (YDI)<sup>48</sup>, European youth has a very high youth development ranking.

The situation of young people (15–29) is significantly different from that of their predecessors two decades ago. The age limit of the social definition of adulthood has shifted, which is determined by living in a relationship/marriage, having children, living independently and having a permanent job. In the EU, 68% of people aged 15–24 still study compared to 49% in 1987 and 58% in 1995. The average age of a young person entering the labour market has increased from 18 to 20 years. Due to the economic crisis of 2008–10, young people were much more vulnerable to unemployment. In 2011, the youth unemployment rate in Europe reached 20.7% – equal to approximately five million unemployed young people. In 2018, 16.5% of the 20–34 olds in the EU were neither in employment nor in education or training (‘NEETs’)<sup>49</sup>.

Despite economic recovery and lower unemployment, there are still inequalities between generations. For the first time since World War II, a real threat has appeared that the current generation of young

<sup>45</sup> R.D. Putnam, R. Leonardi, R., Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton 1993, p. 83.

<sup>46</sup> N.S. Kawecka, J.K. Taft, *Youth Engagement: The Civic-Political Lives of Children and Youth*, vol. 1<sup>st</sup> ed, Bingley 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Eurostat, 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/population-demography-migration-projections/data> (accessed: 09.04.2020).

<sup>48</sup> Youth Development Index 2019, <https://www.thecommonwealth-healthhub.net/global-youth-development-index-ydi/> (accessed: 09.11.2019).

<sup>49</sup> Eurostat Statistics Explained, *Statistics on Young People Neither in Employment nor in Education or Training*, 2018, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics\\_on\\_young\\_people\\_neither\\_in\\_employment\\_nor\\_in\\_education\\_or\\_training](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training) (accessed: 10.09.2019).

people will be in a worse economic situation than their parents. 28% of people aged 15–29 are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and 11.6% of those aged 15–24 are not in education, employment or training (NEET youth)<sup>50</sup>. The youth unemployment rate is twice as high as for the general population. What is important, there is a clear relationship between NEET youth and dropping out. Early leavers from education and training (ELET) also named “early school leavers” refers to people aged 18–24 who obtained no more than a lower secondary diploma and are not enrolled in further education or training. People with low levels of education are particularly vulnerable as they are more likely to fall into poverty, suffer from health problems and take less informed decisions affecting marriage, parenthood and retirement. People with a low level of education (ELET) have weaker employment prospects and are therefore more vulnerable to unemployment or professional inactivity (NEET) when they are not in education or training<sup>51</sup>. Socio-economic exclusion and exclusion from democratic processes go hand in hand. Young people in difficult conditions are usually less active citizens.

There are large national differences in the EU, the share of young excluded people in 2018 was 3.6 times higher in Italy than in Sweden. Italy (28.9%), Greece (26.8%), Bulgaria (20.9%), Romania (20.6%) and Slovakia (20%) recorded the highest youth unemployment, while Sweden (8%), the Netherlands (8.4%), Luxembourg (9.9%), Malta (10.1%) and Austria (10.6%) are countries with the lowest percentage of professionally inactive young people<sup>52</sup>. High unemployment of the young in southern Europe creates fertile ground for extremist right parties and populist radical right parties to use anti-immigration rhetoric in the electoral struggle<sup>53</sup>.

The difficulty in finding a job in one’s own country leads to fear about one’s future – problems with entering adulthood are becoming more common. Research<sup>54</sup> indicates the existence of the correlation: the harder it is for young people to gain life independence, the harder it is to have the conviction that political participation can bring a satisfactory solution to social and their own life problems. The more young people fear about the future, the more strongly they reject the classical political system practiced by modern democracies. Uncertainty in

<sup>50</sup> Eurostat, *Young People at Risk of Poverty or Exclusion*, 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/dashboard/social/poverty/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/dashboard/social/poverty/index_en.htm) (accessed: 10.09.2019).

<sup>51</sup> European Commission, *Education and Training MONITOR*, Luxembourg 2019, p. 51–54, <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/volume-1-2019-education-and-training-monitor.pdf> (accessed: 20.02.2020).

<sup>52</sup> Eurostat Statistics Explained, *Statistics on Young People...*, op. cit.

<sup>53</sup> V. Georgiadou, L. Rorib, C. Roumanias, *Mapping the European Far Right in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Meso-level Analysis*, “Electoral Studies” 2018, no. 54, p. 109.

<sup>54</sup> K. Szfraniec, *Młodzi 2011*, Warszawa 2012, p. 181–182.

a risk society reduces interest in public affairs and leads to political withdrawal.

The issue of political participation in the literature on the subject refers to forms of civic engagement through which citizens make political choices influencing the policy making process. Verba and Nie<sup>55</sup> describe political participation as the actions of citizens aimed more or less directly at influencing the representatives of authorities or decisions they make. Political activity is sometimes equated with political participation consisting in taking actions by citizens to support or influence authorities and politics. In broad terms, political activity is understood as any form of interest in politics and as such is expressed in crystallised attitudes towards selected elements of the political system, i.e. institutions, parties, political options and politicians<sup>56</sup>. Political participation also means interest in political issues, including political knowledge, electoral preferences and political likes and dislikes.

The notion of political activity includes a wide repertoire of activity. Fyfe<sup>57</sup> distinguished three categories of participation along with forms of specific activities that range from activity (Active) to passivity (Inactive).

<sup>55</sup> S. Verba, N. Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*, New York 1972.

<sup>56</sup> K. Skarżyńska, *Aktywność i bierność polityczna* [in:] *Podstawy psychologii politycznej*, K. Skarżyńska (ed.), Warszawa 2002, p. 19.

<sup>57</sup> I. Fyfe, *Researching Youth Political Participation in Australia: Arguments for an Expanded Focus*, "Youth Studies Australia", 2009, no. 28.1, p. 37–45.



## Traditional hierarchy of political participation

Description of Activity      Form of action

Gladiator	Holding public and party office Becoming candidate for office Soliciting political funds Attending a caucus or strategy meeting Becoming an active party member Contributing time in a campaign	<div>Active</div> <div>↑</div> <div>↓</div> <div>Inactive</div>
Transitional	Attending a political meeting or rally Making a donation to a party or candidate Contacting a public official or political leader	
Spectator	Wearing a badge or displaying a sticker/poster Convincing some else which way to vote Voting Following political issues and debate	

**Source:** I. Fyfe, *Researching Youth Political Participation in Australia: Arguments for an Expanded Focus*, "Youth Studies Australia", 2009, no. 28.1, p. 38.

In the world there are more and more democratic elections, in which citizens have the right to decide which party/candidate they will support, or more importantly for the functioning of democracy, whether they decide to exercise this right. Voting is the most common and basic form of political activity. The other key element of representative democracy are institutions for active participation and responsible representation, i.e. political parties. These activities essential for democracy are the subject of political science research and analyses. Scientists and researchers of the issues of citizens' political activity point to the constant tendency of decreasing involvement in traditional forms of political participation measured by the level of voter turnout and membership of political parties<sup>58</sup>. Taking into account

<sup>58</sup> S., Harrison, *Young Voters*, March 2018, 255–66; B. Levy, *Advising a Model United Nations Club: A Scaffolded Youth-Adult Partnership to Foster Active Participation and Political Engagement*, "Teaching and Teacher Education" 2016, no. 59, p. 13–27; J. Sloam, *Voice and Equality: Young People's Politics in the European Union*, "West European Politics" 2013, vol. 36, no. 4, p. 836–858.

the multitude of factors differentiating electoral systems, studies on voting<sup>59</sup> indicate that the turnout has fallen by an average of 10 per cent over the past three decades.

Box 1

### Average turnout by period

	Period				Number of elections
	1970–79	1980–89	1990–99	2000–04	
All cases (106 countries)	78.9	78.5	74.2	70.7	533
Stable and well-established democracies	83.1	81.5	78.4	73.9	246

**Source:** A. Blais, *Turnout in Elections* [in:] *Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*, R. Dalton, H.D. Klingemann (eds.), Oxford, p. 241.

In western democracies, it is particularly visible in the case of young people. We can even talk about the deficit of the young generation at ballot boxes and in everyday political activities. The British research of Jowell and Park<sup>60</sup>, which covered two generations – young people aged 18–24 and their parents, showed that the deficit of civicism of modern youth, measured by participation rates in universal suffrage, is much more severe than it would appear from the specifics of youth. According to the authors, it results from the failure of the social system, its limitations and blockades which make it difficult for young people to achieve life independence.

As far as institutional reasons are concerned, we should point to increasing dependence on expert bodies at the level of the EU institutions and, as a result, a growing sense of national politicians' weaker position of influence on the strategies and ways of solving problems. In consequence, the traditional role of political parties in mediating between different interests has weakened significantly, with the perception of political parties as an "electoral machine". These processes have

<sup>59</sup> A. Blais, *Turnout in Elections* [in:] *Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*, R. Dalton, H.D. Klingemann (eds.), p. 621–635, Oxford 2007.

<sup>60</sup> R. Jowell, A. Park, *Young People, Politics and Citizenship: A Disengaged Generation?*, London 1998, p. 24.

led to a drop in the legitimacy of political parties in the eyes of citizens of all ages. However, as Kestilä-Kekkonen<sup>61</sup>, referring to experience before disappointment occurred (20 years ago in the old EU countries), pointed out, older generations somehow out of habit take part in elections. What is also relevant for the fall in young people's participation in politics is the growth of issue-based lifestyle politics which has supported a transition from politics to policy, whereby citizens, politicians and government officials have together shifted 'the emphasis from democracy [and democratic participation] to good governance'<sup>62</sup>. On the one hand, it may be viewed as a positive development, increasing the opportunities for citizen interaction with policy-makers through 'small scale democracy'. On the other hand, the emphasis on outputs (output legitimacy) has helped fuel the rise of managerialism in politics.

Studies show that youth's acceptance of the importance of voting for democracy is not decreasing, but they often think that the political offer does not take into account their concerns<sup>63</sup>. More than any other age group, the young have an idealistic approach to democracy and expectations of the political system. Politics is seen as a way to solve international problems, social conflicts and to create a better world. It is clear from their discourse that they eagerly listen to news about positive transformation and are ready to support activities that will help create solidarity and social cohesion. Young people are prone to suspicion of elites and politicians, while on the other hand they are more passionate about a particular problem than a political party. In this context, according to Harrison<sup>64</sup>, the high turnout of people aged 18–24 in the referendum on Britain's exit from the European Union (Brexit) should be explained.

The EU institutions hold the view that the participation of young Europeans in democracy is an essential element for the functioning of the "European project". Important predictors of civic and political commitment include the level of satisfaction with democracy, activity in social organisations, the level of confidence in politics (politicians and political institutions) and interest in politics after voting.

Surveys of satisfaction with democracy in the European Union show<sup>65</sup> that citizens support the extensive European project. The

<sup>61</sup> E. Kestilä-Kekkonen, *Anti-Party Sentiment among Young Adults. Evidence from 14 West European Countries*, "Young" 2009, no. 17(2), p. 145–165.

<sup>62</sup> J. Sloam, *Diversity and Voice: The Political Participation of Young People in the European Union*, "British Journal of Politics and International Relations" 2016, no. 18.3, p. 521–37.

<sup>63</sup> B. Cammaerts, M. Bruter, S. Banaji, S. Harrison, N. Anstead, *The Myth of Youth Apathy: Young Europeans Critical Attitudes Toward Democratic Life*, "American Behavioral Scientist" 2014, no. 58(5), p. 645–664.

<sup>64</sup> S. Harrison, *Young Voter*, "Britain Votes" 2017, p. 255–266.

<sup>65</sup> Special Eurobarometr 477, *Democracy and Election*, 2018; Standard Eurobarometr 88, *Public Opinion in the European Union*, 2017.

European Union is largely perceived positively and most people feel that membership is gainful to their countries and claim that their countries benefit economically from their membership of the Union. However, although the positive attitude towards democracy in the EU dominates, unfavourable opinions can be encountered. The most favourable opinion about the European Union is expressed by the inhabitants of Poland and Lithuania, i.e. the former communist states that joined the Union in 2004. Among the factors building dissatisfaction with democracy is the frustration resulting from the way political elites function. A low level of trust in political institutions and actors, and a lack of interest in politics are the main reason for not voting. Political elites are seen as out of touch with average citizens and as many as 69% of Europeans disagree with the statement that “Most elected officials care about what people like me think”<sup>66</sup>.

Europeans are unanimous in their views on which political institutions and laws are the most important for the functioning of democracy. Fair judiciary (87%), gender equality (85%), free speech (74%), regular elections (70%) are indicated most frequently<sup>67</sup>.

Hobolt’s research<sup>68</sup> confirms the existence of a positive relationship between satisfaction with democracy at the national and EU level. Satisfaction with the way democracy works at the national level translates into higher satisfaction at the EU level. Confidence in European institutions is more important for assessing democracy in the EU than for assessing institutions at the national level, especially among those who are more knowledgeable about the functioning of the Union. As the knowledge increases, procedural European factors become increasingly important for citizens’ assessment of democracy in the EU. These findings suggest that citizens care about democratic procedures and institutions of the Union. Therefore, focusing only on the effectiveness of the EU and its results may not be enough to satisfy the citizens. Research conducted as part of the European Social Survey since 2002 indicates that satisfaction with democracy among young citizens in Europe does not change (ESS 2002–2018). What is more, in each of the eight rounds of the research since 2002, the average young European perceived democracy more positively than those who were relatively older at the time the research was carried out. Although

<sup>66</sup> R. Wike, J. Poushter, L. Silver, K. Devlin, J. Fetterolf, A. Castillo, Ch. Huang, *European Public Opinion Three Decades After the Fall of Communism. Most Embrace Democracy and the EU, but Many Worry about the Political and Economic Future*, Pew Research Centre 2019, p. 10, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/15/european-public-opinion-three-decades-after-the-fall-of-communism/> (accessed: 11.03.2020).

<sup>67</sup> Standard Eurobarometer, *Public Opinion in the European Union*, 2015.

<sup>68</sup> S. Hobolt, *Citizen Satisfaction with Democracy in the European Union*, “Journal of Common Market Studies” 2012, vol. 50, no. S1, p. 88–105.

**SOCIAL CAPITAL** the resources an individual or a group derived from relationships of mutual acquaintance, recognition, and cooperation.

**POLITICAL TRUST** confidence in the political community (nation-state), confidence in the principles of the regime, confidence in the performance of the regime, confidence in institutions and confidence in political leaders. The minimal level of political trust is crucial for the sustainability of democracy as a legitimate political regime.

a decline in contentment with democracy was recorded (in all age groups) during the financial crisis, the overall democracy satisfaction trend did not change over time. In-depth research shows that young Europeans were not unhappier with democracy before the Global Financial Crisis of the late 2000s than older citizens, and they did not become more dissatisfied with democracy after the crisis<sup>69</sup>.

The analyses<sup>70</sup> show also that citizens who attribute more responsibility to the EU are less satisfied with democracy in the EU. This suggests that as more powers are transferred to the EU level, citizens may become more critical and demanding of the EU institutions. Therefore, it is a constant challenge for the EU not only to ensure prosperity and economic stability, but also to instil confidence in its democratic institutions.

As far as the activity of young people in social organisations is concerned, research<sup>71</sup> indicates an increase in activity in relation to the data from 2014. Over half of the young (53%) act in sports (29%), youth (20%) or cultural (15%) organisations. Over 1 in 10 is involved in activities for the benefit of a local (13%) or social (12%) organisation. Younger people much less frequently work for political parties (7%), organisations fighting for human rights (7%) or environmental ones (5%). When looking at social and civic participation at the state level, it should be noted, however, that there are considerable disproportions, which should be explained by the existing socio-cultural differences (the level of **social capital**) and the related availability of organisations, school curricula and the location and distance of the place of residence from large cities.

Young people in particular seem to display lower levels of political trust, which is a challenge for the sustainability of democracy. The level of **trust** in political institutions (the national parliament, the European parliament, government, politicians) confirms the distance of Europeans from politics and politicians. The biggest lack of trust is in political parties, where as many as ¾ (75%) of Europeans declare that they do not trust them. They distrust national parliaments (58%) and the government (59%) to a slightly lower degree. The level of trust increases in the case of European institutions which more than half of young people trust. 63% declare confidence in the European Parliament, 60% in the European Commission and 70% in the European Bank<sup>72</sup>. In-depth research of youth under the EUYOPART<sup>73</sup> project from seven countries

<sup>69</sup> J. Zilinsky, *Democratic Deconsolidation Revisited: Young Europeans Are Not Dissatisfied with Democracy*, "Research and Politics" 2019, no. 6(1), p. 2–9.

<sup>70</sup> S. Hobolt, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>71</sup> Flash Eurobarometer 455, *European Youth*, 2018.

<sup>72</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 88, *Public Opinion in the European Union*, 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Institute for Social Research and Analysis, *Political Participation of Young People in Europe – Development of Indicators for Comparative Research in the European Union*, Final Comparative Report 2005, p. 247.

(Austria, Belgium, Estonia, France, Italy, Germany, Slovakia, United Kingdom) confirms the results of the Eurobarometer. The young do not have much faith in national institutions (political parties, parliaments) and place greater trust in the European institutions (EC, EP). However, there is a “trust bonus” for national parliaments, with the exception of Slovakia, where higher trust in national parliaments increases confidence in political parties. What is important, the research has shown that young people are more detached from right-wing (extremist) parties than other parties. This detachment increases with the level of education. Green parties enjoy the greatest confidence of educated young Austrians, Brits and Germans. Trust in NGOs (such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International) is the highest.

