



European Youth Forum  
Contribution to the European Convention

Bringing Europe closer to its young citizens

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*The Union needs to become more democratic, more transparent and more efficient. It also has to resolve three basic challenges: how to bring citizens, and primarily the young, closer to the European design and the European institutions, how to organise politics and the European political area in an enlarged Union and how to develop the Union into a stabilising factor and a model in the new, multipolar world.*

*From the "Laeken Declaration on the Future of the European Union"*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Declaration of Laeken has defined the mandate of the European Convention which will consider the key questions for the European Union's future development and try to identify possible responses. The Convention will be an important step in the history of the European Union. The European Youth Forum welcomes the fact that the issues at stake are addressed in this form as it will allow for a public debate on questions that concern all citizens in Europe. The Convention has set up a Civil Society Forum and youth organisations have declared their commitment to making a contribution to the work of the Convention.

The Laeken Declaration pointed out that one of the key challenges of the Union – and therefore for the Convention – will be to find ways of making sure that young people do not feel alienated from the European project, that they are motivated to participate in the construction of Europe and that it actually becomes possible for them to participate. We call upon the Convention and all involved in EU affairs to take this question seriously: how to bring Europe closer to its young citizens and how to bring young people closer to the European Union, to its objectives and institutions. With this resolution the Youth Forum would like to contribute to the discussion on this question and hopes to stimulate further discussion - and hopefully action - by the Convention, the EU institutions and among young people.

## **TACKLING THE CONCERNS OF YOUNG PEOPLE – WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

It is clear that acceptance of and identification with the European Union depends to a considerable extent on whether young people feel that the Union tackles issues that concern them - and how it tackles them. The Union needs to reinforce and make its role more visible for policies related, for example, to youth unemployment, or the sustainable use of natural and economic resources, more equitable economic relations with developing countries and political responses to globalisation. The European Convention will not deal with all of these issues to the same extent but they are at least partly related to the attribution of competencies between the EU and the Member States. The Youth Forum invites all its members to engage in these discussions and to facilitate the involvement of young people, be it by making contributions to the Convention or be it in the Fora that have been established on national level.

Issues that concern young people more than other sections of society should be tackled by a cross-sectoral youth policy. The Youth Forum has developed numerous recommendations during the consultation process on the Commission's White Paper on youth,<sup>1</sup> which it would like to see taken into account also in this context.<sup>2</sup> The European Union should assure that policies for young people are developed in all Member States and that these policies draw on the examples and experiences that exist in other Member States. Where necessary, the policies should be developed with

more coherency across the Member States. This pertains particularly to aspects touching on transnational youth work. Here there is a clear need to strengthen the EU's competency in terms of policy co-ordination. Along with globalisation and increasing mobility of the work force, education is an issue that requires European answers, as has been recognised by the European Council.<sup>3</sup> At the same time the Bologna process<sup>4</sup> has taken on a dynamic outside of the EU framework. This is worrying, because democratic control is very limited in such an intergovernmental process. This has been especially vivid in the exclusion of student organisations from active consultation in the process until recently. The Convention should therefore consider carefully if and how to integrate this process into the EU framework.

Young people want to participate in making the decisions that concern them and the more responsibility they are given, the more they are ready to participate and will eventually identify to a greater extent with the decisions and the institutions. This is particularly pertinent to EU actions specifically aimed at young people such as the mobility programmes. If the Union wants to become more democratic and closer to its young citizens it should measure itself against models of good practice that exist in terms of co-management of youth related programmes in Member States and other international organisations such as the Council of Europe.<sup>5</sup> Legal obstacles to such co-management practice within the EU should be removed. It is important for the EU to recognise that participation is more than consultation on pre-defined questions. As the Laeken Declaration makes clear, the Convention needs to establish a broad dialogue with young people and with youth organisations, to ensure public support for its work and the greater involvement of the citizens in shaping the future European Union. The planned Youth Convention can only be one of the many forums where young people can make their contribution, and should be part of a much broader and more inclusive process to allow young people's voices to be heard. The European Youth Forum encourages all of its members to involve themselves in an open and continuous debate on the future of Europe, and in the framework of the dialogue with Civil Society.

