



FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
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 **Renner**Institut



VOTE 16 **WHEN** **OPPONENTS** **TURN INTO** **SUPPORTERS**

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VOTE 16

WHEN

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VOTE 16: WHEN OPPONENTS TURN INTO SUPPORTERS

This publication reflects the joint cooperation carried out throughout 2018 by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), the Association Progresiva and the Renner Institut (RI) on the VOTE 16 project. It assembles opinion pieces and experiences from various countries on the lowering of the voting age to 16 as a means to increase young people's participation in politics. With the project and the VOTE 16 publication, FEPS, Progresiva and RI brought about a space for discussion and provided expert insights and new ideas for the potential lowering of the voting age in Slovenia.

The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) is the European progressive political foundation. The only progressive think tank at European level, FEPS establishes an intellectual cross-road between social democracy and the European project, putting fresh thinking at the core of its action. As a platform for ideas and dialogue, FEPS works in close collaboration with social democratic organisations, and in particular national foundations and think tanks across Europe, to tackle the challenges that Europe faces today. Close to the Party of European Socialists (PES), the S&D Group in the European Parliament, the PES Group in the European Committee of the Regions, Young European Socialists and PES Women, but nevertheless independent, FEPS embodies a new way of thinking on the social democratic, socialist and labour scene in Europe.

Progresiva Association (Društvo Progresiva) is an association for development of advanced thought in Slovenia. It has the ambition to develop into a central platform for people that are linked to the idea of Social Democracy in Slovenia and in the near future to become a progressive "think tank". Close to the political party Social Democrats (SD), but nevertheless independent, Progresiva Association embodies a new way of thinking in the social democratic, socialist and labour scene in Slovenia.

The Karl Renner Institut is the political academy of the Austrian Social Democratic movement. In this capacity, it foremostly aims at:

- involving experts from various fields in the development and realization of new political positions by establishing a discourse between experts from various fields and the Austrian Social Democratic Party;
- generating a forum for political discussion and thus helping to introduce social democratic positions into public discussion;
- training representatives of the Austrian Social Democratic Party so that they are optimally prepared for their present and future tasks;
- fostering the organizational development of the Austrian Social Democratic Party in order to open up and modernize party structures.

Besides this, the Karl Renner Institut is involved in educational work on an international level. Together with its foreign sister organizations, it especially tries to support the young Central and Eastern European democracies and to help their integration into the mainstream of European political life.

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- This report is edited by FEPS, Progresiva Association and Renner Institut with the financial support of the European Parliament
- ISBN: 978-2-930769-42-4

Published by:

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES
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D'ÉTUDES PROGRESSISTES



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Copyright: FEPS, Renner Institut and Progresiva Association, December 2018

ISBN: 978-2-930769-42-4

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Page layout: Igor LENNASI – SLOVENIA

This study does not represent the collective views of FEPS, Progresiva Association and Renner Institut.

The responsibility of FEPS, Progresiva Association and Renner Institut is limited to approving its publication as worthy of consideration of the European progressive movement.

With the financial support of the European Parliament.



European Parliament

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FOREWORD



MOJCA KLEVA KEKUŠ, President of Progresiva Association

Progresiva, being the most progressive foundation in Slovenia decided to reflect on the topic of voting rights for young people as its *file rouge* of activities and actions for 2018. It was a natural and timely debate to have in a year that has seen changes in the Slovenian political life due to the general elections in spring and local elections in autumn.

As progressives all over Europe discuss the state of modern democracy and citizens participation in a changing society, we wanted to motivate young people in 4 cities around Slovenia to start thinking about their future as citizens in a globalised world where political participation in the traditional understanding of voting and being a candidate, has moved to the streets and to the internet. Participation in questions important for our society and everyday life is measured with clicks on social media and not in voters turnout in elections. On the other hand, streets around Europe are overflowed with protesters questioning the status quo and shaking up entrenched political systems. People on the street demand a safer future and respect of their rights.

Slovenia is inclined to these changes but has a rigid electoral system that does not give chances to adapt to this kind of external stimulations. The Slovenian national constitution states that the right to vote, in both active (to vote) and passive (to be elected) form, is granted after reaching the age of 18. Therefore, we wanted to understand if younger generations were inclined to follow the examples from Austria and Malta. The answers are listed in this publication.

Progresiva's ambition is to discuss political questions that are arising in everyday media coverage and is organising different events

and political debates in order to boost discussions on progressive ideas for our society in order to bring about changes. Therefore, as a political foundation and being an active part of the political processes and discussions in our country, it is our duty that we create the space for reflection of new ways of political participation, based on the opportunities that digital revolution and social media as political tools can bring. We need to make changes in the way we communicate. Youth are not “citizens of tomorrow in formation” but major actors of democratic participation and protest politics. The contribution from Progresiva, a small but very active foundation with the Vote 16 project was overwhelmingly positive. It united a number of young people, civil society actors, academia, governmental institutions, local and national politicians and important personalities that could influence the future of lowering the voting age to 16.

As we are proud members of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) family, we joined forces with the Austrian Karl Renner Institut and organized not only round tables around Slovenia but also a summer school with international guests. The results of all the discussions and reflections are summarized in this booklet that can witness only a small part of the process that includes hours of debates with youngsters and people mostly seen only on TV, new friendships, better connection with like-minded foundations and exchange of best practices between progressives. It was encouraging to see that with an inclusive platform young people are seeking a better position in the 21st century society that is looking upfront to the many challenges but also opportunities to participate in political decision-making.

DR LÁSZLÓ ANDOR, FEPS Secretary General

MARIA FREITAS, FEPS Senior Policy Advisor

Much like Millennials, the Generation Z (Gen Z) is taking matters into their own hands. The buzz surrounding the younger generations and their societal impact and interaction with politics can no longer be disregarded. It's high time to give teenagers the right to vote at 16.

At present, the Millennial generation makes up roughly a quarter of Europe's entire population and reflects 35% of Europe's workforce. The Gen Z on the other hand, and even though the oldest are just reaching their early 20's, will make up 20% of the workforce and 19,8% of the population across the EU 28. It is therefore no understatement that the combined power of both generations Millennials (those born after 1980) and Gen Z (those born after 1997) is quite significant.

The truth is simple; today's younger generations have adult responsibilities and are actively contributing to the economy and our societies. How about politics? The perception is that young people are engaging in a variety of issues except in voting booths and that they are too immature to vote at 16 and ascertain the responsibility of such an act.

The recent 2019 EU election results however, show a different story – as also the Millennial Dialogue project of FEPS has consistently shown – young people are interested in politics and do go out to vote when the issues matter to them – and the European Union is definitely a project of their concern. According to the latest Eurobarometer, young citizens under 25 as well as the 25-39 year olds have led to a turnout increase by 14 percentage points and 12 percentages points respectively in the last European elec-

tions. David Sassoli, President of the newly elected European Parliament commented: “The very significant boost in voter turnout in May’s European elections shows that people, especially the younger generation, value their democratic rights”. The turnout results were in fact a win and a boost for European democracy.

