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RESTORING THE SENSE OF POLITICS THROUGH YOUTH PARTICIPATION

GEORGIA, MOLDOVA AND UKRAINE



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PREFACE

Restoring the Sense of Politics Through Youth Participation

The Millennial generation – young people aged between 15-35, born between 1980-2000 – and their engagement with democratic life and political participation have been a matter of much discussion in recent years.

This is primarily because the era of an individual's close affiliation with political parties appears to be approaching an end. As evidence suggests, in most European democracies there is a clear downward trend with regards to political party membership, especially amongst young people. What is more, this generation is increasingly disillusioned with party politics and/or politics in general, as illustrated by their absence at the polling stations.

The combined effect of this apparent political indifference of Millennials makes them frequent targets of political prejudice. Millennials are often depicted as a lazy and disengaged generation, uninterested in both political processes and political outcomes. This context has resulted in a widening of the perception gap between politicians and Millennials, effectively making their relationship complex and at times challenging. Crucially, this has been a dynamic observed all across Europe, from the East to the West, and from the South to the North.

Analysing and understanding the values, expectations and aspirations vis-à-vis politics of this large and powerful generation¹ is an important task that the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and the Foundation Max van der Stoep (FMS) have taken on in partnership with the valuable support of the Institute for Democracy and Social Progress in Ukraine (IDSP). There was a com-

1. In 2015 23% of the population of the EU was between the ages of 15 and 34.
Eurostat, population database (variable demo_pop)

mon willingness among the partners in the “Restoring the Sense of Politics Through Youth Participation” initiative to counter the myths that dominate the popular narrative around Millennials and to show that Millennials are neither withdrawn nor apathetic. Rather, they are a generation ready to be involved in contemporary politics, yet on their own terms and through their own rules, which are often dependent on each specific national context but always different from the old models of political engagement.

The important findings of the research undertaken in three country-specific examples – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – contained in this publication seem to confirm this idea. We therefore see this research as an important and useful tool for progressive politics in the world of today: in addition to demystifying the negative connotations towards this demographic, this research also shows a positive way forward on how Millennials expect to be addressed by politicians and how they wish to be included and heard in the deliberations and decision-making processes of policies that are important to them.

In light of this, we hope that this book serves as a fresh analysis to be used by policy-makers, youth experts, students and anyone with an interest in comparative political and sociological studies focusing on youth political engagement. The perspectives presented in this book aim to empower the Millennial generation and offer a solid basis for a genuine reflection on how to strengthen participative democracy and to re-engage Millennials with progressive politics.

After all, this is not a generation that is against politics in general. It is instead a generation that is seeking a deep transformation of how politics functions and how decisions are made, a generation that is forcing contemporary politics to engage with them in a different way.

Ernst STETTER, Secretary General of FEPS
Arjen BERKVENS, Director of Foundation Max van der Stoep
Vitaliy SHYBKO, Head of Coordination board of IDSP

INTRODUCTION

“Restoring the Sense of Politics Through Youth Participation. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine” is a research project into youth political engagement in three Eastern Partnership countries that aims to achieve a deeper understanding of the ways in which young people are engaging nowadays with political parties and systems. The present research project integrates the global youth engagement study pioneered by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) that provides recommendations worldwide on how the democratic world can better engage with this generation and build trust among them in a way that is positive, progressive and participatory.

Young people born between 1980-2000 aged 15-35 are commonly referred to as the Millennial or the *wh(y)* generation and are usually described as a group cohort that tends to strongly question issues rather than engage. What is more, Millennials are also often depicted as a generation that tends to have no special interest or even avoids politics. Recurrent trends of low voter turnout among young people and their refusal to join mainstream political parties has led to a ballooning of negative prejudices towards this generation as apathetic and as a generation that simply does not engage in politics.

However, the FEPS Millennial Dialogue study “The Future Starts Now! 10 cornerstones for a Dialogue Between the Progressive Family and the Millennials Generation²” attests through sound research and vast data sets that this recurring story about Millennials is neither fair nor true. In fact, FEPS research provided a major breakthrough as to how this generation is behaving towards con-

2. Study by A. Skrzypek, M. Freitas on behalf of FEPS available at http://www.call-toeurope.eu/assets/b6bba582-cc87-4023-8b2c-39e895e747fa/2016%2006%2014%20md%20final%20paper_done.pdf

temporary politics and what sort of engagement and communication means young people are expecting of their elected officials. Most importantly, the FEPS Millennial Dialogue project has myth-busted most of the negative attributes that this generation has been branded with and has paved the way among progressive parties in the European Union (EU) to think of new openings and better ways to galvanise this generation towards social democracy.

In light of the positive outcomes that the Millennial Dialogue research project of FEPS has brought about within the progressive family in the EU and by shedding a more positive light on this generation there was a desire to also conduct further analysis of the characteristics of the Millennial generation of three Eastern Partnership countries – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, which are the three countries of the Eastern Partnership that have signed an Association Agreement with the EU – and investigate the similarities and differences between young people in these countries.

The present research project aims to outline the general trends of young people’s participation in democratic life and to show how the political structures and organisations in these countries are, or are not enabling the political engagement of the Millennial generation. This study is of importance not only for the countries under scrutiny as it can pave a positive way towards building and solidifying bridges between this generation and progressive politics but also due to the fact that it looks into three new countries and thus opens up three new perspectives on FEPS’ global youth engagement initiative.

As for the methodology of this study, it should be noted that the research was conducted without taking into account the territories that are not under control of the central government. Within the framework of the research the authors relied on systems of primary knowledge, the work of individual authors and data from analytical centres as well as sociological surveys, research discussions, interviews and empirical observations.

1. A LOOK AT THE PRESENT

Based on the objectives set out by the authors and by the framework of the Millennial Dialogue project of FEPS, the present study aims to identify general trends of young people's participation in politics in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

To fulfil the objectives of the study the authors carried out an online survey in the three countries comprising a sample of 1,200 Millennials. For more information about the survey results, see the SURVEY section on page 57. This survey took account of the geographical spread of young people in the countries' various regions, their different age cohorts, gender balance and socio-economic backgrounds so as to make it a representative sample. The survey used the standard questionnaire of the Millennial Dialogue project of FEPS that was carried out consistently in 23 countries all over the world.

The top line survey results conducted in the three countries are set out below.

Georgia

Georgia law defines people aged between 14-29 years as youths. According to data of the National Statistics Office of the country one in five people in Georgia is in the youth age group. Considering the fact that the population of Georgia is 3.7 million, one can deduce that the total number of Georgian youths is about 740,000 people.

Over the past 10 years the percentage of Georgian youth vis-à-vis the total population decreased by 4%. The main reasons behind this significant decrease relate to military, political and economic problems that Georgia has been faced with. The Russian-Georgian

military conflict in 2008, the economic crisis in 2008 and a radical change of power in 2012 were the main reasons that a large part of the country's youth has migrated in search of better opportunities.

In 2016 *The South Caucasus Regional Office of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung* carried out a systematic study of Georgian youths aged 14-29: "Generation in transition"³. This study also complemented the country-specific Millennial Dialogue survey and thus provides a good basis for a description of the average young person in Georgia.

The average young person in Georgia can be described as an orthodox Christian (85%), who completed secondary education (47%), who lives with her/his parents (70%), and who is still dependent on their support (62%). They get on well with their parents (55%), who have the strongest influence on their lives.

Most Millennials' families are facing hardship. 43% of those surveyed said that their parents hardly had enough money to buy food, clothes or shoes, and did not have the means to replace a broken fridge or buy a new TV set. In fact, the most pressing issues facing youths in Georgia are unemployment and poverty. 34% of Millennials in Georgia are unemployed but are eager to change the terms of this situation. 75% believe that in order to find a job you need to have good contacts. When asked about their job preferences 42% of those surveyed said that they would prefer to work in state administration rather than in the private sector. 87% of Millennials stated they had never tried to start their own business.

Another trend that was observed among young people in Georgia is that they prefer to spend their monthly allowance on cigarettes (80 Georgian Lari/28 EUR) rather than on entertainment (61 Lari/22 EUR), books (27 Lari/9.5 EUR) or other necessities (eating out, transport, internet etc.).

