Majors issues affecting young people and democracy

A- Mutual distrust between political parties and young people

1- A strong trust issue
   - Young people often have a negative opinion of politicians, and
     consider that politicians act more in their own interest than for
     society.
   - Politicians often see young people as “dangerous” - more prone
     to strike or to manifest their discontent than to collaborate.
   - In the work environment, young people or the “Generation Y” are
     often seen as unreliable. Young people with a strong educational
     background experience difficulties in finding employment.

2- Lack of participation in the institutional political system
   - A basic fact – low turnout in particular for European elections, but
     not only confined to Europe.
   - On the other hand, strong involvement in other forms of
     participation through the internet and social media, as well as new
     forms of mobilisation. Nuit Debout in France and Indignados in
     Spain tend to involve mostly young people. Another example
     could be the “ZAD” (Zone à défendre) phenomenon in France.

3- Challenge of representation in the institutional political system
   - Young people are not visible, and their views and opinions are not
     taken into account.
   - In representative organs, there are very few young people. People
     between the ages of 20 and 44 represent 57% of the world’s voting
     age population, but only 26% of the world’s MPs. Only 1.9% of the
     world’s 45 000 parliamentarians are under the age of 30 and
     nearly 1/3 of the world’s single and lower houses have no MPs
     under the age of 30. (Source: IPU Report on youth participation in
     national parliaments, 2016)
   - Young people are not represented, and the neither are their Ideas,
     opinions, interests and concerns.

4- Rigidity of our representative systems
   - Democracies are quite reluctant to change and embrace new
     ideas.
   - New forms of expression and mobilisation are not taken into
     account, or only in the margins, by political parties. Political parties
     are increasingly active on social media, but it appears more like a
     “modern façade” than really embracing all the potential that new
     media can offer.

B- Question of the intergenerational dialogue
5- Young people feel like they lose influence whereas the interests of old people are more taken into account

- Both groups are marginalised since they are not the “working age” core of a democracy.
- However, there are differences - old people gain political weight because they are the fastest growing age class and tend to vote. At the same time, in European countries, the number of young people are decreasing and their voices not heard. (See figure 2 before).

Source: Intergenerational Dialogue for Democracy, T. Deželan

6- The risk of a growing social cleavage between the two generations

- There are diverging visions of what the political system should look like.
- Strong influence of the internet and new forms of mobilisation on young people, whereas older people prefer different forms of engagement. It does not mean that older people are indifferent to new forms of engagement, and some of them are very active.
- Challenge of diverging views – generations of young and old people are erroneously treated as homogenous groups.

7- A lack of linkages/connections between young and old people

- It relates to the challenge of more individualistic societies. In everyday life or at the workplace, very few institutions are equipped to reconcile the views of these two generations, and for the political authorities to be receptive to their views.

Recommendations to address challenges:

1- Improved citizens education (to understand political system)

- Mandatory civic citizenship programmes in school curricula, and at the European level, a common definition of what should be the content of such classes.
- Sustained information campaigns targeting young people throughout the electoral cycle (not only before national and European elections).

2- Showing trust in young people
- Lowering of the voting age to 16 for all elections, and make first time voting mandatory. In Austria for example, the lowering of the voting age increased the interest and participation of young people in the functioning of democracy.
- Increased involvement of young people (participation and representation) in political parties and in public/private companies. Provide young people more responsibilities on a voluntary basis.

3- Concrete steps to fully integrate young people to the political system
- Setting of quotas for young people in parliamentary elections. Even though it seems like a brutal and short-term solution, it has proven very effective in promoting gender equality.
- Creation of consultative bodies of young people that could participate in policymaking and decision-making on concrete, important issues.
- Facilitate new forms of voting (online, extended in time, easier when abroad).
- Adapting the political system to the internet era and new forms of mobilisation. The political authorities can propose new, innovative ways to make people, and not only young people, more interested in the functioning of democracy. In France, the city of Grenoble is a pioneer in what is called “Budget Participatif”. An envelope of €50.000 has been dedicated to realize specific projects designed by the inhabitants of the city.

4- Towards an intergenerational dialogue
- Creating institutions and places where young and old people can exchange views and reach agreements regarding specific issues.
- In the workplace, promote programs to promote mutual learning. Young and old people both have useful knowledge to share. The European Agency for Safety & Health at Work (EU-OSHA) is promoting this approach, and at the European level, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and BusinessEurope are committed to work on the same issue.
- Financing studies and associations promoting mutual dialogue and encounters.
- Establishing an EU Intergenerational Council to represent and promote the interests of the young and old generations.