"Youth Parliament on Democracy"

Eibar, 24 – 28 May 2010

With participation of young people from Basque County (Spain), Northern Ireland (UK) and Slovenia

Background paper

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Background paper for Youth Parliament on Democracy

Youth participation in what?

"Everybody in politics desires the participation of the young and everybody is saying that youth participation is lacking, but in what young people should participate in?" (Lauritzen 2007: 5)

The point made by Peter Lauritzen, former Head of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, will be taken as a starting point for the paper in which we will compile some relevant thoughts and data to encourage participants of the "Youth Parliament on Democracy" (to be held in Eibar, Basque Country, Spain, from 24-28 May 2010) for discussions, deliberations and conclusions on possible actions with regard to youth, participatory democracy and the media.

It seems that there are numerous opportunities for youth involvement in public affairs and in democratic institutions, with new media and mechanisms of e-participation providing another pave in that direction.

Forbig explains that the vast range of specialized institutional arrangements for young people have been established - from youth groups to students' councils, from youth wings of political parties, trade unions to networks on local, national and European levels, youth support programs etc. And, all this has contributed much to establishing and emancipation youth as a distinct and important social category. (Forbig 2007: 13)

But, these opportunities and arrangements obviously have not resulted in widespread and effective participation of young people. »On the contrary, many lament a dramatic decline in the political involvement of younger generations, and decreasing levels of youth participation in elections, political parties and traditional social organizationse" (Forbig 2007: 7)

Inadequacy of traditional democratic arrangements for contemporary youth

Is that the case because of »apparent inadequacy of traditional democratic arrangements for contemporary youth« and because of »the changing forms of youth political participation, away from involvement in conventional democratic institutions and towards novel patterns of youth engaging in public life«? (ibid)

As Forbig further argues, "varied youth subcultures or the globalization movement are but two examples how young people create new modes of expression and participation that are more appealing to them".

It seems that "input of young people to democratic politics is clearly conditioned by the extent to which democratic institutions are open to the concerns, interests and involvement of young people, whose participation will largely depend on whether or not they see their voice sufficiently reflected in the political process and its outcomes." (ibid)

Therefore we can also say that youth participation could be won only in the context of real offer to share the power (Lauritzen 2007: 5).

If anybody still have doubts about competences and potentials of young people to be given roles and resposibilities in structures and processes of democratic decision making at very early stage, Lauritzen make it clear: "Someone who can develop a computer company in the garage can also have his or her voice heard in the city council." (ibid)

So, if young people demonstrate no much interest in playing role of democratic actors in existing institutions, what to do next?

Growing diversification of the patterns of political participation

At first, it is not young people only to whom the problem of political participation is connected. As Forbig underlines "there is emerging deficit of democracy, regarding its institutions and participation therein, in both established and new democracies". (Forbig 2007: 8)

Second, different political traditions, political and social circumstances in which young people develop their identities and values in the fundamental formative periods of their lifes influence their political socialisation. (ibid: 14)

And, finally, what if the "signs of disengagement of young people from politicis – such as low number of young people voting in the European parliament or in the local elections, decline of youth membership in such traditional institutions as political parties, trade unions and even in youth organisations" (Kovacheva 2007: 9) are in fact signs that the problem is in the traditional forms and institutions and not in youth? Signs that "these traditional forms are being replaced by new patterns of civic involvement invented by young people"? (ibid)

Not only that there is growing diversification of the patterns of political participation, including conventional institutional participation and uncovnentional or protest politics (Kovacheva 2007: 19), but it is necessary to think and discuss the issue of youth

participation considering their own understandings of politics and political participation. (ibid)

It might be useful at this point to refer to distinction between representative and participatory or direct democracy[1]. United Nations Development Programme for example defines democratic governance as a system in which all people participate in the debates and decisions that shape their lifes. Participatory democracy is not a substitute for representative democracy but acknowledges the need for more participation and accountability in global decision making (Kovacheva 2007: 21).

