

STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF SERBIA ON THE RALLIES IN SERBIA

The National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS), on the occasion of the rallies which are being organized throughout Serbia, strongly supports young people who are taking part in the non-violent protest and are expressing their attitudes and contributing to the development of democratic society in Serbia.

The National Youth Strategy 2015-2025 recognizes that the legal and policy framework does not encourage and stimulate youth participation in decision making process and lacks efficient mechanisms for integrating youth perspectives into public policy. Youth participation in the decision making processes is of immense importance because it allows comprehensive and quality response to the needs of young people.

A protest implies a declaration of opinion, dissent with the current state of affairs, values and the means of their manifestation in society. These rallies are a message to the whole society in Serbia that young people do have something to say but their voices **aren't taken into consideration enough**. KOMS expresses hope that these rallies will consolidate the values of openness, democracy, non-violence, tolerance, transparency and solidarity, values on which we must build our society. Emphasizing the need for safety of the protesters and young people we welcome all efforts in order to keep the rallies non-violent.

Young people are the driving force of development, which is why we are obliged to listen to their voices, to support their initiatives and put efforts into finding a common solution through partnership relations. Young people are a heterogeneous group with various needs and problems and in the creation of solutions we must apply a systemic and cooperative approach.

With these principles in mind, KOMS urges the decision makers to "open their doors", start a discussion and dialogue on the reasons behind this rally, as well as to develop new mechanisms which will allow a more active role of young people in decision making. We call upon the representatives of all institutions to actively and throughout the year work on these issues and acknowledge the opinions of young people in election periods, as well as in other decision making processes because voting isn't the only form of political participation.

We urge other relevant stakeholders, above all, the media, to report objectively on matters related to young people, while acknowledging their attitudes and needs. The insufficient representation and distorted view of young people in the media creates a barrier and limits their potential to actively engage in the public discourse. Two thirds of young people in Serbia believe that there is no objective representation of young people in the media which in the long term leads to their discouragement from participation in public life.

KOMS will continue to support young people and to represent their interests, as well as to include other relevant stakeholders in this endeavour. Young people need to be involved in all phases of public policy cycle. Young people who are taking part in these protests are sending a message what should not be the path for Serbian society and at the same time what are the possible options. This is why we all have an obligation to take into account what they have to say.