

# EU-Youth Conference of the Polish Presidency

05-07.09.2011 in Warsaw, Poland

## Joint Recommendations

The EU-Youth Conference is an element of the structured dialogue process that was established by the Council of the European Union in the *Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)*. The structured dialogue is an instrument to ensure that the opinion of young people is taken into account in the formation of youth policies in the EU.

For the duration of the 18 month Team Presidency (1 July 2011 – 31 December 2012), the Team Presidency of Poland, Denmark and Cyprus in cooperation with the European Commission and the European Youth Forum made a common decision to implement the structured dialogue on the theme of *youth participation in democratic life in Europe* with a chosen specific focus area for each of the three presidencies: the second 18 month cycle of structured dialogue with young people.

The first phase of the consultations came to an end with the EU-Youth Conference in Warsaw, where youth delegates and Directors General of the EU Member States jointly defined the following recommendations for the mobility of and cooperation between young people from the EU and EU neighboring countries with a focus on Eastern Europe and Caucasus, based on the results of national consultations.

## **Workshop 1: MOTIVATION: from interest in international youth cooperation beyond the EU – to action!**

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### **Background discussion** (written by facilitators)

Motivation and interest are starting points for every activity and action. Peer education; the exchange of experiences and opinions; national campaigns and support provided by the EU and national Governments to youth NGOs and young people themselves, are the kinds of factors and activities which may help to increase the interest and motivation of young people in youth participation and the promotion of youth participation and mobility, including the Eastern dimension of these aspects.

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### *Long-term goals*

- To increase the number and quality of funded projects for international youth cooperation, made available to as many young people as possible.
- To provide harmonized procedures, rights and obligations within youth programmes for young people and youth NGOs in the EU and Eastern European and Caucasus countries.
- To provide easier and more accessible application procedures for all young people and youth organisations in Europe (EU, Eastern European and Caucasus countries, other neighboring countries etc.).

### *Best practices*

- Peer story telling (via national media campaigns, face to face meetings, etc.) as the best way for young people to motivate each other in order to eliminate stereotypes, share information and positive experiences, and to create networks.
- Cultural events are very important as they promote and generate high interest among young people about other countries, cultures and cooperation.
- It is important that governmental institutions financially support NGOs with the purpose of promoting peer education. This would deepen parents and young people's trust in youth cooperation providing motivation for participation.

### *Recommendations*

- The European Commission and Eastern European and Caucasus countries should work together to set up National Agencies in the Eastern European and Caucasus countries with the purpose of motivating young people and Non-Governmental Youth Organisations to take part in the Youth in Action Programme.
- In order to encourage international youth cooperation, the EU should improve and formalise the recognition of the Youthpass, non-formal education and youth work under one system and expand it to all EU neighbouring countries.
- Youth NGOs should be offered more peer education opportunities, in formal and non-formal settings, supported by public administration at all levels (local, regional, national, European).

## Workshop 2 – RECOGNITION: valuing international cooperation

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### Background discussion (written by facilitators)

The workshop dealt with the recognition of international youth cooperation between the EU and neighboring countries. Currently there is little formal, political and social recognition of the value that international youth cooperation provides (such as personal and professional development, the strengthening of civil society, increasing young people's interest in the EU etc.). Moreover, there is lack of recognition for the organisations and other actors engaging in cooperation with EU neighboring countries.

Considering recognition as a means of empowering young people, we tried to identify the key stakeholders of the process and suggest concrete actions and mechanisms that could improve the current situation. The discussion focused on three levels of recognition: recognition at the political (governmental) level, recognition at a societal level (NGOs, communities) and recognition for individuals.

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### *Long-term goals*

- To increase awareness of the added value of international youth cooperation and youth mobility and their impact on society.
- For NGOs to continue advocating to the main stakeholders of the public and private sector to recognise the added value of international youth cooperation activities.

### *Best practices*

- Tools for personal reflection and self-assessment, such as European Portfolio for Youth Workers and Youth Leaders, Youthpass, Europass, Volunteers Passport are currently used and facilitated properly.
- Cross-sectoral cooperation on an equal footing, i.e. co-management of the youth sector in the Council of Europe.

