

***“Young People and Political Participation” (panel discussions)***

ESTONIAN TEAM in Sastamala, Vammalan Lukio 18 February – 24 February

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**SOME FACTS FROM HISTORY**

**ELECTIONS after the birth of the Republic of Estonia on 24 February 1918**

Estonia was in the situation where German troops were invading the country and the Russian army was fleeing from Estonia. Estonians declared the country independent. It was on 24 February 1918. Estonia had been part of tsarist Russia, but now Germans wanted to get it from Russia to be part of the Keiserliche Germany. It came out Estonians had meanwhile declared themselves independent. In the War of Independence 1918-1920 against Germans and Russians Estonia won and the period of independence began with the Peace Treaty of Tartu (1920) between Estonia and Russia.

The first elections of the Independent Republic of Estonia were the elections to the Estonian Temporary Government , held on 5-7 April 1919 and the turnout was 80% of the citizens who had the right to vote. It was a very high activity. 25 lawyers were elected to the Founding Body - Parliament (Riigikogu).

The first elections to the Parliament (Riigikogu) were held in 1920, it was still the time of the War of Independence.

Estonians were enthusiastic about their own free country, sometimes the period is called “ the good old Estonian time”. Parliamentary elections held in 1926 had the voter turnout of 73.3%, and in 1929 - 69.3% , in 1932 – 67.1%. The next elections were in 1938 (voter turnout 71%)

Elections of 1940 were already not true elections, they were affected because of the Soviet occupation of 1940-1941. Opposition candidates of the Union of Estonian Working People were removed from the elections. Voting turnout was 84% and 92.9% of the votes were given to the Union of Estonian Working People, but these percentages cannot be trusted.

 **About the voting age.**

Active voting age according to the constitution in **1920 and 1933 was 20, in 1938** it was **22.**

**After WW II, during the Soviet occupation,** the voting age was **18.** During the Soviet time there was no real choice between the candidates, people went to the polling stations because they were ordered to, and they had to choose between For or Against one communist party candidate . The voter turnout was falsified. Polling stations organized concert and sold deficit products (coffee beans, bananas, etc) to attract people.

People became very active in the 1980s in the hope of restoring independence.

Many organizations were formed to show people’ s will. Young people were very active.

**In 1990** on 6 January the coference of The Estonian confirmed the document which gave the right to vote to **16-year-olds** as they were very active and eager to register for the elections to regain Estonian independence. These elections were a citizen initiative (not organized by the state). It was a very important event in the history because Estonia became the first territory in Europe where 16-year-olds got the right to vote. Over half a million people (about half of the population) gave their vote for free Estonia.

**When Estonia regained its independence on 20 August 1991, the voting age was 18.** So, compared to the pre-war period, it was lower.

Now young people’ s activity has decreased. Many young people are not interested in politics.

**1. Has the voting age been changed in your country since WWII?**

Voting age has been changed in Estonia since WWII. The age, when you can vote was 18, but since 2015 the local election age has been decreased from 18 to 16.

However, during the period before lowering the voting age there were heated discussions whether it would be right to do it.

Only 48% of young people in Estonia were in favour of having the right to vote at the age of 16 at local elections. 50 % were against and 2% had no opinion.

LOCAL ELECTIONS

2% no opinion

50% against48% for

PARLIAMENTARY AND GENERAL ELECTIONS.

At the parliamentary level and general elections young people were even less interested in having the right to vote. Only 21 % were for lowering the voting age and 78 % were against it.

It shows that our young people are not very eager to have the right to vote.

The right to vote at the local elections was decised in the government in 2015 and the first local elections where 16 - and 17 – year- olds voted were held in autumn 2017.

**2. Are there any differences in voting ages in different kind of elections (e.g. municipal, parliamentary, presidentials etc.)?**

There has been one change - in local municipal elections. The voting age has been changed from 18 to 16+. The constitution was changed in 2015.

In Estonia we have about 24 000 16,17 years old young people. The government assumed that if only 60 percent of the young people come to vote, then we get about 15 000 new voters, who can also be part of the policy. The interest was actually lower. And that is why the parliament decided to make a new law that allows people who are 16 or 17 years old to vote on local elections. Except that law, there are no new laws that say anything about voting ages in different elections. The usual voting age is 18.

16year olds+ are allowed to vote in municipal elections. Parliament is elected by citizens entitled to vote (aged 18) and 21years old or older has the right to stand as a candidate. President is elected by the members of the parliament who are 21years old or older.

**3.****What were the voter turnouts among the young in the previous elections in your country?**

The last election was the local election in 2017.

The number of online voters was very small. We have 24 334 16,17- year- old residents in Estonia of whom 1794 voted on the internet. That shows that young peaople use the internet for other purposes, for example, entertainment and communication with friends, they are not used to using the Internet using their ID card or for more serious communication (voting).

Also, they may be not interested in politics.

**4.****Has the situation among the young in your country changed since WWII (e.g. are there less young voters now than before)? If so, how?**

Politician prof Rein Toomla has studied **the people who do not go to the the elections** to give their vote.