In that context for instance, alter-globalisation protests dominated by young people represent an attempt to put powerful (often private) economic forces under social control. (ibid: 22)

As Kovacheva explains, political action is not only the action structured through political institutions and non-governmental organisations, but also involvement in less structured, looser networks and friendship circles, and even individual action. (Kovacheva 2007: 27) Even disengagment can be seen as a political step. (Dahlgren 2009: 164)

But, "it is not so much individualisation as the continuing centralisation of political and social life in many European regions which inhibits young people's experiences of participation in politics and civil society. The short-term financing of youth projects, the invisibility of youth initiatives in the regions, the low level of co-operations with the third sector also contribute to young people's preferences for participation through more flexible and informal structures". (ibid: 25)

Also, it should be clear that youth participation is not only about bringing ideas of social justice, solidarity and cosmopolitanism in political arena, but "intolerance, xenophobia, terrorism, and ethnicisation of politics also occur among youth groups". (ibid: 28)

Youth disengagement with the news

Great concerns are related to the decline in news consumption among young people. The lack of interest in news about domestic and foreign politics is demonstrated also in the purposes for which the young people use the Internet. The study made by Ofcom, a communication regulator in the UK, for instance shows that three types of internet use are more prevalent amongst those aged 16-24: work/studies information, leisure information, and entertainment. By contrast, younger users are less likely than the UK average to use the

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[1] See more on definitions in the glossary at page 8.

Internet for news, whilst users aged 65 and over are more likely to use the Internet for news«. (Ofcom Media Literacy Audit 2006: 47)

Similar studies in the US are revealing similar findings, making them even more dramatic when they are put in contrast with data on news consumption among youth in 1950s or 1960s. As Mindich explains in his book »Tuned Out – Why Americans Under 40 Don't Follow the News«, young people in the US are following the news less than their elders do and less than young people once did. Despite the widespread use of the Internet among young people, the current generation of 18-24-olds appears to be no more informed than such generation in 1990. (p 19) Only 25,2 percent of 18-24-olds say they »definitively« or »generally« agree with the statement »I need to get the news (world, national, sports, etc.) every day.« (Mindich 2005: 27) Also the same age category asked in 2002 about their preferred news media source rarely chose the Internet (11 percent). (ibid: 33)

Mindich claims decline of news consumption among young people has taken place over the past four decades, producing two generations of young adults in the US almost disable to make informed decisions in the democratic procedures.

It is obviously necessary to ask what is the reason why young people tune out, and what drives their decisions in media use and in democratic procedures?

Still, in his research based not only on media audience survey, but also on interviews with young people, Mindich unerlines that despite their disengagement with news, young people are as thoughtful and passionate and self-reflective as they have ever been, ready to interact with news the right conditions are provided. (2005: x)

Alternative media?

As well as for political participation it seems that new concepts and forms, and new public spaces need to be open for participatory communication.

According to Hintz, "civil society media" make attempt to create fractures in the domination of the large mass media. And what is the concept of civil society media?

"Civil society media encompasses media organizations, groups and projects, which fit into the basic non-state non-commercial model and share the structural and thematic tendencies of civil society. /…/ Some of the most widely used concepts to describe the types of civil society media are community, autonomous, alternative, radical, and tactical media. /…/ They are usually organised as decentralized networks of local groups, based on common values of diversity, authonomy, decentralization and horizontality." (Hintz 2007: 244, 246)

General tendencies in civil society media content can be according to Hintz described as "criticizing mainstream media content, addressing worrying trends such as poverty, ineaquality and environmental degradation, and at the same time expressing an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives" (ibid)

The relevance of the civil society media development is connected with the emerging needs for new forms of governance in the rapidly changed global political, economic and cultural landscape. In such context the civil society media are representing a counterpart to forces of centralization and homogenization, to the state-centered world. (ibid)

There have been attempts to form joint actions, campaigns, coalitions and networks from the fragmented arena of civil society media actors regionally and globally to be able to intervene in the policy field, for instance with regard to the issue of global communication governance, and many of them have been led by young people.

Transnational political and media activism

There are many cases of transnational activism and localized transnational activism in which the youth are participating. Three types of transnationalization in activism have been recognised by recent empirical studies. According to Cammaerts, the first, "trans-international" activism is strongly organized and integrated at transnational level with staff or members dispersed internationally and aiming to translate local issues and interests to global level of governance. Such examples are Transparency International or the Association for Progressive Communication. Second type is "trans-national" activism where the transnational provides a common frame of reference, but local cells have relative independence. There are local struggles linked with the international agenda and vice versa. Examples are Indymedia or ATTAC, but also Greenpeace, Amnesty International etc. The third is more abstract and can be called "glocal" activism where local struggles at national level are importing transnational discourses and action-methods and adapt them to the local context. (Cammaerts 2007: 271)