It should be noted that there are large differences in trust at national levels. In this regard, Chevalier’s<sup>74</sup> latest research gives an explanation of the relationship between trust in politics and the presence of policies addressed to young people at the national level. Countries (institutions and politicians) promoting activities supporting young people in becoming independent through appropriate social policies, student support, education policies and employment policies have high confidence level indexes. The author pointed out that in research on trust it is necessary to take into account macro determinants of trust in politics like “youth welfare citizenship”.

Participation in elections is an important indicator for measuring formal political activity. Lower voter turnout among young people occurs in democracies around the world. A common unfair interpretation of the low voter turnout among young voters is that they are apathetic and belong to a generation that does not care about political issues – is in fact a selfish and materialistic generation. Young people are aware that they should vote. Therefore, both national and European declarations of participation in voting are much higher than actual participation.

Most young people declare that they take part in elections. 64% say they have voted in any political election in the last three years<sup>75</sup>. They are most likely to have voted at a local (44%) or national level (43%), followed by a regional level. In the 2014 elections, the average rate of voter absenteeism was 72.2 per cent for the younger age group (16–24 years). Moreover, in 14 Member States, the voter turnout by young people was less than 25 per cent. The gap of electoral participation between the older (55 years and over) and the younger age groups exceeded 20 percentage points in 16 out of the 28 Member States,

<sup>74</sup> T. Chevalier, *Political Trust, Young People and Institutions in Europe. A Multilevel Analysis*, “International Journal of Social Welfare” 2019, no. 28(4), p. 418–430.

<sup>75</sup> Flash Eurobarometer 455, *European Youth*, 2017, p. 15.

with the average EU age gap being 23.5 percentage points. In Ireland, it was 54.5 percentage points. Only in Sweden and Belgium (voting is compulsory in the latter country) were the younger citizens more participative than the older ones<sup>76</sup>. The turnout in the 2014 European elections amounted to 42.54% (43% in 2009). In 2019, the turnout in the European elections was 50.6% and was the highest since 1994. As many as 19 Member States recorded an increase in attendance compared to 2014, including the largest in Poland (46%, +22 percentage points (pp)), Rumunia (51%, +19 pp), Spain (61%, +17 pp), Austria (60%, +15 pp), Hungary (43%, +14 pp) and Germany (61%, +13pp). There have also been increases in countries with the lowest turnout, such as Slovakia (23%, +10 pp) and Czechia (29%, +11 pp). The turnout fell in only eight countries, but by less than 3 pp<sup>77</sup>. Importantly, the highest increase in the number of voters was recorded among young people, where in the age group below 25 years of age there was an increase of 14 pp, and in the 25–39 age group by 12 pp.

Moreover, in addition to the increase in turnout in recent European Parliament elections, for the first time more Europeans believe that their vote counts in the EU (56%), which increases the democracy and legality of the EU. Younger respondents are more likely than older respondents to agree that their voice counts in the EU. Among those aged under 25, 60% agree and 31% disagree, whereas among those aged 55 or over 53% agree and 41% disagree<sup>78</sup>. Younger respondents are more likely to say that voting can make things change (23% of those aged under 25 compared with 15% of those aged 55 or over) and that they feel European or a citizen of the EU (16% compared with 10%).

It is worth emphasising that between generations there are also differences in the reasons for voting. Younger voters are more likely than older voters to say that combating climate change and protecting the environment was an issue that made them vote (45% of those aged under 25 compared with 34% of those aged 55 or over). They are also more likely to mention the promotion of human rights and democracy (44% of those aged under 25 compared with 34% of those aged 55 or over). Respondents aged 25–39 are most likely to say they were influenced by the way the EU should be working in the future (42%). Immigration is less likely to be mentioned by those aged under 25 (29%) than those

<sup>76</sup> Cristina Ares, *Engaging Young People and Women in European Parliament Elections*, *Engaging Young People and Women in European Parliament Elections*, 2019, iii, <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2019.16>>.9.

<sup>77</sup> Eurobarometer Survey 91.5 of the European Parliament. A Public Opinion Monitoring Study, *The 2019 Post-electoral Survey. Have European Elections Entered a New Dimension?* <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/post-election-survey-2019-complete-results/report/en-post-election-survey-2019-report.pdf> (accessed: 11.04.2020).

<sup>78</sup> Ibidem, p. 90.

in the older age groups (34%–35%), while older respondents are most likely to mention the fight against terrorism as a reason for voting (29% of those aged 55 or over compared with 21% of those aged under 25)<sup>79</sup>.

Deficiencies in the participation of young people in Europe are not the result of a lack of interest in public good, but rather a combination of contextual and psychosocial factors, including both actual and perceived inadequacy of the existing political offer<sup>80</sup>. In fact, despite all the distrust and the feeling of being betrayed by politicians, young people want:

- to be heard by their representatives,
- to be taken seriously by their representatives,
- have more representatives from minority groups – disabled, homeless, young women, unemployed, ethnic minority – engaged in speaking to those in power,
- have regular contact and feedback from their representatives,
- have “authentic” representatives, not just those who were suited to politics and rhetoric.

The data suggest that young people would like to be involved politically, but they are discouraged by the concentration and nature of existing political discourse and practices that many believe exclude them and ignore their needs and interests. Contrary to the assumptions about citizens’ discouraged and apathetic approach, many young Europeans have a strong desire to participate in democratic life, but existing options and discourses do not satisfy this desire. The research has shown a discrepancy between young people’s hopes for democracy and the way these are being addressed (or not) by politicians. The authors conclude that anyone who thinks that the low turnout of young voters is due to young people being too lazy to take five minutes to go to the polling station or being too selfish to do so is grossly mischaracterising the immense political appetite of European youth. However, at the same time the overwhelming message that young people delivered to us was: “we want to and are excited to vote, but you need to treat us seriously and like intelligent people”<sup>81</sup>.

Research on interest in politics, without taking into account the social context, shows little interest among young people, especially

<sup>79</sup> European Parliament, ‘Have the 2019 European Elections Entered a New Dimension?’, *Eurobarometer: The EP and the Expectations of European Citizens*, 2019, p. 56.

<sup>80</sup> B. Cammaerts, M. Bruter, S. Banaji, S. Harrison, N. Anstead, *The Myth of Youth Apathy: Young Europeans’ Critical Attitudes toward Democratic Life*, „American Behavioral Scientist” 2014, no. 58(5), p. 645–664.

<sup>81</sup> *The Myth of...*, op.cit., p. 15.



among girls. Long-term studies into interest in politics on a four-point scale, where 1 means “politics does not interested me at all” and 4 “politics interests me a lot” show that the average value is 2 ( $M=2.04$ ) which denotes the response “politics interests me only a little”<sup>82</sup>. Taking into account the social context – the family and peer environment – brings new information in this regard. It turns out that the degree of attentiveness of young people to politics depends on the interest of their parents and the peer group. The stronger the parents’ interest in politics, the greater young people’s interest. Among the young people who declare to have strongly politicised parents, the attitude towards politics is more positive: 80% declare to be interested in politics (only 14% when they have very weakly politicised ones), 29% show a party proximity (only 7% when they have very weakly ones). They are also more confident, considering the effectiveness of political actions (40%/16%) and having more trustfulness in political institutions (21%/9%). To have a politicised environment gives a more favourable framework to develop some personal links to politics. It also permits to develop some political behaviour: 83% of the young people do vote when they have parents strongly politicised (compared to 37% when they are not), 36% have already taken part to a demonstration (compared to 7% in the second case), 61% are a member of an association (compared to 36% in the second case). The interest increases with a higher standard of living, higher parental education and the own level of education<sup>83</sup>.

The results of the in-depth research carried out under the MYPLACE project<sup>84</sup> indicate that 42% of surveyed young Europeans are actually interested in politics, despite their highly sceptical attitude towards politics, politicians and the political system. Instead of rejecting politics altogether, young Europeans seem to negate formal and institutional politics<sup>85</sup>.

In April 2019, just before the European elections, climate activist, initiator of youth climate strikes Greta Thunberg addressed the young: “In this election, you are voting for the future living conditions of humankind<sup>86</sup>”. In these elections, problems related to global warming, digital rights, to

<sup>82</sup> M. Lavrič, S. Flere, M. Tavčar Krajnc, R. Klanjšek, B. Musil, A. Naterer, A. Kirbiš, M. Divjak, P. Lešek, *YOUTH 2010. The Social Profile of Young People in Slovenia*, Ministry of Education and Sports, Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, [https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Slovenia\\_2010\\_Youth\\_Profile\\_Study.pdf](https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Slovenia_2010_Youth_Profile_Study.pdf) (accessed: 12.03.2020).

<sup>83</sup> Institute for Social Research and Analysis, op. cit., p. 243.

<sup>84</sup> *Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement Project (MYPLACE)*, My Place. Thematic Report. UK Election Special, Manchester 2015, [https://myplaceresearch.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/151204\\_voting\\_uk\\_election\\_special\\_final.pdf?fbclid=IwAR26uLAQzq\\_Dv2g9mbB-B9cv1zTIA6Rr8l-xlvVZY08krGmJOCFalNfqm8oc](https://myplaceresearch.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/151204_voting_uk_election_special_final.pdf?fbclid=IwAR26uLAQzq_Dv2g9mbB-B9cv1zTIA6Rr8l-xlvVZY08krGmJOCFalNfqm8oc) (accessed: 12.03.2020).

<sup>85</sup> J. Mihalik, *Political Leadership and Democratic Governance from the Perspective of Slovak Youth*, “Slovak Journal of Political Sciences”, 15.3, 2018, p. 182–201.

<sup>86</sup> J. Rankin, *Forget Brexit and Focus on Climate Change, Greta Thunberg Tells EU*, “The Guardian”, 16.04.2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/16/greta-thunberg-urges-eu-leaders-wake-up-climate-change-school-strike-movement> (accessed: 22.02.2020).

**DISSATISFIED DEMOCRATS** people who value the ideal of democracy, but are critical of its everyday functioning.

trade and consumer protection, which are the responsibility of the European Parliament, played a particularly important role for young people.

The Millennial generation has not experienced a war or an arms race and a division of Europe, their future is more important to them than their parents' past, that is why they naturally do not accept the concept of the EU as a peace project. The priorities of young voters are shaped by their fears about job instability and climate change. This has resulted in an increase of interest and support for green but also populist parties. Green parties compared to the previous election from 2014 doubled their seats thanks to the support of young voters, especially in Germany (21 MEPS), Austria (2MEPS), France (12 MEPS) and Spain (4 MEPS). However, nationalists also appeal to young voters who are concerned about their future. In some countries, a significant number of young people are attracted by far-right or anti-establishment parties. For example, young voters in Hungary for the first time supported the Eurosceptic Jobbik party twice as often as Hungarians as a whole. vox in Spain, Kotleba in Slovakia and the Confederation in Poland are similarly popular among young people, especially men.

Young people under 30 make up only 1.9 pp of the world's 45,000 MPs. The proportion of young MPs is lowest among under-30s, at 1.9 pp, rising to 14.2 pp among under-40s and 26 pp among under-45s. In national parliaments in Europe there are 44 young MPs (3.1%), in Sweden (12.3%), Finland (10.5%), Denmark (6.1%) and Slovenia (5.6%) respectively<sup>87</sup>. There are 21 MEPS up to the age of 30 in the 751-member European Parliament of the 2019–24 term, representing 3% (14 MEPS under 30 and 7 MEPS aged 30<sup>88</sup>). The youngest member is a 21-year-old Member from Denmark, who is the youngest person ever to sit in the EP.

### 3.2. New form of youth political activity

Studies on the issue of political activity suggest that in the last decade there have been significant differences in this respect between the older and younger generations. Dalton and Klingemann<sup>89</sup> introduced the term “**dissatisfied democrats**”, who do not trust existing democratic institutions and are politically excluded. Dissatisfied democrats avoid activities associated with constructive and stable membership of formal political organisations, while at the same time they are easily attracted to movements based on direct activity. According to Hans Dieter Klingemann<sup>90</sup>, they are people who value the ideal of democracy, but are critical of its everyday functioning.

<sup>87</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Youth Participation in National Parliaments*, 2016, 1–44, <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youthrep-e.pdf> (accesse: 11.03.2020).

<sup>88</sup> Autor's correspondence email with Citizens' Enquiries Unit of the European Parliament.

<sup>89</sup> R.J. Dalton, H.D. Klingemann, *Obywatele a zachowania polityczne* [in:] *Zachowania polityczne*, t. 1, H.D. Dalton, R.J. Klingemann (eds.), Warszawa 2010, p. 33.

<sup>90</sup> S. Dahlberg, J. Linde, S. Holmberg S., *Dissatisfied Democrats. A Matter of Representation or Performance?*, “Working Paper Series” 2013, no. 8, <http://www.qog.pol.gu.se/digital>

**ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT** consumer activity boycotting or purchasing specific products, "buycotts"), signing petitions, gaining support for them on social networks.

Undoubtedly, the political activity of young Europeans is no longer determined by old class divisions, where, for example, workers voted for leftist parties, but by their own experience and perception of democracy. The current generation of 15–24 year-olds is growing up in different conditions than their parents. The classic indicators of political activity (turnout, party affiliation) distort the picture of participation in the case of the young generation, leading to a simplified conclusion about young citizens' political passivity (apathy). Research<sup>91</sup> indicates that people aged 18–24 are more often members of an organisation than people aged 25–30 (58% compared with 49%). It is not surprising that respondents aged 25–30 are more involved in formal politics than respondents aged 18–24 (78% compared to 63%).

Norris<sup>92</sup> notes the appearance of **alternative forms of political involvement**. Norris's research indicates the occurrence of generational differences in the repertoire of political behaviour. The author proposed a theoretical model that takes into account the evolution of the repertoire of political actions (**Figure 1**).

**Figure 1 Typology of the evolution of political action by Norris**

		REPERTOIRES	
		Citizen-oriented repertoires, including voting, party work and contact activity	Causes-oriented repertoires, including consumer politics, demonstrations and petitions
AGENCIES	Traditional voluntary associations, including churches, unions and political parties	Older generation	Younger generation
	New social movements and advocacy network, including environmental and humanitarian organizations		

**Source:** P. Norris, 'Young People & Political Activism: From the Politics of Loyalties to the Politics of Choice?', January 2004, p. 22.

Assets/1448/1448856\_2013\_8\_dahlberg\_linde\_holmberg.pdf (accessed: 12.02.2020).  
<sup>91</sup> M. Kitanova, *Youth Political Participation in the EU: Evidence from a Cross-national Analysis*, "Journal of Youth Studies" 2019, p. 1–18.  
<sup>92</sup> P. Norris, *Young People & Political Activism: From the Politics of Loyalties to the Politics of Choice?*, January, 2004.

According to Norris, the young are shifting from the politics of loyalties to the politics of choice. According to researchers, the decline in voter turnout and in the level of interest in politics among the young generation recorded in statistics testifies to a change in the attitude towards politics. Younger generations are more sceptical of politics, which should not be equated with a lack of interest and political activity. In the current stable conditions, traditional forms of engagement are not very attractive to young age groups. That is why, the author suggests the inclusion of a more contemporary concept of political and civic participation to the definition of political activity. Younger generations reach for new repertoires (forms) of participation without having to engage in cooperation with political parties or institutions chosen in democratic elections<sup>93</sup>.

Young people derive deeper satisfaction from determining individual activity paths such as: local volunteering, consumer activity (boycotting or purchasing specific products, “buycotts”), support for human rights and environmental protection organisations, and participation in international protests. Access to new communication technologies is a key element, providing the basis for “new” expression and mobilisation of political activity<sup>94</sup>. The research shows that digital and social media are indeed critical channels of communication for public relations practitioners, allowing direct interaction with key publics and their opinion leaders, bypassing legacy media gatekeepers<sup>95</sup>. Online engagement is seen as a form of political participation. Non-traditional activities – such as building solitary – and private activities – such as reading a blog post or searching for candidate information online – were treated as behaviours similar to wearing a campaign t-shirt or door-to-door canvassing.

Civic participation oriented on voting and belonging to a party, of course, remains important for democracy, but they seem to be a too narrow conceptualisation of activity that excludes some of the objectives of civic involvement. Young people clearly see that the political system that was supposed to represent *demos* has ceased to respond to their voices. If it strives for them, it is mainly to – having social legitimacy – care for the interests of those who are privileged anyway. Such a view – most clearly expressed by Lawrence Lessig and picked up by the movement of the “outraged” (“we’re the 99%”) – made its voice heard in Poland on the occasion of anti-ACTA protests. It is also

<sup>93</sup> D.M. Dozier, H. Shen, K.D. Sweetser, V. Barker, *Public Relations Review Demographics and Internet Behaviors as Predictors of Active Publics*, “Public Relations Review”, 2016, no. 42(1), p. 82–90.

<sup>94</sup> Digital Agenda Scoreboard 2012: *Life Online*, [http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/sites/digital-agenda/files/scoreboard\\_life\\_online.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/sites/digital-agenda/files/scoreboard_life_online.pdf) (accessed: 13.02.2020).

<sup>95</sup> D.M. Dozier and all, op. cit., p. 82.

**POLITICAL CONSUMERISM** buying or boycotting some products for political or ethical reasons.

impossible to estimate the probability of building a Polish equivalent of the German pirate party: a group trying to define citizenship away from traditional political and ideological divisions.

The current repertoire of forms of citizens' political involvement indicates the growing importance of the actions of the citizen focused on specific issues and political problems. Examples are the use of **political consumerism** (buying or boycotting some products for political or ethical reasons), signing petitions, gaining support for them on social networks<sup>96</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> quarter mothers), organising demonstrations and protests ("sardines" movement)<sup>97</sup>. In order to influence authorities the new social movements use mixed strategies that combine traditional repertoires, such as contacting politicians by means of online communication channels, street protests and consumer boycotts in which the young generation is active.

