

The Declaration of Rotterdam

**Declaration on the outcomes of the Youth Event hosted by the Dutch
Presidency of the European Union and the Dutch National Youth
Council**

Rotterdam, the Netherlands 27-28 November 2004

Preamble

This declaration was drawn up during the Youth Event that took place from 27 to 28 November 2004 on the eve of the EU meeting of the Directors-General for Youth during the Dutch presidency of the European Union. 102 young people from the Member States of the European Union, the European Union Candidate countries, the Member States from the European Free Trade Agreement Area and the European Youth Forum took part in this event. It was organized within the framework of the Dutch Presidency by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports of the Netherlands, in cooperation with the Dutch National Youth Council and the Netherlands Institute for Care and Welfare, with co-funding of the European Commission and the assistance of the European Youth Forum. This declaration reflects the discussions and issues that were raised by the participants during the Youth Event.

2004 is a crucial year for the future of youth in Europe. It is today that national and European politicians have to rethink the role of youth in the EU and have to develop new means of involving them into political processes. The heads of governments from Germany, France, Spain and Sweden have taken a new initiative by asking for a European Youth Pact. We do not only welcome this step, but we ask all heads of governments in Europe to openly support it. In particular the Youth Pact builds on the EU White Paper on Youth. It should not be a new method as such, but should be a tool to develop new ideas for the Open Method of Coordination in the field of Youth Policy in the EU, the new generation EU Youth Programme for 2007 - 2013 "Youth in Action" and new themes and subjects for a new European Youth Political Agenda. To tackle these three issues have also been the main purpose of this youth event. This declaration not only aims to inspire the Council, Directors-General for Youth of the European Union and the European Commission, but also all other stakeholders within the field of youth policy on local, national and European level. We hope that our work during these three days is appreciated by these decision makers and contributes to the debate on youth in Europe.

Recommendations on the European Commissions' proposal on the new generation EU Youth Programme for 2007 - 2013: "YOUTH IN ACTION".

The participants of the Youth Event in Rotterdam in general welcome the proposal from the European Commission on the "YOUTH IN ACTION" programme¹. The current YOUTH programme plays an important role in the

¹ Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council. Creating the "YOUTH IN ACTION" programme for the period 2007-2013 (presented by the Commission)

personal, social and cultural development of young people from all over Europe. We hope that the proposed "Youth in Action" programme will make an even greater contribution to the lives of young people in Europe. However the participants of the Youth Event would like to raise several questions and make the recommendations as they are written below.

QUALITY

In all actions one should stress the quality of the programmes rather than the quantity. We support the idea of ensuring quality within the programmes and the procedures through training rather than increasing the amount of bureaucratic procedures. In order to provide quality, more emphasis should be placed on supervision, care and social security; especially towards young people with less opportunities.

Within Action 2 there should be greater uniformity in the implementation of the programme across member states. To ensure this, special focus should be put on the establishment of coordination between the National Agency's evaluation of the participating organizations and the participants. A sufficient follow-up on each EVS project is vital in ensuring the quality of the EVS programme. Also to ensure quality, the number of places for EVS should be limited but each individual participant should receive more financial support than is currently available.

In Action 3 there should be a primary focus on co-operation with certain regions of neighboring- and other countries, but this should be done without totally excluding other countries from co-operation. There also should be a focus on certain themes where to co-operate on. Both these focuses should be flexible and be revised on a regular base.

BUDGET

We strongly recommend that the overall budget for the programme is being increased. Considering the efficacy of the programme in reaching as many young people as possible, Action 1 is more successful in doing so than Action 2. Greater financial support and resources should be allocated to Action 1. Action 2, though important, should not be prioritized to the extent proposed in the new programme. Hence, it should not receive more money than it already does within the current programme. Also more funding should be allocated to action points 3,4 and 5, in order to be able to facilitate more activities under these actions.

In general we propose to have greater financial balance between the actions, by removing funding from action point 2, and allocate this money to the other action points.

Furthermore we would like to see that the money provided for projects and other initiatives is already being granted in the beginning of the projects during the funding procedures.

INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

It is crucial to include young people in all the aspects of the programme, from the design and the implementation of projects to the work of the national agencies. These agencies must in co-operation with youth organizations support the involvement of all different target groups into the programme.

We believe the EVS programme is a good way to reach young people with fewer opportunities.

We also welcome the initiative of Group EVS, especially regarding the formation of international group projects in order to increase the added value of a EVS group project.

INFORMATION AND PROMOTION

With this new programme our aim must be to inform all young people and make them aware of the opportunities available under the Youth Programme. Diverse promotional tools relevant to specific target groups should be implemented. We recommend that the Commission develops a strategy for information and visibility of the programme. Hence, this strategy should be designed for a broad range of different groups of young people, youth organizations and platforms.

