

## **European Youth Week 2007**

**“Youth in action!”**

***Brussels, 3 – 6 June***

### **Conclusions of the working groups**

#### ***Introduction***

More than 150 young people from 35 European countries gathered for the European Youth Week in Brussels, taking place from 3 to 6 June 2007. The slogan of the “Youth in action!” event invited young people to voice their concerns and visions for the future of Europe and its policies directly affecting their lives.

The European Youth Week is not just a one-off consultation but closely connected to past and upcoming events, such as the European Youth Summit in Rome and the German Presidency Youth Event in Cologne, which both had taken place earlier this year. Focusing on social inclusion and diversity, the participants worked throughout the Youth Week in seven thematic and three creative working groups dealing with youth issues.

This report is the outcome of these discussions, produced and edited by young people selected as rapporteurs by their working groups and facilitated by a general rapporteur nominated by the European Youth Forum. The report includes general conclusions and our recommendations to the European institutions, member states and other stakeholders.

The European Youth Week brought together young people from diverse backgrounds and experiences in youth policies and youth work. The participants in the event felt that there was still room for improvement in terms of time available for the discussions and the possibilities for follow-up and monitoring of the process.

The participants of the European Youth Week discussed their concerns and visions and worked hard on developing proposals and recommendations. Now it's up to policy makers to ensure a sufficient follow-up and to put the recommendations into practice.

#### ***The future of Europe – an inclusive Europe***

The future of Europe has been a dominant issue at numerous youth events. In the face of the challenges people of Europe have to deal with today, especially the feeling of social insecurity and the lack of a coherent vision for Europe's future, young people feel a great need and a civic responsibility to provide the decision makers in the EU with the following visions and recommendations.

#### **European values and identity**

The values of Europe should be based on human rights, freedom of speech, access to information, respect of minorities and diversity, and mutual acceptance of all expressions of identity.

The symbols of the EU are tools of visibility, but European identity is also created through cultural sharing and social inclusion. Every young person should have the opportunity to

participate in a youth exchange programme, as youth programmes are tools for social inclusion.

## **Constitutional Treaty**

As stated in the Rome Youth Summit Declaration, institutional reform leading to further democratic participation of all European citizens in the EU is a very important issue for young people.

We feel however that the current debate is not always representative, as it does not involve all layers of society, and does not always address people's needs, fears and expectations. We therefore need an open and diverse debate, launched at the local level, in which all young people participate and have same access to objective sources of information. The future of Europe must not be shaped mainly by a privileged Euro-elite, but by all people of Europe in a sustainable intergenerational dialogue.

## **Enlargement and EU's relations with its neighbours**

We believe that further enlargement to include the Balkan countries is vital for sustaining a diverse and peaceful Europe. The EU should promote the debate about what the borders of Europe. This debate should be initiated by the Portuguese presidency and continued under the Slovenian presidency.

In order to increase the freedom of movement, the EU must aim to remove visa requirements and additional education fees for all non-EU countries, especially for those who are members of the Council of Europe. Moreover, EU policies should be more transparent for citizens and especially youth in these countries.

The EU should enhance cooperation in the field of asylum policies and implement a common policy on illegal immigration, in which the EU also takes into account the reasons for migration. Therefore the EU should also enhance the Euro-Mediterranean partnership by developing a platform for greater economic and political cooperation and revive the coordination in the youth field.

We support the membership of Turkey subject to its fulfilling of all the accession obligations including human rights and ensure that accession requirements are the same for all candidate countries.

## **EU and the globalised world**

We demand the implementation of all institutional changes regarding foreign policy set out in the European Constitutional Treaty, which support a peaceful and stable Europe in this world.

The EU should be represented in the Security Council of the United Nations with a single seat. Furthermore, the EU should push for an institutional reform of the UN in order to make it more democratic and representative so to turn the UN into an effective mechanism to cope with global challenges.

The EU must set human rights as well as at least minimum social and environmental standards as an import condition for all products inside and coming into the EU. The EU must fight global poverty and diseases and ensure that the development aid is used in a transparent and sustainable way. The fight against poverty must be fair and independent of any economic considerations.