Young Europeans more and more often turn to "non-electoral" and "non-institutionalised" forms of participation, and many young people use social media for various political activities. This activity focuses on individual self-expression that crosses the private-public border and solves problems related to the lives of young people<sup>98</sup>.

Youth are less likely to focus on what we refer to as "big P" politics – on elections and on influencing elites and state institutions. Youth are more motivated by the power of direct action and express interest in a range of more direct forms of lifestyle politics, community-based work, and politics that emphasise self-expression and self-actualisation – which Kahne<sup>99</sup> refer to as "little p" politics.

Social media usage is one of the most popular online activities. In 2018, an estimated 2.65 billion people were using social media worldwide, a number projected to increase to almost 3.1 billion in 2021<sup>100</sup>. In Europe, 94%<sup>101</sup> of residents have access to broadband mobile internet, which translates into the potential for political involvement online. Research on the use of digital technologies by citizens for

<sup>96</sup> The action that led to the amendment of the Act and the extension of the annual maternity leave to all parents of children born in 2013, and not only from the second quarter of 2013 onwards as the Act originally assumed, <https://www.facebook.com/MatkiKwartalu2013> (accessed: 11.03.2020).

<sup>97</sup> An estimated 7,000 people at 14.11. 2019 have crammed together in Bologna on ITALY as part of a growing "sardines" movement against the politics of the far-right leader, Matteo Salvini <https://www.facebook.com/events/2792866504057269/>. More on: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/01/19/sardines-movement-in-bologna-italy-hopes-to-block-far-right> (accessed: 11.03.2020).

<sup>98</sup> J. Sloam, op. cit., p. 552.

<sup>99</sup> J. Kahne, D. Crow, N. Jin Lee, *Different Pedagogy, Different Politics: High School Learning Opportunities and Youth Political Engagement*, "Political Psychology", 2013, no. 34(3), p. 419–441.

<sup>100</sup> J. Clement, *Number of Global Social Media Users 2010–2021*, Statista 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/#statisticContainer> (accessed: 12.03.2020).

<sup>101</sup> International Telecommunication Union, 2019, <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx> (accessed: 22.04.2019).

various political activities is gaining in importance. Activities such as searching for information, signing petitions online, sending emails to governmental institutions or making donations for political purposes are an element of the political mobilisation of users. In addition, social media are conducive to revealing sympathy and/or dislike for a politician or a political organisation, and tweeting/retweeting political opinion seems to be a new, more direct type of expressive engagement<sup>102</sup>. The evidence to date suggests that online activities appeal to young people. Some more relevant differences appear when levels of engagement in the more active types of e-campaign participation are compared across the two contexts. In France, involvement with the official campaign in the form of signing up as a Twitter follower or Facebook fan of a party or candidate was reported by 12% of internet users. Less common were activities such as posting political content to social networks walls and blogs (7%), forwarding campaign content (8%) or embedding or reposting content (4%). Helping to promote the parties' message or online profile via various tools such as email or texts or posting supportive links and messages on Facebook or Twitter also attracted a more limited pool of individuals online (3%). Notably, starting or joining a political social networking group or reposting political material was the least popular activity during the French campaign (2%)<sup>103</sup>.

### 3.3. European Union towards youth engagement

Since adopting a position on the negative impact of the social democratic deficit on the integration process, the European institutions have undertaken numerous activities addressed to youth. Since 2016, after the economic crisis, the European Union has strengthened its youth policy through the implementation of education, training and sports programmes targeted at young people. At the 2016 the Bratislava Summit a commitment was made "to fight youth unemployment and enhance EU programmes dedicated to youth" signing the document Investing in Europe's youth<sup>104</sup>. The initiative covers four areas of key importance for young people: employment; mobility; solidarity and participation; education and training. Engaging the young and strengthening their position in youth policies is also treated as an element consolidating the development of the continent in which

<sup>102</sup> R. Gibson, M. Cantijoch, *Conceptualizing and Measuring Participation in the Age of the Internet: Is Online Political Engagement Really Different to Offline?*, "Journal of Politics" 2013, no. 75(3), p. 701–716.

<sup>103</sup> M. Cantijoch, R.K. Gibson, D. Cutts, *Engagement in the Online Campaign in the United States and France*, "A Comparative Analysis" 2013, no. 1–31, p. 11–12.

<sup>104</sup> European Commission, *Investing in Europe's Youth*, 2016, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=COM:2016:940:FIN&from=FR> (accessed: 21.2020).

the rising generation can take advantage of opportunities and refer to European values. Defining the directions for creating a new EU strategy for youth (2021–27), the European Commission identified three premises<sup>105</sup>:

1. ENGAGING understood as fostering youth participation in democratic life,
2. CONNECTING understood as Bringing young people together across the EU and beyond to foster voluntary engagement, learning mobility, solidarity and intercultural understanding and
3. EMPOWERING by supporting youth empowerment through quality, innovation and recognition of youth work.

The concept of engaging, connecting and empowering youth is realised in programmes and initiatives dedicated directly to young people, flagship of which are: Erasmus+, Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative, European Solidarity Corps (ESC) and DiscoverEU.

#### Erasmus+

Erasmus+<sup>106</sup> is a key EU programme that supports education, training, youth and sport. The programme was launched in 1987, so far 10 million people have benefited from it. The programme is based on the assumption that learning, studying and training in another country provides a unique opportunity to gain experience and opens new horizons. European economies are closely connected and the possibility of going abroad helps young people become more independent and confident. Erasmus + has a chapter dedicated to youth, the aim of which is to:

1. improve the level of key competences and skills of young people, and promote participation in democratic life in Europe and the labour market, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and solidarity;
2. foster quality improvements in youth work;
3. complement policy reforms at local, regional and national level and support the development of knowledge and evidence-based youth policy;

<sup>105</sup> European Commission, *Engaging, Connecting and Empowering Young People: A New EU Youth Strategy*, 2018, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0269&from=en> (accessed: 21.02.2020).

<sup>106</sup> European Commission, *The EU Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport 2014–2020*, 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/erasmus-plus-in-detail\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/erasmus-plus-in-detail_en.pdf) (accessed: 21.02.2020).

4. enhance the international dimension of youth activities and the role of youth workers and organisations as support structures for young people<sup>107</sup>.

In the last perspective of 2014–2020, education and training activities targeted at almost 3 million young people are planned, including 2 million higher education students will study and train abroad, 650 000 vocational students will spend part of their education and training abroad, 200 000 Master's students will benefit from a new loan guarantee scheme and more than 25 000 scholarships for Joint Master Degrees. Students who have been mobile are half as likely to experience long-term unemployment after graduation compared with those who have not studied or trained abroad. One in three students who do traineeships abroad supported by Erasmus+ gets a job offer in the company they worked for. In addition, Erasmus trainees are also more entrepreneurial than their stay-at-home counterparts: one in ten has started their own company and more than three out of four plan to, or can imagine doing so. Erasmus students have better problem-solving skills, adaptability, tolerance and confidence than the ones who did not go abroad. These are skills highly valued by employers, but are also essential social and civic assets<sup>108</sup>.

### Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative

Preventing youth unemployment is above all a task for national governments and EU actions are supporting and complementary. This goal is to be achieved by means of the Youth Guarantee (YG) and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)<sup>109</sup> launched in 2013 in response to rising unemployment among young people as a result of the economic crisis. The addressees are young people at risk of unemployment or unemployed for a long time, not in education or training (NEET). It is a political commitment taken by all EU Member States in the form of a Council recommendation<sup>110</sup> to give the young under the age of 25 a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

<sup>107</sup> European Parliament, *Facts Sheets on the European Union*, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/141/youth> (accessed: 15.03.2020).

<sup>108</sup> European Commission, *Main Results in a Nutshell How Does Erasmus Influence Future Careers and Social Lives?*, [http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/library/study/2016/erasmus-impact\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/library/study/2016/erasmus-impact_en.pdf) (accessed: 11.04.2020).

<sup>109</sup> About YG and YEI, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=en>; Factsheets about YG and YEI, [https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?pager.offset=0&advSearch-Key=YGYEI&mode=advancedSubmit&catId=1307&doc\\_submit=&policyArea=0&policyAreaSub=0&country=0&year=0](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?pager.offset=0&advSearch-Key=YGYEI&mode=advancedSubmit&catId=1307&doc_submit=&policyArea=0&policyAreaSub=0&country=0&year=0) (accessed: 22.02.2020).

<sup>110</sup> Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on Establishing a Youth Guarantee (2013/C 120/01), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2013:120:0001:0006:EN:PDF> (accessed: 22.02.2020).



In the years 2014–16, 14 million young people joined the programme in the EU, of which 9 million benefited from a job offer, further education or internship. Youth Guarantee is an initiative supplementing the European Social Fund, which for 60 years has been investing in the skills, education and training of young people. The Youth Employment Initiative is the main EU funding programme initiated at the same time to facilitate the roll-out of the Youth Guarantee and give particular support to regions where youth unemployment rate is over 25%.

In 2019, six years after the initiative was launched, youth unemployment which reached 24% in 2013 dropped to 14.6%, the percentage of NEET people aged 15–24 diminished from 13.2% in 2012 to 10.3%<sup>111</sup>.

After the elections in 2019, the President of the European Commission (2020–25) Ursula von der Leyen confirmed the importance of the YEI initiative “We must do more to give children and young people the care, education and opportunities they need”. In the new perspective (2021–27), the emphasis will be placed on improving young people’s digital competencies and increasing cooperation with local stakeholders creating the labour market. The technological revolution and new digital forms of work are shaping the labour market. Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, says “I think that today, no young person coming up to the labour market should not have a minimum level of digital or computer skills. Access to those skills is something that needs to be as broad as possible”<sup>112</sup>.

### European Solidarity Corps (ESC)

The European Solidarity Corps<sup>113</sup> is an EU initiative addressed to young people aged 18–30, the aim of which is to strengthen solidarity attitudes. Jean-Claude Juncker establishing the ECS in 2016 said: “*The European Solidarity Corps will create opportunities for young people willing to make a meaningful contribution to society and help show solidarity – something the world and our European Union needs more of. For me, this has always been the very essence of what the European Union is about. It is not the Treaties or industrial or economic interests that bind us together, but our values. And those who work as volunteers are living European values each and every day*”<sup>114</sup>. The ECS fits in with key EU actions for young

<sup>111</sup> European Commission, *The Youth Guarantee & Youth Employment Initiative*, 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=en> (accessed: 22.03.2020).

<sup>112</sup> R. Beatriz, *European Youth Guarantee Needs to Address Labour Market Changes, Experts Warn*, “EURACITY”, 13.01.2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/european-youth-guarantee-needs-to-address-labour-market-changes-experts-warn/> (accessed: 22.02.2020).

<sup>113</sup> European Solidarity Corps, [https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en) (accessed: 22.02.2020).

<sup>114</sup> J.C. Juncker, President of the European Commission (2014–2019), *State of the Union*, speech in Bratislava on 14 September 2016, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_16\\_4165](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_16_4165) (accessed: 22.02.2020).

people by offering mobility, education and solidarity. The programme assumes that through volunteering or working in non-governmental organisations, local governments or enterprises in the Member States the young can become engaged in helping communities affected by natural disasters or those facing social problems such as poverty, demographic challenges, health care, or work in receiving and integrating refugees. From among 22 types of activities, young people can easily choose the area, place and type of organisation with which they want to cooperate. The ESC portal ([https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en)) is available in all languages of the Member States and associated countries. Projects supported by ECS last from 2 to 12 months and are usually implemented on the territory of the Member States of the European Union.

Since the ESC was launched over 30,000 young people from over 34 countries have started cooperation, the majority (57%) were young people from Turkey, Spain, Italy, France and Germany, and the fewest from Liechtenstein, Iceland, Luxembourg, Malta and Norway. Most activities have been carried out in Italy, Spain, Romania, Poland, Portugal and France. 175,000 young people have registered, of which 73% as volunteers, employees and trainees, 20% as volunteers and 7% as employees and trainees. It is estimated that in the new 2021–27 perspective, 350,000 young people will participate in the programme.

### DiscoverEU

The idea of the DiscoverEU<sup>115</sup> initiative was formed during the European Youth Event (EYE) in 2014 as a scheme enabling young people to travel around Europe. The idea was supported by the European Parliament, which recognised that the initiative allows young people to experience European diversity, understand each other better and learn more about Europe. Financing young people's journey across the European Union will enable them to meet people from other countries and strengthen common values. The purpose of DiscoverEU is to give young people an opportunity to get to know European identity and cultural heritage, but also to sensitise them to the diversity that constitutes Europe's potential. The initiative is contained in the slogan "Europe is at your feet. Take the first step". The addressees of DiscoverEU are pupils and students, as well as interns and workers who work with the young who are 18 years old. Participants are awarded with a travel pass enabling them to travel to at least one foreign EU country. The rail trip (if there is no connection – by ferry or plane) to the selected country can last from 1 to 30 days to be made within 8 months after the evaluation, which is determined

<sup>115</sup> DiscoverEU, [https://europa.eu/youth/discovereu\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/discovereu_en); DiscoverEU / (accessed: 22.02.2020).

by the order in which the applications are submitted in an open call. Selected candidates can travel individually or in a group of up to five people. Participants act as the ambassadors of the initiative and are encouraged to describe their experiences of traveling and meeting people and share them on social media (Instagram, Facebook, YT and Twitter) with the hashtag #DiscoverEU and prepare a presentation at their school or for the local community. Instagram #DiscoverEU contains 302,000 colour photos shared by various participants<sup>116</sup>. On YouTube there are thousands of videos and channels created by young people illustrating travel adventures but also videos with tips<sup>117</sup>. The initiative has been operating since 2018. In the application procedure in 2018–19 almost 350,000 young people filed applications, out of which 70,000 were selected. In the first round for 2020, 73,941 applied and 20,020 were qualified<sup>118</sup>. Every year, DiscoverEU activities are organised around a dedicated theme related to the European Union’s priorities. The theme for 2019 was “Learning about Europe”. The theme for 2020 is “Sustainable Green Europe”. What is important, the allocation of the passes is based on the percentage of the population of the Member States compared to the overall population in the EU. Information about subsequent rounds and a specific online application can be found on the European Youth Portal ([https://europa.eu/youth/EU\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/EU_en)).

### European Youth Week and European Youth Event

Every second year European youth meetings are organised in the European Parliament. The first of them, the European Youth Week (EYW)<sup>119</sup>, is to inform and educate. Participants get to know places – the EU institutions and agencies. They learn about their operation and the way of making decisions and work of parliamentarians. The other meeting with the young, the European Youth Event, is for dialogue and opinion forming.

Every two years, the European Commission, together with Parliament, organises the European Youth Week. Its purpose is both to celebrate youth activities across all of the countries and to present the various EU mobility opportunities that are on offer to young people. In 2019 the EYW took place under the theme “Democracy and me”. The EYW is a meeting of participants of EU projects, youth organisations and politicians in the European Parliament. The organisers of the EYW are

<sup>116</sup> FaceBook DiscoverEU, <https://www.facebook.com/youdiscoverEU> (accessed: 28.02.2020).

<sup>117</sup> YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=%23DiscoverEU](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%23DiscoverEU) (accessed: 22.02.20).

<sup>118</sup> European Commission, *DiscoverEU, Factsheet*, 2019, [https://europa.eu/youth/sites/default/files/discovereu\\_factsheet.pdf](https://europa.eu/youth/sites/default/files/discovereu_factsheet.pdf) (accessed: 22.02.2020).

<sup>119</sup> European Youth Week, [https://europa.eu/youth/week\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/week_en); Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/YouthEP/> (accessed: 22.02.2020).

the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture in partnership with the European Parliament and involving other Directorates-General of the European Commission. At the national level, organisation and coordination is entrusted to the Erasmus+ national agencies in cooperation with Eurodesk network. Registration and information about the next EYW (2021) can be found on the European Youth Portal ([https://europa.eu/youth/EU\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/EU_en)).

The European Youth Event (EYE) is organised by the European Youth Forum with the support of the European Parliament every two years since 2014 onwards. The meetings take place in the European Parliament in Strasbourg and are attended by between 5,000 and 10,000 young people. The objective of the EYE is to engage the young in the discussion on Europe. Participants take part in the discussion with decision-makers and experts according to thematic sections. Three editions have taken place so far: Ideas for a better Europe<sup>120</sup>; EYE2016: Together we can make a change<sup>121</sup>; EYE2018: The plan is to fan this spark into a flame<sup>122</sup>. The fourth edition The Future is Now<sup>123</sup> will be held on 29–30.05.2020.

Importantly, in the months following each EYE a report is published, which is addressed to all Members of the European Parliament. Then these ideas, comments and opinions that have resounded the most are presented at “YouthHearing”. During “YouthHearing”, broadcast and available online<sup>124</sup>, MEPs talk to former participants to provide feedback on ideas they support, plan to implement in the future or disagree with. For example, the DiscoverEU initiative was introduced as an effect of the EYE2016. Moreover, since 2018 young Europeans have been able to share their ideas on the future of Europe by means of the website EuropeanYouthIdeas<sup>125</sup>.

<sup>120</sup> European Parliament, *EYE2014 Report: Ideas for a Better Europe*, [http://www.epgencms.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/b9973083-b9de-4085-aa5e-39ce13bd2f25/21370-EYE\\_Report\\_EN.pdf](http://www.epgencms.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/b9973083-b9de-4085-aa5e-39ce13bd2f25/21370-EYE_Report_EN.pdf) (accessed: 1.03.2020).

<sup>121</sup> European Parliament, *EYE 2016 Report: Together We Can Make a Change*, <http://www.epgencms.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/ed9ba35e-217e-4a95-945d-cdac986e13a3/EYE2016-Report-EN-web.pdf> (accessed: 22.02.2020).

