



EUROPEAN YOUTH WEEK

“Youth Takes the Floor”

Report and Proposals from the Conference taking place in Brussels

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RAPPORTEURS

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Introduction

The slogan of the “Youth Takes the Floor” event invited young people to voice their concerns on the future of the European Union and the policies of the Union which directly affect their lives. The participants worked throughout the event in three thematic groups focusing on different aspects of youth and Europe.

The first Working Group dealt with the participation of young people in society; their contributions to society and different forms of engagement; the meaning of active citizenship for young people, including European citizenship; and what makes young people participate in Europe.

The second Working Group focused on the themes of the European Youth Pact – employment and social inclusion; education, training and mobility; and balancing work and family life. Participants made recommendations for maximising the potential that these themes offer for improving the life situation of young people, especially since the Pact places young people at the centre of the EU's priorities for the next five years. The group also discussed how to involve young people and youth organisations and contributed to the discussions on bringing the EU institutions closer to young people, and to the proposals for improving the structured dialogue around the themes of the Pact.

The third Working Group provided space for young people to voice their expectations and concerns relating to the future of the European Union and make suggestions as to how the Union should develop, what its priorities should be and how Europe should get closer to its young citizens.

This report is fruit from those 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 is comprised of general conclusions and proposals from the conference, based on the Working Group debates, and the different discussions that took place throughout the conference, and also includes the reports of the three Working Groups.

The European Youth Week - “Youth Takes the Floor” 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 for three days in the heart of EU institutions and to “take the floor”. The participants worked hard to discuss their concerns and to develop proposals for addressing them - now it's time for decision makers to listen and to take action.

YOUTH TOOK THE FLOOR - AND THEN...

Conclusions of the European Youth Week 2006 - Youth Takes the Floor Conference

More participation - no policy about us, without us

Young people expect more participation and more influence in the matters concerning their lives – on all levels of decision making. Besides opportunities for participation, there is need for more information on how to get active and to make a difference in society.

- The existing commitments of the Commission and the Member States within the framework of EU Youth Policy cooperation have to be followed up and implemented. These include the Common Objectives on Participation, Information, Voluntary Activities and Better Understanding and Knowledge of Young People, as well as the European Youth Pact.
- Youth organisations should be further supported and empowered to continue their efforts to reach out and provide participation opportunities and information on how to get engaged in society to as many young people as possible; regardless of their background
- Development and implementation of youth policy should be done in genuine partnership with youth organisations and public administration. This is not only a prerequisite for good policy but also for young people's ownership of the policies affecting their lives. *No policy about us, without us!*

Young people - living their European project

Young people have not given up or deserted the European project. Young people are living *their* European project every day, through their international contacts, through their associative life, through their shared concerns about the future. This commitment is not, however, fully recognised by the institutions and wider society.

- The concerns of young people have to be taken into account when developing the policies and actions of the EU.
- Young people are against building a "fortress Europe". When young people think of Europe, they think of the wider Europe. All too often young Europeans have to suffer because of the colour of their passport; fighting obstacles to mobility has to be a priority of the EU. Young people want also to see the EU taking action to contribute to the problems of a globalised world. Europe has to increase humanitarian aid with respect to the 0,7% commitment made in the UN MDGs. Furthermore, the EU needs to promote fair trade and trade justice.
- The role of young people and their civil society engagement should be recognised by the institutions, and future EU policy and actions should be developed in partnership between institutions and civil society.
- There is a commitment from the side of young people to the future of the European project. Therefore young people should be an integral part of the Plan D process. The role of young people and youth organisations should also be recognised in the development of the White Paper on Communication.
- Youth participation within the Plan D should be promoted by the establishment of Young European Teams and through organising a European Youth Summit within and as an integral part of "Europe Day" on 9 May; during the political activities organised in the framework of the Plan D.

European Youth Pact – it's a time to make it matter!

Young people are committed to the European Youth Pact, however, now it is time for the EU institutions and the Member States to realise the Youth Pact fully and live up to their commitments.