3. GENERATION IN TRANSITION. Youth study 2016 – Georgia. Tbilisi, 2017, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), South Caucasus Regional Office available at <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/georgien/13150.pdf>

The general trend observed in terms of participation in public life was that 94% of Georgian youths do not attend public meetings or take part in online forums. Also when it comes to joining in political or social mobilisation on topics such as defence of human rights or signing petitions, young Georgians distance themselves from such activities (96% do not participate).

Young Georgians generally treat politics with indifference. 46% of Millennials surveyed said they followed political developments in the country to a certain extent, but in the end were not really interested in politics at all or in what is going on outside Georgia and in the rest of the world. Millennials keep up to date with daily news mainly through traditional media such as TV (73%).

Study results show that religious institutions enjoy a high level of trust. 81% of respondents trusted the church and religious institutions in general. It is quite interesting that after religious institutions, the army (76%) and police (62%) are highly trusted. Religious leaders are among the top three categories of people about whom respondents expressed a high level of trust. The importance of religiosity and spiritual life is once again confirmed by survey data - among the most important values, the majority of youth in Georgia named belief in God (90%).

The portrait of Georgian youths can be further complemented with the results of the Millennial Dialogue project. 40% of Georgian Millennials who took part in the survey said they were satisfied with the reality of their lives whilst 50% stated that certain difficulties/obstacles prevented them from being fully satisfied with their situation. At the same time 7.5% of young people stated they were in quite difficult circumstances and thus not completely satisfied with their own realities. Only 2.5% of the Georgian youths responded that they were completely happy and satisfied with their lives at present.

When inquired about the future prospects in Georgia, 22.5% of Millennials had an optimistic outlook. 27.5% were more moderate and cautiously optimistic, whilst 45% said they were rather more opti-

mistic than pessimistic about the future. There was a distinct tendency towards optimism, as only 2.5% said to be pessimistic about their future prospects.

When asked to rate their preferences for future professions, 20% of the Millennials surveyed indicated they would like to become a scientist (20%) or a business owner or founder (10%). Becoming a professor, politician or writer scored equally at 7.5%. However, 32.5% of the respondents selected 'other.'

Moldova

Under Moldovan law people aged 16-30 are defined as young people. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (NBS) young people aged 15-29 make up 25% of the population.

As of 1 January 2014 the total population of the Republic of Moldova was 3.6 million, one in four, or approximately 900,000, of whom are young people (falling into the 15-29 age category).

In recent years, the number of young people has been steadily decreasing as this cohort has been migrating in search of education or work opportunities abroad. About 50,000 of young people (approximately 5% of the country's total youth cohort) have left Moldova. In absolute numbers, 135,000 young people, or 15% of the population, have left the country to work or study abroad.

State authorities in the country claim that a wide range of rights and opportunities is provided for the young people. At the same time, according to data from the National strategy of youth development up to 2020 (Act of the Government of Republic of Moldova No. 1006,

4. The Government Decision of the Republic of Moldova on the Approval of the National Strategy Development of the Youth Sector till 2020 and the Action Plan for its Implementation. Available at <http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=356215&lang=1>

10-12-2014)⁴, 8.1% of young people are aware of the full extent of their rights, 44.6% know their basic rights, 38.9% are partially informed as to youth legislation, 35.6% are not aware or concerned about them and 8.1% of young people know nothing about their rights. These numbers attest that a large proportion of Millennials in Moldova is not familiar with their rights and/or basic opportunities.

Fewer and fewer young people in Moldova claim to have an interest in politics or express a wish to vote in elections. Results of the survey carried out by IData Company in the framework of the ProDEM project “Attitude of young people from Moldova towards the electoral process” testifies to this. According to the survey, 46% of respondents said they were interested in the country’s social and economic situation, whilst 54% said they had little or no interest in politics.

When asked about their level of interest in politics, Millennial respondents replied as follows: 12.8 %, said they were very interested, 33.1% somewhat interested, 41.1% not really interested and 10.4% not interested at all.

Should elections take place the next Sunday, 46% of the respondents would vote (48% women and 46% men). Respondents also explained the reasons/obstacles as to why they would not take part in an election.

60% of respondents said that they would not vote, as there is no obligation to do so. 57% claimed not to be informed about elections, whereas 54% said that their absence at the polling stations was due to a lack of conditions conducive to casting their vote. In addition to this, 35% said that their absence was due to a health problem, and another 35% of those surveyed said it was difficult to get to the polling station⁵.

5. Attitude of young people from Moldova towards the electoral process.
http://prodem.md/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Studiu_AtitudineaTinerilor_eng2.pdf

The survey conducted as part of this research describes Millennials in Moldova in the following way: 66% of young people said they were highly satisfied with the reality of their lives, whilst 18% said they were satisfied and 15% were not satisfied with the present state of their lives.

When asked to assess their future prospects, 44% of youths in Moldova said they were very optimistic about their future, whilst 33% claimed to be cautiously optimistic. 19% said they were more optimistic than pessimistic and only 4% claimed to be rather pessimistic.

As for their preferences with regard to future professions, Millennials rated becoming a politician or businessmen as their preferred career option (44%) whilst becoming a professor or musician both scored 6%.

Ukraine

Ukrainian law defines young people as those aged between 14 to 35. In 2015, the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine carried out a study of the country’s Millennial generation called “Youth of Ukraine – 2015”⁶.

According to the study young people ranked their priorities in life as follows: 48% were concerned with having and raising children, 44% were concerned with work, 36% were concerned with earning enough money, 21% were concerned with searching for love, 19% were concerned with their health, 18% with freedom and independence in decisions and actions and last but not least 15% were concerned with education.

When asked to assess their financial needs, 9% replied that they did

6. Youth of Ukraine 2015. GfK. Kyiv 2015.
https://www.gfk.com/fileadmin/user_upload/dyna_content/UA/Molod_Ukraine_2015_EN.pdf

not have enough money even for food, 37% of young people said that they had enough money to buy food and other inexpensive necessities and 42% stated that they had enough money for life in general. Only 8% said that they lived a comfortable life, but still had difficulty buying things like an apartment or a car, for example. In total, only 1% of youth in Ukraine have already achieved their desired financial state.

With regard to social mobilisation, 54% of young people said they had taken part in at least one kind of social initiative in the last 12 months. 13% said in particular that they took part in volunteer activities or initiatives and 11% claimed to have participated in charitable or humanitarian initiatives. 10% of those surveyed took part in sport organisations or activities connected with leisure time. 2% of young people surveyed said they were members of non-government youth organisations, and 6% attended some of the events put on by these organisations. 36% of youths did volunteer work sometime in their lives and 22% had volunteered during the last 12 months.

According to the survey conducted by the authors of this research the following characteristics can be attributed to Millennials in Ukraine:

54% of Ukrainian youths are mostly satisfied with their lives. 34% said that because they were facing certain difficulties they were not completely satisfied by their state of affairs. 4% of the young people surveyed said they were completely unhappy with the existing reality. In contrast, 7% claimed they were completely satisfied with their lives.

When inquired about their levels of confidence in the future, 40% claimed to be confident and optimistic. 18% of young people also expressed confidence and optimism with regard to the country's dynamics and development. Some level of caution about the future was expressed by 18% of those surveyed. Only 7% of young Ukrainians believed in a rather pessimistic scenario. And less than 1% of young people perceived the future development of Ukraine in a pessimistic manner.

With regard to their preferences for future professions, 42% of Millennials in Ukraine would like to have their own business; 15% said they would like to become a politician whilst 9% said they would like to be a scientist. Becoming a writer and professor scored an equal amount of support among Ukraine's youths (8%).

2. POLITICS IN THE STREETS

Independent social and political youth movements in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine shot up in the beginning of the 1990s. What motivated these movements were the substantial changes in the structure of Soviet society – young people were among the first ones to experience a sense of freedom. At the time, communism was proclaimed as the number one enemy by young politicians, who championed ideas of liberalism and national renaissance. They were spurred on by a belief that in an independent state with active participation of youth it would be possible to solve the country's problems.

Here one can observe some resemblance with the student protests in France in 1968. Even though slogans and issues were very different in the three countries and France, young people in both countries were mobilised by a desire for self-expression.

According to the interviews conducted by the authors of the research, this desire led the majority of young people to resist the official political system that was already outdated and did not meet the wishes and desires of young people.