<sup>122</sup> European Parliament, *EYE 2018 Report: Speak Up Europe! 100 Ideas for a Better Future*, [http://www.epgencms.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/df21ce53-6131-4117-bef5-85cc61099f88/Hemicycle\\_of\\_EYE2018\\_ideas.pdf](http://www.epgencms.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/df21ce53-6131-4117-bef5-85cc61099f88/Hemicycle_of_EYE2018_ideas.pdf) (accessed: 22.02.2020).

<sup>123</sup> European Parliament, *EYE 2020 Programme: The Future is Now*, [http://www.epgencms.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/42a7e356-75bd-40f1-ab88-24e0586e4650/2019\\_EYE\\_Programme\\_EN.pdf](http://www.epgencms.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/42a7e356-75bd-40f1-ab88-24e0586e4650/2019_EYE_Programme_EN.pdf), <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/european-youth-event/en/eye2020/home.html>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/EYE2018participants/> (accessed: 22.02.2020).

<sup>124</sup> All multimedia of EYE are available on official page of the European Parliament: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/european-youth-event/en/eye2020/previous-editions.html> (accessed: 22.02.2020).

<sup>125</sup> European Youth Ideas, <https://www.europeanyouthideas.eu/> (accessed: 22.02.2020).

## Conclusions

Young Europeans in aged 15–29 constitutes 16.9% (86.776.713) of the population of the entire Union. The traditional political activity of young people in the European Union is lower than that of adults and it decreases from decade to decade. In comparison to adults, young people are less interested in politics, less often follow political debate, have less confidence in political systems, institutions, political parties and politicians, and are less involved in the most institutionalised forms of political participation, such as voting, political party activities and running for formal political roles. At the same time, however, a significant proportion of them are aware of today's major social problems, reflect on potential solutions and are more active than adults in non-institutional forms of participation, such as social movements, protests, petitions and other specific digital socio-political activities, as well as some forms of social intervention. Participation of young people takes on different forms and occurs in various places, which should be associated with changes in the possible forms of activity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Technological changes and the evolution of democratic institutions in the direction of including society in the decision-making process, transparency, openness of databases, creation of initiatives dedicated to young people are possibilities that older generations were completely deprived of. Changes occurring in the EU can be explained by means of socio-political and historical contexts of national policies. The European Union plays a supportive role in the field of youth activities because specific youth policies are within the competence of the Member States and, depending on the strategies the countries have adopted, differ from one another.

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# Summary

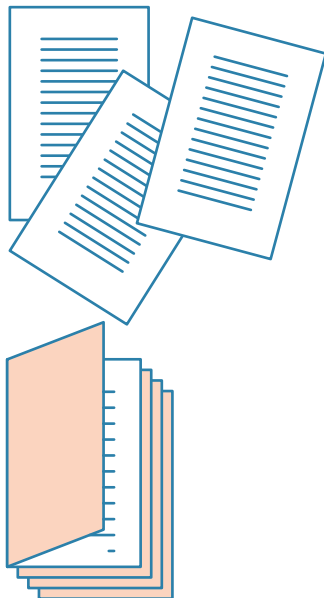
The statement that democracy around the world is going through a crisis and calls for strengthening democratic values and counteracting the negative effects of the crisis are losing the capacity for political mobilisation will not be a gross exaggeration. The most clear symbol of the crisis of democracy is the interception of control of the political process by political parties, its leaders and interest group. In this mass process, the basic goal of democracy, which is the control of citizens over their own destiny and public institutions, is disappearing.

History shows that if citizens notice this disturbing trend at the right time, they are able to realise what the historical causes of democratisation processes were, but also what obligations connected with citizenship and real possibilities they have to change the situation, which before their eyes is getting out of social control. Activities undertaken then as a reaction to the mounting crisis do not always produce satisfactory results. Threats in the form of growing nationalist, religious, populist fundamentalism are very dangerous and often impossible to stop quickly. Such situations are marginal in cases where citizens treat civic activity as a value and duty in public space and if they see sense in engaging in political and social activities and are able to assess and respond quickly enough to the emerging symptoms of politicisation of the public sphere.

The European Union and its Member States are not free from similar problems. The social deficit of democracy in the European Union that has existed for many years has led to the diagnosis of this phenomenon and consideration of its possible effects. This has led to political corrective actions, increased transparency, openness, access to public information, and the start of a long and winding path, as it turned out, to restoring confidence in the value of European integration 75 years after the end of World War II.

There is no doubt that the European Union is not indifferent to crises of democracy, it evaluates policies implemented to counteract them and takes further actions. It is even more difficult because the EU itself is changing very dynamically and in many areas. Also global and internal challenges make these processes more and more difficult.

Today, the EU is based on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law as well as respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States. However, the Union will be a guarantor of these values as long as the half-millionth community of citizens of the Member States support it. The newly elected European Commission clearly sees this relationship. The President of the European Commission – Ursula von der Leyen – on the European Day, 9 May 2020 – on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of



the Schuman declaration and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II, is inaugurating the Conference on the future of Europe. The conference is announced as a project that aims to provide Europeans with more opportunities to influence what the Union does and how it serves its citizens. The aim of the conference is also an open, pluralist, transparent and structured debate with citizens from different backgrounds and representing different social groups. The proposed topics encompass the promotion of European values, increasing the EU's significance on the international stage, and strengthening the democratic foundations of the Union.

Opening a new chapter of the European Union's cooperation with young Europeans is a chance for attaining these ambitious political goals.

European youth is a unique social group with their views and positions on what the future of this organisation should be, critically assessing the reality in which it operates and the ubiquitous politics it often does not feel a subject of. In turn, the European Union needs young people like never before. Although the European institutions discern the need to build a partner approach to youth and make endeavours to achieve this goal, understanding European youth is not an easy task. Involving young people in constructive dialogue on public topics is even more difficult. Persuading them to participate actively in public life is a necessary challenge but only possible when the voice of European youth is more audible in public space and in the forum of the European institutions. Empowerment of the rising generation in European policy should be the first step on this path. Recommendations arising from the dialogues with young people regarding their expectations as to the conditions for increasing their own civic activity in European space, which they perceive in increasing transparency, openness and access to public information, show that European youth have a lot to offer and constitute another argument for closer cooperation to look for prospective solutions to problems that Europe is facing today.



# Annex 1

## Access to Public Information in the European Union

## Priority Transparency Needs from Youth Perspective



## *Access to information is part of both citizens' participation and citizens' control*

Jean-Paul Pinon, Director of WeCitizens  
SIA4Y project partner

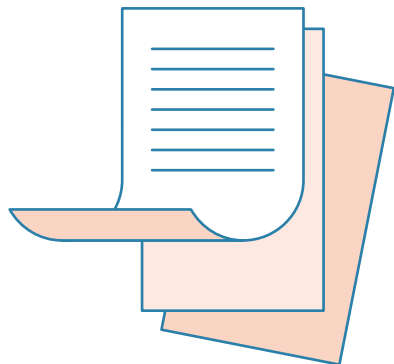
*Young people act in a different manner: quicker feedback, etc. The new technology offers the potential to offer additional channels to satisfy the needs of all. There is a momentum and we should be quick enough to grasp the opportunity to enhance democracy.*

Assya Kavrakova, European Citizens Action Service,  
Executive Director  
SIA4Y project partner

### Introduction

The right to information is a human right. For young people, this is a special right because in many cases the ability to exercise the right to information opens up possibilities for young people to exercise other human rights. Being able to find the right information can mean taking the first step to solving the problems European youth face today and encourage them to civic activity.

In the conditions of information overload, characteristic of the information society and knowledge-based economy, a particularly important challenge is to teach the young generation of Europeans how to recognise and act on high-quality information using all available communication and information tools. The success of this type of action depends on many factors. First of all, young people should be given better access to reliable information, their ability to critically evaluate information should be supported, and they should be involved in constructive and participatory dialogue. We should try to understand them and take action to lower the barriers they encounter in an attempt to be active in public space.



This is especially important in the case of the European Union. The social deficit of democracy this organisation suffers from requires many actions, taken both by the European institutions, politicians, but also all Europeans who benefit from the effects of European integration and support its further development.

European youth is a social group that requires special attention first and foremost because of the role it will play in the future – it is young people who will decide on the shape of the future European Union. In this context, information about youth's interest in political and public activity is becoming alarming. In the last decade it has decreased significantly. In addition, 14.2% of the European Union's population aged 15–29 are NEETs (unemployed, not in education or training).

At the same time, European youth is a very diverse social group with great potential, which should be properly recognised and unlocked for the benefit of the entire European Union. This will happen only when young people from being informed begin to take part in active two-way communication to finally consciously participate in the political and public life of the European Union.

For this to happen, youth's voice should be heard.

If European youth's right of access to public information is to be more effective, we assumed that it is essential to find the answer to the following questions:

- Do European young people think that the right to public information makes public institutions more open and accountable?
- Is this right useful to them?
- Are RTI and ATI a condition for the functioning of democracy, transparency of operation of institutions and good governance?
- How can RTI/ATI overcome the problem of youth's lack of trust in public institutions?
- Does European youth feel the addressee of public information of the European Union?
- Where does youth gain knowledge about RTI/ATI from? Is it useful?
- What increases young peoples' interest in RTI/ATI, and what discourages them?

## Methods

Transparency needs were formulated on the basis of the analysis of opinions of young Europeans who took part in meetings (discussions, workshops, lectures) and the survey conducted from March 2018 to January 2020 as part of the project *Strengthening the civil society rights by information access for European youth* (SIA4Y) as well as on the basis of correspondence and discussions with the project partners: SOCIALAS INOVACIJAS CENTRS Latvia; WeCitizens – WijBurgers – NousCitoyens Belgium; Aktiivinen Eurooppalainen Kansalainen Suomi Ry Finland; Stowarzyszenie Gmin RP Euroregion Baltyk Poland; Eesti Naisuurimus- ja Teabekeskus Estonia.

During the execution of the SIA4Y project, in all partner countries 9 meetings took place, in which in total over 400 young people participated. Each meeting with the young had a theoretical dimension as well as a practical one engaging the participants. The general purpose of the meetings was to promote knowledge about the right of access to information. The meetings differed in their specific objectives, which, taking into account national specificities, the activities of organisations dealing with transparency and working with the young, set out their own agendas of meeting topics. The analysis covered the issues and forms of cooperation with young people during these meetings. In addition, a quantitative survey was conducted using a questionnaire “Youth about experience with Freedom of Information”, obtaining a total of 105 responses meeting the formal criteria. The respondents were aged 12–25.

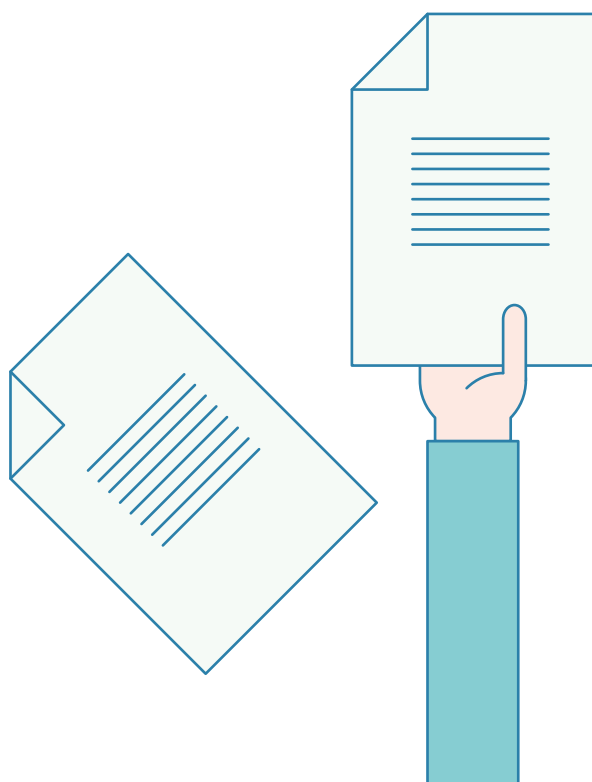
Each of the meetings was preceded by lectures on the right of access to information given by people actively working for human rights and freedom of information. The thematic areas of the lectures covered the right to information (RTI), the importance of freedom of access to information for democracy – the FOI perspective and the possibility of exercising the right of access to information (ATI).

The parts of meetings that engaged young people were characterised by great diversity. There were three issues raised during active cooperation with young people, namely:

- involvement of young people in the decision-making process on the example of the civic budget and youth councils;
- development of communication tools that facilitate the use of ATI and those thanks to which young people will become a group of active citizens;
- proactive search for information.

Multidisciplinary teams were an important aspect of the workshops. The young cooperated with representatives of various professions and different ages and with diverse experiences. Among them were youth policy experts, social activists dealing with youth activation and social participation as well as employees of institutions – offices and universities.

The project partners provided information containing answers to the following questions: What is Freedom of Information in your country? When can I use Freedom of Information to access documents (local level, e.g. public institutions)? How can do I lodge a Freedom of Information Application (local level, e.g. public institutions)? What fees are required to lodge my application? and RTI/ATI data and statistics, laws, research papers (with case study), projects, education programs about RTI/ATI for youth, list of youth institutions, organisations, councils. An important source of information on the attitude of young people to the right of access to information were the partners' opinions about the level of awareness of youth about RTI/ATI and examples of methods of raising of awareness in this case.



## Results

*Universal access to information is a driving force for transparent, accountable and effective governance, and paves the way for freedom of expression, cultural and linguistic diversity, and participation in public life.*

**Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO**

### AWARENESS

We know how important access to public information is for healthy democracy

### KNOWLEDGE

We know that we have the right to access information, but we feel that you only say what you want to tell us

### EDUCATION

We do not know what we can look for, so we look for what we think we can find

### ATTITUDES

We are motivated when the matter concerns us personally and we are able to assess the sense of our commitment to solving our problems

### TRUST

The more we trust institutions, politicians, officials, the more we believe in the sense of exercising the right of access to information

### TOOLS

The easier the tools, methods (forms, applications) to access information, the more motivation we have to use it

### SUPPORT

We need support in using access to public information

## The first: AWARENESS

### We know how important access to public information is for healthy democracy

Young people agree that the right to information is of great importance for the functioning of healthy democracy (73%) and recognise the right of access to information as an important value for their age group (73%). There is no doubt as to the relationship between ATI and the functioning of democracy and good governance. They also agree that FOI contributes to increasing the transparency of power (67%).

## The second: KNOWLEDGE

### We know that we have the right to access information, but we feel that you only say what you want to tell us

Half (51%) of the respondents declared that they had heard about the right to information. Of this, almost half had used ATI (47%) in the application mode, mainly to educational institutions (25%) and local government (19%). On the other hand, the respondents assess the possibilities of enforcing their rights much worse. Over half (56%) declared that if institutions do not want to publish information, they will find a way to hide it. Indirectly, this indicates a lack of confidence in public institutions, which decide by themselves whether they disclose information or not.

## The third: EDUCATION

### We do not know what we can look for, so we look for what we think we can find

Half (51%) of the respondents declared that they had heard about the right to information. Of this, almost half had sought ATI (47%) in the application mode, mainly to educational institutions (25%) and local government (19%). The majority of the respondents (82%) who confirmed that they had made an inquiry, received an answer. The lack of answer had not compelled them to file a complaint. It is interesting that among the respondents who had heard about ATI but had not used the application mode, the vast majority (76%) indicated that they had had no questions as the reason, and only a few that they had not known how to ask (10%) or had not known that they could ask (14%). Discussions with the young people taking part in the project pointed to the importance of systematic education about civil rights, among which the right to information appears as a tool improving democracy. The fact that only half of the respondents had heard about the right to

information, and on the other hand, again half (47%) had submitted a request for access to information may indicate that a large part of the requests might have been part of a school task. This is confirmed by the nature of the institutions to which applications had been submitted and the high level of satisfaction with the feedback received, as well as the age of the respondents. In the majority of cases young people exercise this right only at the level of educational institutions without being aware of for what other purposes and how they could exercise this right.

#### **The fourth: ATTITUDES**

##### **We are motivated when the matter concerns us personally and we are able to assess the sense of our commitment to solving our problems**

Advocacy in one's own case or of a peer group is the biggest motivation to take action in the field of seeking public information. The lack of sense of being a partner, a subject in relation with decision-makers is a demotivating factor. Young people notice the prevalence of one-way communication defining it as the dominance of "talking heads" who mass produce information without expecting feedback. This behaviour neutralizes civic attitudes of young people, they feel that their voice does not count. Motivation to being committed depends also on the possibility of truly involving young people in solving problems in their immediate environment. On the other hand, young people also show a lack of knowledge that reduces their possibilities of exercising the right to information.

#### **The fifth: TRUST**

##### **The more we trust institutions, politicians, officials, the more we believe in the sense of exercising the right of access to information**

The young clearly expressed their lack of trust in institutions, officials, the administration and politicians. They pointed to the examples of politicians avoiding publishing public information. Distrust was indicated as one of the reasons for not exercising the right to information. The lack of trust intensifies the sense of the lack of influence, which contributes to the belief about the senselessness of action. Among critical remarks there was also the conviction that institutions can manipulate. Youth often stressed that the dominance of politics in media reports fills them with aversion to politics.

## The sixth: TOOLS

### **The easier the tools, methods (forms, applications) to access information, the more motivation we have to use it**

Among the tools promoting and facilitating FOI and RTI/ATI, young people emphasised the role of public institutions, on which, first and foremost, the quality, transparency and value of published information depend. In the respondents' opinion, institution's publications are unintelligible, the young explicitly stated that information provided should be easy to search, comparable, effortlessly navigated, in friendly formats, with visible contact details.