- The Lisbon Goals cannot be achieved without true partnership between decision makers, traditional social partners and youth organisations. The National Reform Programmes as well as other measures to reach the Lisbon Goals should be developed in partnership with youth organisations
- Different European tools and programmes should be opened up to be used in the implementation of the European Youth Pact. Priority areas of the Youth Pact should be priorities e.g. the European Social Fund and the Structural Funds. The European Commission should engage with youth organisations to increase the use of these tools to combat youth unemployment, social exclusion etc.
- A system of “*Youth Pact Impacters*” should be created for each Member State. This national “*Impacter*”, coming from the National Youth Council, should work together with Mr./Ms. Lisbon to follow up and monitor the impact of the implementation of the Youth Pact in each country.
- Creation of an “EU Charter for basic standards for internships” — A charter should be adopted at the EU level, stating the minimum standards for internships, to prevent misuse of interns.

The way forward - a structured dialogue between decision makers and young people

There is a strong need for development of a methodology for structured dialogue between young people and decision makers — on all levels of decision making, including the European level and the European institutions.

- An annual space for structured dialogue between young people and different EU institutions - including the European Commission (with its different working fields), the European Parliament and the Council - should be created
- Participation is not only a cornerstone of active citizenship but also key to ensuring that EU policy meets the needs of young citizens. European initiatives such as the Lisbon strategy or the Constitutional Treaty cannot succeed without the participation of, and ownership by, young people.

Youth has taken the floor. Participants in the conference reaffirmed their support for the European project and their willingness to work for a better future for all young people in Europe and indeed, in the wider world. It is time for institutions and decision makers to hear our voice and work with us. The commitments have been made — now it is time to make them matter.

REPORTS OF THE WORKING GROUPS OF THE CONFENCE

Report of the Working Group on Active Citizenship

1. *Why do young people get involved in civic activity and which forms of engagement do they choose? What motivates young people to engage to Europe?*

Getting involved in civic activities can give a young person different personal and social benefits: they can experience a feeling of importance; creates relationships and connections; as well as enjoy the possibility to participate in a decision-making process. Fields of engagement vary from volunteer activism in youth associations to cultural events - art, music and drama - and participation in different programmes initiated by public authorities such as the EU YOUTH or Erasmus programmes.

Regarding the different factors that motivate young people to engage in Europe, the Group cited several well known considerations, such as: mobility; information; recognition; experience; and economic benefits; as well as some more specific factors such as a strong conviction that they can make a change; idols; security and support from other EU Member States; and a feeling that they are integrated and included.

The group stressed the empowering influence of the media, that makes all of these motivations more acceptable to young people. The group was convinced that the possibility to participate in activities and programmes does increase motivation, and as a result of this, society benefits from its active members. On the other hand, since a lack of motivation is often connected to society's attitude in this area, we then ask how society could better recognise the benefits that are behind active citizenship?

Following discussion on different forms of engagement, the group was concerned about how the European Union could also better take into account other forms of participation by young people that do not fall under the EU YOUTH programme, as proposed by the European Commission through the 'Youthpass' initiative. The group concluded that while the 'Youthpass' alone would not be an adequate means to address the issue, it would have to be *developed in an open and non-bureaucratic manner that would take into account all forms of youth engagement, and be promoted actively to employers and in the formal education system* - as it could, for example, be used as a merit in a job application or when applying for further education.

2. *What is the role of youth organisations?*

In general, youth organisations have a function as a bridge between (young) citizens and the government. With respect to young people and participation, youth organisations play a significant role in engaging young people and giving them space for involvement - an opportunity to raise their voice and make it be heard - by recognising their needs and through making their role in society visible. The group stressed that the knowledge, experiences and opinions of young people are extremely important for the future of European politics - through youth organisations, young people are represented and empowered so they become active as citizens.

Youth organizations are the most important channels to involve and engage young people in order to facilitate their participation and become active citizens. It was concluded that that criteria for democratic youth representation would be: independence; membership-based, democratic structures; youth-leadership; transparency; and accuracy. Youth organisations and youth councils in particular carry out fulfil this criteria and carry out this role towards decision-makers. The Working Group emphasised that it is crucial that they are recognised by the authorities as equal partners in the development of policies that affect young people; and that committing to youth policy and thereby increasing active citizenship requires the allocation of the necessary financial resources to support the sustainable functioning of youth organisations.