Georgia

After the dissolution of the USSR, Georgia went through several difficult stages of development. Regimes were frequently changing, altering between nationalists and former communists. The period in which the United National Movement party was in power provides an interesting perspective for the purposes of the present study as it had many admirers among Georgian youths.

Between 2004 and 2012 when the United National Movement was in power it had distinctive features that characterised it as the party of new “reformers”, as its ranks were mostly composed of a new

generation of leaders bringing fresh points of view and new policy approaches, thus setting them apart as a generation without a communist past.

By blending a more free market economy and a stronger commitment to prowestern values with the patriotic mood of Georgian society, the United National Movement gathered support and a massive youth mobilisation that finally accomplished the Georgian Revolution of Roses in 2003, which was the first colour revolution on the territory of the former USSR.

The new “reformers” led by Mikheil Saakashvili were expected to win the parliamentary elections in 2003. However, the ruling clique headed by the Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze falsified the results of the elections and thus prevented the United National Movement from taking power, even though it had strong support among Georgians.

In a reaction to this unlawful situation, on 22 November 2003 during the first session of the new parliament the United National Movement broke through the police cordon surrounding the parliament building and entered the assembly hall. Protestors had roses in their hands – as a symbol of peaceful change. Eventually, Georgian police and the army supported the new government led by United National Movement. Many experts believe that the Revolution of Roses became a forerunner of huge changes that were to follow on the whole post-Soviet territory.

Moldova

Moldova has at least two examples of street revolutions in the history of its independence after 1991. Youth street protests in Moldova were directed against communists (Twitter revolution, 2009), and against the self-proclaimed pro-European ruling coalition (2016). During 2009-2016, there were no outbursts of civil activity in Moldova that brought Moldovan young people out on the streets. In both street revolutions youths played a particularly important

role. In the first case they protested against Soviet realities and old people in power, and supported the pro-European track of Moldova. In the second case young people rebelled against “new” pro-European politicians who did not have a clean reputation and were involved in corruption scandals.

The characteristic features of both Moldovan street revolutions was what some jokingly refer to as “mamalyga won’t blow up”, meaning that Moldovans tend to negotiate and tolerate authority rather than take radical action and being confrontational.

Analysis of the events in 2009 and 2016 may in a sense underscores the peaceful mentality of the people of Moldova in general. At the same time, one should keep in mind the fact that during the 2009 protests it was the youth that was more radical. Young people took part in vandalism and the occupation of the parliament building in their actions against the administration of the president.

This happened when the leaders of the opposition who took protests to the streets lost control of a group of young people. In that situation, politicians were not ready to take radical action, but young Moldovans were more resolute.

According to a BBC report authored by Mark Grigoryan we therefore shouldn’t classify the 2009 youth protests in Moldova as a “colour revolution” (non-violent resistance). What is more, the street protests did not last that long and the youth empowerment was diluted as there were no youth organisations or structures in Moldova at the time that could support this mobilisation⁷.

It did not take long for the pro-European coalition led by the Democratic Party of Moldova, which came to power after the Twitter revolution in 2009, to face another revolution, which this time was directed against it.

7. Riots in Chisinau: again a revolution? BBC report authored by Mark Grigoryan. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/russian/international/newsid_7988000/7988861.stm

The new revolution of 2016 was led by the pro-Russian Socialist Party of Moldova and was caused by a great number of problems in the country, such as deep poverty, banks being taken over by corporate raiders, control over mass media by authorities and dirty pre-election campaigns.

In a survey by Sociological Centre CBS-AXA, 80% of the population in Moldova claimed to be dissatisfied with the economic situation⁸. The peculiarity of the street protests lay in the fact that it had united the right and the left of the country’s political spectrum as well as representatives of pro-Russian parties and pro-Western politicians who believed that the Government led by Democratic Party of Moldova only paid lip service to reform and European integration.

We should take into account Moldovan realities, in which some young people support pro-European aspirations for Moldova, others supported the country’s rapprochement to Russia and some advocated joining Moldova to Romania (known as “the unionists”).

Ukraine

Ukraine’s democratic history has experienced three longlasting protests or revolutions: the 1990 Revolution on the Granite, the 2004 Orange Revolution and, last but not least, the 2013 Revolution of Dignity. All these three revolutions were directed against the existing active government and each had its own peculiarities.

The 1990 Granite Revolution was the first revolution, organised by students, the predecessors of the Y (or Millennial) generation. It was the first ever open protest of young people against the existing authorities in the history of Ukraine. Protestors resorted to such methods as hunger strikes, building a tent camp in the centre of the capital, and publicly voicing their demands before the parliament.

8. Almost 80% of respondents are dissatisfied with the economic situation in Moldova. TELERADIO MOLDOVA. Available at <http://www.trm.md/ru/economic/cbs-axa-circa-80-dintre-moldoveni-nemultumi-i-de-situa-ia-economica-din-ara>

The most important demand was a wish to ban the signing of a new treaty aimed at saving the Soviet Union. The new generation demanded change and the independence of Ukraine.

Paradoxically, most of the organisers and active participants of the protests were members of a communist youth organisation (The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League) which fought against its own mother party, Communist party. And what is more, many students who organised the Revolution on the Granite were in fact the sons and daughters of prominent communists who were trying to save the Soviet Union.

Interviews conducted by the authors of the research during personal meetings 20 years later with people who took part in the Revolution on the Granite showed some disparaging assessments of the nature and effect of the so-called Granite Revolution.

Some interviewees claimed that not only were their demands not fulfilled, but also that the revolution did not even take place. Others had the exact opposite point of view – claiming that the independence of Ukraine was proclaimed because of this revolution, and that it laid the foundation for the following youth revolution in the country, the first Ukrainian Maidan (the Orange Revolution).

The generation that followed the youths responsible for the Granite Revolution, the Millennial generation, was at the centre of the organisation of the two Maidans in Ukraine. What is also remarkable is that these youngsters built bridges and composed a common agenda among very different social strata compared to their “granite” predecessors.

A steady increase of social problems for Ukrainian youths was one of the main catalysts for the two Maidans (Orange revolution and Revolution of dignity) to occur in Ukraine.

Both general similarities and significant differences can be pointed out between Orange and the Dignity Revolutions. What is common among them is that both revolutions took place in the same city -

Kyiv, both were directed against Viktor Yanukovich (prime minister of Ukraine in the periods from 2002-2005 and 2006-2007, and then as president of Ukraine between 2010-2014). What is more, both revolutions had almost the same leaders (Y. Tymoshenko, P. Poroshenko, Y. Lutsenko). In both cases protesters received political and financial support from various donors.

A distinctive feature of the first Maidan (Orange revolution) compared to the Revolution of dignity was the fact that there had been a thorough preparation for the 2002 parliamentary elections and 2004 presidential elections. All opposition leaders and forces were mobilised for a political battle. And when the authorities headed by president at the time L. Kuchma tried to use administrative resources to win the presidential elections of 2004 people rebelled to protect their votes. This is how the Orange revolution began.

During the second Maidan (Revolution of the Dignity) mobilisation happened not vertically (politicians-to-people) but horizontally (people-to-people). A different young generation came to the front: the “Facebook generation” of social media network users who considered everyone to be equal. It is worth mentioning that the second Maidan was started by a Facebook post with a call for everyone to come to the main square in Kyiv.

A series of events and developments that followed after the second Maidan in Ukraine testified to the fact that the organisers did not want to give up their struggle. Most of them, being young people, wanted immediate action and solutions to the unfavourable economic and social conditions of the country and to the events unfolding on its borders (annexation of Crimea and intervention in Donbas). The main principle behind such actions of the abovementioned group of young people was the “Act first - think later!” motto. In the aftermath of the two Maidans, there has been a growing number of young Ukrainians, who are moving to the status of “precariat”⁹, and this fact raises particular concerns.

9. Guy Standing. *The Precariat: The new dangerous class*. New York. Bloomsbury Academic.-2011.-192p.

The concept of the “precariate” refers to a new generation of “care-free” people who are growing up under the influence of social networks and mass media, lacking life and professional experience, and who, in addition, have neither economic nor social basis for development. This definition to the concept “precariat” comes from the surveys by Ukrainian scientists Yaroslav Grytsak¹⁰ and Volodymyr Ischenko¹¹, respected members of Ukrainian scientific circles.