Direct actions are considered legitimate way of voicing dissagrement by activists and social movements, while, according to Cammaerts, violence is discredited as a mean to achive social change. He illustrates it by giving examples of the green movement and the gay-rights movement, and their sustained non-violent struggle which included changes in values among population, in youth culture and in legislation. (ibid: 267)

In his case study on media and communication strategy in the case of protests in Belgium to save the Lappersfort forest (direct action-occupation of the forest by young activists for

more than a year in 2001 and 2002), Cammaerts quotes the activists' web site illustrating their four ethical principles in dealing with the media:

1. don't hate the media, be the media

2. a correct relationship with the press

3. we cannot, won't, should not determine the agenda of the fourth power

4. transparency in internal governance in action (for example, "subjects" of our press-release always get a copy)

(Cammaerts 2007: 276)

It is needless to say that the Internet has provided the (localized) transnational activists opportunity for networking, exchange and independent distribution of information and own discourses.

The democratic potential of the Internet

Should we spread optimism on the potential of the Internet and the new media for advancing participatory democracy, and for increasing youth participation in public affairs, political processes and democratic institutions?

According to Dahlgren, whose thoughs on the issue we will compile here, the first wave of optimism in regard to the democratic potential of the Internet that appeared in mid 1990s was often built more on enthusiasm than evidence.

Dahlgren recognizes a new ground for optimism in a growing inability of the corportate sector to maintain firm control over digital proberty rights and in growth in open source software sharing which can be seen as s growing ideological threat to captialist values and ethics.

»Digitalization of the media is eroding the industrial information economy based on private property and profit. Such trends lead to establishment of an increasingly robust nonmarket sector for information and culture via digital netoworks, openning up the cyberworld for all the more civic activity.« (Dahlgren 2009: 40-41)

Dahlgren further explains that it is difficult to predict how the issues around the democratic character of cyberspace will develop in the future: will the Internet serve the interests of both democracy and the major industries, as well as the innovators, creators and artists working within them? (ibid)

»The use of the net helps create new conditions for democratic engagement, and citizenship as social agency has found new form of expression there. The sense of empowerment that

can follow from net activism suports newer forms of citizen identity. And these civic cultures are increasingly global in character, but there is question of the political efficacy of these actions.« (Dahlgren 2009: 199)

Problems with political efficacy of (transnational) civic actions organized through the Internet, Dahlgren illustrates with the case of protests against the war in Iraq in 2003. »Such massive exercise in civic participation was largely organized and mobilized by networks of groups cooperating transnationally online. Yet, channels for transforming such global opinion into policies are highly limited. There are simply few established procedures for democratically based and binding transnational decision making.« (ibid: 166)

Being optimistic or pesimistic about the democratic potential of the Internet or the media on general, we have to take some responsibility for own engagement or disengagement. »We live in highly mediated societies, and much of our civic knowledge derives from the media. In a sense, the media bear some responsibility for our political involvement, yet we as citizens also have a democratic responsibilitiy to become engaged and to participate.« (Dahlgren 2009: 81)

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Glossary:

Participatory democracy strives to create opportunities for all members of a political group to make meaningful contributions to decision-making, and seeks to broaden the range of people who have access to such opportunities.

Because so much information must be gathered for the overall decision-making process to succeed, **technology** may provide important forces leading to the type of empowerment needed **for participatory models**, especially those technological tools that enable community narratives and correspond to the accretion of knowledge. Effectively increasing the scale of participation, and translating small but effective participation groups into small world networks, are areas currently being studied.

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participatory_democracy)

Participatory democracy is a method of local or national political organization which enables people at the grassroots to contribute to decision making in matters relating to their personal lives. It is **different from representative democracy** whereby citizens simply vote for representatives to think and decide for them at whatever level.

(Source: Kaduuli, Stephen Charles, The Value of Participatory Democracy in Uganda (March 2008). Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=1112642)

Direct democracy, classically termed pure democracy, is a form of democracy and a theory of civics in which sovereignty is lodged in the assembly of all citizens who choose to participate. Depending on the particular system, this assembly might pass executive motions, make laws, elect or dismiss officials, and conduct trials. Direct democracy stands **in contrast to representative democracy**, where sovereignty is exercised by a subset of the people, usually on the basis of election.