3. How do participation, information and active citizenship link up in the views of young people?

As the group dealt with examples from our own experience, it was concluded that there are different structures to provide information in our countries. We have one crucial problem in common: the dialogue between politics and youth is difficult and often impossible. The problem lies in the insufficient structure and the bad image of politics. Important information does not reach the people because it is either inaccessible or inappropriate.

To bring the information to the people it is important to include young people in political processes, initially at the local level. They have to feel concerned; otherwise there won't be any motivation to participate. When the awareness of responsibility is given, people are willing to participate. But their participation can only occur, when there is a good structure and a good communication, e.g. between institutions and young people. Finally, to make their voluntary input long lasting, and to achieve sustainability, young people need some encouragement and acknowledgement, especially from wider society.

Referring to some examples, the group concluded that that the three topics are interdependent, one is based on the other as follows:

1. information

3. active citizenship 2. participation

4. What tools can be used for the better implementation of the 'European Youth Policy'?

The group considered that the priority in the implementation of the European youth policy framework should be in a.) the participation and representation of young people in the political decision-making process at local, national and European levels; and b.) in the quality improvement and strengthening of Youth NGOs.

Legislative initiatives

The next step in favour of political participation should be legislation that provides a national basis for the participation of young people in decision making processes and bodies. This legislation should include the right of direct speech and the right to make proposals. Forms of participation should be created, and existing ones developed, to enable more active participation at the governmental level. A positive example on the creation of youth parliaments was mentioned.

Roundtable discussions at the local level

The beginning of the process of political youth involvement should be as simple as possible. Roundtables are suitable for this, as young people can gather with the intention to talk about topics, whatever they may be (skate halls, environment etc.). This idea should be promoted amongst social workers, local and national youth departments and authorities, and carried out in cooperation with local youth organisations.

Hearings and Consultations

Hearings from youth organisations, youth parliaments and other relevant actors should be conducted whenever the government decides to impose regulations on the youth field. In order to ensure that the hearings and consultations are conducted in an efficient manner, a strict set of rules has to be set up in order to ensure that the voice of the majority of young people is being transmitted to decision makers.

Lowering the voting age at the European level

To give young people a strong political voice, and to make politicians aware of the needs and the opinions of young people, the voting age has to be *lowered* for both local and European elections, in order that young people have better representation at the European level. A specific age was not agreed within the Group.

NGO development

This tool requires the setting up of organisational development schemes for NGOs, in order to improve their effectiveness in implementing the youth policy

Lobbying skills

NGOs should be aware that lobbying politicians could have a significant impact on financing or supporting a project, so it is necessary that these organisations develop suitable skills in order to get recognised at the political level. The manner in which they can advertise their project to politicians could make the difference between failure and success.

Database

This database should include successful projects that have been implemented by NGOs and that have had a significant impact on their community, in order that other NGOs learn from their experience and best practice and can themselves carry out successful projects.

5. What can motivate young people to engage themselves for Europe?

Image: exciting. Message: simple. Action: easy.

The group was convinced that much of the information produced by the EU institutions for young people is not exciting or accessible. The EU has a lot to offer, but there is not enough emphasis put on communicating this to young people. Europe-wide marketing campaigns are often 'cheesy' and have no relevance to young people at a local level.

To solve the communication problems, *youth organisations should be better involved in designing and implementing different European initiatives*, such as the 'Youth in Action' programme; consultations; website; and events. *The marketing of European Union issues and opportunities should be devolved to a more local level. NGOs and young people should be encouraged and have access to more resources to raise awareness at a local level.* Through devolving the marketing, by developing and further empowering youth organisations and youth councils on different levels to do more outreach work, it would also be possible to ensure that excluded young people learn about these opportunities.