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10. Precariat – a new dangerous social class appears in Ukraine. FinanceUA. Available at <https://news.finance.ua/ru/news/-/318441/v-ukraine-poyavilsya-novyj-opasnyj-sotsialnyj-klass-prekariat>
 11. The middle class gives way to a new stratum - the precariat. Newspaper Segodnya. Available at <https://www.segodnya.ua/lifestyle/psychology/v-ukraine-poyavilsya-novyy-opasnyy-socialnyy-klass-493673.html>

3. OWN SANDBOX

The current state and origins of public organisations and associations that deal with youth problems in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are also interesting for this study as these three countries share some characteristics..

Most of them include student organisations, public non-political and political organisations, and youth associations within parties. An interesting thing occurred in all three countries with regard to youth branches within political parties. While most political parties in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine do have youth branches and organisations, their presence is often purely symbolic and does not always translate into a stronger support for youth initiatives.

As the present country-specific analysis shows, political parties in the three countries serve primarily their own agenda by mobilising young people as volunteers for their causes (handing out leaflets, taking part in meetings) rather than empowering their youth branches or focus on youth-specific issues.

It is also very important to point out that during the entire history of independence of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine (1991-2017), not a single youth political force has ever been independently elected to the parliament. With few rare exceptions, youth candidates were elected by a majority in their constituencies and only through the lists of individual parties or local self-governing bodies.

Georgia

At the very beginning of the 1990s, Georgian civil society began taking the first steps in its development. This was not easy since non-governmental organisations did not possess the necessary tools or experience to thrive in a post-communist period. Most of

the country's NGOs conducted their activities based on a top-down approach, even though they aspired to enabling more substantive democratic reforms in the country. It was important, however, that their activity was conducted with financial support from abroad. These public organisations played a crucial role in the country's development and most importantly they prepared the ground for the Revolution of Roses ten years later in 2003. One of the examples of successful youth movements was the unification of students' organisations "Kmara" ("Enough"), which played a decisive role in the success of the revolution.

"Kmara" emerged as a student movement focusing on criticising corruption in Georgian universities. However, very soon it became a broad coalition that coordinated the efforts of the new reform movements in preparation for parliamentary elections. This movement managed to create a platform for cooperation between various non-governmental organisations, mass media, political parties and civil society opposing the ruling government headed by President Eduard Shevardnadze, activists for the peaceful resolution of political conflicts at elections.

Kmara remained at the forefront of the mass rallies following the November 2003 parliamentary elections, which were criticised by the opposition, NGOs and international observers. After the demonstrations brought about the resignation of Shevardnadze, Kmara was allied with Mikheil Saakashvili's United National Movement which came to power after the success of the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia. This new coalition greatly differed from the preceding ones due to its unprecedented representation of young people. The new ruling government was comprised of those young people who were firsthand participants in the revolutionary events, and who now transitioned from having a disruptive role to becoming decisionmakers of their country – in short, politicians.

Innovative communication approaches of "Kmara" during the protests in Georgia are worth noting too as a strong example of youth empowerment. They used mass media (for example, the opposition television channel Rustavi-2) to cover their struggle. It was the pre-

sence of the media at their demonstrations and speeches that played a decisive role in the outcome of the Revolution of Roses.

Moldova

Moldova's parliamentary elections of 5 April 2009 have deeply marked the country's democratic history. The outcome of these elections greatly dissatisfied a number of citizens and led in turn to a massive rebellion, where the country's youth played a central role. A preliminary announcement that the Communist party of Moldova was leading with 49.96% of the votes and would probably win the 2009 elections was the catalyst for riots.

On the day after the elections, 6 April 2009, some 2,000 people, mostly students, gathered in the centre of Chisinau for a peaceful mass-demonstration with the slogan "Down with the Communists, we want Moldova in the EU". The country's youth decided to express their disappointment and discontent with the results of elections. Protestors were called to take part in the demonstration with several appeals that were published on social networks by pro-European leaders. This massive youth demonstration, which later developed into riots, was therefore called the "Twitter Revolution".

The next day, 7 April, more protestors joined in and about 5,000 people came to the central square in Chisinau. Participants were mainly students and young people. These post-election protests were characterised as "riots" as they resulted in the death of at least one participant, hundreds of people injured, mass torture of detainees by the police, as well as the destruction of national monuments like the president's residence and parliament; dozens of policemen were wounded. The ballots were recounted.

The next day, 8 April, the Ministry of Education obliged all educational institutions to prevent students from taking action. Protests in Chisinau lasted for several days, but they were small and there was no violence.

What was the end result of this youth mass demonstration for democracy?

The main result of the uprising was that the pro-Communist majority did not manage to obtain the one remaining “golden” vote in parliament needed to elect the leader of the Communist Party of Moldova Vladimir Voronin as the president of the country. Communist power in Moldova was replaced and different, pro-European political forces came to govern the country (Liberal-Democratic Party of Moldova, Democratic Party of Moldova).

Ukraine

The foundation of the modern youth movement in Ukraine as an active and influential socio-political force was laid by students’ organisations and associations in the 1980-90s.

The All-Union Students’ Forum as well as the first congress of the Ukrainian Student Union (UCC) held in 1989 strove to set up independent student organisations in higher educational institutions. These two assemblies tasked their members to engage in the struggle to achieve Ukraine’s independence. Members of the All-Union Students, together with student associations also organised the 2001 protest movement “Ukraine without Kuchma” (to oust the president of Ukraine of 1994-2004) that gathered 2,500 people (mainly students and teachers). This was the reaction of civil society to the murder of independent journalist G. Gongadze.

Nowadays, Ukraine’s student movements aim primarily at solving the issues facing students as well as protecting students’ rights and interests. Beyond this objective it is important to note that the student movement in Ukraine was the main driving force of political change in the country.

The youth movements in Ukraine, especially after the “Revolution of Dignity” in 2013-2014 were crucial in exerting pressure to introduce reform processes in Ukraine that aimed to combat corruption

and political lobbies. Volunteer activities led by young people in Ukraine also aided in the development of the country especially with regard to humanitarian assistance for those affected by the conflict in East Ukraine.

4. ELECTIONS FOR THE UNELECTED

The role of young people in elections (as the electorate vs. as elected political representatives).

Georgia

In 2012, the Parliament of Georgia lowered the age limit for election to Parliament from 25 to 21, but despite its positive intentions, the new threshold did not affect the number of young people in the legislative body of Georgia. Only five deputies of 35 or younger were elected to parliament out of total number of 150 deputies. This amounted only to 3%. At the same time, there was no place in the new government for any youth representation.

All Georgian governments that were in power during the period of independence considered young people mainly as voters or as party activists for the election campaign (to distribute leaflets, participate in demonstrations, etc.) rather than taking them on board and empowering them as equals or even decision-makers.

This recurring trend has been observed in most Georgian political parties, which after achieving their desired goals and results with the support of their youth ranks usually failed to empower their young activists. This tendency has led on the one hand to the significant decrease of young people in important government positions and on the other hand explains why Georgian youths, like many other youths of the Millennial Dialogue project worldwide, have little confidence in both politicians and politics in general.

It is important that voters are well informed about all electoral processes in order to make well-considered and rational decisions. This means understanding political parties and the powers of parlia-

ment, in addition to the election process. Unfortunately, the Georgian electorate – particularly young voters – are not well informed about political processes.

According to the Caucasus Research Resource Center only 36% of respondents between the ages of 15-35 stated that they follow the activities of the legislative body, which is the lowest ratio of all age groups¹².

Additionally, the 2014 National Youth Survey conducted by UNICEF found that just 12% of young people aged 15-29 were aware of their civil rights.¹³

Another indication that the majority of the youth are not interested in the legislative process is the low number – approximately one-fifth of young respondents and one-third of the overall population – who could correctly identify their representatives in parliament, or even the number of MPs in parliament. Distrust and political disaffection could be one explanation. The results of a recent survey showed people see politics as a dirty business rather than a civic responsibility¹⁴.

The level of trust in public servants and lawmakers is even lower: only 8% of young respondents think that members of the parliament properly fulfil their duties¹⁵.

