



European Youth Forum

Future of the Youth Sector
of the Council of Europe

Position Paper

Adopted by the Council of Members
Athens, Greece, 15-17 November 2001

1. Constructing the Council of Europe for our future challenges

A value-based concept of Europe

The concept of Europe embodied by the Council of Europe is a key issue for young people as they feel it can go beyond the traditional territorial (geo-political) definition. Young people emphasise the importance of the Council of Europe in promoting a concept of Europe based on values that are widely shared amongst young people such as democracy, peace, social justice and human rights. The ways that "European Identity" as well as "European Citizenship" are conceptualised are therefore very important to young people.

Building a new democratic culture

At the dawn of the twenty-first century young people feel that there is a need to build a new democratic culture which responds to a widespread disillusionment with the representativity and responsiveness of the political process and the new challenges posed by globalisations and new forms of communication. Although recognising the virtues of representative democracy, young people often feel that current democratic structures and processes have severe shortcomings.

A pan-European platform for dialogue

While the European Union continues to expand its membership, the Council of Europe remains a unique space for dialogue and co-operation on an equal footing amongst all the countries in Europe. It is also a privileged space to experiment and initiate intergovernmental co-operation and agreements in a relatively flexible framework. This is particularly valuable in the field of youth policy and the Council of Europe should reinforce the pan-European dimension of the youth activities in its programmes.

Promoting Youth Policy

The youth sector of Council of Europe plays an important role in promoting a proactive youth policy in Europe (National Youth Policy Reviews, national youth policy indicators, promoting national action plans on youth policy, especially in South East Europe)

The European Youth Forum envisages that the Council of Europe should be given the opportunity and the resources to play an even larger role in promoting youth policy development than is the case today. As the only pan-European inter-governmental organisation, the Council of Europe has the potential and the expertise to develop a

European standard of youth policy and to encourage increased co-operation between government bodies responsible for youth policy issues through the CDEJ. Moreover, considering that our model of youth policy is based on transversality, youth has to be integrated in all the areas of action of the Council of Europe.

An alternative arena for peace building in Europe

In Europe we have witnessed the emergence of a large number of regional and micro-conflicts, often caused by socio-economic, ethnic, cultural or religious tensions in the last few years, which we are still facing. Everyday security is also regularly endangered by violent outbursts that are outside of the control of the State. One way of helping to prevent such conflicts is by promoting access to quality education with an emphasis on the dimensions of intercultural learning, human rights, skills in conflict management or even the tools to facilitate "reconciliation" processes between the various parties in the conflict areas. This is exactly the type of work which is promoted by the Council of Europe and supported through its core training programme. It has a long tradition of working with civil society organisations and this represents a unique space to develop the alternative approach to peace building in Europe.

2. Political Priorities of the Youth Sector

The youth organisations wish to direct the activities of the Youth Sector toward less theoretic reflections and towards more practical actions.

Keeping in mind that the youth should be integrated in every area of the Council of Europe's action the European Youth Forum believes that the priorities for the Youth Sector in the 2003-2005 period should be:

- **Peace: Prevention of Conflicts and Violence**
- **Active Citizenship: Developing the Dialogue between the Government and Civil Society**
- **Respect and Intercultural understanding**

With the establishment of *Integrated Projects on Making Democratic Elections Work* and *Responses to Violence in Everyday Life in a Democratic Society* opportunity could be taken to develop initiatives in the youth sector related to these priorities. The Youth Sector should develop activities that bring visibility not just to themselves but to the Council of Europe as a whole and therefore highlight the contribution the Youth Sector can make to the core principles of the Council of Europe. Although the establishment of priorities has been welcomed there is still a lack of a longer term perspective resulting in long-term plans for the youth sector. We would advocate regular monitoring and evaluation of the actions carried out within the priorities and long term planning being based on this outcomes and identified future needs.

Peace: Prevention of Conflicts and Violence

Prevention of conflict and violence cannot be ensured only by international treaties and military deterrents. To reinforce peace in Europe, intercultural learning, human rights education and dialogue education are essential elements of prevention of conflicts and violence and strengthening peace in Europe. It is crucial to establish a better recognition of the merits of non-formal education in those areas.

The European Youth Forum recognises that the Council of Europe, as the only pan-European organisation and as playing an active role in the youth field, can play a unique role in bringing together young people in conflict regions and promote mutual understanding and respect.

The Council of Europe should support actions by youth organisations in favour of peaceful developments in areas of social, ethnic and political instability. The approach of pilot projects in the conflict regions, like the Caucasus and South East Europe should be maintained.

The Youth Sector of Council of Europe has, with limited resources, made an important contribution in bringing together young people from different ethnic backgrounds and from different countries in South East Europe, through training courses and workshops and support to youth NGO projects from the European Youth Foundation. The Assistance Programme (formerly ADACS) has been very important in this respect. This effort must be continued.

One of the priorities of the Council of Europe youth sector should therefore be to promote mutual respect and understanding among young people in conflict regions. This should be done by further developing the Assistance Programme and the Training Programme of the Council of Europe youth sector as well as through the Partnership Programme on European Youth Training with the European Commission, so that they adapt to the needs of young people in conflict regions. An understanding of the comprehensive nature of regional conflicts in Europe, and that stability can only be achieved by wide cross-national regional co-operation must also be the basis on which the European Youth Foundation establishes its grant-giving criteria.

