

OBESSU Statement

Don't let young people pay for your crisis! CoE proposal to cut Youth Sector entirely must be rejected

Yesterday the Council of Europe's current Secretary-General Jagland proposed that the Council of Europe's youth sector should be dismantled in its entirety and replaced by a voluntary partial agreement between the Member States. We, as the European youth did not cause the internal budgetary crisis of the Council of Europe and will not accept shouldering the burden alone!

The Council of Europe was founded in 1949 and today brings together 47 Member States with the aim of working to uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It has been a key player in **advancing young people's better access to their human rights and democratic youth participation in decision-making**. The Council of Europe has long championed the rights of the most excluded and marginalized young people, including young LGBTQI+, Roma and other ethnic and religious minorities, refugees and those from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. But now the wind has turned due to a **political crisis**. This as a result of Russia's refusal to pay its membership fee since 2017, and that Turkey has chosen to step down from the place as one of the major donors within the organization. The proposed budgetary plan involves proportional cuts for all sectors of the Council of Europe except for the youth sector. It suggests to put **an end to all Youth sector financing until 2021**, which signifies an **irreversible loss of all Youth sector activities as we know them**. The alternatively proposed partial agreement would be based on voluntary contributions with few incentives for governments to invest. This would lead to a lack in any democratic accountability and stability.

We in OBESSU, representing the voice of school students in Europe, strongly oppose the proposal. It represents a disrespectful action which fails to recognize the importance of the Youth Sector for youth movements in Europe.

First of all, the Council of Europe's youth sector is an absolute necessity for strengthening the living conditions of all children and young people in Europe. Cutting down on the youth field is to betray the coming generations since it is unlikely that these cuts could ever be reversed. Moreover, the fact that Secretary-General Jagland proposes such a disproportionate budgetary change without having a dialogue with the young people and youth organisations is undemocratic and therefore unacceptable. Finally, a contingency plan decision should only be taken after a new Secretary-General has been elected.

Democracy and human rights for young people must be defended unconditionally. The Council of Europe's youth sector plays an essential role in this. In times where young people are marching on the streets demanding political action for climate justice and human rights, we need to invest in the capacity-building of young people as activists and make use of our democratic structures and institutions at both national and European level to achieve progressive change. **We don't accept cuts, but demand investment in young people within the Council of Europe** - for our common future.



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