### *Recommendations*

- NGOs should be pro-active in developing consolidated international programmes and tools at all levels, with a focus on EU- Eastern European and Caucasus countries cooperation.
- Cross-sectoral cooperation between youth NGOs and decision makers should be strengthened in order to achieve better understanding of the benefits of international youth cooperation (following the example of the Co-management of the youth sector in cooperation in the Council of Europe).
- Former participants, NGOs, National Agencies of the Youth in Action Programme, and national and international authorities should regularly present and promote the results of international youth cooperation to society via different channels (peer, social media, publications, presentations etc.).
- Young people should have the right to obtain proof/evidence of their participation in national and international projects from the relevant organizers on request.
- Concrete research programmes should be set up to evaluate the impact of international youth cooperation and mobility at all levels.

## Workshop 3 – INFORMATION: access to information – key to a successful start of cooperation?

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### Background discussion (written by facilitators)

Despite the many websites and information centres that exist, getting proper access to information on cooperation opportunities and the different ways to find partners from non-EU countries remains a challenge for a number of reasons: from translation costs to lack of basic, youth and user-friendly information on EU neighbouring countries and the relevant opportunities for cooperation with them. Another aspect of access to information is making real-life acquaintances and contacts and having meaningful and attractive opportunities to do so.

There is a need to consolidate relevant information, if possible in one place, providing young people and youth organisations with useful and updated contacts: with information on how to navigate the often complicated application procedures for projects and funding; providing a platform for young people for communication with their peers in EU neighbouring countries; and showcasing successful projects. National reports provided a number of recommendations from young people as to how information could be made more youth-friendly and accessible.

The group felt that formal education systems and youth policy actors/non-formal education providers often don't cooperate enough in this area.

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### *Long-term goals*

- Structured, up-to-date and accessible information (cultural, social, political, environmental and on mobility and cooperation opportunities) about Eastern European and Caucasus countries and the EU Member States should be available.
- Formal and non-formal education providers should utilise each other's potential for promoting youth mobility and youth cooperation.
- Existing information resources and structures (e.g. ERYICA, European Youth Portal, Eurodesk, SALTO, Eastern European and Caucasus countries, National Agencies) should be further utilised, developed and promoted.
- Information should be available on the internet and through offline dissemination channels.

### *Best Practices and efficient mechanisms*

- SALTO EECA resource centre as a contacts database, network of multipliers and support structure for the implementation of the Youth in Action Programme; and National Agencies as promoters and information providers.
- European Youth Portal.
- ERYICA – European Youth Information and Counselling Agency.

### *Recommendations*

- Youth organisations and information structures should be connected to EU information networks (e.g. Eurodesk, SALTO etc.) to benefit from their experience, know-how, tools and methods.
- At European level, improve cross-sectoral cooperation between youth and formal education sectors in all fields, focusing on EU and Eastern European and Caucasus cooperation in the youth field.
- All relevant national stakeholders should encourage and support local and regional actors such as municipalities, schools, universities, NGOs and companies in order to build-up networks of multiple communication channels and to develop space for exchanging information, knowledge and experience.
- The existing European Youth Portal should be more accessible to all young people in Europe, neighbouring countries and Eastern Europe and Caucasus, and be developed in order to share, discuss and have up to date information to create and build a relationship between them. On national level, it should be ensured that the information provided by the European Youth Portal should be made understandable to all relevant stakeholders.
- Use social networking tools to build positive interactive relationships between stakeholders and promote opportunities for cooperation and mobility.

### **Workshop 4 – COMPLICATIONS: barriers and obstacles in youth cooperation between the EU and EU neighbouring countries**

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#### **Background discussion** (written by facilitators)

Youth mobility faces several barriers at private, local, national, regional and international levels. Particularly visa barriers, barriers regarding personal finances and language barriers all prevent young people in Europe, especially in Eastern European and Caucasus countries from participating fully.

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#### *Long-term goals*

- To increase mobility, exchange and cooperation between the EU and Eastern European and Caucasus countries.
- To increase mobility opportunities for young people from the EU and Eastern European and Caucasus countries according to their financial means and individual needs.
- To improve communication through increased proficiency in the languages of EU and Eastern European and Caucasus countries.