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Direct_democracy)

Country specifics:

Northern Ireland (UK)

Northern Ireland was the location for an extended armed conflict, known locally as 'the Troubles', which lasted from 1969 until 1994. This initiated a protracted multi-party 'peace process', which resulted in a peace agreement, signed on Good Friday 1998, the creation of a range of new political and human rights institutions and eventually in 2007 the formation of a stable devolved government.

Northern Ireland is a small area of 13,500 square kilometres with a population of just over 1.7 million people; this includes a majority Protestant community of 895,000 people (53 percent of the population) and a minority Catholic community of 737,000 people (44 percent of the population). There is also a diverse mixture of minority ethnic, faith and national communities, which has been growing rapidly since the end of the conflict and now accounts for some 5 per cent of the population. There are approximately 383,300 children in Northern Ireland under 16 years (around 22% of the population) and approximately 464,000 under 19 years.[2]

Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but it is also geographically a part of the island of Ireland, and has a land border with the larger Republic of Ireland. The conflict in Northern Ireland has essentially been over the political status of the region and the competing claims and aspirations of the two main communities. Protestants generally favour the political union with Great Britain, they regard themselves as British citizens and define themselves politically as Unionists. Hardline unionists are known as Loyalists since they proclaim loyalty to the British monarchy. Catholics generally favours the creation of a single united Irish state. They regard themselves as Irish people and define themselves politically as Nationalists. Hardline Nationalists are known as Republicans since they strive for a United Irish Republic. These competing political identities derive from the close geographical proximity of Britain and Ireland, their entwined histories and the political influence and dominance that Britain has exercised over Ireland for much of the last millennium.

The Troubles lasted for some twenty-five years before the Irish Republican Army (IRA) declared a ceasefire in August 1994. The conflict resulted in the deaths of over 3,600 people, while many thousands of people were injured and thousands of people were imprisoned.

After 25 years of violent conflict and more than a decade of transition Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society. A 2004 survey found that 61 percent of parents would prefer to have their children educated in a mixed religion school (ARK 2004), in 2007-08 only 6 per cent of pupils were enrolled in integrated nursery, primary or post-primary schools (DENI 2008: 2). Leisure facilities and other services within predominantly Catholic or Protestant communities are not accessed by children and young people living outside the community (Hansson 2005: 28; Byrne et al 2005). Almost half the 4,500

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[2] NISRA Population Projections, 2004.

people interviewed in a survey about the impact of fear on Belfast interface communities stated they would not travel through an area dominated by the 'other' community during the day and 88 per cent would not enter at night (Shirlow 2003: 86).

McAlister et al. (2009) refer to the continued presence of paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland and 'continuing low-level recruitment of young people' among both Loyalist and dissident Republican paramilitary groups. This research also highlighted the perception among young people as well as community workers of these groups as having little connection with politics or 'the struggle' but using a paramilitary badge to access power and status and to instil fear. In discussing why children and young people become involved, several community representatives considered that paramilitaries "preyed" on the young, "feeding" their fears and emphasising their vulnerability.

Youth organisations

In Northern Ireland there is a plethora of organisations working on issues relating to young people and issues relating to young people. The emphasis here is however set on youth organisations and issues relating to politics and involvement of young people. One initiative is Public Achievement's Where is My Public Servant (WIMPS) which has established a database of all public representatives in Northern Ireland from local Council to European Parliament level. From the WIMPS site it is also possible to write a message to these representatives about the issues they are interested in.

Young people's opinions and views are also being facilitated in various forms. The Youth Panel was established by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY). The Panel which is made up of 26 young people to share their experiences and thoughts with the Commissioner and help NICCY make decisions about issues that affect children and young people. Similarly, some of the cities/towns in Northern Ireland have established 'youth councils' or 'youth panels'. One such council is Belfast City Council's Youth Forum.

