

The Bornholm Declaration – another example of Germany’s support of youth participation in international organisations?

Stefan Talmon, Julian A. Hettihewa

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Published: 04 June 2020 Authors: Julian Hettihewa and Stefan Talmon

The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) is a regional inter-governmental organisation consisting of 11 Member States, including Germany, and the European Union (EU). There are also 11 countries with observer status and 17 organisations serving as strategic partners. The CBSS supports the political and practical translation of international initiatives and agreements into regional actions on the ground. Founded in 1992, the organisation centres around three key issues: regional identity, a sustainable and prosperous region, and a safe and secure region. On 19 May 2020, the Foreign Ministers of the Member States and the Secretary General of the EU’s European External Action Service gathered in a digital meeting, debating important topics such as COVID-19, climate change, organised crime – and youth participation. The session concluded with the adoption of the Bornholm Declaration. In the Declaration, the Foreign Ministers and the high-level representative of the EU:

“underlined the need to foster active and meaningful youth participation and representation in institutions and decision-making processes in the region. In this context, they welcomed the new Baltic Sea Youth Platform established by the CBSS and directed the organisation to give increasing emphasis to its work in this field.”

The Baltic Sea Youth Platform was launched by the Danish CBSS Presidency to encourage young people to become more involved in the Baltic Sea region. The Federal Government pledged to support the Youth Platform with an annual financial contribution of €50,000.

The Bornholm Declaration and the Federal Government’s financial support for the Baltic Sea Youth Platform provides a good reason to look at Germany’s stand on global youth engagement more generally.

Since the 1970s, the UN General Assembly has recognized “the important role of youth in the realization of the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, especially those concerning economic and social progress and development”. In November 1981, the General Assembly adopted “Additional guidelines for the improvement of the channels of communication between the United Nations and youth and youth organizations” which provided that “Governments should consider the inclusion of youth representatives in their national delegations to the General

Assembly and to other relevant United Nations meetings.” In 2005, Germany for the first time invited two youth delegates to join its official delegation. It could be criticized that it took Germany more than two decades to do so. However, it is noteworthy that in 2019 only 40 States included youth representatives in their delegation, putting Germany in a somewhat pioneering role. In addition, since 2002 Germany has been including two youth delegates for sustainable development in its official delegation to the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (previously the UN Commission on Sustainable Development).

Considering that almost half of the world population is under 24 years of age, Germany emphasised the importance of the United Nations taking “the concerns of the young into particular consideration”. During the UN Security Council meeting on Youth, Peace and Security on 27 April 2020, the German deputy permanent representative to the United Nations concluded his address by quoting the German youth delegates who called upon the United Nations and the Member States to:

“[e]ncourage, promote and institutionalize the meaningful participation of young people in matters of peace and security”.

Germany’s support of youth participation at the international level is not limited to the United Nations. On 30 March 2020, Federal Foreign Minister Heiko Maas stated with regard to Germany’s presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2020 that young persons “most strongly” embody the future of Europe and announced:

“During our Presidency, we want to give the next generation a louder voice. We want to listen to young people, spread their ideas throughout Europe, our common home, and seriously engage with their desires, criticism and visions for a just future that is worth living in.”

It will have to be seen what this will mean in practice. Nevertheless, it becomes apparent that Germany encourages youth participation and is advocating the same at the international level. Against this background, it does not come as a surprise that Germany supported the Bornholm Declaration and the Baltic Sea Youth Platform. It is just one part of the bigger picture of Germany’s support of youth participation.

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