The EU must fulfil its commitments regarding environmental protection and aim to develop a common energy policy, promote public transport, encourage alternative energy sources and push for a global regulation on fishing in international territories.

## ***Active citizenship for a more cohesive society***

The 2008 year of 'Intercultural Dialogue' creates a unique opportunity to emphasize the link

between active citizenship and social commitment. As active participation is highly beneficial for both the individual and the community, we, young Europeans, wish to see participation being promoted on a greater scale. In order to achieve this we call for a far-reaching information campaign about the "Year of Intercultural Dialogue", which includes youth organisations, youth centres and clubs at the local and regional level.

We demand

- to implement on a regular basis and with the expertise and experience of young people the concept of European Youth Capitals, starting with Rotterdam in 2009;
- to emphasise the importance of youth clubs as an important tool to promote active citizenship and the inclusion of all youth through peer-to-peer education and peer-to-peer projects;
- a reform of the funding system and the creation of a database that promotes best practises in active citizenship projects.

Youth information is a basic tool to ensure the participation of young people in all fields of the society. Therefore thorough and full information opportunities shall be provided to youth in both informal and institutionalised ways.

- We call for the creation of youth information centres covering a vast variety of topics relevant to young people, e.g. bullying, sexual health, drug abuse, domestic violence and unemployment. These centres should include specialists and experts in the respective fields and be easily accessible.
- Youth information centres and long-term youth projects providing such resources need to be promoted on a large scale and well funded.
- Young people shall take a key-role in the conceptualising, establishing and managing of the centres.
- We demand the implementation of free helpline numbers on national level, providing assistance for motivated people wanting to start projects regarding active citizenship.

Encouraging participation of all individuals in political life is a necessary basis of active citizenship.

To achieve this, we propose to

- provide the possibility to young volunteers of non-member states to enter the EU without a visa or financial restrictions;
- lower the voting age for the elections of the European Parliament to 16 years by 2009;
- extend the right to vote in municipal elections to non-EU citizens with a permanent residence in the EU;
- endow EU citizens living in an EU member state other than their home country with the right to choose whether to vote for national elections in their country of origin or in the country of their residence;
- create the legal possibility to register a European youth association on the European level without being bound to one member country;
- introduce and strengthen active citizenship education as compulsory subject in school curricula;
- harmonise the criteria to become a citizen in any EU member state;
- carry out an EU-wide referendum in 2009 opening the floor towards a reconsideration of the constitutional treaty, keeping in mind constitutional settings of the member states.
- include youth NGOs stronger in the formal decision making-processes concerning youth policies;
- increase the support measures for the organised and non-organised youth at the European level by 2008;
- raise the funds allocated to the Youth in Action programme significantly by the next release in 2013, in respect to the increased needs in a dramatically enlarged Union;
- introduce co-decision procedures in the EU, comparable to the ones existing in the Council of Europe, between member states, administration and youth organisations.

## ***Intercultural dialogue and diversity – Europe, that's all of us***

Intercultural dialogue is an interactive exchange between equal partners. In order to profit from such a dialogue, one has to accept diversity as a fundamental elements of life and a consequence of our uniqueness. We refer to all dimensions of diversity and we bear in mind that we all are different but also equal. This way intercultural dialogue can build bridges between cultures and between our past and future.

In the perspective of an enlarged European Union there is the risk that the fundamental values of solidarity and mutual respect between the members of the European family will fade away. The stage of intercultural dialogue is still far from what we need for the transition from a multicultural to an intercultural society. Such an intercultural society should not only be built on tolerance, which is a passive concept, but on real respect, which is an interactive and conscious act.

We also have to remind ourselves every day to be open-minded and to challenge preconceived ideas and prejudices as soon as we are confronted with them.

We can enjoy the greatest benefit of intercultural dialogue only if artificial barriers as for instance the repressive visa regime are removed. Migration and mobility are part of European reality. Still, there is a lack of understanding and integration of migrants. Social inclusion of migrants is impossible without intercultural dialogue.

So far the formal education system has not been adapted to the changed reality of the united Europe and enlarged European Union. Non-formal education, which is one of the main providers of intercultural learning, is still not sufficiently recognized. We would like to facilitate access to culture, for instance by giving free entrance for young people under the age of 26 to museums, theatres etc.