12. Caucasus Research Resource Centre. (2015) "Survey on Public Policies in Georgia". Built using Online Data Analysis website -

<http://www.caucasusbarometer.org/> Seen on 10.09.2016

13. National Youth Survey in Georgia. UNICEF. 2014. Available at:

http://unicef.ge/uploads/Final_Geo_Adoles-cents_and_Youth_in_Georgia

14. Caucasus Research Resource Centre. (2014) "Volunteering and Civic Participation in Georgia." Built using Online Data Analysis website -

<http://www.caucasusbarometer.org/> Seen on 12.09.2016

15. Caucasus Research Resource Centre. (2015) "Survey on Public Policies in Georgia." Built using Online Data Analysis website -

<http://www.caucasusbarometer.org/> Seen on 10.09.2016

Despite their positive attitude toward voting, fewer young people vote compared to other age groups according to the abovementioned surveys. The Central Election Commission does not publish the data on electoral participation by age groups; however, the abovementioned surveys show that young people are the most passive voters. For instance, according to the Caucasus Research Resource Center, 63% of young respondents participated in the elections in 2012, while 75% of the total number of interviewees voted in elections, and the most active voters were people over the age of 56 (83%).

The situation is even worse in terms of youth participation in the decisionmaking process. Only 11% of respondents from the ages of 15 to 29 were involved in the decisionmaking process for an issue that was important for them, according to the 2014 National Youth Survey¹⁶.

This lack of engagement makes it more difficult for the government to effectively deal with problems, and it means the needs and the interests of young voters are not included on the political agenda¹⁷.

Moldova

According to the National strategy of youth development up to 2020, participation in the country's political life is seen as important by 53.3% of young people, and not relevant by only 1.5% of them. However, only 47.9% of young people believe that they take an active part in the political life of the country, mainly by participating in elections, or by taking part in the development of youth policy and decisionmaking at the community level¹⁸. At the same time, there are

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16. National Youth Survey in Georgia. UNICEF. 2014. Available at: http://unicef.ge/uploads/Final_Geo_Adoles-cents_and_Youth_in_Georgia. Seen on: 09.09.2016
17. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES AND THE ROLE OF POLITICAL ELITES. Georgian institute of politics. September 2016. <http://gip.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Teona-Turashvili-Report.pdf>

discussions among Moldova's youth about the growing desire to exercise their right to vote, starting from the age of 16.

Young people consider civil mobilisation to be important and necessary for solving the most pressing issues of the society. Thus, participation of young people in public life of Moldova is as follows: 61% participate in volunteer activities, 53% organise cultural events at the community level, 41% engage in fundraising for projects, and 37% engage in landscaping activities.

The most important sources of information for young people to be aware of the process of participation or taking part in the political life in the country are the Internet (36%), television (24%) and family (15%).

Millennials' low level of participation in political processes results mostly from their disillusionment associated with the lack of solutions to the problems facing young people. In order to address this issue, various state strategies aim to stimulate youth participation and empowerment through development of a youth public policy framework and promotion of the necessary tools and mechanisms for its implementation. In fact, a system of youth self-government structures is already in place to solve these problems. These are primarily dealt with via a system of youth councils, united in 20 regional networks based on a geographical spread. At present, there are 380 of such youth councils in Moldova.

Non-governmental organisations also play an important role in the public sphere, in addition to state structures. According to data of the survey, the share of non-governmental organisations dealing with youth issues specifically is 7%, while non-governmental organisations carry out 60% of activities, targeting young people or children.

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18. The Government Decision of the Republic of Moldova on the Approval of the National Strategy Development of the Youth Sector till 2020 and the Action Plan for its Implementation. Available at <http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=356215&lang=1>

Ukraine

To review the electoral participation of Ukrainian Millennials, exit polls data, research interviews and election campaign materials were used. The evaluation was carried out on the basis of a chronological sequence of exit polls, carried out on a regular basis since 1998. It was taken into account that only by 2009 did it become possible in Ukraine to form a voters' list as a single base that contained all the relevant information about the country's voters in a single database.

The total number of voters as of 1 September 2015, taking into account the partially occupied territories as well as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, was 36,319,000¹⁹.

According to data from the Ministry of Youth and Sport on 1 January 2015 the number of young people of Ukraine – those aged 14-35 – was 12, 795,000²⁰.

However, in accordance with established practice, sociological services in the country define youths as an electoral group as those aged between 18-29. Thus, the estimate of young voters is about 8-9 million. In line with the above-mentioned established practice the youth threshold group of those aged 30-35 falls outside the register of the total number of young voters in Ukraine and therefore the present review.

Various polls conducted by a number of sociological services showed that in national elections (presidential and parliamentary) the level of participation of young people aged 18-29 years was:

19. National Register Service of Ukraine count the amount of voters.
<http://www.unn.com.ua/uk/news/1496441-derzhavniy-reyestr-vibortsiv-pirak-huvav-kilkist-vibortsiv-v-ukrayini>
20. The state of the Youth in Ukraine 2014. Ministry of Youth and Sport of Ukraine.
http://kntu.net.ua/index.php/ukr/content/download/48703/286584/file/Dopovid__molod__.pdf

- 1998 Parliamentary elections - 67% of the total number of young voters;
- 1999 Presidential elections - 61% of the total number of young voters;
- 2002 Parliamentary elections - 59% of the total number of young voters;
- 2004 Presidential elections - 71% of the total number of young voters;
- 2006 Parliamentary elections - 57% of the total number of young voters;
- 010 Presidential elections - 57% of the total number of young voters;
- 2012 Parliamentary elections - 47% of the total number of young voters;
- 2014 Presidential elections - 44% of the total number of young voters;
- 2014 Parliamentary elections - 35% of the total number of young voters.

The above data testifies to the steady decrease of participation of Ukrainian Millennials in elections²¹. The sole exception was the 2004 presidential election on the occasion of the country's "Orange Revolution" where young people were actively taking part in street protests.

Low figures of electoral activity are not commensurate with the overall demographic potential that young people have, one fourth of the population of Ukraine. Low electoral activity can be partially explained by a belief among Ukrainian youths that "others" are deciding their future anyway.

Contrasting the decreasing youth turnout in elections with the exceptional case of youth engagement during the "Orange Revolution" proves that in today's political context Ukrainian youths have more confidence in public and civil mobilisation than in electoral activity. Ukrainian Millennials feel that as a generation they can sig-

21. Central election commission of Ukraine. <http://www.cvk.gov.ua>

nificantly influence the adoption of political decisions through public initiatives, rather than by participating in elections.

The outcome of both Maidan revolutions confirms that young people as a large demographic can be a source of change and a powerful force for political change in a given country. However, and in spite of the power of the Millennial generation, actual representation of young people in Ukraine's parliament and government has not substantially changed.

During Ukraine's independence years of 1991-2014, 8-12% of the candidates elected to parliament were young people under 35, less than 50 out of the 450 MPs. It is interesting to observe the change in social background of the youth representatives throughout the years. In the first (1990) and second (1994) convocations, young deputies represented production workers, educators and cultural workers.

In the electoral lists for the seventh (2012) and eighth (2014) convocations' electoral lists, the leading parties included Millennial representatives (often unknown to a wider audience). These Millennial candidates were mostly educated abroad and while, as political forces suggested, these people did not have the necessary work experience, they had a good (foreign) education.

Most candidates for the 2014 parliament were from the unemployed category. They included mostly former members of the security services, representatives of volunteer battalions, former senior and middle-level public officials, as well as employees of non-governmental and charitable organisations. They became MPs in the wake of the Revolution of Dignity.

Analysis of the online file of 33 deputies of the eighth convocation (Parliament of 2014) shows that 8% had not reached the age of 35 at the time of election²². Only five of them were among the first ten

22. Website of the parliament of Ukraine.
http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/site2/p_deputat_list

places on the party lists, which usually guarantees election into parliament should the party reach the 5% entry threshold. In fact, the low level of youth representation on party lists was one of the reasons that Millennials put forward to explain their low turnout (35%). Another argument put forward by Millennials to explain their lack of interest in voting for certain candidates was that the electoral law in Ukraine does not provide for open lists, making it thus more challenging to familiarise oneself with the potential candidate(s). What also disappointed young voters (61%) was the inclusion of relatives of influential businessmen as candidates in the lists for the country's majoritarian districts.