## The seventh: SUPPORT

### **We need support in using access to public information**

In the questionnaire survey, young people declared that the main source of knowledge about ATI is school (30% of responses) and the Internet (16%) as well as the mass media (15%), and only a few pointed to NGOs (2%). However, in the discussion, they had no doubt that investigative and news media, especially local ones, and human rights and transparency organisations are key to supporting and controlling the integrity and openness of power. NGOs act as an intermediary in supporting, initiating and teaching how to navigate public data. They pointed to the role of youth organisations whose activities have a local dimension that allows them to act in their own environment.





## Recommendations

*To get a youngster more involved in FoI, give him opportunities to find easily information he is personally interested in.*

Johannes Filter, portal FragDenStaat <https://fragdenstaat.de/>

Transparency is one of the basic principles of healthy democracy and one of the most important elements of building trust in democratic institutions and processes. The European Union, which values democracy very highly, treats transparency as a condition for maintaining Europeans' trust and further support for the process of European integration. The European institutions also understand the importance of the evaluation of public policies for increasing the effectiveness of EU policy processes. Hence the openness to listening to opinions of citizens of the Member States.

The below recommendations for improving transparency in the European Union are based on the opinions of young Europeans participating in the SIA4Y project co-financed by the *Europe for Citizens* programme.

1. Strengthen value of transparency and protect transparency as a value in the European Union

We understand the value of democracy and the role of transparency that gives us an opportunity to use it. In our families and communities in which we live, there is still a memory of those who fought for freedom and democracy. This does not mean, however, that this remembrance will be permanent. We are afraid that it may be ruptured. We can already see worrying trends undermining democracy by examples of destroying transparency. We observe growing populist attitudes, propagation of propaganda and manipulation of information. Therefore, we believe that not only should the value of transparency be increased, but also transparency as a value should be protected.

2. Create an organisational culture in public institutions that gives Europeans more chances to exercise their RTI/ATI

The right to access information is not enough to be able to use it fully. Institutions, administrations, officials and politicians are not always prepared, they do not always have the appropriate

knowledge and tools to understand that great interest in public information is beneficial for both sides: us Europeans and you officials and politicians. Without a two-sided understanding of the value of this right and commitment to creating conditions for exercising it, it will be difficult to take full advantage of the benefits of RTI/ATI. The negative attitude of the administration to our questions about public information should be changed. Perceiving us as petitioners seeking arguments against the institution we ask, and not as active and aware citizens who exercise their right to public information in order to independently solve problems related to functioning in the public and political sphere will lead to the reproduction of examples of hiding information.

3. Invest in and promote the value of civic education by caring about the evaluation of its implementation and functioning in European Union countries

It will be very difficult to prepare us to be active EU citizens without public support for the principles of democracy resulting from investing in civic education and assessing its quality at various levels of education. Civic education varies from country to country. We do not learn how to be aware and active citizens, how to exercise our rights, only what they are. We have the impression that nobody assesses the effectiveness of civic education curricula. And in our opinion, civic education is a condition for improving the quality of public debate.

4. Show the value of RTI/ATI for solving current problems of young people

We are motivated when the matter concerns us personally and we are able to assess the sense of our commitment when we see a chance for solving our problems. Contents about access to public information often does not indicate us as potential recipients. It is difficult for us to deduce from it what benefits we could derive from exercising RTI/ATI apart from educational institutions. It should be remembered that this right applies to various social and age groups and should be presented as such. The language of the message and its substantive content should be addressed to us in such a way that we can see what youth problems can be solved by exercising it instead of being stuck in a sense of exclusion.

5. Treat young people as future voters and decision-makers, build trust

You say that we are the future of Europe and a guarantee of further development of the integration process. We often have the impression that this is an empty declaration. If we do not have an active voting right yet, we are not treated as recipients of electoral campaigns or public strategies, policies and programmes. As a result our trust diminishes. We assess positively the attempt to create youth policy of the European Union and the development of structures of youth institutions, such as youth councils at the level of the Member States. However, a large part of us cannot participate in them. To build trust between us and the European institutions, attempts should be made to democratise the possibility of participating in this important, authentic school of participation.

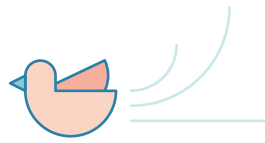
6. Propose exercising the right to access information by means of intuitive, simple and available tools and methods (forms, applications)

It should also be remembered that for our generation, *good information* must first of all be useful, which means that its content must be valuable to young people. Secondly, it must be available. This means, among other things, that it should meet the requirements of being democratic. It should be free of charge or relatively cheap and enable all of us to easily understand its content. It should also meet operability requirements, which means that it must be up-to-date and obtained on time. For us, the time of obtaining information determines its value. Moreover, it should pertain to the issue we are looking for. It should not omit important elements. For us, *good information* means primarily understandable, or intelligible information. It must be factual and come from a reliable source. It should also be correct, verifiable, supplementable and expandable.

7. Remember to support organisations that help us to exercise RTI/ATI

We know that free and professional media and NGOs are the guardians of democracy. Irrespective of whether we live in a small town or the capital, easy access to them will be considerable support and a chance for us to exercise the right of access to public information. We need this support, especially at the first

stage of our civic adventure. We are supporters of non-formal education affording opportunities to learn on examples that refer to our real problems, the solutions for which we are looking for here and now.





# Annex 2

## Youth Access to Public Information

## Towards Better Understanding of Democracy

# Youth Access to Public Information Towards Better Understanding of Democracy

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## Code of Good Practice

*The theme of this year's celebration is "Leaving No One Behind!", a mission in which digital technology is an invaluable resource. However, the unprecedented digital transformation of our era is also leading to new forms of inequality. To combat this, digital innovation must go hand in hand with the obligation of Member States to adopt and improve legislation for public access to information. Through implementing laws, investing in relevant infrastructure, and engaging civil society and young people, in particular, access to information can protect human rights and drive sustainable development.*

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Audrey Azoulay

Director-General

Message on the occasion of the International Day  
for Universal Access to Information

28.09.2019

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Dear Readers,

## The European Union treats participation as one of the essential democratic mechanisms for transforming individual interests into legitimate collective decisions.

The involvement of youth is regarded as particularly valuable. The Union focuses its activities in this area on striving to increase the participation of young people in civic, economic, social, cultural and political life. It calls upon the Member States to encourage and promote the engagement of the rising generation in society and democratic processes, the active involvement of young people and youth organisations in policies affecting the lives of young people at all levels, and to support youth organisations at local, regional and national levels. Besides, it points to the value of involving various young people's voices in decision-making processes at all levels and supports the development of civic competences through civic education and learning strategies. Finally, it notes the potential of the young, e.g. in counteracting such phenomena as populism, xenophobia and digital threats growing in the European Union.

To increase the level of youth participation, it is necessary to create conditions for young people to "learn to participate", including raising awareness of the possibilities they have in this respect and methods of participation as well as benefits resulting from it. The young who have cognitive skills and the ability to communicate improved in the education process and through participation in social phenomena have a chance to become a subject of politics and not just its object.

The first step on the path to conscious and active citizenship may be the acquisition of skills to exercise rights that are not limited by age. Examples of such rights are: the right to freedom of information and the right to access public information.

The project Strengthening the civil society rights by information access for European youth, the aim of which is to popularise the right to freedom of information and access to public information among European youth has been developed and implemented by six organisations from various European Union countries: Project Leader – Polish Economic Society branch in Gdańsk, from Poland; WeCitizens – WijBurgers – NousCitoyens from Belgium; Socialas Inovācijas Centrs from Latvia; Eesti Naisuurimus – ja Teabekeskus from Estonia; Aktiivinen Eurooppalainen Kansalainen Suomi Ry from Finland and Association of Polish Communities Euroregion Baltic from Poland. As a result of joint discussions, meetings, interviews and a review of documents, strategies and policies implemented in the countries which are the project partners, a youth guide for exercising the right to information and public information have been created, together with a code of good practices. We have selected methods that, on the one hand, show what these rights are and how they can be exercised, and on the other hand, illustrate tools that help to use them effectively.

The publication we are handing to you will help you to take the first step towards a conscious and active use of FOI and ATI. We hope that its content will convince you that EU countries, by developing both youth policy and transparency policy, want to encourage you to embark on the great adventure of conscious and active participation in democratic processes. Nothing about you without you!

Sylwia Mrozowska, Barbara Kijewska



# ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Only those young people who are informed about their rights and obligations can independently make decisions and pursue their goals as full citizens.

The right to freedom and access to public information, enabling young people to search for and receive public documents, serves as a vital tool in the fight against corruption, facilitates full participation in public life, increases governing efficiency, encourages investment and helps enforce fundamental human rights.

The openness of public authorities' actions is an indicator of a democratic state. It is the fundamental guarantee of citizens' trust in the state and its law, without which the harmonious functioning of society is not possible. Information on the activities of public bodies may be relevant for both the individual and the general public. Access to it is one of the essential tools enabling citizens to exercise control over those in power. That is why it is so vital to ensure the broadest possible access to public information. At the institution level, it means creating conditions for sharing information, and at the citizen level, the ability to exercise this right (I know how and for what).





## WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

In European countries the right to information (RTI), understood as part of the right to freedom of information (FOI), which is connected with the freedom of expression, is one of the rights of human freedom.

The signatories of international treaties have repeatedly recognised that it is not the duty of the state as such to acknowledge which of the values in the sphere of freedom and fundamental rights deserve protection. They exist regardless of the will of the state. However, the task of the state is to create legal guarantees for their fullest realisation. Among these *safeguards*, the creation of constitutional guarantees for the respect of the rights and freedoms already recognised in international agreements comes to the fore.



### DO YOU KNOW?

All over the world, in early 2019, RTI is legally guaranteed in 128 countries. There are still 67 countries where citizens do not have this right.

See more: [www.rti-rating.org](http://www.rti-rating.org)

## INTERNATIONAL TREATIES

### UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) – Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

### Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000) – Article 11

#### Freedom of expression and information

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart knowledge and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.

The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected.

### UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) – Article 13

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

### European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (2010) – Article 10

#### Freedom of expression

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.

### UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, SDG Target 16.10

aims to “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.”

**Access to public information and freedom of information (FOI)** refer to the right to access information held by public bodies, also known as “right to know.”

**RTI – Right to Inform**  
**ATI – Access to Information**  
**FOI – Freedom of Information**

## YOU WILL FIND THIS RIGHT (RTI) IN YOUR CONSTITUTION!

### BELGIUM

#### Right of access since 1994

Article 32 of the Constitution was amended in 1993 to include a right of access to documents held by the government: "Everyone has the right to consult any administrative document and to have a copy made, except in the cases and conditions stipulated by the laws, decrees, or rulings referred to in Article 134."

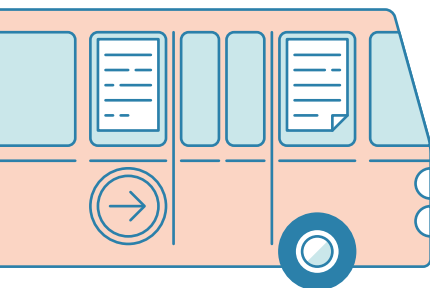
**More:** [www.rti-rating.org/country-data/Belgium/](http://www.rti-rating.org/country-data/Belgium/)

### ESTONIA

#### Right of access since 2000

Article 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia states: "(1) Everyone has the right to obtain information disseminated for public use freely. (2) All state agencies, local governments, and their officials have a duty to provide information about their activities, according to the procedure provided by law, to an Estonian citizen at his or her request, except information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law, and information intended exclusively for internal use. (3) An Estonian citizen has the right to access information about himself or herself held in state agencies and local governments and state and local government archives, under the procedure provided by law. This right may be restricted according to law to protect the rights and freedoms of others or the confidentiality of a child's parentage and in the interests of preventing a criminal offence, apprehending a criminal offender, or ascertaining the truth in a criminal proceeding. (4) Citizens of foreign states and stateless persons who are in Estonia have the rights specified in paragraphs two and three of this section equally with Estonian citizens unless otherwise provided by law."

**More:** [www.rti-rating.org/country-data/Estonia/](http://www.rti-rating.org/country-data/Estonia/)



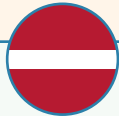


## FINLAND

### Right of access since 1951

[Constitution of Finland] Section 12, para. 2: Documents and recordings in possession of the authorities are public unless an Act has specifically restricted their publication. Everyone has the right of access to public documents and recordings. [Principle of Openness] Article 1 (1) Official documents shall be in the public domain, unless specifically otherwise provided in this Act or another Act.

**More:** [www.rti-rating.org/country-data/Finland/](http://www.rti-rating.org/country-data/Finland/)

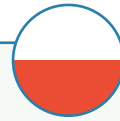


## LATVIA

### Right of access since 1998

Article 100. "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to freely receive, keep and distribute information and to express their views. Censorship is prohibited." Article 104. "Everyone has the right to address submissions to State or local government institutions and to receive a materially responsive reply." Article 115. "The State shall protect the right of everyone to live in a benevolent environment by providing information about environmental conditions and by promoting the preservation and improvement of the environment."

**More:** [www.rti-rating.org/country-data/Latvia/](http://www.rti-rating.org/country-data/Latvia/)



## POLAND

### Right of access since 1997

Constitution Article 61: (1) A citizen shall have the right to obtain information on the activities of organs of public authority as well as persons discharging public functions. Such right shall also include receipt of information on the activities of self-governing economic or professional organs and other persons or organisational units relating to the field in which they perform the duties of public authorities and manage communal assets or property of the State Treasury. (2) The right to obtain information shall ensure access to documents and entry to sittings of collective organs of public authority formed by universal elections, with the opportunity to make sound and visual recordings. (3) Limitations upon the rights referred to in paras. 1 and 2 above, may be imposed by statute solely to protect freedoms and rights of other persons and economic subjects, public order, security or vital economic interests of the State. (4) The procedure for the provision of the information referred to in paras. 1 and 2 above shall be specified by statute, and regarding the Sejm and the Senate by their rules of procedure.

**More:** [www.rti-rating.org/country-data/Poland/](http://www.rti-rating.org/country-data/Poland/)

### What are public institutions?

Public institutions exist to provide citizens with the possibility to access certain essential services. Their task is to protect and support citizens, as well as to improve the quality of their life. Thus, health care, police, fire brigade, municipal and state offices, public schools and libraries, universities, etc. are public institutions because they are financed from public funds. That is why every citizen can use them.

# B

## WHY ACCESS TO INFORMATION?

You and your loved ones pay taxes, and the state or municipality where you live performs tasks using tax money.

Institutions make decisions that affect your daily life, from construction in the city centre to buying vaccines or organising cultural events. Sometimes good things are done, and sometimes bad things are done. The more people are interested in public activities, the more they will be able to make proposals to improve things that are poorly done or to approve what has been done well. The more public leaders are aware that a citizen is checking what actions they are taking, the more careful they will be in managing our taxes. Democracy will be strengthened thanks to your watchful eyes.

On the other hand, institutions produce information that you may need to make a decision, or you can use this information to publish it on your blog or Facebook. In this way, you will make life easier for people who may need similar information, which is called the re-use of public information. Public information cover, among others, train timetables, information about the government's work, a list of hospitals in the area, or information about road construction on a specific route, and even messages from a public meteorological institute.



# C

## HOW CAN YOU DO THAT?

### HOW TO GAIN ATI?

**There are three main ways** to become acquainted with public information:

1. participation in meetings of collegial public authorities, e.g. municipality/city councils;
2. getting acquainted with public information made available in the institution (displayed, posted on the institution's website, stored in a repository);
3. requesting public information.

ATI offers the possibility to see and listen to life debates of people sitting on bodies chosen in general elections, i.e. those that we, as citizens, have chosen.

Institutions publish public information on official websites and display them in their headquarters.

### DO YOU KNOW?

In 2021 the range of data that can be re-used will be extended and will cover data created by state-owned entrepreneurs and scientific units that you will be able to download freely and openly across the EU, via Application Programming Interfaces (APIs).

**EU member states** have an open data portal where they post public information for re-use. In one place, you have access to hundreds of pieces of information according to categories!



**BE** <https://data.gov.be/en>



**EE** <https://opendata.riik.ee/en/>



**FI** <https://vm.fi/en/opendata>



**LV** <https://data.gov.lv/eng>



**PL** <https://dane.gov.pl/>

### WHAT IF I CANNOT FIND WHAT I AM LOOKING FOR?

If you cannot find public information in open resources, you can ask for it orally, but you can only do so only if the information is readily available.

If this is not possible, you have to request information in writing, but this does not mean that you have used a unique form and do it in a particular way. In your letter or e-mail, write what information you want and how you want it to be delivered to you.

## WHAT CAN I ASK PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS ABOUT?

### Law-making

The course of the meeting of the district council or city council is public and available, you can attend the meetings, and you can also access documents created by public authorities during the legislative process.

### Spatial planning

If you want to know what buildings will be built in your neighbourhood, which architects designed constructions for which building permits have been granted. The building permit decisions issued by the architectural and building authority are public information subject to disclosure.

### Contracts, invoices, bills, expenses...

If you want to know if outsourcing of services to people outside the municipal office was carried out transparently, who did what and how much it cost, you can ask the municipality. Just send an inquiry.

### Information on employees and persons performing public functions

Do you want to know if employees of municipal institutions are substantively prepared to perform their tasks? How much money does the mayor spend on trips as part of his duties? You can ask.

### Decisions taken

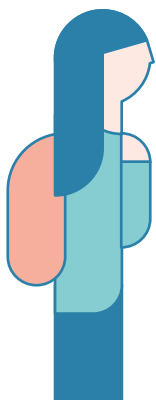
Or maybe you want to know how many permits the municipality issued for felling trees in your favourite park?