We, the European youth, demand a reform of the school curricula by adding a European dimension and equal opportunities and introducing intercultural learning (also through creative methods) as a separate subject. Language education should be revised regarding its form, content, extent and objectives. New approaches in the non-formal sector, such as language courses by volunteers in youth organizations, should be promoted and recognized. Furthermore, the responsible authorities should screen and revise learning materials in order to eliminate stereotypes and discriminatory images. The future "Junior Erasmus" programme should focus especially on school students with fewer opportunities in order to give them the possibility to take part in intercultural dialogues.

As 2008 will be the "Year of Intercultural Dialogue" the "Youth in Action"-programme will concentrate on this aspect even more than usual. By carefully monitoring and evaluating these projects we have to make sure that as much added value as possible can be gained in order to also strengthen intercultural dialogues in the medium and long-term. This would also raise the visibility of the programme, which by itself is a priority goal to achieve. Some of the possible project fields could be conscious travelling, peer-to-peer experience exchanges and "festivals of diversity" for and by youth organisations. Best practices, as presented during the Youth Celebration on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2007, need to be placed in a framework of capacity building so that a stronger multiplying effect can be achieved. In order for 2008 to be a true year of intercultural dialogue we need to raise awareness of and promote mobility programmes as a tool of cultural exchange and to encourage mobility in general.

## ***Equal opportunities and anti-discrimination***

### **Legislation**

In the Year of "Equal Opportunities for All – towards a just society", we still face a European Union where social cohesion does not fully keep pace with increased competition and where people still experience discrimination due to their sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Increasing job mobility, migration and immigration require an always higher sensibility with regard to other ethnicities, religions, beliefs and customs. A transforming and increasingly global market needs to be based on an understanding of other cultures and societies. The quickly changing employment environment puts family structures

under strain without appropriate support from the current social systems. Legislation in the field of equal opportunities and diversity is neither flexible nor quick enough to react to these challenges. Further harmonisation at European level is necessary. Full implementation of legislation needs to be ensured at all levels.

- We urgently call upon the European Commission and the member states to revise national laws to reinforce anti-discrimination policies in areas other than employment such as education, citizen rights (freedom of speech), social services and housing.
- At a horizontal level, indicators and a benchmarking mechanism with regard to anti-discrimination policies in the different member states need to be introduced. More specifically, we call for a closer monitoring of gender equality.
- With a view to the possibility of extended immigration and migration streams in Europe, we urge the European Union and member states to develop and guarantee a set of minimum minority rights at the European level.
- We propose a labelling system for enterprises and organisations which are specifically proactive in implementing and promoting measures with regard to equal opportunities and diversity.
- Member states need to make faster progress in closing the gender gap in the labour market and, more specifically, in ensuring equal income opportunities for men and women in a comparable position.
- We call upon the European Commission and member states to harmonise official documents (parking cards, certificates) for disabled people and acknowledge already existing ones.
- Member states, in close cooperation with NGOs, have to support young people with fewer opportunities in defining their needs. Young people with fewer opportunities and more specifically disabled people need to be given more choice and control of services provided for them.
- Member states have to ensure that existing legislation regarding the access of disabled people to public buildings and transport is fully implemented. The Action Plan to be developed has to be discussed with the stakeholders concerned.
- We invite the European Commission and the member states to develop an anonymous CV (CV without name) and to integrate it into Europass.

#### Family

- With a view to the requirements of a modern society and labour market, we call upon member states to recognise diverse family structures and to guarantee equal rights.
- The option for a shared maternity and paternity leave for men and women needs to be given in all member states.
- We recommend to member states to review financial aid on the basis of family income and family size (means testing). Funds need to be more directly allocated towards child benefits.

#### Training and Projects

##### Training

- Civil servants are often not sufficiently aware of the challenges of a diverse society. We invite member states to introduce and reinforce compulsory training measures for civil servants on diversity issues (e.g. police, teachers).

##### Certification and recognition

- Taking into consideration the vulnerable position of young people with fewer opportunities on the labour market, we invite all stakeholders involved to cooperate in promoting Youthpass with priority to employers (e.g. by the use of an information campaign).

