

## CLOSING DEBATE ON THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH AND ENDORSEMENT OF THE CHARTER FOR YOUTH AND DEMOCRACY

Committee of the Regions,  
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### Speech Silja Markkula, President of the European Youth Forum

*Check against delivery*

- It's the European Year of Youth.
- I am the outgoing President of the largest platform of youth organisations in the world, I often get asked what Europe is like for young people today.
- And **what a time it is, to be a young person.**
  - Our friends in Ukraine have had to flee war against Russia.
  - Our friends in Belarus have had to go into exile, **because they believe in democracy.**
  - Our friends in Sweden have seen violent attacks against civil society, simply because they **stood up for their values.**
  - Our friends in Spain are wondering how many master's degrees they need to do to land an entry-level job that pays their rent, in the apartment they can't find yet.
  - My friends back home in Finland don't access mental health services, because they're not suicidal enough.
- And that is why we are here today. To build a common way forward for the young generation. To make sure that our voices are heard, to make sure that young people are not left behind.
- To **make sure that the young people of the present, have a future.**
- This is why the Charter matters.
  
- I want to **thank the Committee of Regions as an institution who wholeheartedly embraced the spirit of this year's European Year of Youth.**
  
- The CoR has worked closely with the Youth Forum to realise a number of important events, initiatives and policy proposals for young people.
  
- The **Opinion on the Future of EU Youth Policy** and your support for **important youth-focused measures** during this year's Conference on the Future of Europe have led to a number of important proposals for young people - such as banning unpaid internships and the introduction of an EU Youth Test (which, as we just heard from Vice President Schinas, would change the game for young people in European policy-making.)

- It is an **impact analysis tool** that would see all EU level policy viewed through a **youth lens**. CoR is also a strong support for lowering the voting age to 16, which we are thankful for.
- The CoR is a **fundamental partner in the European Youth Capital project** (for which **a new call for applications has just been launched**), taking part in the Jury, sharing best practices from the Youth Capitals.
- Last week, **the city of Lviv was awarded the European Youth Capital 2025 title**. Next to the support by the CoR to Ukrainian regions and cities, this title will surely help the city in its efforts to overcome the current highly difficult situation.
- And of course, **the European Charter on Youth and Democracy** is an important step in the collaboration between CoR and young Europeans. **The Charter aims to ensure that at all levels young people can participate and make their voices** heard in democratic and policy making spaces.
- **The Charter is also a promising example of how young people and youth organisations can work closely** with the European institutions to co-create something together on an equal footing.
- And **I would like to thank the Committee of Regions** for your support and commitment to this initiative, and am very proud of the document that is being endorsed today.
- It is now time to bring the recommendations of the Charter to life,
  - To realise those **youth-friendly democratic spaces;**
  - And to deliver on the promises made to young people who created this Charter.
- In doing so, we hope to see that once the **year of youth** comes to an end, the **legacy continues to live** and strengthens young people's democratic participation at all levels.