European Youth Festival 2016 - "Digital creativity improving society"

Graz (Austria), 30 November 2016

Presentation by Eunice Campbell-Clark, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Check against delivery

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to take part in the Opening of the European Youth Festival 2016 here in Graz, City of design and Human Rights, where the most creative digital projects developed by young people will be presented and compete for the European Youth Award.

This fifth jubilee year of the European Youth Award takes place under the patronage of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, which I represent.

As you may know, the Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation comprising 47 member states and the Congress is responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its member states. It brings together 648 elected officials representing more than 200 000 local and regional authorities.

I am delighted of this opportunity to exchange views with your digital community of young people who are ready to take on new means of communication to address the needs of their communities.

All the more so, because there is a rather widespread belief that young people are no longer committed to the political institutions and the democratic process as the previous generations were. I think this impression may be based on the fact that perhaps we are blind to the ways in which young people are active: The ways in which they relate to their reality, how they have created a new vocabulary and use other communication means.

We politicians tend to think that participation and citizen engagement means voting and standing for election. Although these are vital for the functioning of the system, participation is not limited to this. We at the Congress have therefore explored how to overcome the different ways of engaging with politics so that young people can have their say in decision-making processes.

Wishing to bring down barriers to youth participation we adopted a resolution in 2015 in which we asked local authorities to create the opportunities for young citizens and elected representatives to enter into dialogue in order to strengthen the links between them and to explore participation modalities such as co-management.

The Congress also promotes youth participation and empowerment within its own body. Indeed, we invite youth delegates between the ages of 16 to 30 from our member States to attend Congress sessions. Alongside our members, they can take part in all discussions and meetings. We also introduced digital means in this process. Youth delegates can make their comments known through Twitter in real time. We also cooperate with them so that they can develop projects together with their local authorities at home.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Congress welcomes the new digital world and all initiatives that allow youth to make an impact on society.

I was told that for this edition of the European Youth Award there were more projects submitted (167) than ever before. **This shows that youth in Europe is highly motivated and engaged**.

13 outstanding solutions have been selected by the jury in 8 categories reflecting the Council of Europe's goals. I was very interested to see that a special category has been added this year on the refugee movement, integration, and migration, addressing one of the biggest challenges in Europe. This is also an issue in which the Council of Europe and, in particular the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, is strongly involved. I understand that for this category, people from 9 North African countries were also allowed to submit projects and I think it very relevant to bridge with the Southern side of the Mediterranean.

The vibrant and lively digital community which is meeting these days discussing innovative ideas and sharing experience shows that **European youth really cares about the future and is ready to engage with it in order to change**.

Thank you for your attention.

www.coe.int/congress

Tel ▶ +33 (0)3 8841 2110
Fax ▶ +33 (0)3 8841 2719
congress.adm@coe.int

www.coe.int

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES
CONGRÈS DES POUVOIRS LOCAUX ET RÉGIONAUX
F-67075 STRASBOURG cedex