##### Project level

- When drawing up policies, programmes or projects, stakeholders (e.g. the European Commission, member states or NGOs) need to insure the appropriate representation of minority target groups at the planning, implementation and evaluation stage.
- All stakeholders involved should more strongly support the promotion and networking of

projects dealing with young people with fewer opportunities (e.g. minorities, ethnic groups) at regional, national and European level, using innovative methods and tools (e.g. "living library").

- The European Commission should take further steps to make the Youth in Action programme more accessible to young people with fewer opportunities. Projects dealing with young people with fewer opportunities should get specific visibility and attention.
- With a view to demographic developments, we invite the Commission and the member states to take measures to reinforce the intergenerational dialogue at all levels.

## **Media**

- Media is a powerful player both in multiplying stereotypes but also in showing the richness of other cultures and people who differ in one way or another from mainstream "clichés". They need to be invited to take their full responsibility in contributing to a common understanding of the value of our differences.
- We call upon member states to encourage innovative ways of promoting diversity issues and challenging stereotypes in media by close interaction with representatives of minority groups. Awards and tax incentives for media promoting diversity issues should be taken into consideration.

## ***Employment and social inclusion***

We call upon member states to put an increased focus on youth unemployment which in the EU on average doubles adult unemployment, which in a number of regions is between 25% and 30% and which in several states is increasing despite all efforts made. Long-term youth unemployment deserves a specific focus in this respect.

Although the basic proposals for employment and social inclusion already exist, the current implementation and carrying out of the policies is unsatisfactory.

- Different actors such as NGOs, public administration (EURES, local and national job agencies), educational institutions and trade unions should empower young people, knowing that there are too many young people facing social exclusion.
- Easily understandable information has to be brought much closer to young people. We call for the establishment of a network of 'mentors' with direct contact to those young people that would promote cooperation of mentors in an effective way. Therefore we need more funding for promoting and advertising of such projects and preparing the people.
- Youth representatives need to be present at the process of evaluation of programmes (such as Youth in Action, Life-Long Learning) organized by formal and social institutions in order to contribute with the special point of view of young people and discussions on future strategies.
- There should be benefits for private companies that employ citizens with fewer opportunities.
- New EU member states must have the same rights as the other members. We have to avoid the current existence of labour market inhibitions.
- There is a need to support and recognize non-formal education, especially of those who do not have the possibility to gain higher qualifications, and the special skills and knowledge acquired, which can be of use for employers.
- Young people with fewer opportunities should moreover be supported in launching their own enterprises.

## ***Volunteering as a tool for inclusion***

Volunteers are part of a global conscience of a changing society. By putting up projects or

developing existing ones, the volunteers are able to develop their skills and competences, giving them the possibility to get added value to the usual education. Volunteering is a life-long learning opportunity. Generally, volunteering is considered as a contribution to the society and local communities. However, there are some challenges that the volunteers and organisations have to face.

### **Volunteering of young people**

In the recent past, we have experienced a low number of volunteers in certain regions of Europe. The European Commission should put pressure on the member states to ensure funding opportunities for volunteering projects on the regional and local levels. Funding criteria need to be transparent. We recommend that national youth agencies assure volunteers' efficiency also on the regional level.

In the places where no information centres exist, the establishment of new ones should be promoted in order to provide an outreaching network of information on volunteering.

We recommend enhancing the communication between national authorities and youth councils. We want national authorities to consult youth councils regarding the issues of youth policy concerning volunteering. Since these councils represent youth, this would make sure that young people are heard in the political process.

Currently, volunteering in the EU is recognised through EVS. However, we want to see different types of volunteering recognised on the European, national and local level.

### **European Voluntary Service**

The EVS programme has to be accessible to all young people. Therefore the communication, especially to young people with fewer opportunities, must be enhanced by all relevant stakeholders. There is not sufficient information about volunteering opportunities or EVS. We propose increasing the budget to solve this specific issue.

The European Commission has to assure that all partners involved in the EVS programme (such as insurance company, sending and hosting organisation etc.) adhere to high ethical standards and promote the values of volunteering, Youth in Action Programme and the European Union.