At the time of writing, the local Northern Ireland parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly, is in the process of establishing a Youth Panel, also referred to as a 'youth assembly'. The Panel is to be made up of 30 young people aged 16-18 to work in partnership with the Assembly us to bring together ideas on how a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly should work. The Youth Panel will be in place from March 2010 to April 2011. With the support of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Youth Panel will listen and take on board young people's views and work with the Northern Ireland Assembly to decide the shape and functions of the youth assembly. The youth assembly is to meet for the first time towards the end of 2011. There is already at a national level, a United Kingdom (UK) Youth Parliament which consists of 600 elected MYPs (Members of Youth Parliament) aged 11-18. MYPs are elected in annual youth elections throughout the UK. Any young person aged 11-18 can stand or vote. In the past two years one million young people have voted in UK Youth Parliament elections. Once elected MYPs organise events and projects, run campaigns and influence decision makers on the issues which matter

most to young people. All MYPs meet once a year at the UK Youth Parliament Annual Sitting.

The Northern Ireland Youth Forum (NIYF) was established by the Department of Education in 1979 to facilitate young people's opinions and views. As part of the Youth Sector, NIYF was asked to help young people engage in the decision-making process about the delivery of services such as youth clubs, local youth councils, as well as in wider society. The NIYF is a member-based organisation and is open to all young people living in Northern Ireland aged between 11 and 25.

It is also worth bearing in mind that all of the political parties represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly all have youth wings or youth groups within their parties.

Politics and young people in Northern Ireland

Previous research on young people and politics in Northern Ireland has suggested that many young people feel negative about politics and politicians. For example, previous research ICR (2003 and 2006) found that young people experienced politics as 'boring and complicated', which led to young people 'switching off'.

Other pieces of research, such as Ewart and Schubotz (2004) and ICR (2006) have also highlighted the feeling among young people that politics in Northern Ireland focused on religion and political division to the detriment of other issues such as university fees, water charges and transport. The role that politicians and political parties play in Northern Ireland was strongly criticised. This was the second most frequently cited factor given by participants for wanting to leave the country. Some participants said that they would find it hard to vote for existing sectarian parties and felt that a non-sectarian alternative to the existing parties was not available.

Other pieces of research (Smyth and Scott 2000) has highlighted that 79 percent of young people were not interested in Northern Irish politics, and that this was possibly compounded by a failure to consult young people on matters that affect them. The Northern Ireland Youth Forum (2009) stated in a report that there was a need for young people to be involved in shaping all policies that impact upon their lives.

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Slovenia

In the population of Slovenia which counts 2.042.335 residents, there are 391.923 young people in the age between 15 and 29. It is 19.2 % of the total population.

Slovenia was established as an independent state in 1991 after the disintegration of Yugoslavia and collapse of the socialist system.[3] Youth cultural groups and media as well as the-then youth organisation in Slovenia (the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia) were important advocates and initiators of democratic changes. Relevance of political activism of youth in that period has been regularly taken for comparison in the studies and debates on the recent youth political (dis)engagement in Slovenia.

Recent research data demonstrate low level of interest in politics among young people in Slovenia and their political distrust, but interpretation of the findings has to consider that such studies and predominant discourses reduce politics to institutionalized politics and to established political actors. (Čeplak 2006: 305)

According to the findings of »Mladina 2000« (»Youth 2000«), a survey made on a sample of 1 262 young people in Slovenia aged 16 to 29, as many as 56.6 percent of them stated they had little or no interest in politics, and only 8.9 percent stated they had a strong or

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[3] Wikipedia: In 1990, Slovenia abandoned its socialist infrastructure, the first free and democratic elections were held, and the Democratic Opposition of Slovenia defeated the former Communist parties. The state reconstituted itself as the Republic of Slovenia. In December 1990, the overwhelming majority of Slovenian citizens voted for independence, which was declared on 25 June 1991. A Ten-Day War followed in which the Slovenians rejected Yugoslav military interference. After 1990, a stable democratic system evolved, with economic liberalization and gradual growth of prosperity. Slovenia joined NATO on 29 March 2004 and the European Union on 1 May 2004. Slovenia was the first post-Communist country to hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, for the first six months of 2008.

very strong interest in politics. Similarly, on the values scale, interest in politics came near to the bottom. (Kuhar 2007: 55)

As mentioned earlier, studies on youth political involvement in Slovenia regularly compare recent indicators with some other historical periods after the WW II, especially with the period in 1980s when young people were explicitly enaged in public life and politics and became a motor behind political and cultural emancipation and change of the political system. (Kuhar 2007: 54) At that period for instance the youth media became the main alternative and opposition media in Slovenia, consequently a key part of the political movement aspiring to democratic changes. In that context it is common to conclude that "the interest of young Slovenians in politics has decreased noticeably compared to socialist period, resulting with generational shift from an open youth responsive to social events in mid 1980s towards a self-centered and pragmatic youth in the 1990s". (Kuhar 2007: 57)

