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Post-Event Report

Title: Youth Engagement and EU Commitment: Exploring Virtual Democracy

Date: 21–23 September 2025

Venue: Libraria Tirana Times, Tirana, Albania

Event Rapporteurs and Notetakers: Krisilda Lula & Irista Veizaj from ESN Tirana

Background

The conference titled “Youth Engagement and EU Commitment: Exploring Virtual Democracy” was held in Tirana, Albania, from 21 to 23 September 2025. Organized by the Institute of European Democrats (IED), in partnership with ESN Tirana and the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS), brought together youth leaders, policymakers, and experts to explore the evolving role of digital tools in democratic participation. The venue, Libraria Tirana Times, served as a hub for vibrant discussions on youth inclusion, digital literacy, and the future of democracy in the European Union.

In an era marked by rapid technological advancement, youth engagement has become a cornerstone of democratic resilience. Digital transformation has fundamentally altered how citizens access information, participate in political processes, and interact with institutions. While digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for civic participation, they also pose challenges such as misinformation, polarization, and digital exclusion. The conference aimed to address these dynamics by providing a platform for dialogue among young people, policymakers, and civil society actors. It sought to empower youth to propose innovative solutions for enhancing digital democracy and strengthening EU integration.

Main Discussions

The first part of the conference focused on the evolution of virtual democracy. Speakers examined how digital transformation has created new channels for political expression and civic engagement. Miren Martiarena, Director of IED emphasized the dual nature of virtual democracy, highlighting both its potential to broaden access and its risks of fostering misinformation and polarization.

Youth participation in the European democratic process was another central theme. Lutjona Lula from ESN Tirana underscored the importance of youth-led organizations in bridging institutional gaps and promoting continuous dialogue beyond formal voting. Alba Cela from AIIS stressed the need for institutional trust, transparency, and education to foster meaningful youth engagement.



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The role of education and digital competence was discussed by Jean Arnaud, who highlighted the importance of equipping the next generation with critical thinking skills and digital literacy to navigate the complexities of a digital democracy. He warned against the influence of algorithms and emphasized the need for responsible online behavior.

The European Union's commitment to inclusive engagement was also addressed. While programs like Erasmus+ and digital participation platforms were acknowledged, speakers called for deeper collaboration between civil society and EU institutions to ensure that diverse youth voices are heard and valued.

Youth Policy Workshop

The second part of the event featured an interactive youth policy workshop. Participants from Albania, the Western Balkans, and EU member states collaborated to draft actionable policy proposals aimed at enhancing digital participation and strengthening democratic culture. Through structured dialogue and teamwork, they identified key focus areas including digital literacy, digital skills and competences, and participatory policy design. Alice Bernard Montini, President of YDE focused on the importance of youth exchanges and interactions for mutual understanding of both what can turn into a collaborative work, but to respect the boundaries of the other cultures as well.

In the area of digital literacy, participants proposed integrating digital citizenship education into school curricula, promoting media literacy, and launching EU-supported training for students and educators. They emphasized the importance of understanding online ethics, privacy, and information verification as essential components of a healthy democratic society.

Regarding digital skills and competences, the workshop recommended the establishment of community learning hubs, mentorship programs, and cross-border digital exchanges. Participants also suggested incentivizing NGOs and local authorities to offer practical workshops on e-governance and online activism.

In terms of participatory policy design, the youth proposed the creation of a European Platform for Youth Policy Proposals to facilitate co-development and voting on policy suggestions. They advocated for strengthening youth councils and networks and promoting transparency and co-creation in policymaking processes.

Keynote Highlights

Jean Arnaud, Director of International Growth at [CIC Berlin](#) delivered a keynote address titled "AI, Democracy, and the Human Future," where he discussed the transformative potential of artificial intelligence and the necessity of ethical governance. He advocated for



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integrating AI literacy into education and empowering youth as digital change-makers. The plenary session titled “Innovation for EU Integration: Youth as Connectors” showcased youth-led digital diplomacy, cross-border mentorships, and social media campaigns as effective tools for fostering EU integration and intercultural dialogue.

Youth-Led Policy Actions

Participants developed actionable proposals in two thematic groups, facilitated by Alba Brojka, Digital Public Policy Expert.

Participants worked in groups on the following key themes:

1. Digital Literacy

Youth delegates assessed current levels of digital literacy and recognised a significant gap between access to technology and the ability to use it responsibly.

- Proposed actions included integrating digital citizenship education into school curricula, promoting media literacy programs, and developing EU-supported training initiatives for both students and educators.
- Participants emphasized that understanding online ethics, privacy, and information verification is essential for a healthy democratic society.

2. Digital Skills and Competences

Another working group focused on the importance of technical and creative digital skills to empower youth participation in virtual democratic spaces.

- Proposed measures included establishing community learning hubs, mentorship programs, and cross-border digital skill exchanges among EU and Balkan youth.
- The group also suggested incentivising NGOs and local authorities to offer hands-on workshops on e-governance tools and online activism.

3. Participatory Policy Design

This group explored how young people can contribute directly to public policy-making through digital means.

- Key proposals involved creating a European Platform for Youth Policy Proposals, where young citizens of EU and candidate countries from Western Balkans can co-develop and vote on policy suggestions.



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- The platform would promote transparency, collaboration, and direct dialogue between youth, civil society, and policymakers.
- Participants also proposed strengthening youth councils and networks at national and local levels, ensuring their voices are represented in decision-making.

Cross-Cutting Recommendations

From the collective discussions, several shared priorities emerged:

- **Education:** Embed digital citizenship, ethics, and participation as core educational values.
- **Media Competence:** Develop initiatives to counter misinformation and foster critical online engagement.
- **Youth Inclusion:** Empower youth organizations and councils to act as mediators between institutions and young people.
- **EU Cooperation:** Promote continuous collaboration between EU institutions and youth networks across borders to ensure consistent engagement.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The conference successfully bridged theory and practice, empowering youth to shape the future of digital democracy. Key outcomes included strengthened networks among youth, policymakers, and experts; actionable policy proposals for EU institutions; and increased awareness of the democratic implications of artificial intelligence. Moving forward, the organizers plan to disseminate the proposals to relevant institutions, launch follow-up mentorships and workshops, and continue collaboration among ESN Tirana, IED, AIIS, and youth participants. The conference also featured cultural and networking activities. These experiences fostered cross-cultural understanding and strengthened regional youth networks.

LINK TO THE KEYNOTE LIVESTREAM:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvsNhenTdbA>



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On organizers:

IED (Institute of European Democrats): With its focus on European governance, democratic innovation, and policy research, IED contributed both as lead organizer, strategic and content expertise. Through the coordination of plenary sessions and the provision of expert speakers, IED ensured that discussions were grounded in the latest research and European policy priorities. For more: www.iedonline.eu

ESN Tirana: has been instrumental in promoting intercultural exchange and youth engagement. ESN Tirana's role was central in designing interactive sessions, facilitating group works, and mentoring participants to ensure effective contributions. Their experience in mobilizing students and young professionals was key to fostering a dynamic and participatory environment. For more: www.erasmustirana.org

AIIS (Albanian Institute for International Studies): As a leading think tank on international relations and policy analysis, AIIS provided intellectual and logistical support, helping to frame the thematic focus of the conference and ensuring high-level participation from both local and international stakeholders, including synergy with the institute's flagship initiative "Foreign Policy Forums". For more: www.aiis-albania.org