Taking a closer look at the youngest cohort, the Gen Z, we see that this generation is taking political activism and their issues-matter to a global scale as the recent “Green Wave” and Fridays for Future mobilizations have shown. The impact on the political agenda and medias as Greta Thunberg challenged world leaders on their inaction to address climate change has led to transformative politics. And this is much needed; as it is a warning to political parties and democratic institutions as we know them to listen to and engage with Gen Z – as also Millennials – who feel disfranchised from politics in the traditional sense.

Changes in voting legislation takes time and as the present publication that FEPS, the Renner Institut and Društvo Progressiva will show, there are many positive effects of lowering the voting age to 16 that surpass potential downsides.

Today’s young people want to change the world for the better – and this is a window of opportunity for contemporary politics to enter into a meaningful dialogue and tap into this incredible and worldwide spur of political activism. There are no signs that Millennials and Gen Z will retreat from their quest of being heard. So the question is:

Europe, are you listening? Europe, time to act and give young people the right to vote at 16!

MARIA MALTSCHNIG, Director of the Karl Renner Institut

In 2007, Austria was one of the first countries to lower the general voting age to 16. In the European Union today, Austria and Malta are the only countries where 16- and 17 years old adolescents have been granted the right to vote.

The Austrian Social Democrats were one of the proponents of this decision; especially the Socialist Youth advocated strongly lowering the voting age. The main argument of the Social Democratic Party of Austria and other supporters of the idea was that 16- and 17-year olds have already many obligations and rights; as a matter of consequence, they should also receive the right to vote. One of the additional arguments was that adolescents of that age would be more interested in politics if the right to vote was granted to them.

Elections and relevant studies since then have shown that by and large, the arguments of the proponents proved to be true (see the article of Eva Zeglovits in this publication). There is evidence that at the last parliamentary elections in October 2017, the turnout of 16- and 17-year old voters was even higher than the one of 18- and 19-years old. Overall, Austrian democracy benefitted from the decision to lower the general voting age.

Given these generally positive experiences in Austria, the Karl Renner Institut readily accepted to become partner of the project VOTE 16 together with FEPS and Progresiva. I am convinced that also in other countries the state of democracy may benefit from lowering the voting age. What is even more important is the fact that the right to vote for 16- and 17-year olds is also a matter of democratic justice. However, the Austrian experience also shows that the reduction of the voting age has to be accompanied by

more civic and political education for young people.

In that sense, this publication provides for additional arguments and evidence for the importance to lower the general voting age to 16. I very much hope that it also gives additional impetus to the relevant debate in Slovenia.

INTRODUCTION

Tin Kampl

In liberal democracies voting and the right to vote represent the strongest decision-making tool available to voters. Consequently, debates on voting systems and the right to vote hold such significance because they can contribute to empowerment or disempowerment of citizens as holders of sovereignty. A look into the past discloses that voting rights have been cut several times, while the pool of persons eligible to vote has also expanded. Today, however, it is difficult to find a country that has lowered the voting age under 18, the age limit that has become the universal voting age limit, but more importantly also the psychological limit no one dares go under. A look beyond Slovenian borders shows a few examples of countries that had the courage to go below the psychological limit, namely countries like Cuba, Brazil, Argentina, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Eastern Timor, Indonesia, North Korea, Seychelles, Sudan, Malta and Austria, where voters under eighteen are eligible to vote at national elections. Currently the only European countries to have lowered the age for voting eligibility to 16 years are Austria and Malta. Germany is also a country where five federal states have done the same, one Swiss canton has done so for the regional and local elections and Estonia for local elections.

The present publication reflects the joint cooperation carried out throughout 2018 by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), the Association Progresiva and the Renner Institut (RI) on the VOTE 16 project. It assembles opinion pieces and experiences from various countries on the lowering of the voting age to 16 as a means to increase young people's participation in politics. With the project and the VOTE 16 publication, FEPS, Progresiva and RI brought about a space for discussion and provided expert insights and new ideas for the potential lowering of the voting age in Slovenia.

Experience of countries and regions who have lowered the voting age to 16 years shows that young people tend to take the extended opportunity to participate at elections seriously and responsibly. Experiences in other countries have provided us with valuable insights into the consequences of lowering the age for eligibility to vote as good learning examples and opportunity to take bolder decisions in the direction of higher inclusion of young people into decision making.

The essential idea of this publication is the question on sensibility of lowering the age limit to acquire the right to vote at the age of 16. We presented this question to young people themselves. Since the young and their rights are at stake, young people must take part in the decisions that concern them. It is exactly the young people that were placed in the forefront of the issue, by participating in debates as key guides and creators of the final result. The basic question on whether voting at 16 should be introduced in fact changed to when is voting at 16 going to be introduced, and rather than addressing the arguments against, addressed potentially required support mechanisms for encouragement of young people's participation.

Lastly, our gratitude for completing the project and the present publication goes to everyone who in any way extended their support.

**VOTE 16: WHEN
OPPONENTS
TURN INTO
SUPPORTERS
- PROJECT
REPORT**

The right to vote is a fundamental political right, as well as one of the founding elements of the modern democratic and pluralist state. The right to vote is not an absolute right, the system in the Republic of Slovenia has several limitations regarding the right to vote, namely the age limit. The Slovenian national constitution states that the right to vote, in both active (to vote) and passive (to be elected) form, is granted after reaching the age of 18.



Comparatively and legally, the Slovenian system is very similar to the voting legislations in the majority of EU member states. However, two European countries that tend to stand out in this context are Austria and Malta. Austria changed the currently (still) prevailing age limit over 10 years ago (2007), while the Maltese were deciding to raise the level of democracy and increase the level of legitimacy of people's decisions recently and lowered the voting age limit to 16. Whether Slovenia too could give some thought to make a similar move was a topic discussed with secondary school students, political representatives and wider (expert) public, in the towns of Velenje, Nova Gorica and Ljubljana.

In March 2018, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) joined forces with the Progresiva Association and the Karl Renner Institut from Austria, and organised a series of workshops in order to facilitate wider debate on lowering the voting age, from the point of view of election participation and democratic legitimacy of such a decision for political system. The "Call to Europe, Democracy Lab Slovenia: Vote 16" consisted of three events held in different parts

of the country.

Before presenting the arguments in each of the debates in more detail, we would like to make a pre-emptive note about the title of this text, particularly on the second part, which clearly describes the situation which all three events shared. In all three events the opinion of secondary school students noticeably shifted, which was confirmed in (quantitative) tests in an on-line survey before and after the debate what shows us the lack of sufficient information and knowledge about this issue among young people.

The project officially kicked off as an interactive workshop on 9 March 2018, in the Inter-entrepreneurship Centre in Velenje.