Still, despite of the lack of interest in conventional politics, a part of young people in Slovenia is engaged in various initiatives outside of institutional politics, in social movements based on similar basic values and political views. According to Kuhar, the demonstration of young Slovenians' eagerness to participate in environmental activism, consumer activism, peace movements, community and voluntary activities, and in various forms of social criticism and protests, diserves more attention. (ibid: 59)

It is relevant to mention a specific feature of the Slovenian political scene – the establishment of the Party of Youth in 2000 (now it has the name »Party of Youth – European Green Party«). It won sufficient number of votes to enter parliament in the mandate 2000-2004, but later split and has never again entered parliament independently. Its establishment and political engagement could be considered rather a »marketing strategy« (Kuhar 2007: 57) for entering politics on behalf of the important segment of the electorate than example of genuine political representation of youth in Slovenia.

Youth organisations

Since 1990 there is National Youth Council of Slovenia operating as an umbrella organisation for various youth organisations working on national level, "irrespective of their various interests or ideological and political orientations". According to its mission statement, its "efforts and activities are based on the premise that the association of young people should be autonomous and integrated into a free and democratic society". There are also around 40 youth councils established on local level in Slovenia. According to the Youth Councils Act, adopted in 2001, the government, ministries, state or local authorities are required to inform the national or local youth council about the drafting

of laws and regulations that have an immediate impact on the life and work of young people.

Student organisations, especially those representing university students, such as Student Organisation of the University of Ljubljana, have been relevant actor advocating student interests, but has also been subject of various controversies with regard to its management and transparency of its finances.

There are also organisations, initiatives and platforms in which a part of the youth in Slovenia have been regularly engaged in social criticism and alternative forms of political and theoretical engagement, many of them being located in alternative cultural and social centers in urban areas. It includes Workers'-Punks' University (within the Peace Institute) in Ljubljana which has been for 13 years self-managed by students and young intellectuals, inventing alternative form of education and theoretical deliberation. The similar initiative in another university center in Slovenia – Maribor, has been organising since 1996 regular lectures and radio-show at Maribor Student Radio under title "Zofijini ljubimci" ("Lovers of Sophia"). There is also quite strong anarchist and antifascist youth movement in Slovenia.

Youth protests

In March 2010 the Government of Slovenia submitted to the National Assembly two laws aimed at changes in regulation of youth work and in development of public policy mechanisms to improve youth participation, such as adoption of national youth programme and establishment of the governmental council on youth policy.

At the same time the attempt of the government to introduce changes in regulation of student work through the law on small work is opposed by student organizations which have organized on 12th March 2010 a protest against it in front of the government building in Ljubljana. The negotiations between student organizations and the government haven't resulted with sufficient revision of the proposed regulation, therefore students announced massive street protests on 19th May 2010. In the rally, the organisations of university students are to be joined by organisations of secondary school students whose motivation is mainly in the announced changes of regulation by which they won't have free meal in school any more.

In recent years, street protests organised by young people are becoming more often feature of non-institutional politics in Slovenia, motivated by issues related to reforms in education, tuition fees, reforms of students work and other attempts of reduction of social rights. It has been also connected to more general criticism towards social exclusion and violations of human, social or labour rights in Slovenia. Students have

been regular part of the trade union protests which have been organised in Slovenia in past years.

Issues related to the divisions in the WW II between anti-fascist movement in Slovenia and collaborators of the fascist occupators, confrontations around attempts for revision of the recent history and different interpretations of events and leaders from that period have been regularly part of the political agenda in Slovenia, engaging also some youth political activists.

Recently several attacks of young nazi activists in Slovenia have happened even within the university premises, while last year occasion to have the protests of antifa youth movement in Slovenia and the protest of young nati activists at the same day has been after all avoided.

Youth media

Youth media in Slovenia have had prominent role in the period of struggle for democratic changes in 1980s, but later lost their influence or became part of the mainstream media landscape. For instance, the main political weekly in Slovenia still keeping the title "Mladina"/"Youth", used to be a media of the communist and socialist youth, was in 1980s initiator of the democratic changes and as such exposed to seizure of some controversial editions and to court trials. Now it is left-liberal private media. At the same time there is Radio Student opperating in Ljubljana since 1969, being one of the oldest student radio stations in Europe, established during the student demonstations at that time. With the support of the Student Organisation of the University of Ljubljana (being financed through commission from the student work) Radio Student is still providing non-commercial, alternative and open-channel programming. Similar program concept is run by Maribor Student Radio.

