



Speech

by the Council of Europe's Director General of Democracy,

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Second European Youth Work Convention

Brussels, 30 April 2015

Commissioner Navracsics, Minister Gatz, Minister Weykmans, (Minister....tbc), Ambassador Deboutte, Ambassador Froysnes, Mr Alhendawi, Mr Williamson, distinguished panel, dear colleagues and friends, ladies and gentlemen...

I thank you all very much for this declaration. I would like to acknowledge the excellent work done by all the rapporteurs and contributors. And let me assure you that the Council of Europe will take good care of it.

Let me say too what a pleasure it is for me to see so many – literally hundreds – of key players and activists in the field of youth gathered here to advance the youth work agenda. And of course, our sincere gratitude to our Belgian hosts for the initiative and their splendid hospitality.

For those who do not already know, let me remind you of the background to these conventions.

The 1st European Youth Work Convention took place in 2010 in Gent – an initiative of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

This, the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, is the flagship event on youth of the Belgian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe.

I would like to thank the Belgian authorities, particularly the ministers of youth and the youth services of the three communities for their excellent and warm hospitality and for providing once again a creative and inspiring space for this key event. It is a milestone in the solid work of the Youth Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission, which has existed now for almost two decades.

Between the 1st and the 2nd European Youth Work Conventions, I am happy to report that much has been achieved. We in the Council of Europe have implemented many new measures to support youth work.

Our Committee of Ministers has recently adopted a Recommendation on *Access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights*. This was based on the grassroots youth work of our ENTER project.

Just two weeks ago in Budapest, the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) adopted new measures on the development of youth policy benchmarks to measure progress in national youth policy development against the Council of Europe's standards. The quality and level of support for youth work and non-formal education will be one important benchmark.

The Council of Europe's Quality Label for Youth Centres is now up and running. The quality label ensures Council of Europe values and the educational standards of our two European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest are promoted by youth centres at local and national level.

Our Joint Council on Youth in April agreed on a strategy for our future programmes to ensure they encompass capacity building, awareness-raising, policy development and standard-setting activities.

We have also stepped up our transversal work across the Council of Europe, including stronger cooperation with our Parliamentary Assembly and our Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, regarding political support for youth work and its recognition.

Agenda 2020 – our guiding document on the future of the Council of Europe’s youth policy – stresses the important role of youth work in “ensuring young people’s full enjoyment of human rights and human dignity”. It also underlines the importance of participative youth work in contributing to a better quality of life for young people living in our diverse and inclusive societies. Innovative forms of youth participation will be one of the youth sector’s priorities over the next two years.

On the publications table outside in the hall you will find copious examples of the work done in the Youth Department, particularly through our Youth Partnership with the European Commission.

Here I would like to draw your attention to our newly-revised *Youth Work Portfolio*, launched only yesterday in this very room.

While I paint a positive picture of the progress made over the last five years, I know, of course that the reality of youth work today is not all rosy.

The context in which youth work is being done today is challenging to say the least, with: unprecedented rates of youth unemployment, educational failure, discrimination, marginalisation, violence and social exclusion. I could go on like this, but you all know too well.

To top it all, youth workers are being given more and more responsibilities while youth work is being hit by severe budgetary cuts.

But we must not lose heart. Youth work is vital. Youth work is innovative, as we saw at our last World Forum on Democracy in Strasbourg. And, supporting youth work is one of our core tasks.

As the Council of Europe’s Director General of Democracy I must underline the importance of the constructive and creative contribution of young people and youth work to the promotion and maintenance of democratic values and human rights.

Following the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen and in the Jewish Museum in Brussels, it is of particular relevance now, that youth work also plays an essential role in preventing extremism and radicalisation – one of the current political priorities of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

I thank the European Commission for their good cooperation in this event and invite them to work with us on ensuring a sustainable follow-up.

Dear participants, you have been working a lot on the Declaration of this 2nd European Youth Work Convention and some of you may wonder what will happen now?

I would like to declare here that the Council of Europe is ready to take the lead in following up on the recommendations of the declaration, and we will do it with the support of our co-management system, in which youth leaders share decision-making powers with government representatives on our youth programme, priorities and policies.

The declaration – and also the networks and dynamic resulting from this Convention – will give new impetus to the work of our youth sector, which has been promoting youth policy, youth work and youth research now for half a century.

We will prepare a draft recommendation for our Committee of Ministers on the role of youth work in building democracy and upholding human rights. The recommendation will need to define youth work in a way that can be universally applied in all 50 States which have ratified our European Cultural Convention and beyond. The recommendation will also come up with benchmarks for quality youth work.

Our aim is to present the results of this new recommendation to the 3rd European Youth Work Convention; wherever it will take place, we will be happy to support it.

You are all well placed to know that this will not be an easy task. But youth work is not an easy task. Important tasks are never easy. And difficult means possible, so called 'impossible' means 'very difficult'. And we'll do our best. You know that, since we, the youth sector in the Council of Europe is working together for 50 years, and because for us, for Europe, youth matters, and so does youth work. And because we know the future of Europe matters.

Thank you.