He compared data from 3 elections: **2003, 2007, 2011**.

**The age group 18 – 30 was the most inactive.** Over about 10 years, inactivity decreased in this age group from 42% (2003) to 33% (2011), but we can see that all the other age groups were much more active.

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**We can see that young people are inactive, they do not go voting.**

In 2017 at local elections, young people aged 16- 17 were unexpectedly passive. Only about a quarter gave their vote. Only 7 out of 100 gave their e-vote.

Some peole think wee cannot compare the number of young voters, because the voters’ age has been changed recently, to be exact 2017, that was the year when 16,17- year- old people could vote.

16 and 17- year- old people are the young voters that we have not had before in our country.

**Voter turnout (all age groups)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Election For | Date  | Votes  | Registered Voters | Turn Out |
| Estonian Parliament | 2015-03-01 | 577,929 | 899,793 | 64.23% |
| Estonian Parliament | 2011-03-06 | 580,264 | 913,346 | 63.53% |

**5. If the voter turnout among the young in your country is considered alarmingly low, what is being / has been done about it?**

**Participation of young people in decision making**

Participation of young people in decision making is defined as one of four strategic objectives in the **Youth Field Development Plan 2014-2020** ([Noortevaldkonna arengukava 2014-2020](https://valitsus.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/arengukavad/noortevaldkonna_arengukava_2014-2020.pdf)).

Legal provisions

There are regulations on youth involvement. Involvement of young people in general and of youth councils is defined in the [Youth Work Act](https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/515012016004/consolide). The involvement of pupils and students is defined in education institutions acts, and the participation of the children in the [Child Protection Act](https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/506052015001/consolide).

Forms and levels of consultations

There are plenty of mechanisms for involvement of young people in the public policy processes. In general, youth participation in public policy takes place within the general framework and practice of participatory governance in Estonia. In the consultation processes, the young people are addressed as a group of stakeholders, which means that generally young people are invited to the consultation as one of the consulted parties.

The collective consultation remains an important principle underlying the interaction between the young people and state or municipality. This means that youth consultation and involvement occurs predominantly between a youth council, organization or association on the one hand and a state, municipal, third sector or business organization on the other hand. Consultation of unorganized young people is organized through opinion markets and other forms of participation.

At the municipal level, local youth councils are consulted on topics that are relevant for youth**. In 2015, the municipal youth councils were active in 70 local governments**. In addition, 15 county **youth councils** were active, one in each county of Estonia. Most often the consultation is arranged with:

* local and regional youth councils – consulted at local or regional level
* **youth organizations** – consulted at local and/or national level
* **student and pupils councils** – consulted partner at local and national level
* **participation café** – form of consultation at local level
* **umbrella organizations of youth councils and youth organizations** – consulted at national level.

**Estonian National Youth Council** initiated a project “[Osaluskohvikud](http://www.enl.ee/et/Noortepoliitika/Osaluskohvik)” (Eng. **youth participation cafes)**

to provide platform for local politicians, civil servants, professionals working with young people, parents etc. to meet and discuss different relevant issues with local young people from schools, youth organizations, non-organised youth interested to take part at the event, etc. The cafes have been taking place in November every year in different communities all over the country and have involved more than 1500 participants yearly.

**Mock/Shadow Government for young people** who have not reached their voting age yet. School children go to the parliament, make speeches and vote.

**In 2017 President Kersti Kaljulaid was on hand to greet the Children’s Republic** at the launch party in Kadriorg Park in Tallinn. The master of ceremonies for event, 8 year-old Otto Samuel Kahar, gave the President a Children’s Republic passport which invites children to museums and adventure centres throughout Estonia.

Triin Soone, Director of the Estonian Children’s Literature Centre and initiator of the Children’s Republic said that they wanted to provide children with a fun and memorable cultural experience in anticipation of Estonia’s centenary.

**The president asked personally to come and vote (2017). She spoke to people, made a speech on TV.**

**6.** **Your personal POV: how to increase young people’s interest and participation in politics in general?**

* People think that it was not right not to allow any election campaigns in schools. There should be representatives from different parties explaining their views. Balanced debates and balanced presentations.
* I think there should be some lessons about policy and politcs etc. Where they talk about, what makes this stuff fun and interesting and why is this important.
* There are for sure some compulsory lessons already in the curriculum, but they are kind of boring. The interest depends on the person itself, you can’t like everything.
* There are compulsory civics lessons for 13- year- olds (curriculum) but there should be more balanced information for older students as well.

**Young people are passive. How to make elections more attractive for the young?**

* In the elections there should be more young candidates (we usually do not have) who express the views of young people.
* Elections at local level should interest young people because these are more personal. Every vote counts!
* There should be debates and panel discussions at school.
* I think that this topic should be discussed in school among 15- 16year olds. I think this topic is discussed in schools too early (among 13year olds or so), so children don’t really see interest in it, but if it would also be discussed among older students( as 15-16 year olds) they would be more interested and mature, because they would soon have an opportunity to vote and be a part of the system.
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