

MORE INCLUSIVE AND REPRESENTATIVE EU YOUTH STRATEGY: THE GRASSROOTS PERSPECTIVE

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/NYF, EYCA BULGARIA/

1. Overview. Examples, affected by the European policies and the Pro - European course of political development.

The next examples are a significant part of the evolution of Youth policy and participation of young people in decision - making process in Bulgaria, **affected by the European policies and the Pro - European course of political development.**

1. The establishment of National Youth Forum / 2010/

There are **three main reasons** for the establishment of the National Youth Forum in Bulgaria at that moment:

- The will of the Youth sector
- Well - qualified young leaders
- Essential support from the European Youth Forum

In the democratic history of Bulgaria /after 1989/ the government tried several times to set up National Youth Council, composed of youth sections of the political parties. These organizations had short life.

The initiative to set up the National Youth Umbrella Organization started in 2009 after the third edition of the national youth meeting in Varna. Every year these meetings get together more than 100 young people from all over the country to discuss concrete topics, relevant to their youth life. In 2009 Youth Consultative Body /YCB/ was established its horizontal structure. At the end of 2009 the members of this YCB rethought their decision. Networking days were planned for the spring of 2010. The European Youth Forum was approached for facilitation. There was an open call for co – founders. In the autumn 2010 the National Youth Forum was established. 28 young representatives joined the Constituent Assembly. **The first generation of NYF was well - experienced in the youth sphere on local, national and EU level thanks to EU Youth programs.**

In 2012 NYF became Candidate Member of European Youth Forum.

In 2014 NYF became Full Member of European Youth Forum.

2. The Pool of trainers / 2011/

At the end of 2011 following the best practices on European level **NYF developed its own Pool of trainers.** The book “How to build Pool of trainers” of EYF was the guide line. The

main objective of this initiative is continuously to reproduce the values and knowledge of the organization, to build and develop its own capacity and the capacity of its Member Organizations.

I. In 2012 NYF joined the project Re – Evolution, financed by **Grundtvig programme**. The leading organization is National Youth Council of Italy in partnership with 8 other national youth councils, including Bulgaria

Significant outcomes were on hand as a result from the project:

- Position paper “Common understanding on the recognition of non – formal education”. NYF used the paper during the National Strategy for Life Long Learning /2014 -2020/ discussions.
- Capacity building of the Pool of trainers of different NYCs through involvement in different training on national and European level. The next 4 years PoT delivers high level training expertise on local, national and European level. Some of the trainers are now working for the European Youth Forum’s Pool of trainers and do Council of Europe trainings as well.
- Lasting cooperation focused on education and training between partner organizations.

II. Between January 2015 and February 2016 NYF in cooperation with 13 Municipalities and with the well – developed capacity of the PoT conducted **13 Youth Leadership Academies for Democracy**. Over 500 young people were involved in the project. Most of the participants are students between 16 and 20. The academy promoted topics such as - democracy, active citizen participation, lobby and advocacy, Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.

3. The NYF chair of NWG /2014/

NYF joined the National Working Group for Structured dialogue after its official registration in 2011 as member. The next 3 years NYF proposed different good practices for improvement of the working process – a procedure for selection of Youth delegates, a working procedure, NWG member’s involvement in the activities and etc.

In 2014 the NWG voted NYF as a Chair following the good practices of the other NWG. The Ministry of youth and sport passed the chairmanship to the National Youth Forum. This was **an act of recognition** of the capacity, expertise and the role of the youth representation in the process as European Youth Strategy recommended.

NYF promoted 3 good practices with Structured dialogue in Bulgaria project:

- **Open call procedures** for everyone who want to be a Youth delegate in EU Youth Conference
- NYF started with the SD project to deliver **trainings for Youth delegates’** preparation. It was clear that if NWG wants more and more young people from different backgrounds to feel confident to apply as Youth delegates, we need to involve them first in training and to support them to develop knowledge about the EU Youth Strategy, Structured dialogue, the concrete topic and to develop skills of active and well – qualified

participation. The SD project covers all expenses and encourage young people from youth organizations or non – organized youth to participate.