- **The basic treaty of the EU which the Convention will draft should include a revised article concerning youth and education policy (replacing Art. 149 EC Treaty). The EU should be given a clear complementary competency in this area.<sup>6</sup>**

The objective of EU youth policy should be: to strengthen European co-operation and co-ordination in trans-national youth work; to strengthen fundamental, social, economic, cultural, civil, and political rights of young people; to improve coherency in the further development of national youth policies; to develop minimum standards; to enhance the mobility of young people; to enhance equal participation of young women; to allow for greater participation of young people in the EU and to ensure that young people's

needs are taken into account to a greater extent in other policy areas. It should also allow for an effective system of youth-proofing to be established in other EU policies, meaning that the impact of EU policies on young people and future generations is assessed systematically.

The integration of the Bologna process and other intergovernmental processes into the framework of the European Union would develop both political and democratic accountability and control. This would not negate the need for consultations with relevant expert youth organisations, which should be part of the framework.

- **Common Procedures for elections at all levels should define the voting age and the right to stand for elections at 16. The right to vote on all levels should also be given to non-EU nationals who have been resident in a Member State for a period equivalent to the one laid down for EU-nationals in the detailed arrangements referred to in Article 19 EC-Treaty.**
- **Parties should actively promote young candidates for seats in the European Parliament election.**

## **A EUROPE OF ENCOUNTERS, OPEN TO THE WORLD**

The Youth Forum is convinced that young people will identify more strongly with the project of making Europe grow together when they feel that this Europe has something to offer for them and when the integration process is not only economical but one that brings together the people that live in Europe.

In its "Resolution on Mobility of Young People in Europe" the Youth Forum stated: "Living in another country for some time, intercultural exchanges and training put young people in a position where they can reflect on their cultural background and come to a proper appreciation of the diversity of Europe. They can learn to co-operate with people of different cultural backgrounds, which is a skill already highly valued by employers and which will most probably become more important in the future. (...) The benefit of such an experience is not exclusive to the individuals involved in the exchanges. Through their interaction, they promote intercultural learning, both in the hosting community and in the one of origin (...) Mobility is a right enshrined in the treaty (Article 18 TEC). The Community and the Member States have to take the appropriate measures to safeguard that all citizens have adequate resources and support in order to allow for equal opportunities in making use of this right. Currently this right remains theory for most young people."<sup>7</sup>

More than a decade ago the European Parliament set the objective to make it possible that "at least 10% of young people and students in Europe" can take part in mobility programmes for young people<sup>8</sup>. This objective is still far from being reached, mainly

due to a lack of resources. Despite some improvement, the opportunities for young people to take part in mobility schemes are still too limited and the recognition of mobility is insufficient. Although the European Parliament has made considerable efforts in the past, the current decision-making procedures do not seem to allow that this issue is prioritised also in financial terms.

It is also important to note that there is evidence that exchanges – of groups of Europeans from different countries - with third countries contribute substantially to developing a European identity and that therefore third country exchanges should be further promoted.

Furthermore, we recall that the Laeken Declaration poses questions regarding Europe's role in the world, suggesting that Europe has a *“leading role to play in a new world order, (...) Europe as the continent of humane values (...) of liberty, solidarity and above all diversity, meaning respect for others' languages, cultures and traditions. (...) Now that the Cold War is over and we are living in a globalised, yet also highly fragmented world, Europe needs to shoulder its responsibilities in the governance of globalisation. The role it has to play is that of a power resolutely doing battle against all violence, all terror and all fanaticism, but which also does not turn a blind eye to the world's heartrending injustices. In short, a power wanting to change the course of world affairs in such a way as to benefit not just the rich countries but also the poorest. A power seeking to set globalisation within a moral framework, in other words to anchor it in solidarity and sustainable development.”*

We believe that Europe can only play this role if it is open to the rest of the World and particularly its neighbouring regions. Therefore the Union must encourage exchanges of young people in Europe – who do not want a “Fortress Europe” – and young people of other world regions. It is therefore crucial that obstacles to such encounters, be it in forms of youth exchanges or voluntary service or academic exchanges, are abolished in all countries of Europe.

- **The EU should ensure that all young people have the means and the opportunity to spend a period of 3 months or more in another country if they wish so. The resources available for the support of young people's mobility need to be tripled over the next years (public-private partnerships should be set up to achieve this objective).**
- **In order to extend the opportunity of longer-term mobility to a greater number of young people including those who do not take up university studies, the EU should also launch initiatives encouraging and supporting the mobility of second level students as well as those undertaking further and higher education and training.**
- **European countries should abolish visa and facilitate the procedures of obtaining the residence cards and similar documents for young people**

regardless of their origin. The origin of a young person should not be a selective mechanism and mobility must not be taxed in any way.

