

EUROPEAN YOUTH WEEK 2008
“Future challenges for young people”

Final Conclusions

General Rapporteur

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Future Challenges for young people

For the fourth time, the European Youth Week brought together young people from national as well as at the European level together as active European citizens to express their ideas and positions on future challenges.

We met in Brussels to formulate our positions and express our fears as well as our hopes for the future Europe whose policies will directly affect our life. It is not just a one-off event, but rather a part of the most important Structured Dialogue. It is closely connected to past events like the Slovenian Youth Event in Brdo and the French Youth Event in Marseille, both of which have taken place in 2008. Consistent European added value will only be achieved in a true dialogue with young people and youth organisations in all stages of policy development and implementation, both at the European and national level.

This report gathers young ideas from discussions. It is produced and edited by young people who volunteered to be Rapporteurs for their Working Groups. It is facilitated by a General Rapporteur nominated by the European Youth Forum. Here we collect the outcomes of the discussions on "Participation and Information", "Volunteering", "Employment, entrepreneurship, social inclusion and well being", "Education and Skills", "Rights of young people, equality and anti-discrimination" as well as the input of the Youth in Action working-groups. These all culminate in the final conclusions of the European Youth Week Event in Brussels 2008. The European Youth Week - "Future Challenges for young people" was a challenging exercise bringing together young people from very diverse backgrounds and experience in youth policy. Many of the participants felt that the event still left room for improvement - and based on the discussions, the need for development of structured dialogue is evident.

Young people were invited to express their opinions, ideas and feelings about the future Challenges for youth in Europe. Now is the time for decision makers to take the floor and start working together with us towards a cohesive and inclusive Europe.

Together we will tackle every future Challenge. Together we are strong.

European Youth Week 2008 – A Structured dialogue debate on “Future challenges for young people”

WG 1: Participation and Information

Access to information is fundamental for democratic participation, and participation is fundamental for each human being and for the prosperity of European society. In past years great efforts have been made within the youth field. Yet we identify some considerable gaps that we find important to fill.

Obstacles for participation should be removed

- Legal obstacles and useless bureaucracy for all sorts of youth initiatives should be identified and removed in each member state before 2012 and this should happen in collaboration with youth organisations.

Access to information should be improved and ensured

- Youth information on EU websites should be written in a clear and understandable way, and entirely translated in all EU languages.
- The structure of existing information tools such as EU website and other interactive tools should be improved and better promoted.
- We support the French presidency youth event's proposal on www.my.eu. But, we wish to complement this concept with more specific and separate sections such as a Volunteering portal, a public database of all youth initiatives, organizations and associations in Europe. Moreover we want to include those projects not included in the structured dialogue.

The learning to participate should be ensured

- The European Commission, Member States and NGOs should collaborate on creating tools aiming at closer cooperation between formal and non-formal Education.
- To further encourage simulations of decision making processes such as Model UN, EU, etc.

Clear structure for dialogue between youth and decision makers should be established

- We propose to have four European Structured Dialogue meetings a year with longer working time and participants delegated by representative youth structures that should also try to reach out beyond their members. The topics of the discussion will be chosen in close

cooperation between the Commission and the YFJ.

- We call for the European Commission to encourage the member states to organize the Structured Dialogues on local, regional and national level.
- Within the Structured Dialogue all participants are equal; therefore we demand a recurrent structured feedback from the Commission to all partners.

WG 2: Voluntary activities of young people

Volunteering plays a crucial role in young peoples lives as it complements their development. We highly recognise the benefits of existing policies and commitments taken by the EU and the Member States. Yet, many obstacles remain making it difficult to motivate young people to volunteer. They are facing a lack of recognition, support and information-transfers from the adopted policies to the volunteer. We believe that the following recommendations will reinforce the existing policies and facilitate the engagement of young people in volunteering

- We ask that 2011 will be the European year of volunteering. This year will be used as method to promote volunteering as “cool” in order to motivate more young people to include it in their daily life. This should be done through a wide, innovative and creative campaign.
- A Europe-wide “**V-card**” should be issued to every volunteer starting from 2011 to increase the visibility of their contribution to society. This card would give specific benefits and support (e.g. insurance, transport discounts) to the volunteer, depending on the level of involvement.
- In order to promote youth volunteering at the local level, grass-root youth organisations should be better supported. They have the capacity to coordinate local authorities, media, young people and the entire community.
- More specific support to youth organisations and their platforms to further develop the exchange of good practices on voluntary activities and volunteering policy. Because volunteers are the heart of youth organizations.
- Youth voluntary organisations need the development of a national framework for volunteering policies. In order to implement the OMC common objectives for voluntary activities, appoint an Ombudsman to strengthen the rights of the young volunteers and to secure quality assurance of volunteer management including responsibility for training.