Young people in Ukraine are also significantly underrepresented in other state authority bodies. Out of 24 Ministers, only 1 could be accounted for as representing youth as an age group. What is more, this Minister in question is not the Minister of Youth and Sports but the Minister of the Cabinet of Ministers (Head of Staff). Therefore, youth is represented by 4% of the total number of members of government.

2015 data from local elections in Ukraine paint a slightly brighter picture in terms of youth representation (up to 30 years old) in cities, councils and villages²³: 8 out of 324 Ukrainian cities are governed by young mayors who have not turned 30 (2.5%). As for the heads of villages and councils, the youth representation is also slightly better. Out of a total of 546, 28 became young representatives (4.96%). An almost identical situation is observed with regards to rural councils. Out of a total of 9078 rural councils in Ukraine, 446 young politicians managed to secure their posts as heads of rural councils (4.91%).

23. Central election commission of Ukraine. <http://www.cvk.gov.ua>

5. IN SEARCH OF IDEOLOGY

The absence of young people at polling stations or a perceived reluctance to join a political party do not fully account for the lack of interest of youth in politics.

In fact, the present study shows that young people from Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are indeed an engaged generation that takes part in democratic life by other means than the traditional sense of political participation (demonstrations, social networks).

The Millennial generation in these three countries expressed a strong wish to be heard and in order to accomplish this they engaged in actions such as taking part in surveys, submitting petitions, or by mobilising people through social networks to promote or stand up for different causes.

Our survey conducted within the framework of the present research project showed that the most important issues for Millennials are good quality education, job creation and improvement of their country's healthcare system. Our survey also confirms that the most important problems, in young people's opinion, are unemployment, poverty and education.

The Millennial generation is used to expressing its position not from the high offices of different state bodies, but mainly through street demonstrations and meetings.

Youth movements or mobilisations are often based on an ideological standpoint. For instance, young left-wing groups traditionally fight against poor working conditions and advocate free access to education and health care.

Right-wing youth movements traditionally appeal to the national interest(s). Right-wing youth movements have been gaining ground

(to a certain extent) due to the military conflicts in the studied countries. Very often, right-wing forces as well as populists ingeniously play with left-wing slogans, but deliver a thick-wallets oriented product in terms of policy. This process goes hand in hand with chronic incapability of leftists in countries embraced by this research to unite their political efforts and parties (organisations) in a productive manner.

However, it is worth noting that youth organisations in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine do not have strong ideological affiliations. Youth organisations focus mostly on single issues or single causes, such as students' rights, university corruption or specific reforms in the country that do not always fit into the traditional left-right divide. In the attempt to address or solve youth problems the youth organisations or associations in these countries more often rely on certain societal values.

Georgia

Georgia's socialist past and current market realities have determined that left-wing politics is not the first choice for the youth in the country.

This pre-condition provided ideal conditions for the Unified National Movement party that was based on a liberal political platform to promote liberal market reforms as the best way to address the country's problems after the Revolution of Roses.

In power from 2004 to 2012 the Unified National Movement carried out liberal reforms that led to a growing stratification of society. This caused the people of Georgia to find alternative approaches to politics and policy-making, preparing the ground for other politicians, from the Georgian Dream political party, to come to power.

Young social democrats of Georgia together with the Georgian Dream party fought against the Unified National Movement as they were ideological adversaries.

As the Georgian Dream party lacked a clear ideological basis, young leaders from the Georgian Social Democrats tried to draw this platform into the centre-left of the political spectrum.

Young people had their doubts about this cooperation in the struggle against the Unified National Movement, since the leader of the Georgian Dream party was a local oligarch. Nevertheless, this coalition strategy was put in place in order to prevent the Unified National Movement to regain power, which intended to create an alliance with the extreme-right Alliance of Georgian Patriots. The coalition between the Georgian Social Democrats and the Georgian Dream party won parliamentary elections in 2016 securing 85 out of 150 seats.

This time period embraces the period that started with the war with Russia in 2008, which particularly fanned the flames of nationalism and a desire to develop the nation state. The aspirations to work towards achieving the standards required by the European Union and the general economic uncertainty provided the controversial background for this process. In such conditions demand for a new people's candidate allowed for several young politicians to take the lead in the political struggles of the period.

Moldova

In Moldova various corruption scandals in the highest echelons of power and the failing economy under the government of pro-European parties led to the rise of pro-Russian parties.

Parties such as the pro-Russian Socialist Party of Moldova and the populist Our Party steadily gained in popularity. This was the result of the inability of pro-European parties to solve the fundamental problems of society.

The left vs. right division of the political spectrum within the country's youth organisations is peculiar, as it is determined also by

external factors. The most significant external factors in this regard are Moldova's relations with Russia and with the European Union. In this sense youth organisations in the same political spectrum could be divided into pro-European (left or right) and pro-Russian (left or right).

By way of example we could focus on two youth political organisations, which share almost the same ideological values, but have different foreign policy priorities.

The youth organisation Young Guard group is currently integrated in the Moldovan Socialist Party. One examples of their activity and campaigning is the organisation of the protest action against the deployment of NATO military equipment in Moldova. This protest was organised not because activists of the organisation were pacifist, but mostly because they are pro-Russian and against NATO. A distinctive feature is that young participants in such events, often work non-systematically and without planning, as all their actions are coordinated by the mother party.

Another active young people's organisation in Moldova is the youth wing of the Democratic Party. The latter embodies a pro-European stance and social democratic values even if, in certain situations, the party has mixed its politics with big business (oligarchic connection), which is not easily compatible with a social democratic ideology base. The large mobilisation of this youth wing backed by its strong regional structures has enabled young people to better pursue their interests and even enabled youth representation in high public positions, attesting to its potential as a "social elevator".

Ukraine

According to expert Andrey Zolotarev, the economic crisis and the steady decline in the standard of living in Ukraine give the country's left-wing forces an opportunity to defend its narrative of

social justice and thus offers good electoral opportunities. In fact, left-wing forces in Ukraine have managed to maintain a steady 30% in the polls.

One can partially agree with this point of view since their ideological opponents also struggle to "master" this niche of the left. First of all, we are talking about the parties All-Ukrainian Union of Freedom, National Corps (formerly "Azov") and Right Sector, which signed the National Manifesto, a document on integration. Though they are right-wing parties they play with the social issues and appeal to the left-leaning part of the electorate. A large majority of the members of this right-wing organisation(s) are young people.

In view of the country's political and economic situation, the political ambitions of right-wing extremists and nationalists are set out in their common manifesto.

The major goals in this manifesto are:

- Ukraine to regain its nuclear status,
- Severing diplomatic relations with Russia,
- Permission for citizens to own firearms;
- Strengthening of criminal prosecution of corruption;
- Implementing an effective fight against illegal migration;
- The creation of a single local church in the centre of Kyiv;
- Introducing a presidential impeachment procedure and recall of deputies.

Each of the left-wing organisations tries to appeal to the electorate independently without considering possible alliances among the left, which plays into the hands of their ideological opponents.

During the 2017 May Day demonstrations for the protection of labour rights, one could observe the presence of a small number of young people in newly created and marginal associations under the socialist brand. Neither during the demonstration referred to, nor in other political events did the number of young people impress. Their appeals and slogans in the struggle against oligarchs or calling for peace were not really attractive to Ukrainian youths, making it difficult for social democracy to connect with this demographic.

A positive example, however, is the Social Democratic Platform movement, which is trying to build a political network of young people in various regions in Ukraine in a completely different way. Its leaders and activists see their engagement not as end in itself, but as a way to achieve greater changes in Ukraine's society and political system. One of the first aims of this movement is indeed to engage the Millennial generation for the progressive cause and promote the basic principles and values of European social democracy as well as defending youth-specific issues in education and social policy.

6. VERGE OF A CONFLICT

For the present study it is important to stress the crucial influence that military conflicts have had on youth struggles in these three countries. In fact, Russia's political ambitions in the region sparked territorial problems for all three countries (the un-recognised republics of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Trans-Dniester Region, the annexed Crimea region and the temporarily occupied territories in the East of Ukraine).