#### *Best Practices and efficient mechanisms*

- The visa liberation process in South-East Europe countries.
- Cooperation with a low-cost airline in Italy, offering 5000 flights for 5 Euro for youth exchanges to and from Italy.

- The use of social media for the teaching of foreign languages included in formal education.

### *Recommendations*

- Provide an online application system for Schengen visas.
- Within the Schengen visa categories, which offer visas free of charge, add categories for youth work and volunteering allowing youth workers and young volunteers to take part in youth activities.
- Encourage public-private sector partnership for international youth cooperation in order to help cover material, travel, administrative, communication costs etc.
- Create a solidarity fund within EU funding programmes designated to facilitate the participation of young people with fewer opportunities for international youth cooperation with a specific focus on the Eastern European and Caucasus region.
- Future funding programmes should provide financing for teacher training, including language skills, use of modern technologies and methods, provided through, for example, exchanges.
- Future funding programmes should provide financing for young people to go to Eastern European and Caucasus countries in order to learn and teach the languages of the EU and Eastern European and Caucasus countries.

## **Workshop 5 – SUPPORT TOOLS: programmes and grant schemes to support mobility and participation**

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### **Background discussion** (written by facilitators)

The allocation of additional funds to ensure more opportunities for international youth cooperation with EU neighbouring countries and the search for alternative and innovative ways to support this kind of cooperation were both strongly expressed factors in national consultations. Additionally, simplifying some of the procedures in programmes and grant schemes available could increase the participation of young people from EU neighbouring countries by offering them more accessible mobility opportunities. The key points discussed during this workshop were mechanisms such as funding opportunities, procedures, partner finding and the accessibility of programmes and grant schemes for international youth cooperation with partners from EU neighbouring countries.

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### *Long-term goals*

- A stronger political focus on youth priorities.
- The capacity-building of youth and youth organisations at all levels.
- The participation of young people in the selection procedures for all areas of funding.

### *Best Practices and efficient mechanisms*

- Long-term international projects at national and local level the results of which are disseminated by the participating organisations.

- Young people and youth-lead organisations are involved in designing and awarding project funding and support.
- Long-term, sustainable support, which does not focus on one-off events, but on multiplying processes, recognising that established youth organisations are best placed as multipliers.

### *Recommendations*

- Strengthen sustainable networks which provide quality information on partnership co-operation such as SALTO & Eurodesk & youth organization networks.
- Establish long-term sustainable financial and technical support for youth organisations and youth councils to further improve their capacity-building (e.g. governments can provide trained personnel who are able to help youth organisations and youth councils with guidance on project implementation). The European Commission could provide grants linked to priorities defined by youth organisations and youth councils.
- Increase the flexibility of support mechanism eligibility criteria (Youth in Action), in areas such as project duration, number of participants, etc. in order to better meet the needs of young people and/or project applicants.
- Increase funding for tools and programmes, especially Youth in Action, to support mobility for all young people, not only in the European Union but also in European Union neighbouring countries.
- Maintain, strengthen and expand an independent youth programme, such as Youth in Action, focusing on individual and group mobility, capacity building, structural support and decision making processes. The programme should reach all young people, including those with fewer opportunities and youth led/youth work organisations.

## **Workshop 6 – INCREASING COMPETENCIES: skills, values and intercultural dialogue**

Intercultural learning has been identified as a core element of international cooperation. Mobility is no longer only about sightseeing or trying out the local cuisine. It can also open horizons on a much deeper intercultural level, as a means of developing intercultural dialogue, eliminating stereotypes and prejudice, as an important aspect of personal development and a must for building lasting links and friendships. Although its not possible to measure intercultural awareness, it brings an added value to any international youth project and requires the development of interpersonal skills and competencies.

### *Long-term goals*

- To increase intercultural competencies for a tolerant and inclusive Europe.
- To increase competencies for a stronger civil society and for the active participation of young people in Europe.



- Generate civic competencies gained and developed through participation in youth organisations, where individuals have the possibility of participating in international exchanges.