- Educating young people about volunteering should be added to formal education as part of the curricula of “citizenship education”. Youth organisations should be involved in the process because they have the practical experience.
- Make volunteering at all levels more accessible to young people with fewer opportunities, by targeting them as an individual, in order to provide them with competences that would.

WG 3: Employment, entrepreneurship, social inclusion and well being

In tackling the issues of well-being through employment, entrepreneurship and social inclusion in a long term perspective, the EU must set youth as its main target. The ambitions set forth in the Lisbon Strategy through the European Youth Pact will only be met by a comprehensive cross sector policy spearheaded by the OMC in the youth field as its core driver. Moreover, rather than seeing youth as a cheap labour force, youth has to be considered as a resource of creativity and innovation.

To create a proper youth agenda that delivers, all necessary stakeholders must be empowered and encouraged to join forces. Each of them must have clear roles and responsibilities, both on a political and technical level. Wide-spread information, improved adequate funding, equal opportunities and empowerment are necessary to strengthen the role of young people to enable them to take up their share of responsibility in addressing the following concerns:

- Assure solidarity between generations thereby enhancing social security systems, which deliver accessible quality services in such fields as education, housing and health to assure autonomy for all generations.
- Address the paradox of European mobility that creates opportunities but does not sufficiently remove current barriers. A common strategy is needed to adapt national laws, rights, taxation and social security mechanisms to employment, learning and volunteering abroad. Existing financial support schemes should target broader audiences in order to be fully inclusive.
- Set substantially improved quality-standards for job and internship contracts to insure a decent work/private life balance and fair wages, thus lifting citizens out of precarious situations.
- Support existing entrepreneurship education initiatives and develop a comprehensive strategy fostering an entrepreneurial mindset throughout education.
- Environmental issues are a crucial human need for the well-being of

generations to come.

Cooperation in the youth field starts with empowering young people, providing widespread information, funding and responsibility in order to participate.

WG 4: Education

All forms of education are of vital importance to young people in Europe. Improving young people's access to education is an investment in the necessary participation in future economic and social life. Therefore, we are seeking to enhance the impact of The White Paper on Youth and the European Youth Pact in relation to the Lisbon strategy by the following measures:

- Member states have to implement common standards of quality of education at a national level (recommended for EU candidate states). Those are to be created in cooperation with EU, youth, and member states and must start with key competencies.
- To support self-awareness of competencies every European citizen should have a personal life-long learning portfolio, usable throughout Europe and bringing together competencies acquired in non-formal and formal education. For this use, youth organizations should identify and describe the competencies acquired, and set up a European database of programs of which the quality is assured and the competencies are defined.
- The EU should request member states to develop this life-long learning portfolio together with employers and youth organizations, so that it becomes a common tool in economic life. The EU should further enhance the recognition of non-formal education and foster counselling to facilitate movements between all forms of education and employment throughout all stages of life.
- By 2020 every young person in the EU should have the right to participate in an exchange programme, regardless of one's financial situation, social background, belonging to a minority group or the field of studies. We urge the EU to reduce bureaucracy regarding the exchange programs and to improve the ECTS system.
- Member states should evaluate curricula and teachers on a regular basis together with students and other stakeholders and invest in life-long learning for teachers.
- National youth organizations and schools should cooperate to provide realistic information about active European citizenship. Furthermore, we recommend

using all possible forms of mass-media to give and receive information to and from young people.

- The EU has to gain the competency to guarantee quality of education in member states.

