



FINAL DECLARATION OF THE 6TH NOW CONFERENCE

PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION -

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN OUR COMMUNITIES

27 – 29 January 2019

The constantly growing dissatisfaction with and the resulting estrangement from politics have negatively impacted the foundations of our representative democracies. The rise of right-wing and right extremist movements poses a threat for our societies and particularly for everyone considering a good life of high quality in an open society to be possible and attainable for all. Where human rights are questioned, where the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press as well as the principles of equality and freedom are curtailed, watchfulness and a committed civil society are more important than ever.

We have convened in Vienna for the 6th International Mayors' Conference NOW to find out – in an atmosphere of openness and equality, of trust and respect – how to secure the participation of young people in the political discourse and as such again strengthen social cohesion. Since young people are largely underrepresented in political decision-making processes, we have extended our room for dialogue accordingly. This time, 60 young people from Europe and the countries in the Middle and Near East have joined us in Vienna. Over the course of three days they have explored new ways and tested new tools together with the members of the NOW Mayors' Network, with local, regional, and international mayors, educational experts, and representatives from governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The world these young people grew up and started to advocate in is often characterised by the cynicism of many actors in power, the selfish interests of international groups, the ignorance of certain elites. Many in this generation no longer consider it an option to simply look the other way. They cannot even refuse the inheritance left to them by previous generations. They see less democracies and the erosion of democratic values – the opposite of what they want: Participatory democracy. Today's young people will have to live with their inheritance.

On the other hand: They alone can save the world and they have the energy to embark on this enterprise. They are our hope. We all cannot tolerate more foul compromises and we cannot do without their contribution in all aspects of society.

This is the spirit in which the NOW Conferences have developed. Whereas in the beginning the focus was on refugee movements and the resulting challenges, they later turned into a laboratory for strengthening social cohesion and now a future-oriented workshop to improve the living conditions of children, adolescents, and adults. This has turned the conference into a platform for specific innovation. The young people who have come to Vienna expecting an open ear and dialogue have long understood that they can and must get involved. 'We are entitled to your attention!', they say.

With their help we were able to prepare outlines and projects in an intense, participative process in numerous focus groups. In these past two days, we have seen that together we can show ourselves to each other and we can become visible to others.





To document that we shall not only debate but must also act, that it is wonderful to dream together but that we also need to implement, we will be working together on the following first projects created in our shared space:

SHAPING COMMUNITIES WITH YOUNG PEOPLE:

Designing a common presence and future together

START INTO MY NEW LIFE:

How can I realise my dreams in the new society I am living in now

EMPOWERING YOUTH COUNCIL IN RASHAYA, LEBANON:

Training young people to voice and realise their ideas

BRIDGING YOUTH COUNCIL TO MUNICIPALITY:

Creating an organised youth council in each district of Lebanon

SCHOOL COUNCILS IN TURKISH MUNICIPALITIES:

Implementing a model for school councils to influence municipalities

We close quoting Fahima Elmi who at age 15 was nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize and who today, two years later, in Vienna reminds us of our potentials and obligations:

WE CAN ALL BE CHANGEMAKERS!

In memory of Paweł Adamowicz, the Mayor of Gdansk who built bridges and on 14 January 2019 fell victim to the climate of hate.

Vienna, 29 January 2019