### REMEMBER!

The above list is only a fraction of the whole wide world of public information which is available upon request.

Don't be afraid to ask!



## STEP BY STEP, HOW TO SUBMIT A REQUEST?



### STEP 1: CHECK

Before you submit a written request to the institution, check if:

1. The piece of information you are looking for is public information.
2. The piece of information you are looking for can be found on the official website of the institution (minutes, audio materials from meetings, reports, etc.). Institutions themselves often create a platform for communication with citizens, informing them about decisions and actions taken. Therefore, review the official site carefully. Be a detective in your case!
3. If you have found the information you are looking for, "work is done"!
4. If you have not found it, take a step no. 2.



### STEP 2: WRITE

Write your ATI request. Remember: you do not have to justify your claim or say how you intend to use the information.

1. Check if there is an "ATI request" electronic form on the official website of the institution.
  2. If you have found the "ATI request" form, fill it in and send it.
  3. If not, you have to send an e-mail or a letter.
- You should receive a confirmation of submitting your ATI request.
  - You should receive the reply within 15–30 days depending on the law and the amount of work required to prepare the answer.



### STEP 3: RECEIVE

The public institution can:

- Give you the information expected.
- Give you a partial reply.
- Redirect your ATI request to another public institution.
- Inform you that it needs more time to respond.
- Refuse to answer if they have the right (examples: the question is not about public information; the answer has already been published; the issue has been addressed to the wrong institution.
- Ignore the question.

**Important!** In many cases, e.g. refusing an answer to a public inquiry or ignoring the question, you can **appeal!** Here, knowledge of the procedure is essential. In democratic countries, there are various institutions supporting citizens in asserting their rights. An example is the civic support networks for using ATI – you can always turn to them for help!



**BE** <https://transparencia.be/>



**EE** <https://www.transparency.org/country/EST>



**FL** [https://www.transparency.org/whoweare/contact/org/nc\\_finland](https://www.transparency.org/whoweare/contact/org/nc_finland)



**LV** <http://delna.lv/eng/>



**PL** <https://informacjapubliczna.org>



#### REMEMBER!

ATI laws and their implementation differ from country to country. To get more information on the state of ATI in your respective country, please consult the [www.rti-rating.org](http://www.rti-rating.org)



# YOUTH POLICY IN A NUTSHELL

The development of the European Union's youth policy in recent years has been primarily associated with the awareness of the importance of the young generation of Europeans for the further development of the integration process, mostly in its social, economic and political dimension, and the general situation of young people in the European Union, which for a long time has been giving cause for concern.

Youth policy is within the competence of the Member States. The European Union supports and complements their activities in this field, providing a forum for cooperation and exchange of experience and information on issues of common interest.

The demographic situation of the European Union is a matter of concern. Statistical data clearly show that the European Union is ageing. Currently, young people constitute around 17% of the total population of the European Union. This proportion varies from country to country. It is slightly smaller in Greece, Spain, Italy and Slovenia, reaching the highest level in Cyprus, where 23.6% of the population is under 30 years old. The share of young people in the total population fell gradually from around 24% in 1985 to 19% in 2010. According to forecasts, when the European Union population increases to 525 million (2050), the percentage of young people will decrease from around 17% in 2018 to below 16% in 2050, which corresponds to a reduction of over 7 million people.

The diminishing political and social activity of young people is another challenge. The results of the European youth 2016 survey indicate the reasons for the low electoral involvement of young people. Respondents (90%) mention among them: disappointment, lack of faith that their voice can change anything, general lack of interest in European politics. To stimulate youth's activity in this area, attempts are made to implement programmes activating young people's civicism initiated by international organisations as well as national institutions, non-governmental organisations and political parties. They encompass formal education instruments (e.g. civics, democratic education) and non-formal ways of attracting young people to local, national and international politics. Most of them promote basic methods of political participation, assuming that knowledge about the possibilities of participation, its benefits and practices is necessary for the development of active political participation.

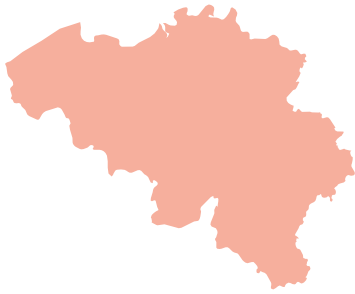
Strengthening of youth policy at both national and European level can be one way to change this grave situation. The European Union prepared the EU Youth Strategy, which provides a framework for EU cooperation in the field of youth policy for 2019–2027. It aims to support the participation of young people in democratic life and their social and civic engagement and to provide young people with the necessary resources to participate in social life. The Member States develop youth policy taking into account the specificities of this social group.

**REMEMBER!**

It is worth knowing what opportunities youth policy offers in your country!



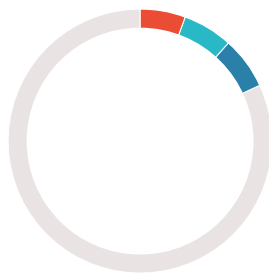
## A BELGIUM



### What is the youth population of Belgium?

The total number of young people:  
**2 057 718**

### Ratio of young people in the total population (%)



Age group 15-19	5,6%
Age group 20-24	6,1%
Age group 25-29	6,5%
Other age groups	81,8%

Total number of young people:  
**2 057 718**

The Flemish Community formally defines “youth” as the group of children and young people up to and including the age of 30.

There is no clear understanding of young people in the French community of Belgium.

The target group for youth policy in East-Belgium is from 4 years up to 30.

### Is there a Belgian youth policy?

Belgium has three youth policies (Flemish Community, French Community and German-Speaking Community). There is no National Youth Law, and there is no public discussion about the need for a single law. No national Youth Strategy exists at the moment.

The Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on conducting a renewed policy on youth and children's rights. The Act defines instruments and financing of youth policy, imposes on the Flemish authorities the obligation to run regional and local Youth Information Points (youth service) financed by local authorities.

In the French-Speaking Community, there are five decrees concerning the implementation of youth policies at the community level.

In the German-Speaking Community youth work is regulated by the Decree of 6 December 2011 governing the funding of youth work (Dekret vom 6. December 2011 zur Förderung der Jugendarbeit) which sets out the essentials of the youth policy.

### Who is responsible for the development and implementation of youth policy at the community level?

The Communities have a minister responsible for youth, a parliamentary commission and several administrative departments with ‘youth’ in their name.

### Is there a Belgium strategy for youth?

The key instrument of the Flemish Government in the implementation of its youth policy is the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2015–2019), which operates on a four-year cycle. The current Youth Policy includes 12 strategic goals and 34 operational goals. The encompassing themes are (1) poverty; (2) sustainability; (3) being young; (4) mobility; (5) education 1; (6) education 2; (7) participation; (8) space; (9) well-being; (10) housing; (11) employment; (12) cultural education. The plan was developed using a participatory method involving young people, who set youth policy objectives covering 12 priority themes as part of the debates and surveys. The relevant ministers were then asked to submit action plans. Finally, administrations developed projects, processes and implementation indicators.

In the French-Speaking Community the Youth Strategy doesn't exist.

In German-speaking Community exists the Strategic Plan on Youth (2016–2020) entitled “Acting respectfully” (Jugendstrategieplan 2016–2020). The plan focuses on 11 actions in 4 categories: 1. Strong against Addiction, 2. Promoting diversity, 3. Political education, 4. Emotions and self-perception.

## Which Belgium institutions are involved in the creation of a youth policy?

The Flemish Agency for Socio-Cultural Work for Youth and Adults in the Ministry of Culture, Youth Sports and Media is responsible for implementing the Plan. At the local level, each province and the local authority has one officer who is responsible for youth matters.

## What is the youth parliament in the Flemish community?

There is no youth parliament in Flanders.

## What is the youth parliament – Wallonia-Brussels?

The Youth Parliament – Wallonia-Brussels is a non-profit organisation, which was set up in 1997. Every year it organises the “simulation” of the French-speaking Community’s parliament. Young deputies and journalists live together for a week and work together on fictitious decrees as deputies and journalists of a fictitious country. The event is broadcast by Belgian media.

## What is the youth parliament of the German-speaking community?

The youth parliament created by the youth Council was a pilot project that started in 2004. It was to become a repetitive project, included in the secondary school curriculum. Unfortunately, this goal has not been attained yet.

## What is the youth council of the Flemish community?

In Flanders, there are Youth Councils (Jeugdraad) at the national and local (Municipal Youth Councils) level. They are appointed as an advisory body to the Belgian Government. Each ministry addressing activities to the young is required to consult the Youth Council. As part of the Youth Councils, consultations are held in which the Youth Council advises on all matters related to youth policy and the development of a multiannual plan. Similarly, Local Youth Councils mostly cooperate with municipalities in the field of local policies addressed to young people and children. Youth councils regularly carry out surveys on youth issues and are responsible for keeping in touch.

## What is the youth council in the French-speaking community?

The Youth Council is the leading and official advisory body for youth consultation in the French-speaking Community. The legislation governing the Youth Council is the Decree creating the Youth Council (Décret créant le Conseil de la Jeunesse). Its primary functions are: (1) To pass on advice on authorities’ demand or its initiative; (2) To promote civic participation of young people and their empowerment; (3) To consult young people on themes affecting them to build a collective speech to relay to the politics; (4) To represent young people and the youth sector at the national and international level.

## What is the youth council of the German-speaking community?

The German-Speaking Community Youth Council (Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend – RdJ) was established by a royal resolution on 30 December 1983. It is an independent federation of individual young people, youth centres, local youth councils, youth political party organisations and youth organisations. The overall goal of the Youth Council is to promote all activities that enable young people of the German-speaking community to participate in making decisions on actions that affect them. The Youth Council considers itself a platform that allows the adolescent to participate in the development of youth policy actively, preparation of projects and to experience (European) democracy.

## MORE INFORMATION

### Youth policies in Belgium, 2017

<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/overview-Belgium-Flemish-Community>

<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/overview-Belgium-French-Community>

<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/overview-Belgium-German-Speaking-Community>

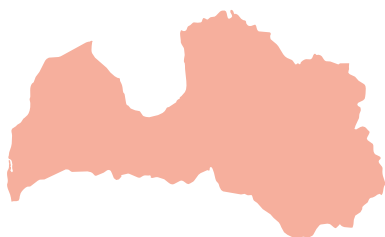
### The Flemish Uouth and Children’s Rights Policy Plan 2015–2019

[http://www.jkp.vlaanderen/assets/downloads/JKP\\_summary\\_digital\\_version.pdf](http://www.jkp.vlaanderen/assets/downloads/JKP_summary_digital_version.pdf)

### The Youth Parliament Wallonia-Brussels

<https://www.parlementjeunesse.be/>

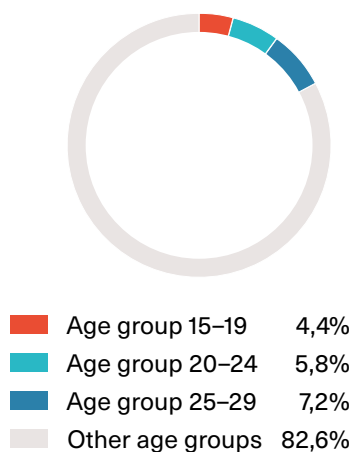
## B LATVIA



### What is the youth population of Latvia?

In 2017 the total number of young people aged 15–29 in Latvia amounted to **341 793** people. The number of young people in Latvia has dropped significantly over the past 20 years. Compared to 1990 it decreased by almost 40%.

### Ratio of young people in the total population (%)



Total number of young people:  
**341 793**

### What is the main goal of youth policy in Latvia?

The main goal of youth policy in Latvia is to improve the quality of life of young people by promoting their initiatives and participation in decision making in public space. The specific objectives are defined in the medium-term policy planning document. The strategic goals in the 2016–2020 plan cover three areas: environment, participation and personal development. Directions of youth policy 2016–2020 in the field of “participation.”

- facilitating and ensuring active cooperation of those involved in the development and implementation of youth policy;
- development of research on youth;
- securing the representation of Latvia in international youth organisations and networks;
- providing young people with an opportunity to participate in decision making at the level of national and local authorities, supporting the participation of young people in democracy and strengthening the potential of youth organisations;
- providing young people with access to up-to-date, understandable information about their rights, obligations and responsibilities

Source: Youth Policy Implementation Plan 2016–2020  
<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/281546-par-jaunatnes-politikas-istenosanas-planu-2016-2020-gadam>.

### Who is responsible for the development and implementation of youth policy in Latvia?

Several entities are involved in the development and implementation of youth policy in Latvia, including public administration bodies, local authorities, youth organisations, youth initiative groups (informal youth groups), youth associations and foundations, trade unions, employers' organisations, religious organisations, youth researchers.

The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) is responsible for youth policy. Each year, the MoES develops a programme that includes measures and actions to implement youth policy in the framework of the Youth Policy Implementation Plan 2016–2020. In turn, a Youth Advisory Council exists to promote a coherent youth policy and encourage participation in decision-making and public life. Another important institution is the Agency for International Programs for Youth which is subordinated to the Minister of Education and Science. The main objective of the Agency is to promote youth voluntary service activities and mobility. At the national level, the body responsible for implementing the youth strategy is the Department of Political Initiatives and Development of the MoES, at the local level municipalities take responsibility for implementing youth policy, among others, by creating local youth policy documents.



## What is youth law?

The Youth Law is a Latvian law defining persons involved in the implementation of youth policy and their competences, the role of young people in the development and implementation of youth policy, as well as the basic principles of allocating funds for youth initiatives and forms of youth participation in decision making in public life. According to the Youth Act, young people in Latvia are between 13 and 25 years of age.

## What are the principles of Latvian youth policy?

There are seven principles of Latvian youth policy: the principle of participation; the principle of information availability; the principle of equal opportunities; the principle of respect for the interests of young people; the principle of favourable economic conditions; the principle of integration of young people; the principle of international mobility and cooperation.

## What are: the latvian youth parliament and the youth council of Latvia?

The Youth Parliament is a project of the Latvian Parliament that provides young people with an opportunity to express and defend their ideas, as well as to get acquainted with the daily work of members of the parliament. Young people submit their ideas for elections and collect votes to support them. In 2016, such a project was implemented already for the sixth time in Latvia.

Any young person permanently residing in the Republic of Latvia, who has reached at least the age of 15 as at the moment of announcing of the project and would not be older than 20 at the end of the project, has the right to stand for election.

To stand for election in the Youth Parliament, a young person shall register their profile on the website according to the procedures specified in the Latvian Parliament project regulations.

Founded in 1992, the National Youth Council of Latvia is an association of youth organisations and organisations working with youth up to the age of 30 that voluntarily unites associations and foundations, the regulations or by-laws of which provide for youth work as

one of the aims and in which at least two thirds of members of the direct target group is persons below 30 years of age or organisers and/or implementers of youth work.

### EXPERT OPINION

#### What is your opinion about the right method of raising awareness of youth about FIO in Latvia?

"The main channel for communication with youth nowadays is social media. Therefore the best results for raising awareness regarding FOI matters could be achieved through interactive social media campaigns and the creation of informative videos and infographics. Additionally, more civic education should be incorporated in the formal education system of the country; therefore youngsters already from an early age would have more knowledge regarding the importance of FOI in the functioning of a democratic country."

**Annija Kaktina**

Social Innovation Centre  
[www.socialinnovation.lv](http://www.socialinnovation.lv)

### MORE INFORMATION

**Flash Eurobarometer 455, 2018, European Youth**  
[http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2163\\_455\\_ENG](http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2163_455_ENG)

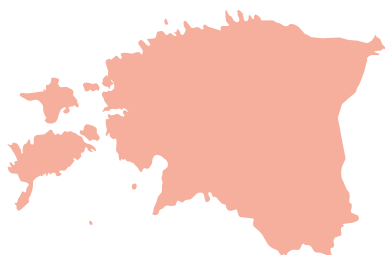
**Ministry of Education and Science**  
<https://www.izm.gov.lv/en/youth>

**The Youth Law**  
<https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=175920>

**Youth Policy Implementation Plan 2016–2020**  
<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/281546-par-jaunatnes-politikas-istenosanas-planu-2016-2020-gadam>

**Youth policies in Latvia, 2017**  
<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/sites/youthwiki/files/gdllatvia.pdf>

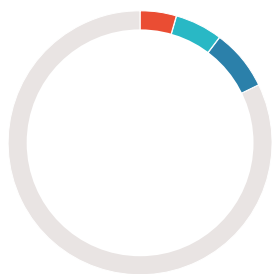
## C ESTONIA



### What is the youth population of Estonia?

The number of young people aged 15–29 amounts to **233 567** in Estonia. Youth in Estonia, according to the law, are people aged 7–26.

### Ratio of young people in the total population (%)



Age group 15–19	4,4%
Age group 20–24	5,8%
Age group 25–29	7,2%
Other age groups	82,6%

Total number of young people:  
**233 567**

### What are the most important legal acts about youth in Estonia?

In Estonia, there are many different laws, which carry more or less direct relevance for young people as they define the obligations and rights of municipalities and central government towards the young people as well as entitlements, rights, duties and limitations of young people. Two most essential acts to the renewed Child Protection Act, which defines the principles of ensuring the rights and well-being of children in the age group of 0–18 and the Youth Work Act, which sets the age range for young people from 7–26 and the obligations of different authorities in the youth field.

### Who is responsible for the development and implementation of youth policy in Estonia?

An institution responsible for youth is the Ministry of Education and Research, and more precisely, the Youth Affairs Department.

### What is the main goal of the youth field development plan 2014–2020?

The main goal of the development plan maintains that young people will have a comprehensive range of opportunities for self-development and self-realisation and that the youth field will support the development of social cohesion and creativity in society in general. Moreover, the detailed goals indicate that: (1) young people will have more choices in terms of discovering their creative and developmental potential; (2) young people will face a lower risk of exclusion; (3) the participation of young people in decision-making will be supported more; (4) the youth field operates more efficiently.