The proposed Community Code on Visas should take the needs of civil society into account and promote easier access to visas for young people involved in civil society, especially international volunteers. There is a need for a special volunteering visa that works as residence permit in the hosting country in the EU. There should be common guidelines and the application procedures should be greatly facilitated. This will make volunteering and especially long-term volunteering accessible for more young people.

### **Volunteers' competences helpful in enterprises, careers**

Volunteering is a form of non-formal education. Through volunteering, young people can develop themselves and find out about their skills and competencies. It is recommended that these are recognized by all the stakeholders.

It is necessary to conduct a research to identify the existing young volunteers. The research has to focus on the socially excluded youngsters and to show the link between volunteering and entrepreneurial "added value". The outcomes of this research must be made accessible to all stakeholders (NGOs, employers, governments etc).

Youth organizations have to be empowered on all levels of action. Young people involved in projects must be prepared for different challenges. Therefore it is necessary to provide access to proper training, youth information centres and professional assistance for projects.

Reliable partners providing financial resources for projects of young volunteers have to be guaranteed. Sustainable funding methods for volunteering projects, such as EVS follow-up funding, should be available for all volunteers in order to develop and to put into practice the skills and competences obtained through volunteering.

The exchange of good-practice projects should be reinforced through issuing materials providing information. This can inspire young people to set up new projects.

## ***Between commitment and job – recognition: the missing link***

We acknowledge all that has been stated in the final documents of the past events which took place within the frame of the structured dialogue on non-formal education. However we realise we need to move beyond statements and focus on doing our best to define steps that can be implemented.

Education needs to be seen in the context of lifelong and life-wide learning, where formal and non-formal setting are taken as complementary. In order to achieve that, both need to be outcome oriented.

We strongly recommend that the major stakeholders (NGOs, labour market and employers, academic bodies, social partners, higher authorities and decision makers) recognise the learning outcomes of non-formal education.

Therefore we demand from the European Commission to

- monitor and report on developments at the national level regarding the recognition of non-formal education;
- include a separate section on non-formal education in the EUROPASS;
- continue the development of YOUTHPASS for all the activities/actions in the frame of the Youth in Action programme;
- allocate more resources for qualitative research on the learning outcomes of non-formal education to identify its impact, especially in regards to the Key Competences and qualitative indicators;
- together with member states, create more space for dialogue and consultation with youth NGOs regarding the recognition of non-formal education on both European and national level;
- give greater importance to self-assessment as a crucial step in the process of recognition of non-formal education, by making much more use of the “Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers”;
- take initiative to ensure the cross-sectoral cooperation on recognition of non-formal education, that will include all the relevant stakeholders, especially academic bodies and labour market;
- collaborate with media to ensure promotion of non-formal education outcomes;
- call for member states to develop in dialogue with youth NGOs national qualitative tools for recognition of youth work;
- disseminate best practices of youth activities and encourage their multiplication, beyond youth events, to show the impact of non-formal education to stakeholders;
- urge member states to create space for involvement in non-formal education activities within the formal curricular;
- promote non-formal education methods to academic staff;
- urge the stakeholders in formal education to outline the steps in the process of transforming formal education from input based to outcome oriented, as aimed by Bologna process.

## ***Photo, music and video***

[will be made available on the youthweek.eu website]

## ***Rapporteurs***

### **The future of Europe – an inclusive Europe**

Kay Sören Lieker  
Zuzana Svetlosakova

### **Active citizenship for a more cohesive society**

Anna Katharina Gabriel  
Marc Ludwig

### **Intercultural dialogue and diversity – Europe, that's all of us**

Vaida Cesnuleviciute  
Mourad Mahidi

### **Equal opportunities and anti-discrimination – count me in**

Pavels Gumennikovs

### **Employment and social inclusion – doing it our way**

Ondrej Pavlik

### **Volunteering as a tool for inclusion – back on board through volunteering?**

Pedro Henrique Aparício  
Marta Sykorova

### **Between commitment and job – recognition: the missing link**

Anna von Krshiwoblozki  
Audrey Agius  
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### **General Rapporteur**

Tim Schrock