It was noted in the Group that there are still not enough projects undertaken by excluded groups. The extra funding available for working with excluded young people in the YOUTH programme - such as money for advance project visits and mentors - was applauded, but the group was worried that while direct costs are covered, the extra time and administrative costs of organising such a project with excluded young people are not recompensed. *Providing additional administrative funding for these projects would solve this.*

The group was concerned by the fact that young people are stigmatised. Many young people, especially excluded young people, are stigmatised by the media and in their society. Young people need support in positively promoting their initiatives. *Young people taking part in different activities should have toolkits which enable them to promote the activities they have undertaken to their communities and to the media.*

The fact that many young people from across Europe are unable and therefore demotivated to participate in different European activities, such as YOUTH programme projects, due to visa problems, was also highlighted in the discussion. The Working Group stressed that *young people taking part in youth work activities should have special dispensation in applying for Visas at the national level. The EU institutions should promote this initiative through its dialogue with Member States.*

Many young people don't understand the relevance of Europe to their lives. Young people would be more motivated to get involved if they were better educated. This could take place through citizenship classes at school. *European institutions should encourage Member States to add the topic of 'Global and EU Citizenship' on*

to their National Curriculum, as already committed in the Common Objectives and successfully practised in some countries such as the UK.

As a general rule, it was concluded that *less bureaucracy in documentation and more involvement of young people in the design and implementation European policies and programmes will boost the motivation for youth to engage for Europe.*

Recommendations on Active Citizenship

I Towards the European Union (Commission, Parliament, Council)

- Create an annual space for a structured dialogue that is priority -focused and action-oriented
- Establish greater coordination between the European Commission and other institutions to realise the cross-sectoral nature of Youth Policy
- Increase the funding for youth organisations to support their efforts in enhancing young peoples' participation
- Invest in the development of a European civil society for young people, through securing stable financial support for NGOs.
- Continue the efforts in the development of the European legal basis for associations.
- Organise possible new sessions of the European Youth Week in close partnership with youth organisations

II Towards Member States

- Create a space for structured dialogue between youth organisations and decision-makers on the policies that affect young people at all levels (local, regional, national)
- Empower young people to become active citizens through support for specific education programmes in schools; as well as for programmes developed by youth organisations on education for participation (*full and effective implementation of action lines agreed in the Common Objectives on participation*)
- Develop the legal basis for the recognition of volunteering, youth work and youth policies in general
- Provide the financial means in order to implement youth policies, as this is an essential element to promote active citizenship
- Develop the monitoring of the implementation of the Youth policy through the engagement of all actors concerned
- Develop information campaigns through the engagement of young people to promote active citizenship

REPORTS OF THE WORKING GROUPS OF THE CONFERENCE

Working Group on the European Youth Pact

Bringing the Youth Pact to the local level

The Working Group identified the need to bring the discussion on the implementation of the European Youth Pact down to the local level, where young people are: to high schools, universities, youth centres and different social events. High Schools could organise European education and consultation sessions, through lessons and seminars focused on Youth policies. Universities could organise workshops and info campaigns on Youth Policies, with the help of Youth Organisations. The Group considered it important that there would be enough local information centers for youth, focusing on youth policies and opportunities. Social arenas, including pubs, bars, discos and sport centres should also be used as spaces to allow young people to debate the issues of the Youth Pact.

All these activities could be organised and implemented by a "European Facilitator" (also a team of) that is responsible for coordinating and promoting events and collecting information. These Facilitators could be selected, for instance, from the EVS program; from volunteer projects; but also from smaller projects financed by local entities. It should not be, however, an expensive program for the EU.

These activities should be supported by collecting as accurate statistical data as possible on youth conditions in different European regions, which could then be used at higher level consultations to evaluate the degree of the realisation of the Youth Pact.

Making the Youth Pact work on the National level

The Working Group discussed ways to enhance the impact of the Youth Pact within Member States. It was agreed that the success and impact of the Youth Pact is dependent on the opportunities young people have to participate in shaping its implementation. Under the OMC, civil society has to be consulted at the national level by the Member States. At the moment this is not functioning well. The Group identified challenges and solutions on how to make the Pact have a real impact on the national level.

1) Empowering youth organisations to play an active role in Youth Pact consultations

In order to have a viable participation, the national governments need partners from civil society that provide as broad a representation as possible of young people. Sometimes umbrella organisations like Youth Councils face capacity problems when consulting their partners about the Youth Pact.; this can hinder them in efficiently influencing the process *vis-a-vis* national governments.

Umbrella organisations that are consulted by national governments should have the opportunity to ask for financial and political support from the Commission and Member States in order to present a report that represents the opinions of civil society.