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Basque Country (Spain)

The total population of the Basque Country was in 2008 registered at 2,157,112 people. According to the 2008 register the Basque Country was home to 354,176 young people aged between 15 and 29. The youth make 16.4 percentage of the total population.

A survey made by the Basque Youth Observatory in 2008 to collect opinion of young people in Basque Autonomous Region about citizen participation and the European

Union showed that 83.5 percentage of young people think they should be consulted before any public decision that affects them is made. Only 20.6 percentage of young people supported the possiblity of lowering the voting age to enable them to participate in the elections earlier.

The same survey indicated the following patterns of political activities which young people find relevant to make their opinions are heard: 27.5 percentage mentioned participation in debates with politicians, 15.7 percentage pointed membership in NGOs, 14.7 percentage taking part in demonstrations, and 10.5 percentage supported signing petitions. The political actions that young people found less interesting were joining a political party (8.4 %) and joining a trade union (9.9 %).

In relation to how they have been involved in political activities over the past year the most commonly mentioned activity is taking part in public demonstrations (almost half of the young people).

Youth associations

In Spain there are many youth associations, most of them working on local level for the welfare of the community like NGOs active on city level. The most known national youth organizations are related to conventional politics, for instance the youth oganisation of People's Party called New Generations of the People's Party of Spain (NNGG). Such organizations involved in institutional politics have a chance to participate in decision taking. Other type of youth organisations can only take part on their level.

The Youth Council of Spain was created in 1983 as a public law entity with legal personality and full capacity to fulfill its purposes, which ultimately focus on being a channel of free membership to encourage participation of youth in the political, social, economic and cultural development of Spain.

The Basque Youth Council (EGK) was created in 1986 under the law passed in the Basque Parliament. It is established as a youth associations platform which works on behalf of the young people rights.

There are not many political parties in Spain which have in in their political program the issue of youth as a main issue. There is one - UGT juventud en Euskadi - which declares its aim "to work for the rights of young people and their incorporation as representatives of the workers, promote equality actions, training for young professionals and trade union workers and protect their working conditions".

In some parties young people have been organized in sub parties. For example Ezker Batua is a political party in Euskadi and young people have organized Ezker Batua Gazteak (youth) Berdeak or CCOO gazteak.

In the Basque Country there are many youth organizations (like SEGI, HAIKA) which have been illegalized because of their ideology. The media are spreading bad image of these organizations and are manipulating by saying that they are the same as ETA. According to our project partner, it is possible to say that the government of Spain has been fighting terrorism and now it is fighting the financial crisis, being too busy to worry about youth.

Youth protests

In the Basque Country young people have organized protests, tackling the independence of the country, the outlawing (ilegalización) of some of youth organizations.

There are also some other issues such as abortion that make people protest recently. The Spanish govrenment has agreed to liberalize the country's strict abortion laws, allowing abortion in most cases up to 14 weeks of pregnancy. Anti-abortion groups have condemned the proposals and the Roman Catholic Church has started an anti-abortion campaign. There is great controversy on this topic.

This year Spanish university students have often protested against the Bologna system and "anti-Bologna movement" is growing among Spanish university students. The anti-Bologna movement is hard to quantify but at the universities protests are taking place almost everyday. The protests take the form of blocking the entrance to buildings or to lecture halls or other institutional events. One of the main reasons why students are protesting against the Declaration of Bologna is that they believe it will pave the way for the gradual privatization of public universities and that study fees will inevitably go up. The university vice chancellors have attempted to deny this, but protests continue to grow all over Spain.

The issue of anti-Bologna could be a good issue to discuss within our project, having participants from Northern Ireland/UK, Slovenia and Basque/Spain, with probably different experiences and views on that important common topic.

Youth media

There are no relevant youth media in Spain, only TV or radio programs dedicated to young audience (consumers), but they don't really talk about participation and activism and have no real influence. Young people are using traditional media to spread their ideas on social and political situation when they have opportunity. With the Internet evolution the blogs and the social networks have made new distribution channels.

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