WG 5: Rights of young people, equality and anti-discrimination

The EU has already done substantial work on Human Rights, yet it should continue to ensure the implementation of article 13 of the Amsterdam treaty. It is our vision that during the next ten years the EU should endeavour to prevent discrimination on any grounds in every area of life as defined in article 21 of the European charter of fundamental rights with special attention to the following points:

- Within EU territory, basic social rights, such as healthcare, education, employment and housing, must be made available to all human beings.
- Clear regulation must be enforced for immigration detention centres concerning education, privacy, maximum stay, integration and keeping families together.
- We must ensure the participation of youth workers and youth active in civil society in international activities by abolishing visa for citizens of European countries outside the EU.
- EU member states should use affirmative action to ensure the employment of young people facing discrimination on the grounds defined in article 13 of the Amsterdam treaty. There should be a continuing focus on equal pay for equal work and breaking the glass ceiling.
- Prioritizing, increasing and simplifying access to financial support and information for informal youth groups promoting the integration of minorities within society.
- Ensuring equal rights for same sex couples.
- Ensuring equal parental rights despite sex and/or marital status and providing full salary to parents on parental leave.
- The investment in infrastructure and technology ensuring the inclusion of people with a disability in all areas of society.
- Access to universities within the EU has to be non discriminatory and free of charge.
- National youth administrations should reform their programs to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Having common courses focusing on the EU founding principles, social and economical rights of youth throughout all levels of formal education.

European Youth Week 2008 – Youth in Action Workshops on the Intercultural Dialogue

With 27 Member States and 496 million Europeans, Intercultural Dialogue is more than a thematic year. Dialogue is a voluntary process to communicate. An intercultural element without dialogue refers to multiculturalism, which is a goal but not sufficient to construct a European identity. The YIA workshops focused on the improvement of the grass roots of youth policy, the YIA, and the challenges it has to live up to in the upcoming years. Therefore, we strongly suggest:

- To increase participation of young people with fewer opportunities, DG EAC must develop an electronic/interactive user friendly guide for the YIA program.
- To ensure efficiency and better quality of the YIA projects, DG EAC has to simplify the application and reporting procedure.
- DG EAC must create a database with the outcomes of past projects and link it to its home page in order to guarantee the valorisation of results and the exchange (dissemination) of good practices.
- In order to increase the number of participants, the visibility of YIA and the quality of youth projects, it is vital that the European Commission increases the budget of the program.
- The EC is expected to offer guidance and empower the Member States to continue projects set up by the YIA program.
- To increase the quality and quantity of the projects the European Commission is strongly advised to assist the Member States to develop the Youth policies for supporting Youth work.
- The EU must ensure the continuation of the Youth Programme beyond 2013.
- To ensure Intercultural Dialogue, the European Commission must simplify the visa procedures for non EU participants.
- The European Commission must create a new specified action for supporting information campaigns, events and information days within the YIA programme.

Challenging future obstacles today

We urge the European institutions to reformulate the framework of European cooperation in the youth field, in a way that allows a more focused and structured approach. This more structured framework should ensure a genuine cross-sector youth policy at the European level, allowing the different actors to have a proper understanding of the real situation and needs of young people. We hope that the framework will also provide the necessary flexibility regarding the future processes, and further considering the subsidiarity principle. It is necessary that the framework addresses the different levels of decision-making as well as their interaction. Aspiring to achieve increased effectiveness and sustainability of the framework, we share its goals and demands, but we express our willingness to remain a reliable partner towards decision-makers.

Only with all the relevant actors involved - namely the political stakeholders both at the European level and also in the Member States, and the young people of Europe – can we challenge future obstacles in the Youth-Field.

Despite physical, social and linguistic barriers between the representatives of National Youth Councils and those of Youth in Action projects throughout the whole event and the different working methodologies, both groups came up with three common demands:

- Increase the participation of young Europeans in Volunteering by eliminating obstacles. Recognise a volunteer's commitment to society and the learning-outcome as an important step towards active citizenship.
- Create a user-friendly website for young people, that acts as a single access-point to the overwhelming wide range of volunteering opportunities in Europe.
- Remove any VISA-obstacle immediately.

The fact that representatives of both the grass root and the political level have arrived at similar recommendations, shows that there is a consensus in the Youth field.

Looking at the variety of different challenges that will come up in the near future, we should never forget that today's youth is going to be the generation that has to live with the decisions we make today. Thinking in a more holistic way, it is more than just the conclusions made by the Working Groups – it is urgent to realize, that young people's views and opinions are an indispensable source of inspiration for European decision makers.

Young people need Europe and Europe needs young people.

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