



Democracy workshop at Utøya

19.-22 August 2019

Youth politicians and civil society activists from Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Norway



19 - 22 August 2019 The European Wergeland Centre and Utøya organized a workshop at Utøya with the support of the Norwegian Embassies in Prague, Bratislava, Budapest and Warsaw. 24 youth politicians and civil society activists participated in the workshop. The aim was to inspire and motivate young people to promote and defend democratic values and act against hate speech and extremism.

The workshop was organized at the commemoration – and learning centre at Utøya which was established after the terror attack on 22 July 2011, where 69 people, most of them youth politicians and young people, were killed by a right-wing extremist. Utøya today is a living educational centre that safeguards both the memory of those who lost their lives on 22 July 2011 and the creation of new life. Thereby, an important part of the workshop 19 – 22 August was for the participants to reflect upon people’s resilience to terror and violence, and how living remembrance can motivate young people to contribute to building open and tolerant societies.

Through interactive methods and learning activities, the participants discussed challenges to democracy in Europe today, and the role of young people in addressing these challenges. Furthermore, they explored the notions of hate speech and extremism, and learned and exchanged experiences on how to prevent and combat them. The workshop was also an arena for exploring opportunities of establishing partnerships and networks between engaged young people in the Visegrad-countries and Norway.

The workshop was promoted by the European Wergeland Centre on Facebook and shared by the embassies. In addition, a journalist from the student newspaper *Universitas* at the University of Oslo visited the workshop and interviewed several of the participants. The article is scheduled to be published both online and on paper the first week of September. Utøyas communication advisor also made a couple of short video interviews with some of the participants, which will be used for promotion of Utøya as an international meeting place.

The workshop was partly financed by the EEA grants.

“I was not pushed to change my values and ideals, but I now have a better understanding about the arguments from both sides”

To facilitate the exchange of experiences, learning and discussion of how to tackle these challenges the facilitators carried out participatory activities in which the participants get to experience and position themselves to different dilemmas and situations connected to human rights, democracy and hate speech. This approach is based on learning *about*, *through* and *for* human rights and democratic citizenship. Participants both as individuals and as representatives of organizations are encouraged not only to discuss challenges on a general societal level, but rather to reflect about their own role and possibilities to act against challenges and for change. This approach was familiar to some participants and new to others.

Exploring challenges

Many of the participants have leading positions in youth organizations of political parties. Thereby, the program was adapted to mainly address hate speech in the public debate. Some challenges that were highlighted by participants were:

- the groups who are typically targeted by hate speech are minorities, refugees, immigrants and LHBTQ communities
- both the *hate speech narratives* (the stories told about these groups) and the public support for these narratives, varies between the countries. In some countries these narratives are promoted mostly by what can be called extremist groups, while in others they are also supported and promoted explicitly by the authorities
- hate speech contributes to polarization in the public debate
- spread of disinformation and “fake news”
- Lack of dialogue between political parties, but also between political parties and civil society organizations

Ideas for follow-up

The overall aim of the workshop was to motivate and inspire young people to promote and defend democratic values and act against hate speech and extremism. Some plans and ideas from participants are

- Organise a petition to extend the definition of hate speech in Polish law, using the definitions and experiences from the other Visegrad countries and Norway
- Based on inspiration from the other countries, launch #iamhere campaign on social media to address hate speech online
- Educate members in own organizations and carry out workshops between and within the youth structures of political parties on how to act against hate speech and extremism
- Organize non-formal trainings with young people
- Initiate more cooperation between political youth organizations and civil society organizations which has expertise on prevention of hate speech
- Organise public seminars together with youth politicians from different parties
- Explore opportunities for international collaboration and help each other find funding for organizing seminars, events and exchanges

Evaluation

The feedback from the participants in the evaluation forms as well as feedback during the training are overwhelmingly positive, both connected to Utøya as a unique place for learning, and to the program, organization of the workshop and the topics addressed. The meeting with a witness who survived the terror attack at Utøya 22 July 2011 and the possibility of asking questions and sharing reflections on how both different societies and individuals respond to violence was highlighted as a particularly powerful tool for learning. Furthermore, the opportunity, in an organized form, to meet and discuss both challenges and solutions with politically active young people who normally disagree on a number of issues, was emphasized as valuable. The majority of the participants reported that they are motivated and inspired to take action against hate speech and to motivate others to do the same.

Several participants propose for the future to expand the workshop with at least one more day. The internal evaluation by the trainers also support this proposal. An additional day could open up space for exploring further some of the issues which were touched upon during the workshop, which this time was not possible to explore further. Examples of such issues could be how to deal with controversial issues or the development of counter- and/or alternative narratives to hate speech, which are relevant to both youth politicians and civil society activists. To expand the seminar with at least one more day could also contribute to balance on the one hand experiencing Utøya, exploring the different places on the island and to share experiences in an informal setting with people from different national or local contexts, and on the other hand to have enough time for the official program of the workshop.

Another proposal is to include more space for participants to introduce their organizations and/or institutions, which could be considered in the process of selecting participants and as a part of preparation for the workshop. To already before the workshop have some information about participant's background could motivate to even more cooperation within the countries, as well as international partnerships and networks.

To summarize the evaluation: Positive feedback from participants both connected to Utøya as a learning and meeting arena, the topics addressed and the composition of participants (youth politicians and civil society activists from Visegrad countries and Norway). Most of the proposed changes are connected to the time frame of the workshop, emphasizing more time for sharing experiences between the countries as well as exploring further and more in depth how to prevent and act against hate speech and extremism.

«I learned a lot about hate speech, theory and practice as well, many things were unknown for me before the workshop. Also, I reach the new motivation for the working with these topics and engage myself in politics»

It's a great place for meetings, the story of the terror attack is sad and we need to remember, but we need to bring life to this island»



Norges ambassade

Prague, Bratislava, Warsaw and Budapest