The Group concluded that the keyword is empowerment. The Commission and the Member States should empower youth organisations, and Youth Councils in particular, as umbrella organisations representing youth interests towards their governments. Without empowerment the Youth Pact, and the Open Method of Coordination are ineffective methods of governance.

2.) Youth Pact Congresses

In order to have strong consultation partners, Youth Organisations should be given the chance to organise Youth Pact Congresses in each and every Member State. These Congresses on the Youth Pact should include student associations, youth organisations, youth arms of trade unions and other NGOs, as well as civil servants from ministries responsible for the Youth Pact.

3.) *Active Citizenships in Schools*

There is one place where all youth (organised and non-organised) can be found; this is in schools. Secondary education should have subjects teaching active citizenship. The curriculums of these subjects should be designed by national governments together with Youth Organisations, NGOs and Volunteer agencies. These subjects would result in more active citizenship as well as combine formal and non-formal learning. Until these subjects are realised, consultations on the Youth Pact should also be brought under the attention of schools and universities.

However this leaves the early school leavers out of the Youth Pact. In order not to push the early school leavers even further to the outskirts of the participation circle we must also reach them. This can be done in two ways. The first is by new technologies such as the internet. Participation should be promoted through internet communities and e.g. *MSN Messenger*. To ensure that the information gap does not affect the promotion of participation traditional methods should also be used. These include appealing for promotional activities at Youth and sport centers. In short, to reach non-organised youth, we should go to where they are, and not expect them to come to us.

Following up the priorities of the Youth Pact on European level

REGULAR MEETINGS ON SPECIFIC TOPICS (from the youth pact)

<u>Actors:</u>	European Youth Forum <ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Youth Councils• International Youth Organisations Members of the EU Parliament and Commission (specialised on the specific topics) Representatives of Member States' Governments
<u>Method:</u>	Debate/ Consultation/Cooperation (not questions and answers)
<u>Two concepts:</u>	The pyramid concept (consultation from the local to the national to the European level) The two ways transmission in the pyramid system: <u>consultation</u> from local to the national, to the European level and <u>information</u> from the European to the national, to the local level

Tackling Unemployment and Social Inclusion of Young People

Young people are particularly affected by unemployment, but youth organisations are not included in a structured dialogue with the stakeholders of this area.

- A social dialogue on the Youth Pact should include the participation of youth organisations. Structured dialogue between youth organisations, social partners, and national government.
- Frequent consultation between Ministries of Social Affairs or other Ministries and Youth Organisations concerned with the Youth Pact.
- The outcomes of the consultations should be presented to the Mr. / Ms Lisbon of the respective countries.
- When the Youth Council or any National Body trusted with monitoring the Youth Pact organises a Conference on the Youth Pact, a civil servant from the Ministry should be present to participate in the dialogue with civil society.
- Use the same measures for young people that are used for general employment policies such as promotion of entrepreneurship to create jobs or creating tax incentives to support youth employment.
- Promote the social economy through the reduction in numbers of early school leavers, and promote employment schemes for young workers.
- A Charter should be adopted on the EU level, stating the minimal standards for internships to prevent misuse of the intern. This Charter should be developed by social partners, youth organisations and student associations.
- Universities should engage in partnerships with local authorities to support businesses run by young people.
- Apart from national and regional authorities, local authorities should consult Youth Organisations when developing employment schemes at their respective levels.

Education and Mobility of Young People

This Group discussed existing good practice and how to improve integration and the complementarity of formal and non formal education.

Inspired by the Irish experience of a “transitional year” in school, and bearing in mind the foreseen “Erasmus like” mobility project for under-18 students (the long term student mobility initiative within the Comenius programme), and being aware of the limits on EU competencies on formal education, the Group considered that it should be possible for European Institutions to promote the adoption of a similar system in other Member States.

The transitional year should be a voluntary choice for students, to interrupt their normal school career in order to experience a period of greater involvement in civic life and engage in active citizenship with the direct and strong involvement of youth organisations and other social stakeholders. The initiative should be realised in coordination and cooperation with the school system.