- Road show in the universities, **cooperation with EYCA Bulgaria**. Every spring and autumn NYF meet over 10 000 young people as part of EYCA information campaigns in 25 universities in Bulgaria. It is effective promotion of SD and opportunity to do SD survey among young people who are not in youth organizations.

4. Varna – European Youth Capital /2014/

The final selection of Varna as European Youth Capital was one of the greatest achievements of the youth sector in Bulgaria. The bottom-up approach which was implemented throughout the 3 candidacies for the EYC title, was a showcase of how **grass roots organizations** and their values can have impact on shaping youth policies internationally. Varna shifted the paradigm of being in Europe's far away corner to being a trend initiator in the topic of social innovation and youth empowerment. The title itself was an indicator for efficiency of the citizens' dialogue and the regional and national authorities, which was a learning experience for all involved actors. The legacy of the capital is mainly intangible - human capital achievements and improved public capacity. Varna 2017 was a possibility for the youth sector in Bulgaria to add 'youth' in the political agenda and to underline the multilayered approach needed for youth policies. The challenges and achievements which were faced during this year were very clearly indicating the missing interlinks for successful policy making - from demographic point of view, from social point of view, economically and educationally orientated.

5. ECVET and NYF

Following the recommendations of the *Youth – related aims and possible initiatives for Education and training field* of the EU Youth Strategy in 2014 NYF together with Human Resources Development Centre / Erasmus + Agency/ organized the National Youth Seminar “European programs and initiatives implementation in order to support transparency of qualifications in national education system. Erasmus +, Europass, Euroguidance, Eurodesk, Evridika and ECVET.” During the seminar **ECVET as tool established at EU level** for validation of skills and recognition of competences was fully presented.

In 2015 HRDC decided to include in the ECVET team a representative from the Youth sector and to ensure direct communication between both sides. Next 2 years during different national youth events ECEVT expert delivered detailed information about the ECVET principles, how young people could use them to validate their competences, gained through non – formal learning.

In 2017 during the National Conference “Validation of non – formal and informal learning through ECVET” different stakeholders were invited. The Conference provided the opportunity for the National Agency for VET /NAVET/, the National Youth Forum, and the representatives from the business sector to synchronize their perspective about competences, recognition and validation and to think about future cooperation. The main outcome was that **responsible institution /NAVET/ should deliver specific trainings to youth organizations**. Those

trainings should develop the understanding of the participants of the learning outcomes, unit of learning outcomes, state educational standards, validation of learning outcomes, acquiring qualification in profession or part of profession.

2. Youth in Europe: What's next?

So, how young people in Bulgaria and other EU countries could contribute in most effective and efficient way to the common Future of Europe, what they need:

2.1. Clear Youth dimension in next Erasmus + program or Youth program like Youth in action, YOUTH, Youth in Europe programs.

Some of the European countries have administrative friendly national youth programs, aiming European values, some don't. The Youth in action in Bulgaria as mentioned before played a crucial role for active participation of young people and youth empowerment in decision making process **on local, national and European level**, sharing common European values. Erasmus + supports mainly individuals / educational mobility, EVS, youth exchanges and initiatives on national or European level/ but Youth in action supported many local initiatives in different rural areas, where European values were presented.

2.2. Support young people at certain age to establish **healthy and sustainable relations with their peers as prevention** of social exclusion, hence alcohol and drug abuse. Relationships foster a sense of belonging, which is an important basis for learning and well – being when you are teenager when it is maturity transition period. Young people need to leave their parents and it will be much easier if they have a friendly alternative where to go. In Bulgaria 27 % age of the young people between 18 – 29 say they do not even work, because their parents pay everything.

What we can do?

Develop general strategies, friendly Youth spaces / there is a Policy paper on Youth Spaces of National Youth Forum/, include Youth workers and develop their competences on that topic, support specific friendships – be friends with children with disabilities. Help young people to communicate, play, work with people with disabilities and understand that this process sometimes takes additional efforts and time.

2.3. Better coordination of different tools established on local, national and European level.

Bulgaria is good example how we can “improving access to quality youth information and disseminating information through all possible channels at local, regional, national level, as well as through Europe-wide organisations such as Eurodesk, ERYICA and EYCA and other European networks”. NYF has **efficient cooperation with EYCA Bulgaria and Eurodesk**. NYF is **promoting also ECVET as tool for validation**.