One of the initially presented arguments was the inconsistent “double standard” – the fact that a person may acquire work and sign a work contract and be subject to labour taxation at the age of 15, but not be entitled to the role of a citizen actively participating in decision-making processes. Speakers at the workshop pointed out certain issues directly linked to the question of legitimacy of the democratic process. It was clearly highlighted that the current election participation and structure of the electorate allow for a situation in which elder voters decide on issues which directly affect the youth. High voting abstinence issue was highlighted, the reasons for which, according to Tin Kampl, the president of the National Youth Council of Slovenia (MSS), can likely be traced to the fact that young people are disinterested in politics, and have small chances for active political participation. He also reminded of the Council of Europe’s resolution¹ in which it encouraged member states to review the possibilities of lowering the age limit (following the example of the Republic of Austria). In the course of the debate, secondary school students admittedly recognised that

¹ Council of Europe. 2011. Expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16, 1826: <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=18015&lang=en>

they do not feel the responsibilities they are entitled to along with the status of a citizen. One of the possible solutions to the issue, as presented by Andrej Omerzel, the president of the Youth Forum of Social Democrats, would be to boost civil education in sec-



ondary schools to improve political literacy and the level of political culture, the proposal which achieved a high level of support from participating secondary school students. They made an additional suggestion for a longer period to be taken into account in the context of a more efficient implementation, which would finally lead to the lowering of the voting age. The interactive workshop extended beyond the proposed framework, as a number of secondary school students also spoke in favour of a secondary education reform, which they now see as rigid and not facilitating full potential development of their talents, and which fails, as they added, to encourage creativity, the only way towards progress.

The project continued on 16 March 2018, when a round table took place on the premises of the Crafts and Entrepreneurship Chamber in Nova Gorica, predominantly with participants from the region. The auditorium was packed with secondary school students, who focused on two arguments: inexperience and insufficient information that youth presently have. Although the large portion of secondary school students agreed that their (current) political knowledge is insufficient and that despite the age of technological advancements they do not have enough information as basis to form their opinion, they do wish to co-decide. They believe that answers could lie in the shortcomings of our educational system, which does not encourage their sense of belonging into the political environment. Participants also warned about the irony of the situation, namely that

they often hear the ‘encouragement’ mantra being repeated - ‘the young are the foundation of the world’ - while the development of their personalities is not being supported. Similar to the previous event, a pre- and post- debate online survey took place and gave similar results. A large share of opponents of lowering the voting age changed their position in the course of a critical debate into a supportive one.

Extensive debate and series of discussions were round up with an international conference, which took place on 29 March 2018 in Ljubljana. In addition to guests from Brussels, Maria Freitas (Political Advisor at FEPS), and Vienna – Melanie Zvonik (Socialist Youth of Austria), the guests at the event included European parliamentarian Tanja Fajon (Member of the European Parliament, Group of the Socialists and Democrats), professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana, Dr Jernej Pikalo, and two representatives of youth, Tin Kampl (President of the National Youth Council of Slovenia) and Andrej Omerzel (President of the Youth Forum of Social Democrats). The debate was moderated by member of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, Jan Škoberne. Central idea of the debate was similar to that of the first workshop – necessity of introduction of civic education in high schools, which received the support of all persons present. Two additional arguments of apathy and (in)experience of the young were pointed out, which as both international guests pointed out, are often over-generally applied terms. Maria Freitas warned that the issue is often not with the young people, but with methods used by decision-makers to increase interest in politics, which have now (obviously) become inefficient and outdated. She used the concrete example of political parties, which tend to function in a closed-off way and excessively underline conventional forms of participation in politics. She also stated several international best practices which highlight certain (progressive) methods of political participation. She proposes the political e-participation as a solution.

The guest from Vienna also presented the best practice example, and highlighted that in Austria the lowering of voting age resulted in the increased interest of young people in the nature of functioning of the political process, while the measure also resulted in the increased turn-out of young people at the elections, a positive consequence for legitimacy of decisions of people's representatives.

To conclude, we could say that arguments stated in the discussions confirmed what had been anticipated as one of the purposes of the project – a wider debate which would increase critical evaluation by secondary school students on the world of politics, those who immediately supported the lowering of age



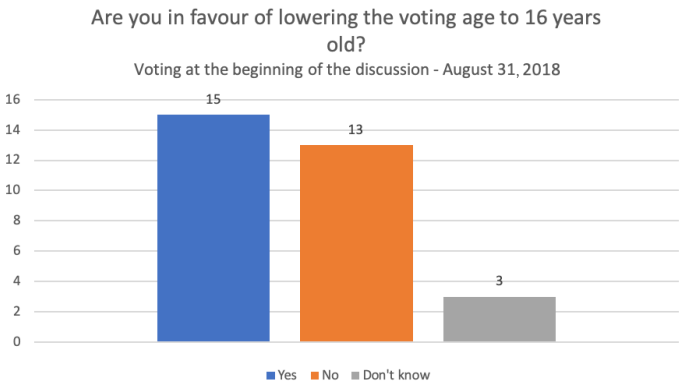
limit, and – even more importantly – those who were initially against such a measure. The encouraging conclusion is that young people seek equal decision-making and being adequately informed and educated about their responsibilities. We were also able to build a constructive debate using rational arguments to convince certain (even those fiercer) opponents that the 21st century just might be the time to think about those more progressive ideas.

**VOTE 16
SUMMER
SCHOOL**



The Summer school VOTE 16 took place in Portorož, Slovenia from August 31 – September 2, 2018. The first day started with a public event on the thematic of participation of young people in society and introduction of an earlier voting age. There were around 80 participants from different backgrounds in the Summer school, older generations (mostly SD local party members) but also a significant number of young people.

We started the public event of the Summer school with the interactive voting system where we asked the participants if they were in favour of Vote 16 and mostly were in favour.



With this starting position the meeting, moderated by Dr Jernej Štromajer, FEPS YAN Network member², started in good atmosphere.

The introductory remarks were given by **Progressiva President Mojca**

² The FEPS Young Academics Network was established in March 2010 with an aim to gather promising progressive PhD candidates and young PhD researchers ready to use their academic experience in a debate about the Next, Progressive Europe. For more information visit FEPS website: <https://www.feps-europe.eu/>

Kleva Kekuš that explained the importance of this project, being the *filie rouge* of the foundation for 2018. She summarised the activities on the topic in Ljubljana, Velenje and Nova Gorica. The regional **Member of Parliament Meira Hot** welcomed all participants in one of the most turistical cities in Slovenia. Political participation in the city is very high, much higher than Slovenian average and youth is very active in organising events and opening debates that are of interest to them.

Maria Freitas from FEPS presented the European context and the way the European Union (EU) communicates with its citizens. If young people have an opportunity to show their expectations vis-à-vis the European and national political systems for instance – as the Millennial Dilaogue clearly shows, young people are ready to engage.

A fishbowl debate started with **Dr Jernej Pikalo, professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana** with his explanation of the importance of active and passive voting rights at 16 but gave a thorough explanation on teaching the citizens rights, civic education and political system in school in order to prepare the youngsters to be able to resonate and decide about their role in the political future of their country.

Member of the European Parliament Tanja Fajon stressed the importance of voters engagement for European elections. She supported the idea of civic education in order to prepare the future voters to vote so that they would know on what are they deciding.