The programme should really seek at co-operation with schools and youth organizations in order to achieve more effective promotion and to create awareness of the programme among as many young people as possible.

It is important to obtain state recognition of EVS projects done by volunteers.

ADMINISTRATION

We believe it is important to have clearer, more youth friendly and less bureaucratic procedures, so that it easier for young people and youth organizations to apply for and undertake projects. Hence, in order to achieve this the application forms the programme currently used by the programme.

We need to address issues of mobility and make it easier for young people to receive visas. These procedures have to be improved in order to ensure that participants can engage in activities in other countries.

We support the European Youth Forum's proposal to include youth seminars in the new programme and to make the new programme even more flexible; i.e. it should be made possible that the country where the idea for a project is developed does not necessarily have to be the country where the project eventually takes place.

International groups and organisations should be supported to use the opportunity to design and undertake initiatives.

Finally, we recommend that the selection of projects and participants should be based on criteria that ensure political neutrality.

Evaluation of the White Paper process and the Open Method of Coordination in the field of Youth Policy.

The EU White Paper on Youth "A New Impetus for European Youth"² has proven to be an important document and development in the elaboration of a youth policy in Europe. During the Youth Event in Rotterdam the participants evaluated the Open Method of Co-ordination for Youth Policy and the White Paper process. From a young people's perspective we would like to highlight the following points:

Improved participation at the European level

We recommend that a consultative body consisting of delegates of the European Youth Forum, National Youth Councils and national Ministries for Youth hold regular meetings organised by the European Commission in close contact with the European Parliament. This consultative body should also liaise with the relevant Council of Europe bodies.

Improved participation at the national level

The national, regional and local levels of government play a crucial role in ensuring young people are consulted in all stages of the policy cycle in the White Paper process and the OMC. Their input must be taken into account by the authorities dealing with youth. The consultative process should make use of additional tools supplementing the questionnaires, in order to foster a more satisfying and full dialogue between the national governments and the national youth councils. These national governments, as well as the national youth councils themselves are asked to give higher political priority to the OMC and White Paper.

New supporting tools for participation of young people on the OMC

² European Commission White Paper "A new Impetus for European Youth" Brussels, 21.11.2001 COM(2001) 681 final. This document can be found on:

http://europe.eu.int/comm/youth/whitepaper/download/whitepaper_en.pdf

The questionnaires used by the European Commission during the consultative phase proved to be cumbersome and difficult to complete. In addition to that time was very limited and the member governments did not, despite explicit requests from young people and youth organisations, consult them on the final and completed questionnaires. We advise that with support of the European Commission, the European Youth Forum and the national youth councils more effective consultation tools to involve and engage with young people (e.g. internet surveys, forums, meetings, councils, informal programmes, etc.) be developed.

To ensure the involvement of young people at all levels, youth organisations should receive the necessary support to inform and enable young people to take part in the implementation of the common objectives under the framework of European co-operation in the field of youth. Involving unorganised youth to participate in the decision-making process has to be evolved on a structural basis.

Information dissemination on the OMC and the White Paper

There is a greater need for a structured dissemination of information concerning the OMC and the White Paper towards national, regional and local governing bodies, and especially elected representatives and administrations. At the same time the objectives of consultation process should be clarified and made more attractive for young people so they can more easily participate in issues concerning the OMC and the White Paper. To support the effort to reach young people as well as administrative bodies all documents and reports on the white paper and OMC-process on national & European level must be made public, and measures taken to aid young people in finding and making use of these materials. As a first step the member states and the European Commission are obliged to publicise the progress reports and questionnaires.

Special attention ought to be paid to disseminate information about best practices, utilising the Council of Europe's *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*.

Tools to improve evaluation of the common objectives

We emphasise the importance of greater commitment to the follow-up, feedback and evaluation of all adopted common objectives. We strongly advocate the development of an EU-wide common set of both quantitative indicators and qualitative guidelines. These can be used to ensure proper monitoring of the goals set under the Open Method of Co-ordination for Youth Policy. The evaluation has to be carried out in association with the European Youth Forum, national youth council's and young people in general. Furthermore, the evaluation should take into account specific local needs.

Expanding the current common objectives

We urge the EC and the member states to provide the opportunity to revise the current set of common objectives so young people can propose changes to within the existing four common objectives and add entirely new ones.

Within the common objective on the participation of young people we propose that on local level the opinions of young people should be taken into consideration when defining the policy priorities.

We propose two new common objectives be devised carrying the same weight as the current four common objectives: youth employment & social inclusion, and secondly: life long learning and non-formal education.

