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Creation of a European initiative for an annual designation of European Capitals for Children

European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2024 on the creation of a European initiative for an annual designation of European Capitals for Children (2024/2621(RSP))

(C/2024/6561)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to Article 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union and Article 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,

— having regard to Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,

— having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,

— having regard to the EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child (COM(2011)0060),

— having regard to the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (COM(2021)0142),

— having regard to the Council of Europe's Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life,

— having regard to the UN General Assembly resolution on the rights of the child,

— having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas children's rights are human rights; whereas every child should enjoy the same rights and be able to live free from discrimination or intimidation of any kind;

B. whereas the protection and promotion of the rights of the child is a core objective of the EU; whereas the EU's ambition is to build the best possible life for children both in the EU and worldwide;

C. whereas children play a crucial role in our societies; whereas their active involvement can help shape and build child-friendly cities that promote the full realisation of their rights at all levels; whereas they are at the forefront of raising awareness about environmental challenges and climate change, the digital transformation and online safety, and discrimination and injustice; whereas they represent not only the voice of today's youth, but also the leaders of tomorrow;

D. whereas children should have the right to the best possible start in life and to develop to their full potential; whereas this includes the right to live on a clean and healthy planet, in a protective and caring environment, to enjoy quality education and to have access to child-friendly recreational, cultural and artistic activities;

E. whereas access to education is a fundamental human right; whereas formal, non-formal and informal education are the basis for equal opportunities and the individual promotion of talents and potential;

F. whereas the EU and its Member States should join forces to fulfil their shared responsibility to respect and protect the rights of every child and to build, together with children, more inclusive, healthier and fairer societies;

G. whereas all children have the right to protection from poverty and social exclusion; whereas the European Child Guarantee is an EU instrument whose objective is to prevent and combat poverty and social exclusion by guaranteeing free and effective access for children in need to essential care services, such as early childhood education and care, educational and school-based activities, healthcare and at least one healthy meal per school day, and effective access for all children in need to healthy nutrition and adequate housing;

H. whereas all families and communities must also be provided with the necessary support so that they can ensure their children's well-being and development;

I. whereas in order to achieve these objectives, children must have the opportunity to regularly come together and get to know and develop a better understanding of each other, thus participating in shaping the future of the European project;

J. whereas the European Capital of Youth was created in 2009; whereas adequate EU funding could ensure that it realises its full potential; whereas the European Capitals for Children should complement and go hand in hand with the European Capital of Youth;

K. whereas further research and assessments are needed to develop this initiative; whereas the input from local authorities and non-governmental organisations working for children's rights is fundamental in shaping it;

1. Calls on the Commission to explore the possibility of creating a European initiative to annually designate European Capitals for Children, in collaboration with local authorities and civil society organisations led by or working with children;

2. Underlines that the European Capitals for Children should provide evidence to support responsible child policies, with the participation of children and prioritising their perspectives, notably on equal opportunities, healthy growth and access to quality education, clean environments and urban development;

3. Underlines that the European Capitals for Children should be tasked with bringing children in the Member States closer together, helping them to better understand each other;

4. Believes that fostering a better understanding between people and different cultures from an early age helps to break down prejudices and stereotypes and to promote intercultural dialogues, which is central to the EU and its values and objectives;

5. Underlines that the European Capitals for Children could be co-led with the children themselves, through children's organisations and clubs; stresses that it could promote children's rights, including active child participation mechanisms and European citizenship education, as fostering this process from an early age facilitates the development of educated young people and adults who understand the values, objectives, history and identity of the EU;

6. Stresses that the European Capitals for Children should promote social inclusion, accessibility and equal opportunities for children and do its utmost to ensure the broadest possible involvement of all components of civil society in preparing and implementing the initiative, paying particular attention to children with fewer opportunities and the most vulnerable groups;

7. Believes that the European Capitals for Children could contribute to the fight against child poverty, a comprehensive examination of children's living conditions and the effective implementation of the European Child Guarantee by Member States by making full use of the available resources at national and EU level; believes that this could be achieved through the exchange of best practices among civil society, in particular children's organisations, parents, cities, local governments and Member States, and with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders; reiterates its call for an urgent increase in funding for the European Child Guarantee, with a dedicated budget of at least EUR 20 billion;

8. Underlines that the European Capitals for Children should serve as an opportunity to organise EU-related educational, cultural and sports events, which could be facilitated through workshops on topics related to everyday life, combating discrimination, child sexual abuse, poverty, social exclusion, gender equality, the digital world, climate protection, mobility, urban development, democracy, history and freedom of religion and belief;

9. Recalls the importance of taking into account children's best interests in the digital transformation and in all digital actions and decisions concerning them, notably their physical and mental health, safety and well-being, while promoting digital education and enhancing digital literacy;

10. Stresses that the establishment of such an annual designation, with children at the forefront and empowered to actively participate in discussions as partners and future decision makers, will help children grow up into open-minded adults;

11. Underlines that the European Capitals for Children will help connect existing child participation mechanisms at local, national and EU level, including the EU Children's Participation Platform ([1]) and the European Capital of Youth, and involve children in the decision-making processes;

12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

([1]) https://eu-for-children.europa.eu/ – This EU platform was established in line with the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.