### What is the Estonian Youth Work Centre?

The Estonian Youth Work Centre (Eesti Noorsootöö Keskus) is a national centre for youth work under the administrative authority of the Ministry of Education and Research – the national youth work agency. Its main objective is to develop and organise youth work in the framework of the national youth policy.

### What is the role of youth participation in Estonia's youth policy?

Participation of young people in decision making is defined as one of four strategic objectives in the Youth Field Development Plan 2014–2020. Most political parties in Estonia have a dedicated form for young people to participate – whether it is a substructure under the organisation or a separate organisation. There are local and county level youth participation councils in Estonia. The Estonian National Youth Council coordinates and supports the development and activities of youth councils in Estonia.

Considerable emphasis on youth participation in public life is related to the fact that Estonian youth is a passive group of voters. There is a noticeable disturbing tendency of a decrease in the participation of young people in the elections to the European Parliament and the national parliament. The emphasis on youth participation is intended to help curb this negative tendency.

In Estonia currently, innovative forms of youth participation are sought including supported by e-services and technologies. Smart youth work, including youth work using the developments of the technology, is a subject of high-priority in the youth policy throughout the youth field development plan period until 2020.

### Are there youth representative bodies in Estonia?

In Estonia, the term “youth parliament” is not defined legally. Therefore, the term has been used for example as a name for some local youth councils (for example Narva Noorteparlament, see [www.parlament.noortek.ee](http://www.parlament.noortek.ee)). However, just like in other European countries, there is the Estonian National Youth Council (Eesti Noorteühenduste Liit – ENL). The Estonian National Youth Council is an umbrella organisation established in 2002. It unites 56 youth organisations and 37 youth councils throughout Estonia.

Moreover, there are local and county level youth participation councils (osaluskogu) in Estonia. At the municipal level, local youth councils are consulted on topics that are relevant for youth. In 2015, the municipal youth councils were active in 70 local governments. The youth consultation in the public policy processes occurs mainly in 3 contexts: drafting sectorial strategies and development plans, implementing sectoral strategy and development plans and design of the youth work services.

### MORE INFORMATION

**Estonian Ministry of Education and Research**

<https://www.hm.ee/en>

**Youth Field Development Plan 2014–2020**

[https://entk.ee/sites/default/files/arengukava%202014\\_2020.pdf](https://entk.ee/sites/default/files/arengukava%202014_2020.pdf)

**Youth policies in Estonia, 2017**

<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/sites/youthwiki/files/gdlestonia.pdf>

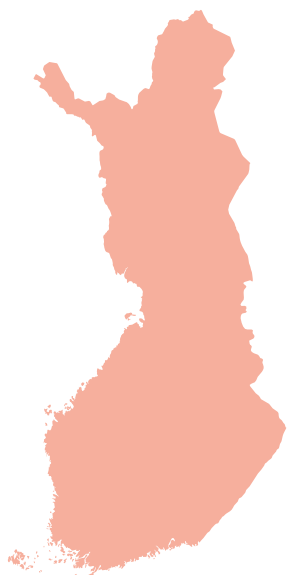
**Youth Affairs Department**

[https://www.hm.ee/en/contact?tid\\_with\\_depth%5b0%5d=153](https://www.hm.ee/en/contact?tid_with_depth%5b0%5d=153)

**the Youth Work Act**

<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/515012016004/consolide>

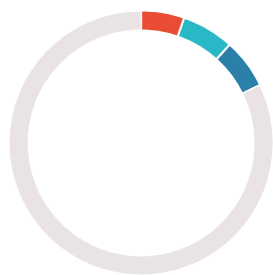
## D FINLAND



### What is the youth population of Finland?

The Youth Act defines young people as those under 29 years of age. Therefore, the actors that operate in the field of youth work target their actions at this age group.

#### Ratio of young people in the total population (%)



Age group 15–19	5,5%
Age group 20–24	6,2%
Age group 25–29	6,2%
Other age groups	82,1%

Total number of young people:  
**982 915**

### What is the Finnish youth act?

The Youth Act promotes social inclusion, opportunities to participate in decision-making on matters of concern, development of individuals' abilities, improvement of living conditions, and access to free-time hobbies and youth work – to name a few. The Government Decree supports the implementation of the act by, for example, specifying the assignment of the duties involved at the national, regional and local levels.

### Who is responsible for the development and implementation of youth policy in Finland?

In Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the overall development of youth work and youth policy. The Ministry strives to support young people in growing up and gaining independence, promote their active citizenship and social empowerment, and improve the environment in which they grow up and their living conditions. The development of youth policy issues is informed by the Government Programme, the National Youth Work and Policy Programme as well as other strategies and implementation plans of the Government, including the Government Programme's key projects.

### What are main goals of Finnish youth policy?

The Youth Act specifies the objectives and values of youth work and youth policy.

#### The goals of Finnish youth policy

- to promote the social inclusion of young people and provide them with opportunities for exerting influence and improving their skills and capabilities to function in society
- support the growth, independence and sense of community of young people and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and adoption of skills necessary for this purpose
- support young people's free-time pursuits and engagement in civic society
- promote non-discrimination and equality among young people and the realisation of their rights
- improve young people's growth and living conditions.

Source: The Youth Act, <https://minedu.fi/en/legislation-youth>.

### Is there a Finnish strategy for youth?

According to the Youth Act, the Government shall adopt a national youth work and policy programme every four years. The National Youth Work and Policy Programme (2017–2019) based on the Youth Act and the Government Decree on Youth Work were accepted on 12th of October 2017. The part of national policies of the programme comprises five youth policy objectives, which the government has outlined for 2017–2019: (1) Every child and young person has the possibility to engage in at least one free-time hobby of their choice; (2) Young people's employability skills are enhanced and social exclusion is reduced; (3) Young people receive more opportunities for participation in decision-making and exerting influence; (4) Fewer young people suffer from mental health problems thanks to preventive work, and (5) Young people receive sufficient guidance and other support for independent living.

### Which Finnish institutions are involved in the creation of a youth policy?

The Regional State Administrative Agencies are responsible for the regional implementation of the Ministry of Education and Culture guidelines in the field of education, daycare, libraries, sports, and youth work. The municipality is responsible for how the youth policy and youth work is implemented at the local level. The municipal youth work services include e.g. information and counselling services, youth facilities and hobby opportunities, sports, cultural and multicultural youth activities, outreach youth work and youth workshops. The expert bodies assisting the Ministry of Education and Culture in matters of youth affairs are the State Youth Council and Assessment and State Aid Commission, the roles and tasks of which are defined in the Youth Act. As youth policy is cross-sectorial several ministries are responsible for policy areas concerning young people. These ministries include, e.g. the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Another critical national public agency involved in youth policy implementation is the Finnish National Agency for Education which merged with the earlier Finnish Centre for International Mobility CIMO on 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2017.

#### MORE INFORMATION

##### Youth policies in Finland, 2017

<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/sites/youthwiki/files/gdlfinland.pdf>

##### The Youth Act

<https://minedu.fi/en/legislation-youth>

##### The Ministry of Education and Culture

<https://minedu.fi/en/policies-and-development-youth>

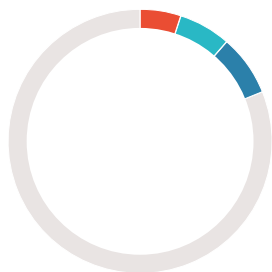
## E POLAND



### What is the youth population of Poland?

The total number of young people is **7 153 794**. According to social policy programmes, youth means people aged from 13 to 30 years of age.

### Ratio of young people in the total population (%)



Age group 15–19	5,2%
Age group 20–24	6,3%
Age group 25–29	7,4%
Other age groups	81,1%

Total number of young people:  
**7 153 794**

### Does Poland have a youth strategy?

The “State Strategy for Youth for 2003–2012” (Strategia Państwa dla Młodzieży na lata 2003–2012; Strategy) prepared before Poland’s accession to the EU remains the only document determining the development and directions of Polish youth policy. Currently, there is no strategy in Poland directly devoted to young people. It is impossible to indicate one official document focusing on the needs and rights of young people and regulating issues relating to them (“Youth Law”). However, this does not mean that Polish legislation does not cover young people’s lives, rights and duties. Youth-related regulations are provided in various legal acts.

### At what stage is the creation of the national youth representation in Poland?

Official youth representation at the central level has been the subject of much debate since the onset of the political transformation in Poland. However, up till now, no permanent and single authority representing young people’s interests has been created. Work is currently in progress to create an entity whose activity may contribute to the development of Polish youth policy.

The Polish Council of Children and Youth of the Republic of Poland at the Ministry of National Education has operated in Poland since 2011. The tasks of the Council include expressing opinions and presenting proposals on issues concerning children and young people in matters related to government administration responsible for education and upbringing, in particular providing views on planned changes, including recommendations for solutions. The Council is composed of 16 members and their deputies, appointed by the Minister of National Education, one member and his/her deputy from each province.





## What is the status of the development of Polish youth policy at the regional level?

At the regional level, we can observe the rapid development of youth policy. Seven provinces have established formal structures supporting and representing young people.

Examples of formal structures supporting and representing youth at the regional level in Poland:

- Youth Assembly of Dolnośląskie Province (2013)
- Youth Assembly of Podlaskie Province (2014)
- Youth Forum of Opolskie Province (2017)
- Youth Parliament of Wielkopolskie Province (Youth Assembly of Wielkopolskie Province) (2017)
- Youth Council of Zachodniopomorskie Province (2005)
- Youth Council of Pomorskie Province (2015)
- Parliament of Children and Youth of Lubelskie Province (1996)
- Youth Parliament of Śląskie Province (2017)

Source: Youth Policy in Poland 2017  
<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/sites/youthwiki/files/gdlpoland.pdf>

There are more and more examples of such initiatives in Poland. Following art. 5, paragraph b of the Local Government Act, local authorities may appoint a youth council as an advisory body. In 2016, there were “about 200 youth councils operating under the authority of municipalities, cities, and in the case of Warsaw – also urban districts.” Some youth councils are members of the Polish Council of Youth Organisations (PROM) established in 2011. Since 22 April 2017, PROM has been a full member of the European Youth Forum. On 29 April 2016, the Parliamentary Group Supporting Youth Councils was established operating in local government units (the Parliamentary Team for Youth Councils at local government units), whose goal is to provide support and advice to youth councils integrating communities associated with youth councils and to promote the idea of active citizenship through participation in the work of youth councils. The group cooperates with the Polish Council of Children and Youth of the Republic of Poland operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education.

## EXPERT OPINION

### What is your opinion about the proper method of raising awareness of youth about FIO in Poland?

“Unfortunately, despite emphasising the strategic role of the youth component and loud announcements about the inclusion of young people in participatory processes, attempts to improve the current civic education system, or access to public information, there are still significant deficiencies in the system approach, on which we still need to work in order to lead to its improvement and this is a challenge that all of us must take on in the near future.”

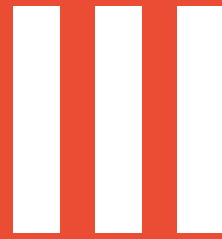
**Marcin Żuchowski**  
Association of Polish Communes  
Euroregion Baltic

## MORE INFORMATION

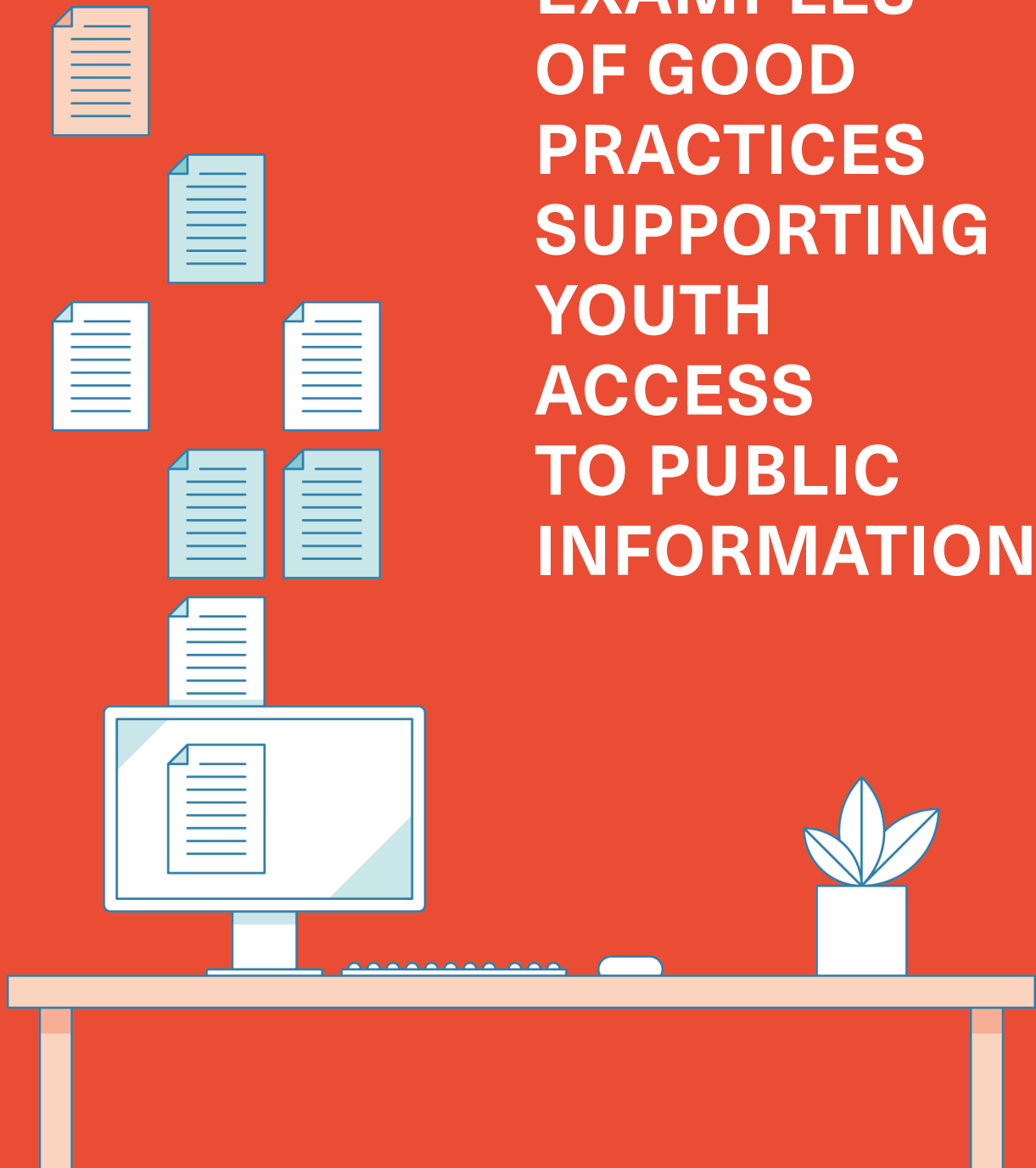
### Youth policies in Poland, 2017

<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/sites/youthwiki/files/gdlpoland.pdf>





# EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES SUPPORTING YOUTH ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION





## A TRANSPARENCIA

**Country:** Belgium

**Organisation:** Anticor

**Dates:** 2016

**Number of participants:** 100,000 readers per week;  
7,000 subscribers on facebook

**Youth Information tool:** digital citizen technologies,  
web platform

**More information:**

<https://transparencia.be/>

<https://www.facebook.com/transparenciaBE>

<https://twitter.com/TransparenciaBE>

### Description

Transparencia.be – an online platform founded to help citizens request access to administrative documents from a public authority. This platform gathers citizens' requests and publishes reports received from public administrations.

The platform was launched to promote access to public information, facilitate the submission of questions and strengthen civic control. The founders' idea was to fight corruption, abuse or misuse of public resources.

Any citizen interested in obtaining information from the authorities can ask a question via the platform form. If necessary, the team will phrase the issue correctly and direct it to the appropriate office. The portal has a list of public institutions in alphabetical and thematic order for better navigation around the institutions. In its register currently, Transparencia lists 1,212 national public institutions and European institutions with address data (csv).

Every user can track at what stage of processing his inquiry is. Each query is placed on the portal, and the status of the inquiry is specified – If the administration responds, the answer will also be published on the website, and the applicant will be able to assess the response and say whether he/she considers it complete, sufficient or satisfactory.

Besides, transparencia.be cooperates with volunteers wishing to increase the transparency of public institutions, thus developing their civic competences.

### Achievements

Since its launch in 2016, the users of Transparencia have sent 1,513 questions. Complete answers have been obtained from 465 institutions. In the case of 173 applications, no response has been received, and 766 are being processed.

The greatest achievement of the portal was the change of 4 transparency provisions within three years from the creation of the portal. On 1 May 2019, the Walloon Parliament unanimously adopted an act strengthening the competence of the Commission for Access to Administrative Documents (Commission d'accès aux documents administratifs – CADA) facilitating citizens' access to documents and administrative laws in Wallonia.

The portal is available in French and Dutch.



## B TRANSPARENCY INDEX OF POLITICAL PARTIES

**Country:** Belgium

**Organisation:** WeCitizens

**Dates:** 2016 and 2017

**More information (in French):**

**Complete report (2017):**

[www.wecitizens.be/docs-fr/E18-ITPP17-Indice\\_de\\_transparence\\_des\\_partis\\_politiques-Rapport.pdf](http://www.wecitizens.be/docs-fr/E18-ITPP17-Indice_de_transparence_des_partis_politiques-Rapport.pdf)

**Press release 2017:**

[http://www.wecitizens.be/newsletter/itpp17-communique\\_de\\_presse/](http://www.wecitizens.be/newsletter/itpp17-communique_de_presse/)

**Press release 2016:**

<http://www.wecitizens.be/newsletter/itpp16-presse/>

### Description

The concept consists in calculating a rating of each political party concerning the easiness to find information about the party itself and its members. The main source, object of the investigation, is the party's website. It can be extended to some other popular databases.