### *Best practices*

- All European campaigns combating prejudice, stereotypes and racism such as “All different, all equal”.
- Institutions such as universities supporting International Youth Non-Governmental Organisations (active in universities) which increase young peoples’ competencies and skills.
- Training provided to civil servants in order to increase cultural competence and assist the social inclusion of all young people.
- Exchange of expertise and best practice between National Youth Councils in order to improve youth policy in their countries and in so doing, the well-being of young people in Europe.

### *Recommendations*

- Strengthening young civil society in Europe requires a diversity of youth organisations. Those organisations must be entitled to freedom of existence and access to state, regional and international funding in order to function in a sustainable and independent way.
- Every European country must have representative, youth-led, independent and democratic National Youth Council composed of youth organisations in order to develop the competencies of youth organisations and increase their outreach to society.
- Intercultural learning should be prioritised in EU policies and programmes, as competencies such as knowledge of different countries, open-mindedness, tolerance, the ability to communicate with people from other backgrounds and the motivation to act are crucial to fighting prejudices and stereotypes while allowing collaboration within and between countries in the EU and beyond.
- Member States should invest in intercultural education at all educational levels, both within formal and non-formal education.
- Non-Governmental Organisations should promote volunteering as a tool for gaining competences for greater youth participation in civil society at all levels.
- Exchange programs for young people need a serious overhaul. Promotion of exchange programmes should focus on young people in transition from education to employment.
- Long-term administrative grants for European organisations which work with organisations from Eastern European and Caucasus countries. Within the EU, long-term administrative grants for organisations, which work with socially disadvantaged, excluded groups, such as immigrants, Roma and other national minorities.



## Workshop 7 – PARTICIPATION: youth participation in democratic life in Europe

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### Background discussion (written by facilitators)

The majority of young people consulted in the 27 EU countries see the impact of international youth cooperation on youth participation. This is evident at both individual, social and political level, directly and indirectly, and on both sides of the EU's borders. Experience and non-formal learning processes strengthen motivation and therefore empower young people: enhancing decision-making and leadership skills, as well as increasing the awareness of democratic processes and their importance among young people. As a consequence, the active role of individuals in society is strengthened. The exchange of knowledge, best practices and practical personal experiences are the best means for contributing to openness and intercultural learning processes. Cooperation with Eastern European and Caucasus countries may also support their democratic transformation, helping to build personal and economic ties between them and EU countries. There may also be direct or indirect impact on the labour market in terms of fostering the skills and competences of individuals. Youth mobility is therefore an important means of generating and supporting youth participation for a number of diverse reasons.

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### Long-term goals

- Work towards at least doubling the number of participants in cooperation projects on non-formal education and volunteering between young people from the EU and the neighbouring countries by 2020.
- To foster sustainable civil society in the EU and Eastern European and Caucasus Countries.
- To foster European identity by raising awareness of common European values.

### Best practices

- Youth exchanges, as opportunities for personal development and intercultural learning, enable young people in Europe to grow, learn and work together towards active participation.
- National Youth Councils working to improve international youth cooperation by creating opportunities, and providing information about funding, while facilitating relationships in order that local communities can create exchanges, meetings and networking opportunities etc. which result in an increase in the participation of young people in Europe.
- Erasmus serves as a learning tool via interaction at individual and community level: as a space for gaining experiences, skills, independence, knowledge about other academic systems, values and practices, all of which are important elements of participation in democratic life.

### Recommendations

- There should be a program funded by the EU allowing Eastern European and Caucasus youth organisations to cooperate sustainably and in varying ways with EU youth organisations.

- In its foreign policy, the EU should strongly defend the independence of civil society and youth organisations.
- The European Commission and the EU Member States should foster the use of virtual mobility tools (i.e. e-twinning mechanisms) as a means of increasing international youth cooperation. National Agencies should provide information and guidance to local organisations for engaging in efficient virtual exchanges.
- The European Commission, in partnership with EU Member States, International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations, National Youth Councils, representatives of civil society, Council of Europe member states and structures, and other existing European networks, should raise awareness of common European values through expanding the Structured Dialogue to specific target groups, such as non-EU members, non-organized youth and youth with fewer opportunities.