Young European Socialists Vice-President Phillipp Tzapheris presented the experience from Austria. Youth participation in politics is very important and Austrians started to introduce the vote 16 in regions together with education in schools. At beginning when vote at 16 was introduced for young people between 16 and 17 years old

was really high because the whole election campaign was devoted and targeted young people in order to motivate them to polling stations. There were many young people elected and the turnout was much higher.

Tin Kampl, president of National Youth Council of Slovenia (MSS)

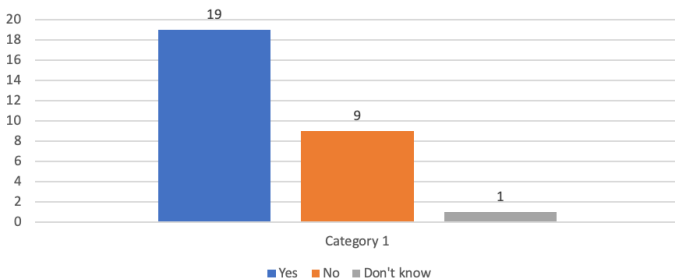
spoke about the sustainability of the democratic system and negative impact in a country's democracy when young people are not voting. Elections results should represent everyone, but a worrying contemporary trend is that young people feel being left out of elections campaigns and therefore are not interested to participate. Most of the existing electoral systems are not adapted to new societal trends and expectations of the younger generations. The world of politics should quickly realise and respond to it by implementing for example electronic elections or vote at 16.

The debates stressed the importance of giving to young people the opportunity to be active in politics and the importance of active political youth organisations through them it is much easier to reach young people. The debate was heavily influenced by different opinions on active citizenship and the important role of a country's education system but also political discussions in the family

We repeated the web-vote with the question of lowering or not the voting age to 16 years old. From the first vote at the beginning of the conference up to its end the results were much more positive and in favour of vote 16.

Are you in favour of lowering the voting age to 16 years old?

Voting at the end of the discussion - August 31, 2018



The second day continued with the debate of active citizenship and participation of young people in politics. There was ample time for discussion because the groups of participants were smaller and everyone was able to express his/her views. As part of the conference, we simulated the introduction of vote 16 in Slovenia and went through all steps needed to realise it. Mobilisation of young people should come from them (bottom to top approach). Dr Jernej Pikalo gave a theoretical introduction of the role of society in the education of its citizens that participate with active and passive voting. He stimulated all participants to express their views and we realised young people are willing to make changes in society and the world of politics but have their own views in how to achieve those changes. The debate was interactive and enriched with the presentation given by Tin Kampl about the »Partycipiraj«³ campaign run by the National Youth Council of Slovenia, with which they encourage young people to take active role in society. Anyone can become an ambassador of the campaign

³ The campaign was designed for the period of several election in Slovenia in years 2017 and 2018 with the main goal to encourage and motivate young people to be active part of society and political life. During the campaign national Youth Council of Slovenia prepared special videos and introduce recommendations for political parties how to assure young people autonomy.

and encourage young people to activate themselves both for sportily, and in society and take decisions about their future into their own hands. The main goal of the campaign is to move from their comfort zone, introduce them to various forms of activation and encourage them to engage in various activities. Since youngsters are the future of the society and it is possible to hear this statement in every political speech, it is right that the young people are also listened to and taken into account. In order for young people to be as successful and effective in their proposals as possible, they need to be adequately informed, empowered and motivated to actively participate in society. The debate was interesting because of the concrete angle provided by Phillipp Tzapheris with step-by-step explanation on how the vote 16 project started and developed in Austria.

With the Design thinking method⁴ the participants defined 5 phases and target groups to organize an alliance to fight for changes of the Slovenian Constitution Art. 43, which speaks of the age limit for voting and being elected. At the same time, we have also identified communication channels through which we will only youth target groups would be addressed. With brainstorming, we came up with ideas on how we will continue advocating for change in the age limit for the elections. We also prepared a project for action days (events) for reducing the age limit for the elections. We also made a simulation of the action day playing different roles when directly approaching people on the street.

The last morning of the Summer school was a closing day, mostly devoted to wrap up of conclusions and taking decisions related to future actions. On the basis of all the findings from the VOTE 16 project, we will discuss the ways in which VOTE 16 could be successfully implemented as an electoral reform in Slovenia.

⁴ Design thinking is a design methodology that provides a solution-based approach to solving problems.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PROJECT



Activities in the framework of Call to Europe, Democracy Lab Slovenia – VOTE 16 left their mark on the wider public, as well as in the political sphere in Slovenia. The question of lowering the age required to acquire voting rights arose several times during the election campaign for the last National Assembly election of 3 June 2018. The proposal was also on the agenda of several civil society organisations, particularly presented by the National Youth Council of Slovenia, the umbrella organisation in Slovenia, which was carrying out a youth-oriented campaign in the run up of the elections, calling young people to participate and vote in the election, addressing several proposals to other political parties, namely proposals it considered crucial for addressing challenges the youth are facing today. The issue of acquiring the right to vote at the age of 16 was also a part of the debates in the media and election campaign debates. Social democrats were the party that was the strongest supporter of the right to vote at the age of 16.

A direct impact of the Call to Europe, Democracy Lab Slovenia - VOTE 16 project was reflected due to the inclusion of the sentence “We shall introduce civic education with the goal of lowering the age limit to acquire the right to vote at 16 into the secondary school curriculum.” into the election programme of 2018 National Assembly election of Social Democrats. Despite the efforts by the Social Democrats in formulation of the current government coalition, the coalition agreement on cooperation in the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for the term 2018 – 2020 did not manage to have the commitment to lower the voting age introduced into the coalition agreement. In late 2018, the Constitutional court of the Republic of Slovenia issued a verdict that the current voting system is unconstitutional in some parts and tasked the National Assembly to remedy the unconstitutional parts during the period of two years. The voting legislation requires approval by a 2/3 majority in the National Assembly, making inter-party coordination talks a great opportunity for Social Democrats to also condition their support with approval of gradual implementation of lowering of voting age. We could follow the practices of other states and start by testing the lowering of voting age at local elections.

DISCUSSION

Tanja Fajon

Member of the European Parliament,
Socialists and Democrats Group

Like in many other European countries that are currently dealing with a sort of crisis of democracy and disinterest of citizens, which is also reflected in lower voter turnout, there are increasingly frequent discussions in Slovenia about the possibility of giving voting rights to young people once they turn 16 instead of when they reach the age of majority. This possibility is in most cases founded on the argument that lowering the voting age would represent a step forward in the development of participation of youth in the society.

Some European countries have positive experience with the aforementioned, however that should be put into context. At the recent international conference hosted by FEPS, Progresiva Association and the Karl Renner Institut in Ljubljana, which had the objective of exploring the youth's sensibility around the topic of decreasing the voting age limit, we have been told by Austrians, who in 2007 as the first nation in the EU invited 16-year-olds to vote in the election, that voter turnout in the first election has increased considerably due to the new voters, however the high turnout has not been repeated since.

This probably points to the fact that apart from lowering the voting age, we need to equip the young people with a range of knowledge if we wish to achieve their truly active societal and political participation/activity.

