

Rue de l'Industrie 10
1000 Brussels
Belgium

Tel: +32 2 793 75 20
E-mail: youthforum@youthforum.org
www.youthforum.org

Brussels / 7 Jul 2023

Support for independent youth council - Croatian Youth Network

Dear Member of the Parliament,

We, the European Youth Forum, hereby express full support to the Croatian Youth Network (MMH), as the representative, youth-led and democratically-elected youth organisation that our members recognise as their peer and one that, nationally and internationally, represents interests of the youth people in Croatia.

As the largest platform of youth organisations in Europe, we and our members have advocated for the importance of youth representation for decades. We have created and provided space for youth organisations to have their say in youth policy. Youth organisations, and especially National Youth Councils, continuously prove their capability to run high-quality youth programmes and training events, consult young people across the country, and implement international projects such as the EU Youth Dialogue.

National Youth Councils also exist as a watchdog, to speak up when things in the youth sector are not running as smoothly as they should do. For this, they do not deserve to face political pressure, even more so when they are brave enough to point out mistakes of the national institutions. Constructive criticism and disagreement are not valid reasons to abandon the concept of meaningful youth participation or to try to replace independent youth organisations with state-controlled youth representation.

MMH has a similar structure to most of the National Youth Councils across Europe – with youth organisations at the core of the Council, a youth-led managing board nominated and elected from member organisations, and not from politicians; focus on youth topics on national and European levels, and a non-for-profit model of work. Their existence, legitimacy and credibility comes from their member organisations in the same way ours does.

They are also non-governmental; something that the newly created body proposed in the latest law changes in Croatia would not be. The independence of the National Youth Council is vital to preserve the best interests of young people at the core of their work, especially when advocating for policy changes. The recently proposed law changes would directly jeopardise independent youth voices in Croatia. Youth organisations must have the freedom to elect their own representatives, and to work on the topics they deem relevant.

We therefore urge decision-makers not to pursue this damaging law and to follow the steps that most of the European countries have already done – recognise an independent youth organisation, in this case Croatian Youth Network, as a National Youth Council.

Membership in the European Youth Forum is not a given; all of our member organisations, including MMH, are recognised because they fulfil strict criteria on what a National Youth Council should be, what it should look like and how it should function - criteria that are constantly under review by one of our elected Statutory Bodies. We are convinced that the MHH fulfils these criteria and that it is the only structure for youth participation that could meet them.

We call upon the national institutions in Croatia to formally recognise MMH as the National Youth Council, include them as representatives of youth in the decision-making processes affecting young people and abandon the idea of creating any form of state-controlled youth council.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'María Alcázar', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

María Rodríguez Alcázar

President of the European Youth Forum