There are a lot of different instruments, tools and other outcomes and more efficient for the economy, nature it will be to start to use them and to save resources.

- 2.4. Positive common rituals to build strong bridges between communities and promoting peaceful societies.

Build a positive culture and climate for young people by creating expectations around constructive routines and fun rituals. Build a strong sense of community in youth sector is important and possible. There is an essential human need of belonging and connection with others. If something has not broken this need and led to social exclusion. Belonging to a community is a choice. And young people need to understand the way things are done, the culture and the manner in which they are completed. We need clear European routines and rituals that are expressions of our values and beliefs. Routines become rituals that followers come to expect. Rituals make the community communication predictable and friendly. Rituals emotionally prepare young people to engage themselves.

- 2.5. Active cooperation between young people from EU and neighbouring countries. Bulgaria is always mentioned as crossroad country that gathers roads of different cultures, community rituals and traditions. Bulgarian youngsters know how difficult and responsible is to build bridges between different communities even in the country. Member organizations of National Youth Forum are youth sections of Movement for Rights and Freedoms and IMRO /nationalists/, during the GA in December 2017 LGBT organization also join the platform.

Building bridges between the differences, promoting respect and sustainable communication is the way for peaceful societies. It will be very far – sight strategy thinking to synchronise with our neighbours the terms and the perceptions what democracy, social and political rights are, why it is important young people to be empowered to take active part in mechanisms of participatory policy-making and co-decision in key policies fields.

European Youth Forum even recommend “EU Youth Strategy should aim to become a reference strategy for EU candidate and neighbouring countries – YFG calls on the EC to organize several EU stakeholders and national thematic meetings.”

3. Recommendations for the future EU Youth Strategy

The next EU Youth Strategy should:

- 3.1. Clear Youth dimension in next Erasmus + program or Youth program like Youth in action, YOUTH, Youth in Europe programs.
- 3.2. Support young people at certain age to establish healthy and sustainable relations with their peers as prevention of social exclusion, hence alcohol and drug abuse.
- 3.3. Support the development of the Youth spaces - a place for youth work, voluntarism and social capital development
- 3.4. Synchronize the state educational standards of Youth worker profession and requires European quality in the field.

- 3.5. Encourage better cooperation with Europe-wide organisations such as Eurodesk, ERYICA and EYCA and other European networks for improving access to quality youth information, disseminating information, better opportunities for youth mobility and participation.
- 3.6. Develop positive European common rituals to build strong bridges between different European communities and promoting peaceful societies.
- 3.7. Help young people to communicate, play, work with people with disabilities and understand that this process sometimes takes additional efforts and time.
- 3.8. Active cooperation between young people from EU and neighbouring countries
- 3.9. Encourage participatory Youth policy on European, national and local level
- 3.10. Develop validation framework for volunteering and extracurricular activities, and non – formal education through proven Leadership programs like the Duke of Edinburg’s International Award.
- 3.11. Develop the understanding of the participants of the learning outcomes, unit of learning outcomes, state educational standards, validation of learning outcomes, acquiring qualification in profession or part of profession. ECVET and young people.
- 3.12. Develop the opportunity and the space young people to share good practices concerned with the themes and trends around the topic of young people’s relationship with democratic life in their countries and Europe
- 3.13. Synchronise with our neighbours the terms and the perceptions what democracy is, what human, social and political rights are, why it is important young people to be empowered to take active part in mechanisms of participatory policy-making and co-decision in key policies fields
- 3.14. National action plans that would outline how countries are implementing the EU Youth Strategy and link with the national policy planning documents and youth programmes, also clearly stating involved actors, like youth organisations and ministries.

The Structured dialogue is a good example for youth participation on EU and national level in different phases of decision - making process. The next step is calling, young people should not only participate in the creation of policies affecting youth, but also in the implementation and the monitoring.

Investing in youth on grass roots level is the key of keeping the bottom – up approach and encourage the gradual growth of every young person in the participatory Youth policy.