- The European Union should revise the budgets available for the Socrates, Leonardo and Youth programmes prior to enlargement becoming effective.
- The European Parliament needs to be given the full “power of the purse”, i.e. the elected representatives of the people should be fully responsible for the entire EU Budget.<sup>9</sup>

## A EUROPE IN ASSOCIATION WITH ITS CITIZENS

The reform of the EU to cope with enlargement and to make it more democratic and efficient is an important endeavour. In this the EU needs to recognise that the institutions cannot overcome the problem of scepticism towards the EU, its objectives and its current institutional setting unilaterally. Reconnecting with the citizens requires engaging with citizens where they are. Voluntary associations of citizens are an important element of democracy and the European heritage.

The European Union should more fully recognise the potential that exists in the non-governmental sector and that building a European Civil Society is more difficult - but even more important - than forging a Common Market. Building a European Civil Society requires a vision and a lasting commitment from the institutions, at least as much as creating the Economic and Monetary Union. This vision and this commitment is not always visible nor always pursued with the same consistency even though the Commission has recognised the role that non-governmental organisations play in “giving voice to the concerns of citizens.”<sup>10</sup> For example, while politically the role of European NGOs in democratic governance is recognised their financial support is questioned.<sup>11</sup> And while the European Company statute has been finally adopted, the creation of a European Association<sup>12</sup> statute has been shelved, contradicting all talk of a *Citizens Europe*. Furthermore, there is also worrying tendency to reduce the role of civil society organisations to functional operators of public policy rather than recognising their contribution to democracy and active citizenship.<sup>13</sup>

- The European Convention should include in its draft of the EU’s future fundamental treaty an article that recognises and promotes the freedom of association in an affirmative manner and acknowledges the role of civic organisations in the construction of a more democratic and participatory European Union.
- The Convention should include the Charter of Fundamental Rights as an integral part of its proposed draft treaty.

- **The Council should quickly adopt the statute of the European Association. European Parliament should encourage the Council to speed up the process and not to delay it any further.**

A European Association statute would facilitate the work of international NGOs which now, despite their international membership and their transnational activities, are subject to national laws on NGOs, which differ from country to country.

- **The EU should recognise the specific nature of International Youth NGOs and their vital contribution to connecting young people with the EU, to reaching marginalised and excluded young people and in providing intercultural experiences for young people all over Europe. International Youth Organisations are a vital part of European Civil Society.**
- **The participation of Civil Society and the European Parliament in the Open Method of Co-ordination<sup>14</sup> should be more clearly defined. Provisions shall be made requiring that the European Parliament and representative NGOs are consulted at all relevant stages in the cycle of the Open Method of Co-ordination.**

## **CITIZEN-FRIENDLY INSTITUTIONS AND INFORMATION**

It is widely acknowledged in the Member States that the European Union is often perceived to be removed from the realities and concerns of its citizens. Its institutions and decision making is seen as complex and incomprehensible. Also often politicians on the national level find it easy to blame "Brussels" for decisions that have been taken jointly. The EU has developed a number of measures to make its working more transparent and accountable. More remains to be done. Access to documents is still difficult even for the initiated and even if available most of them are hard to understand for the common citizen and even more so for young people. This contributes to the perception that Europe is run by an elitist circle using a code that prevents citizens from questioning and understanding the decisions taken on their behalf. The ongoing reform of the European Commission is a positive step and efforts should be reinforced to make the European public service more open and friendly to the citizens that it serves. The composition of the staff of the institutions should, more than it is today, be a reflection of the different social realities and experiences that exist in Europe in the different policy areas on which the Union acts.

- **The decision-making procedures of the EU must be clarified and made more transparent and less complex so that every citizen understands them.**
- **The Council should act only as a legislative body, acting as a second chamber together with the European Parliament and all its deliberations should take**

place in public. Documents of the Council must be accessible to citizens well in advance of the actual decision on them, and at all stages of the decision-making process. Furthermore citizens have a right to know what position their governments' representatives take in the Council, at all working levels.

- All institutions – in particular the Council, the Commission and the Parliament – should provide citizens-friendly information on the major decisions and discussions such as Council meetings, Commission communications, EP reports.
- Youth NGOs should be recognised as important partners in producing and disseminating information about the European Union to young people, in particular in the candidate countries.

Young people have a right to be informed in a timely manner about the decisions by which they are effected in a way that is clear and transparent and avoids unnecessary jargon. The more seriously the Union takes young people the more trust it will earn.