The same has been established at the aforementioned conference, where representatives of Slovenian youth clearly stated that they do not oppose to the possibility to cast their vote at the age of 16 and that they are not afraid of the election, however they actually do not know what it means to be an active citizen. They pointed out that it is strictly necessary to introduce civic education in Slovenian high schools. This is currently con-

ducted in year 7 of elementary school and is in fact the only subject providing 'political literacy' for the generation. However, many experts and the youth believe that such education is too demanding for 12-year-olds.

I am convinced that it is indeed so. Not because they would not have been able to understand the context of the subject, but rather due to the slightly erroneous planning of the whole concept of civic education. Within the current system, year 7 pupils should have absorbed organisational, systemic and other information about the structure of the country and politics in a single year, and after that they have nothing to do with the aforementioned – apart from taking a test. Until the first election. Their first election happens – if it turns out that way – at the end of high school and they do not participate, apart from exceptional individuals, because they would wish to do so, but rather because they are encouraged by their parents, who also impose their political will upon them. Of course, this is not unusual at all.

I merely wish to point out that within the current concept of civic education of youth it is utopian to expect that Slovenian 16-year-olds, who usually reach that age in year 2 of high school, would be able to contribute to the reduction of crisis of democracy in any way.

Social Democrats of Slovenia have entered the possibility of lowering the voting age into our programme for the future. However, we do realise that democratic participation and active citizenship must be understood as a life-long and comprehensive learning process. The skills based on which the children, youth and people in general are able to choose and take decision are suitably implemented into the curricula much sooner,

in accordance with the level of development. Civic education should not have been an exception. Civic knowledge should have been included into various subjects in elementary school and reinforced in high school. Only in such a case our 16-year-olds would have been capable of taking responsibility for their own lives in the elections within a democratic society, take interest into political developments and be prepared to actively take decisions and contribute to the development of their community.

**EMPOWERMENT
OF YOUNG
PEOPLE IS THE
PRECONDITION
FOR THEIR
SUCCESSFUL
ACTIVATION
IN POLITICS**

Dr Jernej Pikalo

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Although democracy has widely expanded throughout the world and democratic principles and processes have been accepted globally, the willingness of citizens to participate in political processes and public debates is decreasing yearly. In highly evolved and new democracies alike, political participation (formal and informal) is declining decisively. Differences between old and new democracies include in the scope of decrease in participation and different shares as to citizen age groups, gender, regional distribution, level of urbanisation, etc. Differences also occur due to cultural and social factors, in individual political communities (democratic traditions, religious patterns, legal obligation/non-obligation to vote, etc.) There are also differences in lowering of formal and informal participation, where informal forms of participation grow on the account of the decline of formal participation. None of the mentioned differences however change the fact that for the past two decades, we have been facing a clear trend of decrease of participation.⁵ This decrease is particularly worrying, since participation is the basis for functioning of democratic communities. Without citizen participation there are no political communities.

It seems as though citizens no longer take interest in modern politics. Politics and the political seem to be unable to animate modern people, who are embedded into a complex network of social relations, to participate in political processes. As if citizens were no longer interested in the common good of all, as if they are losing interest in participation in affairs of the community and (co)creation of public opinion. As if common good was

⁵ A brief overlook of election turnout for National Assembly elections in Slovenia since 1993 shows the negative trend of lowering election turnout as one of the forms of political participation: 2004 (60,65%), 2008 (63,10%), 2011 (65,60%), 2014 (51,73%), 2018 (52,64%) <http://volitve.gov.si/dz2018/#/udelezba>

not something that concerns everybody and something that was out of reach of every single person and only available to the community as the collective. As if common good was not something all members of the community would value as positive and something normative in the sense that it gives direction on how the community should function in order to preserve and develop itself. Continued debate on common good is a primary political debate of every political community, and at the same time it is never completed, nor has a final result. Politics are, *inter alia*, the one activity in which citizens mediate our various political interests in the direction of formulation of common interest.

Surveys have shown that only 5-7% of entire population is actively participating in politics (data applies to western democracies only). Due to increasing complexity of political processes and accompanying legal processes, politics have gradually become professionalised and closed into the circle of those 'who are invited'. The share of viewers of politics who are following politics more or less actively and take interest in political affairs is approximately 60%. These predominantly acquire information through media presentation of politics. Share of 'politics viewers' in western democracies has been decreasing considerably. On the third level, the number of what we call 'the indifferent', those who do not take interest in politics, let alone participate in politics, has been on the rise. Since politics truly directly affects decision-making regarding common affairs that concern everyone, this growth of indifferent citizens is worrying.

Differences in political participation depend on education (those with higher education tend to participate more), income (those with higher income tend to participate more actively), gender (males in western democracies tend to participate more than women, despite decades of attempts for equal participation in

politics), and last but not least, geographical location (in certain territorial areas, of Slovenia too, political participation is higher than others).

Political participation of young people is highly relevant, since the young wish to participate in the management of the community regarding the matters specific to them, as well as general problems of the community. It should be kept in mind that political participation of young people is particularly valuable, as no one can win their political battles in their place. Young people themselves know best what is beneficial to them and do not require a patronizing attitude of the majority of the population to know it. The condition for a successful involvement of young people in politics is their empowerment for cooperation, particularly through systematic civic education. A mere mechanical extension of lowering the age limit for political participation may momentarily increase participation but may in the long run not attract more voters into the decision making processes because of their lack of understanding of politics, potentially resulting in resistance. Systematic civic education is also a guarantee for cooperation to run in the direction that benefits the entire political community.

**LOWERING THE
VOTING AGE 16
– WHAT OTHER
COUNTRIES
CAN LEARN
FROM AUSTRIA**

Eva Zeglovits

Elections are crucial for democracies; the question, who has a right to vote is thus of highest importance and is usually discussed heatedly. Austria was the first country in the EU that lowered the general voting age to 16 in 2007. Supporters hoped that this measure would give young people a louder voice. Critics soon raised many questions, e.g.: Are young people mature enough to vote? Do they know enough to make a correct choice? Will they use their newly gained right at all or will they abstain?

Discussions on lowering the voting age follow a similar path in many countries, among them Slovenia, Denmark, Norway or Scotland. Evidence from Austria might provide valuable input for the debates.

Voting rights for young people are evidently on the agenda in a lot of countries. The Council of Europe supported lowering the voting age in 2011, Scotland enfranchised 16- and 17-year olds for the independence referendum in 2014 and Malta lowered the general voting age to 16 in 2018. Several countries, among them Estonia, lowered the voting age for local elections to 16. On the other hand, a large majority of the citizens of Luxemburg voted against lowering the voting age in 2015.

In total, evidence from Austria rather backs the supporters of lowering the voting age.

First, turnout of 16- and 17-year olds in Austria was found to be higher than of older first-time voters. Living at one's parents' home, attending school means being prepared for the first election in a more sheltered environment. This gives reason to hope that in the long run, this will help to stabilize turnout. If you start as a voter, you are more likely to remain a voter.