The Group also described ways of cooperation in the “normal” school framework that had already proved to be positive practices in different realities. All four were based on the very strong involvement of youth organisations, the main differences being on the methodology chosen to promote and develop non formal education and its recognition:

- a system to link and match suitable local projects and students through the action of volunteers in schools and by connecting schools and the local community to a larger extent;
- a set of activities to be realised by local Youth Organisations for and with students (such as workshops, concerts. etc.)
- a mix of alternative teaching and learning methodologies such as multi-multi relationships and cooperative learning;
- adequate information campaigns on non-formal education, locally managed by Youth Organisations, and to be held in schools

REPORTS OF THE WORKING GROUPS OF THE CONFERENCE

Working Group on the Future of Europe

The Group focused on the obstacles that are hindering the progress and development of young people in Europe, and also determined some priorities which young people find important. The Group focused on the direction that Europe should take within the near future and similarly, the methods and tools in place which will aid the development of the future European Union.

What Europe for tomorrow? - Priorities for young people

It was concluded that ***fighting unemployment*** was one of the most crucial issues for young people at the moment. The group expressed their deep concern at the high rate of youth unemployment (17% of young people unemployed according to OECD statistics for 2004) - and should young people find jobs, they are all too often of a temporary and insecure nature.

Young people face difficulties in finding decent jobs because of over-qualification and under qualification. One of the hindrances to employment expressed by the group was inexperience of young people as they enter the job market. Employers expect prospective employees to have work experience as a prerequisite for hiring them, which is obviously discriminatory to young people. Part of a solution to this would be to further the recognition and promotion of non-formal education and youth volunteering.

The group also emphasised that ***promoting mobility*** should be a priority for the EU. The Group voiced their strong support for education and mobility programmes, as well as welcoming the Junior-Erasmus initiative -

opening student exchange programmes to secondary school students (*proposed initiative for long-term secondary-school student mobility within the Comenius programme*).

The Group was, however, deeply concerned by the fact that all too often visa policies prevent the international activities of young Europeans. Young people want to travel, study and work freely without having to suffer because of the colour of their passport. It was pointed out that the EU has to look beyond its borders and to **prevent the building of a "fortress Europe"**. Removing artificial and opaque visa obstacles has to be a priority for the EU. It was agreed that Europe needs to increase humanitarian aid with respect to the 0.7% commitment made in the UN Millennium Development Goals. To address the problems of the globalised world, the EU also needs to promote fair trade and trade justice.

Young people and the debate on the future of Europe

The group debated the reasons for the failure of the Constitutional Treaty in some Member States. As one of the consequences of the failure, the Group considered whether the European Union needs to adopt a strategy based on a more direct idea of democracy, discussing the participation of young people in the democratic system. There were critical voices highlighting youth apathy around Europe, while other members of the Group argued that young people were still in fact interested in politics around Europe but it was more a question of how "politics" was being defined. The Group agreed on the idea of "politics" as an essential part of involvement in society, but which was not merely limited to the constricted and conventional idea of party politics, and which should be expanded to involve all aspects of community and civic involvement.

The Group also focused on the crucial issue of debate within the European Union - debate at all levels and in many fora, which would allow the young citizens of Europe to truly express their views on issues relevant to them. The Group noted that there should be a space for young citizens to discuss and define European values for them; values which constitute the core nature of the European identity.

The Group further highlighted the importance of dialogue within Europe and therefore supported the Commission's initiative regarding the 3 *Ds*: *dialogue, democracy and debate*. It was, however, pointed out that youth should be an integral part of the Plan D process. The group also discussed how the Commission could continue to promote dialogue with European citizens, especially amongst young people, and pointed out that the role of young people and their organisations should be recognised in the development of the White Paper on Communication.

Subsequently, the Group called **for co-operation with governments**, so as to truly introduce debate on a regional and national level, while emphasising a **bottom-up method of action**, whereby ideas are generated at the grassroots level. The Group proposed the exportation of ideas and initiatives such as European Youth Week to a national level, which should be aided by support from the Commission to provide young people with the possibility to participate in the debate on the future of Europe. To enhance the participation of young people in the Plan D process, the Group called for **the creation of Young European Teams** - teams of young volunteers, recruited by National Youth Councils, that would organise discussions on the future of Europe in schools, youth centres and different social settings, in close cooperation with EU institutions and the European Youth Forum.