This concept is implemented in Spain since 2011 by "Fundación Compromiso y Transparencia" (FCyT). It has also been applied in Chile.

Sometimes people ask for an assessment of the loyalty of parties to their promises and the sincerity of their declarations. This is obviously not possible (with the resources available for the investigation).

There is a check list of topics that should be published by/about the party. The calculation of the 'transparency' is rather straightforward.

### Achievements

WeCitizens has been farther than FCyT and Chile Transparente, by including more topics in the checklist. WeCitizens uses statistics about the transparency of the party's politicians.

In the past, no single party published the party's accounts on its website. After two versions of Transparency Index, most parties had started publishing their account on their website.

In some parties they use our calculation method as reference to complete their website.





## C OPEN GOVERNMENT DATA

**Country:** Estonia

**Organisation:** Government

**Dates:** 2015

**Number of participants:** 2140 unique visitors per month (2019)

**Youth Information tool:** Open Government Data

**More information:**

<https://opendata.riik.ee/en/andmehulgad/>

<https://github.com/okestonia/opendata.riik.ee>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1792458637715167>

### Description

A traditional way of accessing public information is submitting as an application based on Freedom of Information (FOI) regulations. The application mode enables the interested parties to obtain information from government authorities that have not yet been publicly disclosed in the name of transparency. However, in the era of digital communication and universal access to the Internet, governments create conditions for transparency and openness of access to data so that citizens

have easy and full access. Estonian Open Government Data is a portal wherein one place, and everyone has unlimited access to public sector data with the right to re-use and redistribute the data for commercial and non-commercial purposes. Access to the information does not require registration or special software. The information is available in text files or machine-readable data formats (csv or XML). In each thematic area, there is the address and name of the person responsible for preparing the data. Users can also suggest which datasets should be published on the GitHub platform. The portal is run in Estonian and English.

### Achievements

Since the portal was launched the number of datasets has increased from 90 in 2015 to 188 in 2019. Users have access to data on 12 thematic areas – regions and cities, government and the public sector, health, education, agriculture, economy, environment, transport, foreign affairs, society, law, science. On average, 1,700 users utilise the portal every month. Numbers of unique visitors per month is currently four times larger than at the time of launch in 2016 – it was 500.



## D YOUNG ELECTION WATCHERS

**Country:** Estonia

**Organisation:** Estonian National Youth Council

**Dates:** 2017

**Number of participants:** 134

**Youth Information tool:** discussion groups, debates, networking

**More information:**

<https://enl.ee/projekt/noored-valimisvalvurid/>

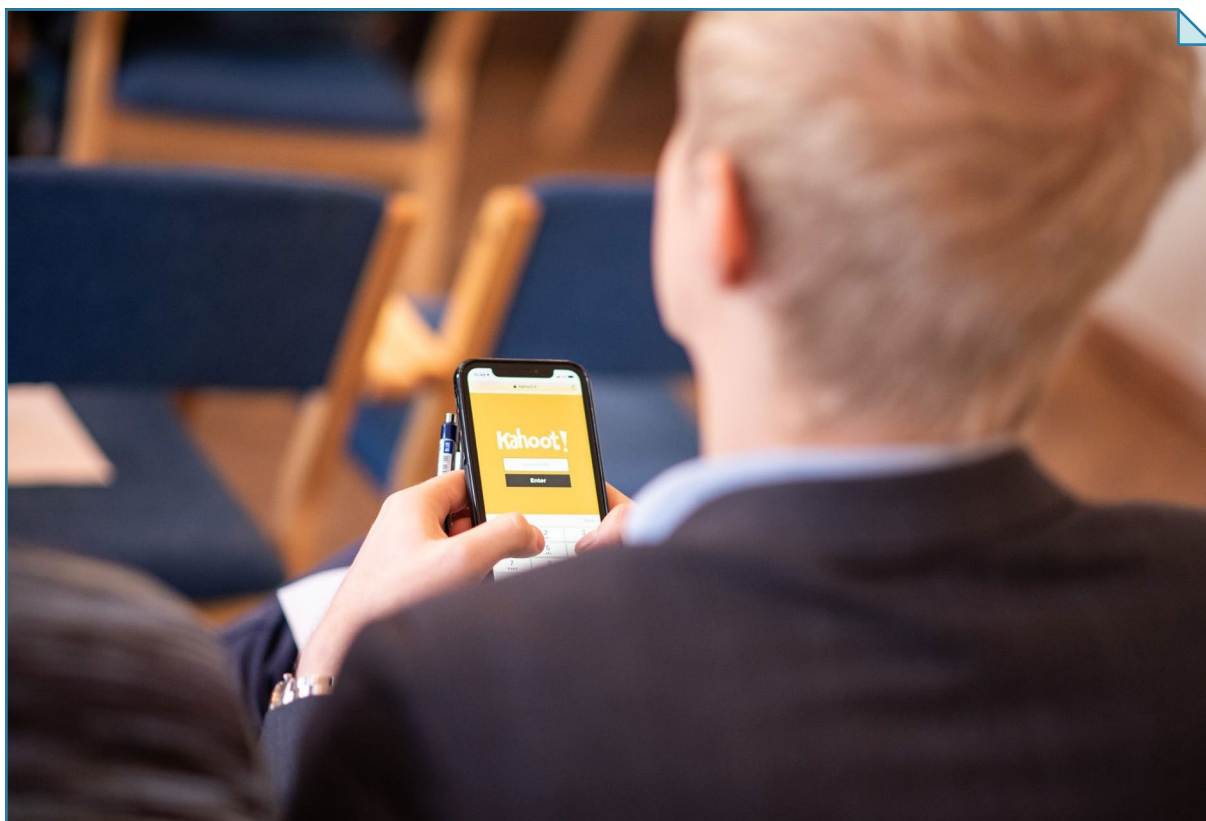
### Achievements

Results – There were 134 participants. All the participants passed training arranged by the officials from the national election service. They also met with the manager of their local election station before the elections. Participants made sure that there were no infringements on election code, contacted the “law-breakers” and answered the questions from other young people.

### Description

Project “Young Election Watchers” allowed young people (age 16–19) to participate in the work of the local electoral committee, try out the role of the “election watchdogs” and take part in their work.

The aim was to increase participation in the local governments, to allow the youth to try election monitoring, while also assessing/overseeing that they are treated fairly and according to the law.





## E KOORDINAATTI

**Country:** Finland

**Organisation:** government and municipality

**Dates:** 2006

**Number of participants:** nearly 90% Finns aged 13–24

**Youth Information tool:** on-line publication, workshops for students, trainings for YI workers

### More information:

<http://www.koordinaatti.fi/en>; <http://www.nutitlastot.fi/>

<https://www.nuortenelama.fi>; <https://www.nuortenideat.fi>

<https://www.facebook.com/Koordinaatti/>

### Description

Koordinaatti is one of the national youth work centres of expertise, which was established by the Ministry of Education and Culture for 2018–2019. The Ministry finances the centres. The work of the centres is based on the national youth work programme and youth policy. The purpose of the centres is to provide advisory and information services for young people on key topics that affect young people. The centres deal with issues related to the life situation (health, relationships, problems), professional careers, but also promote the participation of young people in society as responsible citizens. Information and counselling for young people are to contribute to supporting independence and mobility. Guidance and advice are provided by municipalities and in cooperation with non-governmental organisations. Information is provided to young people through various channels, face to face – consultations, including by phone, meetings, workshops and using online tools – websites, webinars, mailing, newsletter, applications and databases. Koordinaatti runs two online channels. “Young people’s ideas” (Nuortenideat.fi) is a tool dedicated to young people which enables them to put forward their suggestions and consult with other young people. The other information-counselling channel “Young people’s life” (Nuortenelama.fi), contains also guides on democratic education prepared by Koordinaatti.

Koordinaatti cooperates with the European umbrella organisation – the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA).

### Achievements

In 2006, 30 networks of information-counselling services for youth operated, in 2019 over 240. Youth information points are visited by nearly 90% Finns aged 13–24 and 340 employees provide information and consultancy services.



## F OHJAAMOT

**Country:** Finland

**Organisation:** government and municipality

**Dates:** 2014

**Number of participants:** only face-to-face services in 2017 were used by young people nearly 120,000 times

**Youth Information tool:** on-line publication, workshops for students, trainings for YI workers

**More information:**

<https://ohjaamot.fi/etusivu> <https://www.facebook.com/ohjaamot/>

### Description

One-Stop-Shop Guidance Centres (Ohjaamo) is a network of 70 counselling centres dedicated to young people under 30 years of age throughout Finland. In the centres, young people can receive free individual help and support, advice and information in the fields of education, employment, social security, housing and forms of civic activity or writing a cv. The centres are places where young people can get support in their ordinary everyday decisions and essential choices. The One-Stop-Shop guidance centres guarantee a holistic approach where service providers from the private, public and third sectors operate in one place, ensuring a better and simpler way of serving young people who are neither employed nor educated. The centres have been set up nationwide under the Youth Guarantee programme. Regardless of the location of the One-Stop-Shop Guidance Centres, every young person will get the necessary support (short-term and process-related) in every centre they come to. The centres organise meetings with various figures of political, social and cultural life.

The One-Stop-Shop guidance centres receive funds from the state and the necessary funds of the participating operators. The European Social Fund also supports their activities.

### Achievements

After five years of operation, the Ohjaamo effectiveness study conducted in March 2019 indicates that 79% of respondents believe that the centres successfully support the well-being of young people in the area. 75% of respondents believe that the centres have improved counselling and education for young people. Two-thirds (59%) of respondents believe that centres help young people find new employment opportunities.



## G DELNA'S SUMMER SCHOOL 2019 FOR REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS

**Country:** Latvia

**Organisation:** Delna

**Dates:** June 27<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> 2019

**Number of participants:** 30 civil society activists

**Youth Information tool:** Summer School

### More information:

<https://delna.lv/en/2019/09/10/delnas-summer-school-2019-for-regional-civil-society-activists/>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84EK8jSjwbc&feature=youtu.be>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMzwzKsD\\_h0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMzwzKsD_h0)

### Description

Delna's Summer School is a cyclical educational event organised by Delna branch of Transparency International in Latvia.

This year's fourth edition of the school was dedicated to the transparency of public institutions, in particular, the clarity of information and data, monitoring public procurement, the use of EU funds, civic participation and citizen-city relations. The four-day programme included expert lectures, team exercises and involvement in the LAMPA talk festival.

The lectures were given by ten experts representing public institutions (Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau of Latvia), local government, journalists (editor-in-chief), programmers (Open Data Expert), activists of the organisation for activity and transparency and scientists.



The school was attended by over 30 representatives of non-governmental organisations aged 19 to 58 operating in various regions of Latvia.

The main goal for school participants was to increase knowledge in the field of increasing transparency in the use of public funds; the use of open data by researchers and journalists to increase transparency; using social activism to promote transparency and to foster the participation and involvement of citizens.

### Achievements

The Summer School is an educational project in which many people with expert and activist experience are involved. The engagement of various entities: local government officials, activists, civil administration, journalists, students and social activists is of crucial importance in the organisation of the Summer School.

The main achievements of the Summer School are the transfer of expert knowledge, sharing experiences, and propagating knowledge about the importance of transparency and the significance of civic control in democracy, case studies. The Summer School is a cyclical educational activity in which, during four days, participants work on cases with practitioners. The Summer School 2019 was the 4<sup>th</sup> edition. In total, over 100 activists from Latvia participated in it.





## H MANABALSS

**Country:** Latvia

**Organisation:** Sabiedrības Līdzdalības Fonds

**Dates:** 2011

**Number of participants:** total number of signatures: 1,323,692; the total number of submitted initiatives: 1,533 initiatives

**Youth Information tool:** digital citizen technologies, web platform

**More information:**

<https://manabalss.lv/pages/par-manabalss-lv>

### Description

The portal was created by two young people – entrepreneur Christoph Blaus and Marketing expert Janis Erts, who thought those excellent ideas should not remain at the kitchen table at home – they must reach not only decision-makers. In 2010, work began on the creation of the portal and the development and promotion of the first initiatives in the Saeima.

In July 2011 the newly launched portal ManaBalss.lv initially had only two initiatives – “Open Offshore” and “Open Saeima!”. However, hundreds of signatures were already collected in the first hours of operation of the portal. Two days later, then-President Valdis Zatlers called on the public to sign the initiatives. A week after the portal was launched, the first ManaBalss.lv project – regarding the opening of offshore offices – was considered at an extraordinary meeting of the Saeima and was approved at its first reading. The positive reception of the portal has made ManaBalss.lv a turning point in public communication and cooperation with the Saeima.

ManaBalss.lv is a social initiative portal, in which every Latvian citizen can submit their initiative and collect signatures for its submission to the Saeima. This is one of the largest and most successful participatory projects in Latvia's history, which has been highly rated by leaders and organisations around the world.

“ManaBalss now puts Latvia at the forefront of European efforts to shift some forms of political participation to the Internet.” The New York Times (USA), 9 April 2013.

The identity of each voter on ManaBalss.lv is confirmed by online banks registered in the Republic of Latvia. Initiatives can be initiated and signed by any Latvian citizen who is over 16 years of age. Any initiative signed by at least 10,000 citizens and meeting the Saeima's legal criteria will go to the Saeima.

After successful authentication, online banks send the person's name and personal code to ManaBalss.lv, where personal data is stored in protected databases. One person can vote for every initiative. Only the name is publicly available. At the Saeima's request, the signatory database will be compared with the register of citizens, which will be able to verify the authenticity of all signatories using its database.

### Achievements

The total number of portal views is 1.4 ml. One thousand five hundred thirty-three initiatives have been submitted since the beginning of the portal's operation. Currently, there are 383 published active initiatives.

Work is currently underway on technical and content improvement as well as portal development, support for initiative authors, creation of new digital participation tools and promotion of community discussions.

## I STRAŻNICTWO

**Country:** Poland

**Organisation:** Watchdog Poland and the Centre for Citizenship Education

**Dates:** 2014

Number of participants:

**Youth Information tool:** a tool kit for lesson on human right and FOI

**More information:**

<https://ceo.org.pl/english>

<https://kursy.watchdogportal.pl//>

### Description

The Centre for Citizenship Education and Watchdog Poland have developed an e-learning course as part of the system project "STRAŻNICTWO Permanently and professionally in the public interest." The Citizens Network – Watchdog Poland – undertakes activities connected with providing each person with equal and full access to public information and strengthening the inhabitants of local communities in supervising the actions of their authorities. The Centre for Citizenship Education is the largest Polish non-governmental organisation operating in the education sector.

The course is a ready idea for an educational project carried out as part of the subject Civics on both the primary and extended levels.

The course aims to provide the participants with basic legal knowledge and examples of how to apply the law in the field of access to information. The course introduces students step by step to the activities of civic control in the public interest. The course includes educational materials, examples of letters, useful links and broadcasts.

### Achievements

Starting from human rights, the course points to the constitutional importance of the right of access to information. For teachers, it is a ready educational material developed by expert organisations working in the field of openness of public life and educational activities.





## J YOUTH CORE GROUP

**Country:** Poland

**Organisation:** Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic

**Dates:** 2018

**Number of participants:** over 300 people

**Youth Information tool:** discussion groups in “round table” formula, debates, networking

**More information:**

[www.eurobalt.org.pl](http://www.eurobalt.org.pl)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SBYCGN/>

### Description

The aim of the South Baltic Youth Core Group Network (YCGN) is to engage young people in the decision-making process at the municipality level in such themes like sport, culture, civic involvement of young people, ecology, spending free time. The YCGN, implemented in 2018-2020, is being carried out under the project with the same name financed by the Interreg South Baltic Programme.

The involvement of young people in the decision-making process takes place at the local and national levels. At the local level, thematic meetings take place in selected municipalities using the “round table” formula. The primary purpose of the conference is the debate of local government representatives (the mayor, Councillors, office employees) with young people. The round table meetings take place according to a specific scenario and contain a workshop and a discussion part in which 20 to 70 people participate. In the workshop part, the “World Café” method of participation is used to identify problems and analyse the conclusions and ideas developed by the participants working in teams. In the debate part, local government officials respond to young people’s proposals, they decide and justify why some of them are feasible, some still need to be clarified, and some are unfeasible.

The last element of the local network meeting is the public hearing during the meeting of the Municipality Council or the relevant Commission, during which young people present to the decision-makers

the conclusions and recommendations they have developed at the Round Table. The point is to induce the local government to take specific actions.

At the national level (Sweden, Lithuania, Denmark, Poland) there will be meetings of local youth groups in the form of forums to exchange experiences, learn about issues that have proved valuable in other countries and which may inspire undertaking similar ones in their local community.

### Achievements

So far, round table meetings have been held in five Polish local-governments: in Elbląg, Iława, Gdynia, Nowe Miasto Lubawskie, Dzierżgoń. Three hundred young people from small municipalities were involved in the project. The project increased awareness of the role of local government in local life and of the possibilities for young residents to co-decide. Young people had the opportunity to present solutions they worked out and to have constructive discussions with local government officials from their towns.









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## **“Strengthening civil society rights by information access for European youth”**

**SIA4Y** project final publication

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For more information on the SIA4Y Project look at:

[civicyouth.eu](http://civicyouth.eu)

For more information on Polish Economic Society branch in Gdańsk look at:

[www.gdansk.ptc.pl](http://www.gdansk.ptc.pl)