It would be an omission for this study not to address the degree of influence that the military conflicts have had on the Millennial generation, even though there is a lack of academic literature to analyse this phenomenon. Nevertheless, some factual examples will be outlined in an attempt to bring about a better understanding of the extent and the effect that these military conflicts have had on the younger generations and, most importantly, to link this significant context with the new forms of political participation associated with this generation.

The endurance of frozen conflicts or active military actions in the three countries have deeply affected the country's population as well as the potential economic prospects for development, and – most importantly for the present study – the situation greatly impacted the younger generations, causing a permanent sense of crisis, desperation and uncertainty.

Undoubtedly, for the majority of the young people, even those that are quite optimistic about the future, it is very difficult to live and develop in such conditions (this thesis is confirmed by the survey conducted within the framework of the present research). The disaffection is thus much stronger especially among those Millennials who first experienced the military conflicts and who had to flee their usual place of residence.

This is been a major obstacle to the social development of the younger generations affected by the military conflict. The worrying trend that has been observed is that youths on low incomes from mainly small towns or rural areas become quickly involved in the conflict and take an active part in military operations. The sense of desperation is further enhanced by loss of close relatives in the conflicts and severe wounds that in certain cases preclude the youth from entering the job market.

The context that these young people have been living in and experiencing by feeling left out and due to the lack of opportunities / future prospects is likely to draw them closer to the discourse and narratives of the right-wing extremists who, in the end, enable them to be heard and allow them to voice their discontent.

The militarisation phenomena affecting youth in these three countries – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – show a strong degree of polarisation among different segments of youth, which frustrates potential attempts to come together and discuss different points of view. This process has grave consequences as it can enhance (at least for the time being) very illusory expectations for the restoration of the territorial integrity of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. There are, however, some different reactions among the countries with regard to the issues of frozen conflict or military presence.

For Moldova and Georgia, the recent trend – that was further entrenched by the coming of a new generation - is to withdraw from these issues. The younger generations do not feel as strongly as the older generations when it comes to occupied territories.

The situation is more serious in Ukraine because of the ongoing military hostilities, but even in this case, young people in the country try to live a normal life as far as possible, and are also trying to withdraw from this reality. In contrast, politicians in Ukraine have insisted on addressing the topic of conflict as a first priority. This has further disaffected young people as politicians fail to address the more acute social and economic problems. This has had the

consequence of the country's youth not taking an interest in solving the conflict. Of course this is not the general rule as the response to or views voiced on conflict resolution vary according to the ideology underpinning the country's youth organisations (which can range from reconciliation and establishing contacts to complete isolation and active military operations or to achieve a better, peaceful future for the country).

The active youth mobilisations in these three countries and to a certain extent their engagement with addressing the military conflict issue make a case for the statement that this is indeed a generation that takes part in public and political life, that is interested and that structures its interests through youth groups of political parties, through representatives of students' and public organisations.

7. GREETINGS FROM THE FUTURE

The future is always unpredictable, but it is this unpredictability that motivates us to focus in order to be prepared for possible surprises.

What will the children of the Millennial generation be like? Will they be interested in politics? What problems will they face? Answering these questions is difficult. But we are given a unique opportunity! We received a letter from the future. Yes, a letter from 2035, from Dmitriy, who decided to share some of his observations regarding our questions.

There you go! Here is Dmitriy!

"Hello to everyone who reads my letter. My name is Dmitriy, and I'm 20 years old. I have recently enrolled in university and moved to a huge city. I come from Moldova, but now I live in Ukraine and I often visit my relatives in Georgia.

In the future we have not created a time machine yet, but it is already possible to send letters to the past, using the latest digital technologies. By the way, almost no one writes letters anymore: a short message or video at most. Therefore a bit of old-school writing will not hurt. I'm practicing a little.

The world is changing at a really fast pace. Information technologies flooded our lives. Nowadays it is quite difficult to imagine your life without technology. We are spending more and more time in the virtual dimension. It would seem that the opportunities for young people are limitless. However, not all can take advantage of them.

The old problems of access to good quality education, work and social security remain an issue and a priority for young people. It is becoming more difficult to access higher education. I did not even expect to get into a leading university. I managed to get high scores

and win a competition for a scholarship program in political sciences, which is funded by an international company. The number of educational institutions is decreasing each year. Those institutions that remain free are forced by the Government to commercialize their services, as the state is not in a position to cover expenses in full. There are problems with demographic indices. The number of young people in these three countries is decreasing. Many of my friends left in search of a better life abroad. I must confess though that it is quite positive that some who were educated abroad actually returned! This makes me optimistic about the future!

Another pattern that has been arising is the lack of motivation for young people to be active in politics. Politics has become a continuous show. It is extremely difficult to keep the interest and retain the attention, especially of young people. The reason behind this is the massive information flow. Therefore, public and political movements are trying to recreate in the most attractive way their activities, which are often accompanied by large financial costs for advertising and promotion in the virtual dimension.

Partial transition to a digital politics, which makes it possible to "be closer" to citizens has slightly increased the level of involvement of young people. The opportunity to cast a vote whilst "sitting on a couch" increased the proportion of votes among youth. However, the determining criteria for choosing a particular policy are the quantitative indicators of subscribers to pages on social networks and number of views on media platforms.

Our society is isolated. It is difficult for a young person to navigate everyday life. Free access to terabytes of information has given rise to a serious problem related to fragmentation of perception. Sometimes you do not have time to catch up with new consumer trends. It seems that we are guided by our own thoughts and desires, but my own experience suggests that this is not so.

The same thing is occurring with politics. It has become even more sophisticated and all-pervasive, because you can now communicate

virtually with everyone personally, using an accessible card of personal preferences (including political ones).

It is good that this channel of communication can be used both ways. It is much easier to get access and talk to politicians. I'll say even more, the level of transparency behind political processes has substantially increased. Therefore, we can talk about improving the quality of political life, which directly depends on the development of telecommunication technologies.

It seems I went into serious topics. I'll probably finish, as tomorrow I am taking part in a colloquium. And I still have to prepare visualization about the role of youth in the process of political transformation of the Eastern Partnership countries 2015-2020. And after that I will have a virtual date ☺

Stay in good mood! Till the next switching on!

For someone this letter might seem just a fantasy, of course, but some of the trends described in it already exist in our lives. We only need to learn how to see them and draw the right conclusions.

SUMMARY

The results of the study “Restoring the sense of politics through youth participation - Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine” have confirmed many similarities with regards to the engagement of the Millennial generation with politics and political systems pioneered by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) with the support of a number of FEPS member foundations and partners all over the world. Many stereotypes concerning this generation were dismantled, and some new characteristics revealed.

Youths in the three countries do not show consistent behaviour in terms of their political preferences and requirements. The lists of priorities put forward by these young people were firstly connected to education, access to scholarships, first job opportunities, accessibility to housing, etc.

Political programmes often contain proposals to address these priorities. But when choosing for which candidate to vote, young people are guided by completely different, often emotional rather than rational criteria and not by solutions of purely youth problems. Therefore it is difficult to predict the electoral behaviour of the Millennial generation in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Participation of young people in elections varies very much from one set of elections to the next. And it's not entirely clear what the explanation for this is.

This has led to the consequence that youth is often ignored by the political class as an important group of voters.

The arguments put forward by the present study confirm that street protests as manifestations of political engagement are the preferred way of political expression of the young people of Ukraine. Youth mobilisation in Ukraine greatly contrasts with the style and form of the protests of their peers in Georgia and Moldova. The "Twitter Revolution" is an example that illustrates this sharp contrast. A simi-

lar civil mobilisation occurred in Georgia with the non-violent street protests (“Colour Revolutions”) inspired by the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia.

The research provides evidence of the strong desire of the Millennials in these three countries to play a central part in politics and its processes. Another thing that became quite clear was the proliferation of various associations pursuing certain ideologies or political inclinations; this was particularly the case in Ukraine as the country's independence process has led to the formation of youth structures or youth associations with clearly defined political programs. In general, most of them were right of centre liberal associations promoting national-patriotic ideas.

Since Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine gained independence (1991), the structures of youth associations as well as their social composition have undergone significant changes.