- European countries should include the history and functioning of international institutions acting at European and global level (EU, Council of Europe, UN) in the school curricula.
- The recruitment procedures of the EU institutions should be reformed in order to open up the European public service to a greater variety of professional and social backgrounds, including people with valuable 'grassroots' experience in specific policy areas.

- 1 COM (2001) 681
- 2 The Youth Forum has adopted four positions on the White Paper and its follow-up: "Initial contribution of the European Youth Forum to the European Commission's White Paper: Youth Policy" (Assembly 0558-2k-Final); "Strategy and Key Objectives for a Youth Policy in the European Union" (White Paper 0042-01); "European Youth Forum response to the European Commission's White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth" (White Paper 011-02); "European Youth Forum Position Paper on 'Council Resolution on Strategies and Guidelines for Future Co-operation in Youth-related issues" (Bureau 0280-02). All documents are available at [http://www.youthforum.org/our\\_work/white\\_paper/wp.html](http://www.youthforum.org/our_work/white_paper/wp.html)
- 3 As part of the Lisbon strategy the Barcelona European Council endorsed a detailed work programme for a political co-operation on the Future Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe, based on a Joint report by the Education Council and the Commission. The report aims to "provide a comprehensive response to the challenges of the knowledge society, globalisation and the enlargement of the EU". (Council Document 6365/02, of 20 February 2002
- 4 The Bologna Declaration of June 1999 on the creation of a European Higher Education Area is a pledge taken by 29 European countries to reform the structures of their own higher education system in such a way that overall convergence emerges from the process at the European level. For more information (background, documents, follow-up) cf. [www.esib.org/prague/index.htm](http://www.esib.org/prague/index.htm).
- 5 In the youth field, the Council of Europe's decision-making structures include representatives of both youth organisations and governments, who work together to define the institution's policies and programmes, which are then submitted to the Committee of Ministers for adoption. The principle of co-management is defined in the Committee of Ministers' declaration of 12 January 1971 (CM/Del/Concl 571) 196 XXII) and 'Reform of the Council of Europe Youth Sector' of November 1998 CM(98)195.
- 6 The EP's Lamssoure report (PE 304.276) on the division of powers between the European Union and the Member States distinguishes: exclusive powers (of the EU), shared powers, "supplementary powers" ("Compétences complémentaires" in the French original which we have chosen to translate with "complementary competency" above) and political powers (as opposed to legal or law-making powers) and exclusive powers of the Member States. The "compétences complémentaires" are defined as those areas where "action by the Union may only complement that of the Member States, which retain the power to enact ordinary law (...) the scope of Community action would have to be specified (...)". It is important to note that the current EC Treaty article 149, relating to education and youth, merely gives the Union the power to "encourage the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors".
- 7 European Youth Forum Resolution on Mobility of Young People in Europe, adopted by the General Assembly Brussels (Belgium), 19-21 October 2000, Assembly 0745-2k final
- 8 European Parliament Resolution on Community policies and their impact on youth, OJ C 183/469, 15.7.1991; cf. also EP report A3-0142/91 (L. Vecchi)
- 9 The European Parliament has currently the last word only over little more than half of the EU budget, the so-called non-obligatory expenses, while the Council has the last say on the so-called obligatory spending (namely the expenditure for the Common Agricultural Policy accounting for more than 45% of the expenditure).
- 10 European Governance – A White Paper, COM (2001) 428 final, OJ C 287, 12.10.2001
- 11 The proposal for the new Financial Regulation of the Commission foresees that operating grants are reduced gradually. (COM 2001 – 691final 2, Art. 112. 2). Cf. also the Youth Forum position on Future of European Union Funding for Youth NGOs, COMEM 0200-02
- 12 A proposal for a Statute of a European Association was adopted by the Commission already in 1992 (OJ C 99, 21.4.1992), following the proposal on the statute of a European Company in 1991. While an agreement was finally reached on the European Company in 2000, the project of the European

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Association has been delayed until an agreement is reached on European Co-operative Statute [cf. <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/entrepreneurship/coop/statutes/statutes.htm>]

- 13 cf. European Youth Forum Resolution on the European Commission's White Paper on European Governance & the Future of Europe, adopted at the Council of Members, Athens (Greece), 15-17 November 2001, COMEM 0729-01e fin
- 14 The Open Method of Co-ordination, which has been used in key policy fields such as Economic and Employment policy, was formalised as a method for co-ordinating policies at the European level by the Heads of State and Government at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000. The Lisbon conclusions (paragraph 37) both defined the method and its use to promote the strategic goals of the European Union. Cf. also the Youth Forum response to the White Paper on youth (White Paper 011-02), page 4.