



Sport and Active Citizenship

The European Parliamentary Elections 2019
The ENGSO Youth Position



Introduction

The upcoming European Parliamentary elections will take place on 23-26 May 2019. On these days, EU citizens have the opportunity to select who will represent them in the European Parliament for the next five years. Undoubtedly, the elections will have a direct impact on European citizens' life. They will decide how the European Union will act in the coming years to address concerns about employment, business, security, migration and climate change, just to mention a few. Europe is facing a number of internal and external challenges from rising populist political agendas and Brexit to rapidly changing global political, economic and security landscapes. There are a number of young citizens who are growing frustrated and disengaged with politics in Europe. Social exclusion, marginalization and extremism still represent a great threat to the younger generations. As a consequence, ENGSO Youth echoes views of the European Youth Forum, according to which *'the European Union needs to be reinvented, injected with fresh ideas and visions, to transform itself into an entity that young people want to engage with'*.

Sport and active citizenship

Active citizenship can be defined as the democratic participation of civic society between the electoral periods, which is a crucial barometer of a cohesive society. In other words, active citizenship is the glue that keeps society together. Democracy does not function properly without it, because effective democracy is more than just placing a mark on a voting slip. As a Europe-wide youth-sport umbrella organisation, ENGSO Youth aims to encourage the sense of community among young people to feel part of a wider community, and each individual to be aware of the difference they can make. These objectives are important at all levels of society to positively impact a multitude of economic, cultural, and social factors. Furthermore 'engaging young people in democratic and civic life' is a key EU objective established in the proposal by the European Commission for the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

Sport is a powerful tool to enhance team spirit, solidarity, education and social values and cooperation. The role of sport in promoting social networks and active citizenship is important. As a truly universal language, it is one of the best ways to bring communities together and build trust among members of the society. In addition, sport has a significant positive impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing. Its importance and effectiveness in enhancing social development is declared by the European Commission, the UN, several international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and academic researchers.

There are many ways in which young people play an active role as citizens of their societies. Across the EU, more than 100 million people are estimated to engage in some form of voluntary work, with sport and culture being the most popular areas of activity. A recent survey of young people aged between 15 and 30 living in EU member states was conducted to find out how young EU citizens are participating in society. It focused on their participation in organisations (e.g. sports clubs, voluntary organisations), political elections, voluntary activities and projects fostering cooperation with young people in other countries. According to this survey 35% of young Europeans say they have been active in a sports club within the past year, followed by youth organisation (22%), local organisation (15%) and cultural organisation (14%)[1]. We should therefore acknowledge that sport is still the most popular social activity, which engages 1 in 3 young Europeans.

The role of sport clubs in society

Sport and sport clubs hold an important place in our society. Being a member of a club, interacting with people, participating in the life of a club – all these can create important social benefits and may help encourage **active citizenship**. Sport is more than exercise. It is also about social inclusion, about helping those at the margins of society to be fully integrated: to be an important element of a vibrant community. This is what **active citizenship** is all about. An important part of the sport world is volunteering, and more young people need to be encouraged to get involved. Such a commitment at early stage of life may later translate into broader active citizenship, bringing multifaceted benefits to the volunteer and to the entire society. It is crucial that the sport sector and sport clubs realise all this potential, so they can play a stronger role within their communities their society.

Youth sport and European Parliamentary elections

ENGSO Youth believes it is crucial to raise awareness of and encourage the participation of young people in the upcoming European Parliamentary elections. Representing the EU citizens, the EU Parliament has a crucial role in EU decision-making processes which also applies to youth and sport policies. As described above, young European sportspeople take a considerable role in the promotion of active citizenship which shall also be reflected in their willingness for taking part in the EU elections. Therefore, ENGSO Youth officially joins the European Parliament's '**This time I'm voting campaign**' and invites young European sportspeople to join the campaign and take part in the elections. Furthermore we invite the future members of the European Parliament to dedicate even greater attention to youth and sport policies.

ENGSO Youth's recommendations for future members of the EU Parliament:

1. Maintain the hearings of the **Sport Intergroup** and invite stakeholders from the youth and sport sectors for relevant discussions;
2. Support the development of the **European sport funding tools**, especially the Erasmus+ Sport programme;
3. Support the creation of a new generation of **citizens' dialogues** involving personalities from the sporting worlds, as sport is one of the most visible and evident instruments for creating a common sense of belonging. Well-known sports personalities could be asked to serve as **EU ambassadors**;
4. Together with the European Commission, the Presidency of the EU Council, support the bi-annual organisation of the **European Youth Sport Forum** as the major event uniting youth sport leaders from across Europe;

[1] «Youth on the Move», Analytical Report, European Commission, May 2011
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_319a_en.pdf