In the countries concerned, unemployed or temp-working young people have become more involved in politics. This was the case partially because of the fact that political activism since USSR times has been seen as a way to climb the social ladder and youngsters were just trying to do that. The other reason was that young people in poor economic conditions were concerned with the roots of their poverty and saw it was linked to the state policy implemented in their countries. In both cases young people failed to achieve tangible results in terms of political influence.

It became clear that young people in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were directly or indirectly affected by military conflicts, and that the impact of these conflicts varies among the countries and youths within the countries. The militarisation of the minds of young people entails a serious risk for centrist politics as they can become receptive to and galvanised by extremist and populist discourses. What is more, opportunities to leave the conflict zone are directly dependent on higher social status, thus there is a large proportion of youth that has very low chances of leaving in search of a better life.

Frequent and repetitive public discourse on the military conflict and politicization of all processes related to the war has led firstly to a high level of polarisation among young people and secondly decreased the interest of young people in that issue.

In fact, from the present study it became quite clear that territorial integrity is not a priority for the overwhelming majority of young people. They were far more concerned about issues such as securing a decent standard of living, good quality education and access to free healthcare.

The recurring narrative that the Millennial generation is apathetic and disengaged from politics can only be observed – to a certain extent – in election campaigns or political parties' memberships. It became quite clear that the Millennials in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are changing how they engage with politics today. It is now up to the contemporary political systems to acknowledge this new different meaning of politics and of democratic participation and this is the crucial task and a great challenge that the social-democratic movement is facing in these three countries.

SURVEY

Questionnaire conducted within the framework of this research

1. Name, Surname
(if you stay anonymous, please indicate your gender F\M)

2. Age category
 - 18-25
 - 25-30
 - 30-35

3. Marital status
 - single
 - partnership
 - married
 - divorced
 - widowed
 - other

4. Are you satisfied with your lifestyle as of now?
 - completely satisfied
 - satisfied, but not as of 100%
 - quite non-satisfied
 - completely non-satisfied

5. What are your estimations on your future perspectives?

- Very optimistic
- Quite optimistic
- Rather optimistic than pessimistic
- Rather pessimistic
- Completely pessimistic

6. What would you like to be out of listed below:

- famous celebrity
- researcher
- lawyer
- musician
- sportsman
- university professor
- physician
- priest
- business owner
- politician
- writer

7. Place yourself in the scale (introvert – 0; extravert - 100)

0_____100

8. Please prioritize (1- most important, 13- least important) the following values:

- be healthy
- be happy
- be heard by others
- have time for leisure
- possess freedom of speech (be able to out speak what you think)
- have time to spend with family
- earn money
- help others
- live in the society of equal opportunities
- be successful
- live in wealthy society
- be active member of the society
- participate in political activities

9. Your civil participation

- board member of civil organization
- activist
- participant of certain activities (trainings, flash mobs, charity running etc.)
- I do not participate myself, but I like this type of activism by others
- civil activism is waste of time
- I have negative attitude towards civil activism

10. Your political participation

- board member of the political party
- activist
- participant of certain activities (electoral campaigns)
- I vote at elections
- I do not participate myself, but I like this type of activism by others
- political activism is waste of time
- I have negative attitude towards politics and politicians

11. What can be the reason for you to refrain from voting at election?

- I do not trust to politicians
- There is no political party, that would represent my interests
- Voting at elections and politics aren't interesting for me
- I do not support the current political system
- All political parties and politicians are of the same kind
- I do not like political parties that participate in elections
- My vote won't influence anything
- I seem to be bad expert of politics
- I think that there are better variants of representative democracy than the political process
- I just do not bother myself with all that stuff
- Other reason

12. What can make you feel interested towards political participation?

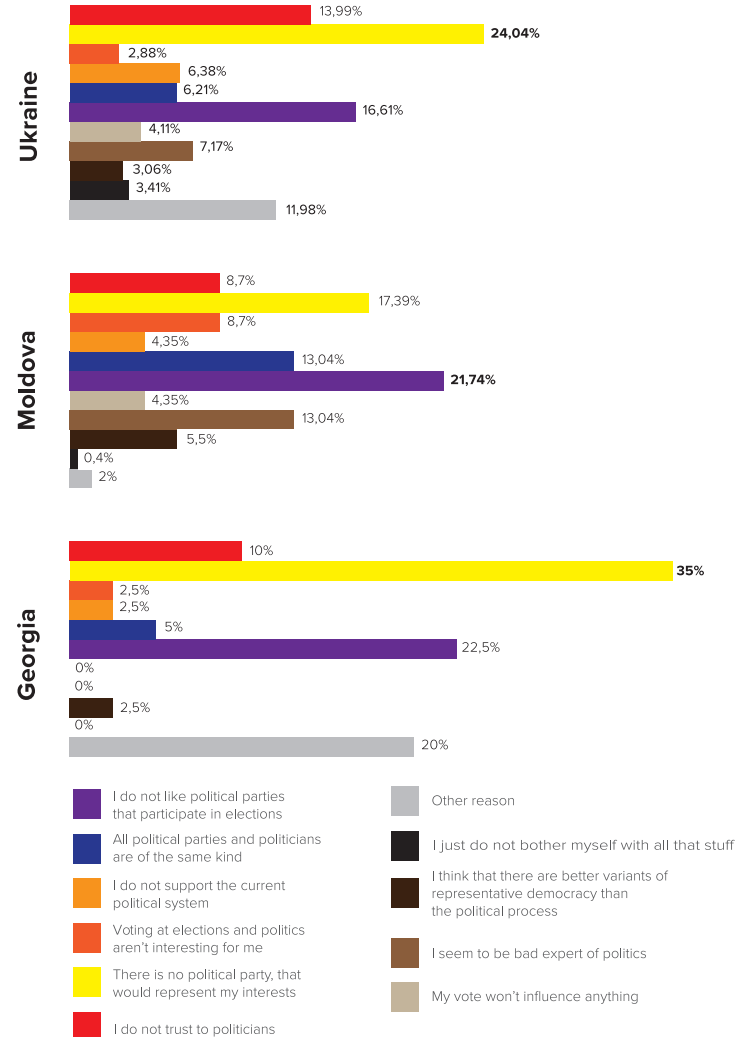
- Higher level of trust to politicians
- Feeling that my voice changes something
- Online voting
- Bigger attention of politicians towards youth problems
- More knowledge on politics
- If I've got to know, that my favorite political party is increasing its popularity
- If there is more political information in social media
- If my friends go to vote
- Other variant ()

13. What is the most appropriate statement on current situation in the country?

- My country wins because of current political authorities
- My country rather wins because of current political authorities
- My country rather loses because of current political authorities
- My country badly loses because of current political authorities

RESULTS of the survey

11 What can be the reason for you to refrain from voting at election?





FEPS is the progressive political foundation established at the European level. Created in 2007, it aims at establishing an intellectual crossroad between social democracy and the European project. As a platform for ideas and dialogue, FEPS works in close collaboration with social democratic organisations, and in particular national foundations and think tanks across and beyond Europe, to tackle the challenges that we are facing today. FEPS inputs fresh thinking at the core of its action and serves as an instrument for pan-European, intellectual political reflection.



The Foundation Max van der Stoel (FMS) is an independent foundation affiliated to the Dutch Labour Party, PvdA. We strive for the social democratic value of international solidarity within three areas: democracy, development and dialogue. As part of our Democracy program, we pay a special attention to supporting young, progressive politicians and activists on their path of greater political involvement.



IDSP is an independent think tank in Ukraine. Established in 2012 as an intellectual institution, it has since been conducting educational projects, researches and conferences. The topical framework of IDSP's activities ranges from international politics and policies to grassroots research in certain regions of Ukraine. The Institute is close to the Ukrainian Non-governmental organization Social Democratic Platform. IDSP's main goal is to promote progressive ideas for a better future for Ukraine.

“Restoring the sense of politics through youth participation. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine” is a research conducted by Georgian, Moldovan and Ukrainian experts within the framework of an international project run by Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), Foundation Max van der Stoel (FMS) and Institute for Democracy and Social Progress (IDSP) in 2017. The main idea of the research is to present analytical materials on the participation of young people in the political processes, as well as find possible ways for restoring the sense of politics through youth participation. The research was presented at the international conference that was held in Kyiv, Ukraine on June 10th, 2017.