

5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum

Introduction

The 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum was organised by the Slovenian Presidency of Council of the European Union in cooperation with the European Commission, the European External Action Service and SALTO EECA Resource Center under the title of "Youth participation in democratic processes". The forum took place online on 23-24th November as a side-event of the forthcoming Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels on the 15th of December 2021. It brought young people, youth workers, and policy-makers together to discuss key achievements, challenges, and opportunities for youth participation in the context of the post-2020 priorities for the Eastern Partnership initiative.

Over 150 youth workers, active and critically-minded young people, and youth policy-makers from the Eastern Partnership countries, European Union, and EU member states had a unique opportunity to discuss achievements and challenges regarding the youth policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood region and the European Union. Participants were encouraged to share good practices, experiences, and proposals in the field of youth participation in democratic processes with the aim to enhance an inclusive platform for youth participation in line with the 9th EU Youth goal – "Space and participation for All". Linkages to ongoing initiatives were promoted, such as the upcoming EU Action Plan on Youth in External Action and the "New Deal for Youth" of the post-2020 policy agenda of the Eastern Partnership. Recording of the 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum is available through [this link - https://www.beyon-events.eu/index.php?eventid=118&roomid=302&lng](https://www.beyon-events.eu/index.php?eventid=118&roomid=302&lng)

The 6th Eastern Partnership Summit took place after a 4-year gap and after the COVID-19 pandemic that plagued Europe and the world in 2020 and 2021. The March 2020 Joint Communication "Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020" set out the next generation of policy priorities, stating also that "The EaP Youth Forum will play an even greater role and become better integrated into structured youth policy dialogue with in a network of EaP youth councils, modelled on the EU-internal youth structured dialogue." After the July 2021 Joint Staff Working Document on "Recovery, Resilience and Reform: post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities", the summit confirmed the new policy framework with a new set of common objectives for the future of the Eastern Partnership process.

Background

The Eastern Partnership is a joint policy initiative launched in 2009 to deepen relations between the European Union and the six Eastern neighbours: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus¹, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. The Eastern Partnership is based on shared values, fundamental freedoms, democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law, as well as a common commitment to the market economy and sustainable development.

With the New Deal for Youth, EU youth Strategy for 2019-2027, upcoming EU Action Plans, and ongoing flagship programs such as Erasmus Plus, Horizon 2020, Creative Europe, European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries should look for enhanced cooperation also in the field of youth. A stronger emphasis should be put on youth policy in the framework of EU and Eastern Partnership cooperation.

¹ As of 28 June 2021, Belarus has suspended its participation in the Eastern Partnership (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/>)

Objectives

It is widely acknowledged and continually emphasised that youth involvement in political, social, and economic process is an essential element of citizenship in a democratic society and has a strong and positive impact in ensure effective and sustainable socio-economic development. Youth participation is a strategic tool of a functioning democracy and a prerequisite for future-oriented policies. As an endless source of energy and innovative solutions, young people bear enormous potential and transformative power. Removing obstacles and facilitating their active civic engagement is essential to the benefit of the whole of society.

The main **theme** of the 5th Eastern Partnership youth Forum was centred around establishing an inclusive environment and adequate conditions aiming to achieve the meaningful participation of young people in democratic processes.

The main **objectives** of the forum included:

- engaging young people in a dialogue on best practices, challenges, and opportunities in enabling youth participation in democratic processes;
- enablin mutual learning, inspiration, and motivation for future actions for the participants;
- fosters dialogue and exchange of views between the EU institutions, EU MS, and Eastern Partners in support of youth participation;
- feeding the discussion on the future role of youth in the Eastern Partnership.

The key **topics** of the 5th EaP Youth Forum included:

- perspectives on implementing the Youth Goal #9 "Space and participation" for all EaP countries;
- state-of-play and future prospects of youth policy under the Eastern Partnership;
- political participation of youth as means to upholding European values & democracy;
- establishing conditions for meaningful youth participation.

Outcomes of the Youth Forum included:

- providing a summary of developments and outcomes from previous EaP Youth Forum events;
- Delivering conclusions and recomendations in line with four thematic workshops to be shared with the relevant stakeholders after the event.

Looking ahead, the 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum has several opportunities to explore: the New Deal for Youth, the EU Youth Strategy 2019 – 2027, the EU Youth Dialogue, and The EU Youth Dialogue support measures.

Participants

The Forum brought together over 150 people from 24 countries. The participants were a mix of young people, youth workers, grassroots youth work representatives, donor agency representatives, journalists, activists, and those from the field of education, social entrepreneurship, and the digital world. There policymakers and researchers from local to international level, staff from SALTOs and Erasmus+ National Agencies, representatives of international youth organisations, the Eastern Partnership Young European Ambassadors Network, and representatives of the EU4Youth Alumni Network. There were also officials from the Council of Europe, and representatives of different governments, the European Commission, and the European External Action Service.

Participants came from all six Eastern Partnership states and seventeen Erasmus+ programme countries. Majority participants were young person, thus strengthening the youth dimension of the event and its final outcomes.

The Forum's participants addressed the future of youth policies and made recommendations for their comprehensive and inclusive development. Closing the event, State Secretary Raščan underlined the constructive conclusions of the Forum, which represent a substantive contribution to the Eastern Partnership Summit, scheduled for 15 December 2021 in Brussels.

Welcome Address and Introductory Remarks

“Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, dear participants, and panellists, I am honoured to welcome you to the 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum organised by the Slovenian Presidency in cooperation with the European Commission, the European External Action Service, and SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Center. Slovenia attaches great importance to youth engagement and its participation in democratic processes. I firmly believe that an empowered youth is a key driver for strengthening democracy and public accountability. Youth participation has a positive impact in ensuring effective and sustainable socio-economic development. This is also in coherence with Slovenian Presidency priorities and the Union's roadmap for the future of Europe. We are meeting in challenging times, in an online format, because Europe and the world are struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of this crisis in our lives will be felt for years to come and youth people were the most affected ones. The social context was cut, education was mostly online, and job opportunities became sparse following the economic crisis. The challenges we have to face are common across the national borders. This is why this Youth Forum joining the participants from the EU member states and the partner countries from the Eastern Partnership will importantly fit in the 6th Eastern Partnership Summit. It must be focused on empowering youth and strengthening the resilience of civil society, spirit of solidarity, diversity, and inclusivity must be maintained for the hopeful future of Europe. Finally, allow me to thank the organising team, the EU institutions for all the support, all the panellists and participants who made this event happen. I am confident that the Youth Forum will provide further steps to increase youth participation in democratic processes, pave the way to strengthening Union's relations with the Eastern partners and deliver progress and numerous benefits to the citizens of Eastern Partnership Countries. I wish you a fruitful discussion and I am looking forward to your recommendations. Thank you.”

Dr. Anže Logar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Slovenia