Second, 16- and 17-year olds are not less politically mature than older

first-time voters. In terms of political interest and political knowledge, they do not differ from other young voters. And preparation matters. Schools' impact on political interest increased after lowering the voting age. Accompanying measures, often organised via schools, help to increase turnout. The importance of civic education is strengthened. However, this also means, that if there was no preparation in schools, political interest and knowledge, and in consequence turnout, would not be as high as they are.

In Austria, different opportunities of preparation result in alarmingly high gaps in political interest, knowledge and turnout between students in full-time schooling and young people in the dual system, who work as apprentices and attend vocational schools. Social gaps in participation start to occur even at the age of 16 and 17. Among the great challenges identified in Austria, reducing the social gaps in political interest and political participation might be the toughest to overcome.

This leads to the question if lowering the voting age has changed the political parties and their agendas as well. By now, there is no evidence that political parties have shifted their agenda towards young people's interests.

Young people in Austria have proven to handle their voting rights responsibly. Political parties are yet to change.

INVOLVING MILLENNIALS IN POLITICS

Maria Freitas
FEPS Policy Advisor

This briefing note addresses the question of how to re-engage young people – Millennials (those born between 1980-2000, aged 15-35) – into politics and make progressive political organisations fit for this cognitively distinct demographic.

1. Strategies to increase Millennials participation in political parties

Millennials do not find political parties or partisan life particularly appealing. This statement is backed with the survey results that show consistently that Millennials are profoundly sceptical about traditional, institutional politics and, in particular, that they lack confidence in politicians and political parties (A. Skrzypek, M. Freitas). In fact, across Europe, most politicians and political parties are perceived as removed and distant from real problems, as they are frequently seen as self-serving, corrupt, deceitful and ineffective.

The Millennials deception can be summarised in three issues:

- Millennials feel that their views are being ignored;
- Millennials feel that politicians are more concerned with older people than with younger people;
- Millennials do not feel that they can make themselves heard.

The decline in trust towards political institutions, organisations and political parties is consequential of the turbulent times that we live in – and, this is even more so for Millennials. Entering the labour market is a test for many young people throughout Europe and the process of finding a first job can be lengthy and often without meeting Millennials' expectations. In the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, it is not just difficult for Millennials to access the labour market but it is equally difficult to remain in the labour

market and to have a good quality job. This of course means that today's youth cannot be independent, cannot make plans for the future and hence becomes quickly disillusioned when governments do not seem able to provide quick and effective solutions to the current state of things.

But there is reason for optimism because despite the gloomy context that surrounded this generation, Millennials are not only happy and positive about their future but also show openness to seek change by listing the conditions that would incentivise them to take part in partisan life. Formalised party membership, for instance, is in no longer an attractive formula (A. Skrzypek) for Millennials but they provide a way forward to reduce their disaffection with traditional political parties:

For Millennials, political parties need to

- 1** Be more creative and provide participatory channels where Millennials are team players in the intra-party debates and internal decision-making. The answer is therefore local - local party branches should be empowered to have a greater say in the making of internal decisions; for instance the EU's Structured Dialogue on youth, whereby Millennials are co-decidors in key decisions across several policy fields is a positive framework that should be replicated elsewhere at different levels (T. Deželan).
- 2** Propose a 'new opening' to broadly engage not only members but also sympathisers and potential groups of interest, for example, by introducing a 'trial membership' for those interested in taking part but that are discouraged by high membership fees (F. Wolkenstein).

- 3** Enable discussions through online political forums and e-consultations. This would be an overall way of reducing participatory costs and of embracing the Millennial culture.

Online political forums tend to be organised at the national level by government institutions or media organisations to enable an interactive relationship between politicians and citizens. Despite its merits, this tool falls short in its objective to enhance a constructive debate between these two actors. One, because government representatives tend not to participate since they lack time and secondly because the forum proved to be an outlet for ill-informed opinions, prejudice or abuse (D. Janssen, R. Kies).

Another digital tool that allows online participation of citizens in the political process are e-consultation forums. These can take a variety of forms - with(out) identification / moderation; strong / weak public spaces, and can refer to different topics, but generally they have the same objective as online political forums - to raise the voice of citizens. How online political forums and e-consultation forums differ from another is that in the latter, there is a direct implication of citizens in the decision-making process. Then again, this tool faces the same challenge – the active participation of government officials or politicians and the extent in which these are actually deliberative. However, the example of the first UK e-consultation forum on a draft Bill (Commbill.net) proved to have a direct impact in the policy-making process. In fact, the e-consultation was referenced a number of times by both Houses of Parliament, and two of its key policy-recommendations were incorporated into the Bill (D. Janssen, R. Kies).

2. Strategies to incentivise Millennials turnout

Contrary to the common belief, Millennials are not averse to voting. In fact, the global results of the Millennial Dialogue show that

this group cohort declares to be ready to vote should elections take place tomorrow. This striking finding needs to be interpreted in conjunction with the low interest that they have in politics. The conclusion is that it is wrong and unhelpful to depict this generation in a negative manner by labelling them as withdrawn, introvert and uninterested (A. Skrzypek, M. Freitas). Millennials did pull out of the traditional political framework but they are politically aware and ready to speak up for their civic rights (A. Skrzypek).

In this context it is worthwhile to consider Millennials own proposals of electoral reform:

(1) E-voting and Smart voting

The Internet has allowed for a widespread usage of online campaigning both by political parties and candidates in the run-up to elections. However, much rarer are the tools that allow the electorate to cast their vote online (R. Michael Alvarez, T. Hall and A. Trechsel). The Millennial generation embraced the technological progress that was brought about by the ICT revolution and see the new digital world as an opportunity. So it does not come as a surprise when Millennials believe that the electoral process should be reformed and modernised. In this context, online voting could be a promising way forward as the Estonian case positively attests. Evidence shows that Internet voting increased turnout.

Online voting lowers significantly the hazards that Millennials are facing when they want to turn out to vote and is in fact an attractive way of securing Millennials electoral participation.

Even though younger voters prefer Internet voting it is also important to nuance some challenges of e-participation and outline the circumstances that need to exist to make Internet work.

Challenges of e-participation

Gender

Research shows that e-voting could potentially worsen the gender gap as the 'digital divide' generally includes a divide between a more male access to the internet (A. Trechsel). The same applies for 2005 local online elections in Estonia – Millennials turnout was high but most e-voters were young and male.

Language

E-voting turnout can be hindered in a given country due to language. Again, the Estonian case attests that a large part of Russian-speaking citizens did not vote as the Internet voting platform was only presented in Estonian. Therefore, the natural recommendation would be to have a bilingual or multilingual Internet platform to avoid exclusion or discrimination (R. Michael Alvarez, T. Hall and A. Trechsel).

Preconditions necessary to make Internet Voting work (R. Michael Alvarez, T. Hall and A. Trechsel):

- Widespread Internet penetration;
- Legal structure that addresses Internet voting issues (possibility of pre-voting, authentication process, ensuring that Internet voters do not cast ballots on the election day, final ballot reconciliation);
- Identification system that allows for digital authentication of the voter (digital signature makes things easier for politics to introduce Internet voting but it is not a pre-requisite);
- Political, public and administrative culture that is supportive of Internet voting (Internet voting was at the heart of intra-governmental activities in Estonia for a long period of time).