A co-ordinated European approach between youth organisations, non-governmental organisations as well as European and international institutions is necessary for the development of youth work in conflict regions. Youth organisations have the potential to play a vital role in a process of reconciliation, peace building and cross-national co-operation among young people in war-torn societies in South Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Young people and youth organisations from all countries in conflict regions must have opportunities to contribute to the development of national youth policy and to support development of youth associative life.

Active Citizenship: Developing the Dialogue between the Government and Civil Society

The increase of the distance between the decision making centres and the recipients, and inability to respond to challenges (e.g. unemployment) put under question the legitimacy of democratic institutions. The stability of democratic institutions depends upon the trust of the people. The development and promotion of clearer reference criteria should constitute a dynamic element of improvement of youth policy on local, national and European level.

Any policy or programme aimed at young people must be characterised by the fundamental principle of youth participation. The involvement of young people must start as early as the planning phase, moving on to the decision-making process and finally ending in the implementation and evaluation of results as an essential guarantee of success for any youth policy or programme at local, national or European level. The participation of young people creates policies which truly reflect the needs and aspirations of young people.

The reinforcement of civil society should include the promotion of voluntary involvement, the output of youth organisations, the support of non-organised young people. Specific recognition and supports should be attached to the role that national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations play in providing a safeguard for democracy, solidarity and human rights through their complex networks and democratic decision-making procedures. The youth sector of the Council of Europe has been a strong evidence of the advantages and the positiveness of the unique decision-making and co-management of the governments and the non-governmental youth organisations. This example of good practice should continue to be strengthened and advocated not only on European but also on national, regional and local level. Participation of young people contributes to a youth policy based on real needs and aspirations of youth and not coming from top to bottom.

Respect and intercultural understanding

The campaign "All different, all equal" showed the potential, strength and reach of the Youth Sector. Beyond the respect for differences, the Youth Sector should today support a quest for a better integration of differences in order to reinforce the unity and diversity of Europe.

Inclusion of youth in European society depends on a better recognition and promotion of the cultural forms for youth expression in all their diversity. Intercultural learning is equally a fundamental issue for reinforcing links amongst young people. This is a crucial element especially for a better integration of all citizens in Europe. Europe has always been a continent where many cultures, religions and languages have co-existed. It is this diversity that has contributed to making Europe a continent with a rich diversity of multicultural societies.

Recent developments have highlighted that fostering understanding and respect for different cultures is not something that has become superfluous overtime, but that it needs to be constantly renewed and discussed. We are facing a decade where “clashes of cultures” – across borders and within states – appear to be more likely than they were in the late twentieth century. Intercultural Learning promotes peace-building and conflict prevention.

On a more pragmatic level, intercultural skills become ever more important for young people facing globalising economies and multicultural societies. If Europe as a whole is actually to become an area with citizens capable of actively facing the challenges of drastic economic and societal change, the capacity to interact and co-operate with people from different cultures must be at the centre of concern in European policies. The Council of Europe youth sector should set an example because it has a great potential in this regard.

Tools to achieve these priorities

Non-formal education

Thorough consideration is needed in the coming years as to how recognition can best be achieved practically without overly formalising non-formal education. Recent discussions suggest that certification is not desirable in all cases and that a flexible approach is needed. The Council of Europe should support undertakings that contribute to such flexible ways of recognising non-formal education. Self-appraisals and APEL¹ schemes (learning outcomes), in addition to a better recognition of youth NGOs as providers of non-formal education can be considered as the way forward.

The European Youth Forum makes a huge investment in the development of the covenant and its programme elements. The conclusions of the Curriculum development group regarding certification and quality assessment should be given top priorities.

Human Rights Education

The European Youth Forum welcomed the launch and the development of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme of the Council of Europe. Creating a space where young people and youth organisations can share ideas and experiences on Human Rights Education means acknowledging the fundamental role they can play in the creation of a Europe of rights and democracy.

Education for Human Rights values has to be seen as the tool to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to participate in the strengthening of a concept of

¹ Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning.

Europe as a place where very diverse people contribute to the development of a democratic society.

In the light of recent increases in cases of discrimination and racist acts in Europe, education for Human Rights values has to be seen as a priority in the fight against these phenomena both in the formal and the non-formal education sectors.

At a time when the three years Human Rights Education Youth Programme comes to an end, the Council of Europe Youth Sector should renew its commitment and contribution of the development of a real democratic Europe. Discrimination can only disappear by changing the attitudes of people and by identifying the right mechanisms to combat discrimination.

The European Youth Forum is committed to the work for equality and human rights focusing on human rights in all its aspects, gender equality, respect, the fight against racism and discrimination, defence of the rights of young people from minority background.

The Council of Europe Youth Sector should renew its commitment to the Human Rights Education Youth Programme as a part of the Respect and Co-Existence priority for the next years showing, once again, its interest in creating a space for all young people as protagonists in the construction of a democratic Europe where human rights can be considered as genuinely universal.