Themes and subjects for a new European Youth Policy Agenda

European youth policy is on a good way. In recent years the white paper process and the open method of coordination have offered a starting point for a European coordination of youth policy and the Youth programme has ensured that initiatives of young people receive substantial financial support. Nevertheless there are new challenges ahead. In the future, a youth perspective also has to be taken into consideration in other policy areas. The proposed Youth Pact is a great initiative and a perfect example on how issues as employment, social inclusion and education cannot be tackled without thinking about the role of youth and their involvement in these fields. During this youth event we have gathered some first ideas and demands on the fields of youth mainstreaming, youth employment and social security, non-formal education and lifelong learning and other areas. We hope that the youth pact will be supported by all EU Heads of Governments, will turn into reality, include all the above mentioned areas and ensures the widest participation of youth possible.

Employment and Social Security Outcomes

As the transition from education to employment is a crucial phase determining one's working life it is important to deal with education in the context of employment.

Education should be a means to empower young people to become active citizens, as well as to be able to access the labour market more easily. Equality among young people can only be reached if equal access for all to good education is ensured.

Non formal education needs to be recognised and therefore complementary of formal and non-formal education needs to be promoted. In order to achieve this, common criteria for the improvement of education need to be developed; more opportunities for internships (national and international) need to be created; more guidance and counselling (within schools) needs to be provided in order to smooth the transition from school to work; more and better vocational training needs to be offered.

When it come to employment policy itself, the stress should be on raising the employment levels among people in Europe. Young people should be enabled to find jobs according to their qualifications, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, sex or sexual orientation. Policies should aim at higher employment levels and better access to the labour market for disadvantaged young people.

Actions plans with quantitative commitments for youth employment should be developed on the national and European levels and the conditions for entrepreneurship should be improved for young people; skills acquired through non-formal education should be recognised. Strategies for labour mobility should be outlined. Finally, funds for vocational training for lesser skilled young people should be increased.

Nonformal Education and Lifelong Learning Outcomes

Non formal education enables youth to undergo the process of self-development and to obtain professional skills through peer education and interactive learning in a safe environment, supported by the government, educational institutions, employers and NGO's. Life-long learning is an ongoing process that should start at an early age. We strongly ask for the recognition and support of non formal education by society, i.e. governments, job-markets, formal education structures etc. Recognition must be linked to different benefits and interests of organizations providing non formal education. This should be done through the youth policy making on different levels. We further recommend the formulation of a policy on the EU level on non formal education, which leaves the national and local levels free to decide on the solutions in implementing that policy.

The role of youth organisations is to provide opportunities of non formal education to young people and the role of public authorities is to provide support for youth NGOs respecting their full autonomy. The public authorities, and the youth organizations themselves, should promote diversity and better quality of non formal education. This also includes that information on non formal education is accessible for everyone. We recommend youth organizations having the full ownership of the implementation and running of initiatives aimed to recognition of non formal education.

Taking more account of young people in policy areas outside youth policy

Politicical decisions in a wide range of policy areas have a strong impact on the life of young people in Europe. Especially the following areas affect them directly: sustainable development, education, social inclusion and social protection, employment and autonomy (all issues that relate to the Lisbon strategy), mobility, environment, health and research.

As the EU is actively involved in ensuring a viable future for the next generations, young people's opinions should especially be taken into account. A provision for youth should be included in all policies issued by the EU that concern the present and future standard of living of its citizens. For this reason, special attention should be paid to young people in the

further development of the Lisbon Strategy. We welcome the proposal to draw up a Youth Pact in the framework strategy and hope that such a pact will set the framework for systematic attention to and consultation with young people.

We also call upon the EU to introduce as a legal principle a standard consultation procedure - involving all relevant actors in the youth field, especially the European Youth Forum and the national youth councils - that they must adhere to in connection with every legislative proposal in the policy areas identified above as being of special relevance to young people.

Important new agenda points

Young people are becoming a minority in this aging society and should not be marginalized. Therefore we are recommending to give more autonomy to youth organisations in how to use their public fundings, to reach all young people. A focus should also be put on including the non-organised youth. Participation of these groups should not only be symbolical.

Innovative and new ways of promotional strategy should be used. Examples for this are a youth symbol, EU Political Idol elections, European Youth Capital on the example of the European Cultural capital. The mass media should be used to reach the young people. Also creating a Youth Ambassador and the Appointing of a children/youth officer within the EU ombudsman office could be a good thing.

The EU commission also should undertake a study to determinate the reasons why young people do not participate and get involved in local and community life with a specific emphasis on the impact of school/ college, part-time work and the lack of free time.