Smart voting is another Internet-based tool suggested to enhance political participation. Research shows that the introduction of smart voting during electoral campaigns helps citizens evaluate their political preferences and match them with those of the candidates.

This system has been tested in numerous elections (ex: Swiss elections in 2003, Dutch elections in 2006), but again in most elections men tended to participate much more than women.

In sum, one should be cautious to assign a priori inclusive qualities to ICT innovations to increase electoral participation. The Internet is no magic bullet to incentivise Millennials to take part in politics but it is definitely a starting point to bring politics closer to this electorate – technology can produce a positive change in our democracies.

(2) Ability to vote in more places

Millennials often responded that the technical barriers to voting should be reduced. By this they mean that the time frame to cast your vote should be extended but also that one should be able to vote online, via a secure app or website and/or to be able to vote in more places, like in shopping malls or libraries.

(3) Lowering the voting age

Giving younger Millennials the right to vote is a rational incentive to make them more interested about politics and potentially become politically active (M. Wagner, D. Johann and S. Kritzinger). Millennials aged 16 and 18 who are legally considered old enough to marry, drive a car, own a business, pay tax or die for their country were not even allowed to vote for the EU Referendum in the UK (although a poll

conducted by The Student Room showed that 82% of voters in this age group would have voted to remain). At present, Austria, the only European country where the voting age for national elections is 16 (and elections were implemented) show that teenagers do not lack the competence to make informed electoral choices and hence effectively participate in the democratic process. Lowering the voting age does not appear to have a negative impact on input legitimacy and the quality of democratic decisions (M. Wagner, D. Johann and S. Kritzinger), quite the contrary, this institutional reform should be seriously considered because of its potential positive impact.

The EU referendum outcome in the UK confirmed that the British youth was excluded from the political system and its decision-making processes (K. Owen, C. Macfarland). According to a polling organisation YouGov, 75% of 18-24 year olds and 56% of 25-49 year olds voted to remain in Europe but their wishes have been set aside by older generations who arguably have less to lose, or at least less time to endure the consequences. The recent outcome of the US 2016 elections should also be analysed as it heightened the significance of these divides – the Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton had a nearly nationwide advantage with Millennials over the Republican nominee and now President of the United States Donald Trump.

The Scottish independence referendum is yet another positive evidence where 16 year-olds showed to be interested in politics and engaged in political conversations. Millennials do take part, especially if they see the impact of their vote.

Instead of declaring an intergenerational warfare (K. Owen, C. Macfarland), these two cases call for a deeper reflection: Millennials are more likely to vote in order to have their opinion heard or because they feel strongly about a certain issue. In light of this, political parties should be wary that younger people are more easily deterred from

voting if they don't think that their vote will achieve something. The challenge for Progressives is to prove that their politics are dictated by a clear system of values that would not be retrenched by coalition agreements (FEPS Young Academics).

3. The importance of civic education to foster Millennials political engagement

Millennials are politically well informed but they also believe that it is important to keep the connection between civic education and political literacy as a critical component on how to improve their trust and participation in politics. This would allow young people to manage their expectations towards politics of today and increase their sensibility towards political participation, as lowering the voting age would do.

Research shows that citizens' education needs to go beyond the school curricula and should provide students with practical opportunities to apply citizenship education in their school and community activities. This could be done by helping set up frameworks of collaboration between schools and youth organisations to run joint citizenship programmes focusing on topical issues such as human rights, immigration, the environment, and intergenerational solidarity (T. Deželan).

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NORWEGIAN RESULTS IN FAVOUR OF LOWERING THE VOTING AGE

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Norway has had pilot projects with votes for 16 and 17-years olds in twenty municipalities in the local elections of 2011 and 2015. In AUFs opinion, the results from Norway serve as good examples on why we should lower the voting age to 16 in general.

Turnouts

Many claim that young people that get the chance to vote won't use it, and that the turnout within young people will be low: the results from the pilots in Norway begs to differ.

The general turnout in local elections is around 60 per cent – and amongst 16 and 17-year olds, it was at 57%. Not only is it almost as high as the general population, it is actually 15 percent higher than other first-time voters of 18 to 21 years old, where the turnout was 44,8%.

Other findings were, maybe not surprisingly, that the turnouts among girls were higher than that of boys. Also, students in general studies to a higher degree made use of their right to vote, than their peers in vocational studies.

Norwegian scientists explain the age difference in the turnouts primarily by so-called life-cycles effects, that voters in a less stable life situation more rarely than those in a stable one use their right to vote.

Higher political participation after terror attack

On July 22nd 2011, the Norwegian Labor Party Youth (AUF) and Labor Party of Norway were targeted in a right-wing terror attack where 77 were killed, of which 69 young members on AUF summer camp at Utøya.

After the terror attack, there has been a generally higher political participation from the young people of our generation.

The youth organisations generally have more members than earlier, and the turnout among young people is higher. Also, AUF have never had more members than we do now, with 2018 as a record-breaking year with 14 422 members.

Results from the pilot projects show that the party preferences of the young voters are almost identical to those of the adult voters. The only clear exception is that the conservative party get lower results among 16 and 17-year olds than in the general population.

More young elected representatives

Results from the pilot project also show that young people tend to elect more young people. Even if those between 16 and 18 couldn't be elected themselves, the results show that more young representatives were elected in the municipalities that tested voting at 16. In Norway 6% of the elected representatives are under 26 in general, and in the municipalities with voting at 16 as many as 8,6% are under 26.

From the Norwegian pilot project, there really are several good points in favour of lowering the voting age:

First: it works! Against critics, expectations, 16 and 17-year olds use their right to vote, as often as the general population, and a lot more than other young voters.

By lowering the voting age, we include a lot more people in democracy and create great foundations for participations for the rest of their lives.

Secondly, it creates foundations for greater participation for the rest of their lives. There are more young elected representatives when more young people get to vote. Young people tend to be underrepresented in politics, and this makes the democracy more representative.

In Norway, the municipalities actually want to make the vote for 16-year olds, over 100 municipalities applied to join the pilot projects, and only 20 got to participate. This tells us that there really is a drive in local municipalities to be part of projects like this.

In a liberal democracy, it is really those that want to refuse someone to vote that have the burden of evidence. The way I see it, there should be very good reasons to refuse 16-year olds the vote. And what reasons would that be?

This pilot project proves that the former counter arguments like maturity and lower turnouts aren't correct. Quite the contrary: this youth generation might be the most responsible and politically conscious ever.

Young people are the ones that will live the longest with the consequences of today's politics. By lowering the voting age, politicians are given an incentive to address the group that will be affected most by their changes.

Going on in Norway, we in the Norwegian Labor Party Youth will fight on to give 16-year olds the vote, hopefully already from the local elections in 2023.

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YOUNG PEOPLE NEED A STRONG DEMOCRACY - AND VOTING RIGHTS!

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The involvement of young people in politics is a universally accepted goal - but when it comes to real action, public discourse often projects its fears onto young people. It is said, young people are uninformed, inexperienced and they might not understand the full extent of their decisions. But experience has shown, that lowering the voting age to 16 has given young people the chance to be actively involved, while they are learning about democracy in school. For a 16 or 17-year-old, voting is thus not something distant that might concern you in a few years, but a responsibility that has to be taken now. This changes the perception of how young people learn about their place in democracy and how they experience it themselves.

Studies have shown that in countries with a 16-year voting age, young and first-time voters are highly interested in politics and political participation. This seems like a logical conclusion, since they get the chance to be informed about the political systems, political parties, as well as specific policies in school. An informed teacher can give a clear overview of how the political system and political processes work. In this environment all these topics are more interesting if young people can actually apply what they have learned in the voting booth. They feel an instant responsibility - and sometimes that also means that they say, "I don't feel informed enough yet to vote". But instead of disregarding the right to vote at 16 from everyone - political education should be expanded and made more accessible.

But what good is this for democracy? Democracy depends on many different factors. A common fact base, trustworthy media, accessible political parties, knowledge about and trust in the political system, the policies discussed and knowledge about the society we live in. But a democracy also needs trust in its citizens. As Young European Socialists, we support voting from the age

of 16, because people at the age of 16 are allowed to work, to face criminal charges, so they should also be allowed to vote on the rules that define their lives. Most recently, we have also been reminded that it is young people, who organise and protest on issues, that many others have been ignoring. The new anti-climate change movement that has sparked climate protests all over Europe is carried by young people, many of them younger than 18 years old. It is young people who have to live the longest with the decisions that are made today. On issues like climate change, inequality and education it is young people who take the lead. If we want healthy democracies, high voter turnout, good and informed debates on the most pressing issues, we have to open up our political system to young people, invest in education, and let young people participate. But participation cannot be just for show. We need real involvement and that means we need to see eye to eye. That also means that a voting age of 16 is a great opportunity to involve young people into the political process and into the political organisations - especially political youth organisations. When it comes to youth organisations - financial and organisational - independence is key. Young people need spaces that are accessible and that can adapt to changing youth cultures and trends. Voting at 16 can enable more young people to access these spaces, because the entrance barrier of a lack of knowledge and agency of the political process, that is felt by many young people, can be reduced.

In conclusion, lowering the voting age to 16 can be an important step towards empowering young people in the political process, and give strength to democracy as a whole. But just lowering the voting age alone is not enough. It needs investment in political education in school, transparency of the political process, trust in the political structures, spaces for young people to organise independently, and an attitude towards young people that sees them

eye-to-eye. In the countries that have applied a younger voting age, studies suggest higher interest in politics and higher participation in the process. Let's give young people a voice and a vote!

**VOTING RIGHT
AT THE AGE
OF 16? – AN
OPPORTUNITY
TO EXPAND
THE CIRCLE OF
DEMOCRACY**

Tin Kampl

Political participation of youth is an important issue that is not being addressed only by the experts, but lately also by politicians, who have realised that the ever-decreasing turnout of voters – which is especially low among the youth – has an effect on legitimacy of their election and consequently on legitimacy of their decisions and the system of democracy.

One of the measures addressing turnout of the youth in the election is the lowering of voting age, which has lately in some countries already appeared on the political agenda, and this theme will undoubtedly spring up at least in most western democracies.

One of the questions, which comes into our minds, is: ‘Would legal regulation of lowering active voting age have an effect on turnout of voters?’ Undoubtedly there is no single answer to that question. However, we can get some answers by using the data that has been obtained from the example of the Republic of Austria, which already has legislation according to which everyone who has turned 16 has an active voting right. It is evident from the data that the lowering of voting age has an effect on turnout of voters. Voters aged 16 and 17 have recorded the highest turnout among young voters, which has almost bordered on general turnout. Therefore, the predictions of experts have in fact turned out to be true, i.e. that the voting experience in adolescence and while in high-school, when the young people are less burdened and live in a stable environment, engraves more strongly into their awareness and becomes a habit quicker, which is then applied at the mature age. This hypothesis was confirmed when checking the turnout of your voters who voted for the second time. The results show that the voters who voted for the first time at the age of 16 and 17 participate more often in the following elections as compared to the voters who voted for the first time at the age

of 18 or later⁶. The general evaluation of the lowering of voting age and its consequential influence on turnout of voters is positive, as it has turned out that earlier voting in the election among the youth promotes higher participation. Turnout is still below the general turnout of voters; however, it is considerably higher than the average turnout of young voters. In relation to this issue we also need to realise that young people more and more often use other forms of political participation instead of classic forms, such as the election.

The next relevant question related to the lowering of voting age is whether the lowering of voting age would influence democracy of the political system. Particularly relevant discussion on this point is the discussion about the 'ability' of young voters to vote, and this is most frequently pointed out as the opposing argument to the voting right at the age of 16. It is clear that the positions about maturity, knowledge and motivation of minor voters vary both among the professionals and politicians. Judging from their motivation, interest, knowledge and conciseness I can assume that they possess sufficient 'quantity' of the aforementioned to be able to cast their vote responsibly and express their will, which is not the will of somebody else. Should young people not be motivated and informed enough about the politics, they could have been misused by the adults, but young people do show interest into making their own decisions. It is important to introduce into politics the will of the section of the population that is practically disqualified from the circle of making decisions. This includes minors, who are not allowed to express their will.

⁶ Zeglovits, Eva. 2011. Votes at 16: Turnout of the Youngest Voters – Evidence from Austria.

Voting right is uniform and general⁷. By lowering the voting age, we will not put anyone in danger; on the contrary, we will make voting right even more general by expanding the circle of eligible voters. Of course, we should not forget to mention other factors that will arise with the lowering of the voting age and will influence democratic legitimacy of the political system. By lowering the voting age, we will improve intergenerational balance and cohesion of the society, as the voice of young people will be strengthened and will thus contribute to the increased regard to the issues concerning the youth and to the refreshment of the politics.

From the historic point of view, we can see that the circle of eligible voters has always been expanding and that it eventually stopped at the voting right of all citizens who have turned 18 (in most countries). It is time to make a step forward and once again open the door to the possibility of expanding the circle of democracy.

⁷ Every person has one equal valued vote and is affecting all citizens (above certain age).





VOTE 16: WHEN OPPONENTS TURN INTO SUPPORTERS

This publication reflects the joint cooperation carried out throughout 2018 by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), the Association Progresiva and the Renner Institut (RI) on the VOTE 16 project. It assembles opinion pieces and experiences from various countries on the lowering of the voting age to 16 as a means to increase young people's participation in politics. With the project and the VOTE 16 publication, FEPS, Progresiva and RI brought about a space for discussion and provided expert insights and new ideas for the potential lowering of the voting age in Slovenia.

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- This report is edited by FEPS, Progresiva Association and Renner Institut with the financial support of the European Parliament
- **ISBN 978-2-930769-42-4**