



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

INTRODUCTION

The European Youth Forum appreciates the invitation to react on the proposals described in the White Paper on European Governance¹ (letter by Commission President Romano Prodi of July 25 2001, addressed inter alia to the Youth Forum).

This resolution, adopted by the European Youth Forum at its Council of Members in Athens (15-17th November 2001), is our contribution to the discussion on the White Paper. The Youth Forum wishes to specifically react on the sections of the White Paper which pertain to the role of civil society in European governance, and to the relations between the European Commission and the civil society organisations on European level.

NEW GOVERNANCE FOR A MORE PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE

The European Youth Forum

- Considers that the White Paper on European Governance is an important and positive contribution to the process of reforming the European Union in order to bring it closer to its citizens, to make it more efficient and participatory and to prepare it for new challenges.
- Believes that the emphasis that the European Commission puts on co-operation with civil society can stimulate more participatory forms of governance and the further development of civil society on the national levels as well, both in the Member States and in the candidate countries.
- Welcomes the intention to further develop the co-operation between the Commission and European NGOs in areas where a good consultation practice exists already, and considers that this is applicable to the youth sector. The Commission should therefore move to an even more participatory model in the field of youth, including co-management of activities and programmes or even partial delegation of implementation to non-governmental youth NGOs (as it is the case in some Member States), based on partnership and shared responsibility, thus contributing to a further development of a European civil society and the empowerment of young people.

¹ COM (2001) 428 final (Official Journal C 287, 12.10.2001)

A PLURAL AND AUTONOMOUS EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY

The European Youth Forum

- Wishes to stress that the value of non-governmental organisations – on local, regional, national and European level – lies inter alia in the fact that they are a direct expression of active citizenship. NGOs should not simply be seen as a tool for public policy, nor primarily as a provider of services or expertise but as an essential element of democracy. Room must therefore be given to a broad and open consultation of all sorts of non-governmental organisations. A too narrow and too sectoral approach to consultations must be avoided, since it would implicitly reduce the role of civic associations to those of expert advisers.
- Believes that both the autonomy and the plurality of associations within the Third Sector are paramount for its value to society as a whole. Public policy should therefore not strive to limit the plurality and autonomy of NGOs but consider it as one of the great assets of European societies and therefore actively foster it. Although the European Youth Forum can be considered as one of the most representative and most encompassing platforms on European level, we cannot support any attempt of public institutions to “rationalise” the number of civil society platforms, or to have public institutions regulate on who should represent a specific section of the citizenry.
- Fully recognises and supports – in general and for ourselves – the notion that NGOs are to be judged on their internal democracy and transparency, their respect for democracy and the rule of law, and that – especially if they are supported by public funds – they are accountable for a lawful, sensible, economical and effective use of funds.
- Believes that it is important that the criteria for allocating EU grants do not endanger the plural and autonomous character of European civil society.

FULLY REALIZING THE AMBITIONS OF THE WHITE PAPER

The European Youth Forum

- Underlines that it will be important that the European Commission coherently applies the principles promoted in the White Paper, and that these principles fully need to be reflected in all policy fields. Budgetary policy and financial regulations need to follow these principles in the years to come. The importance given to European level civil society implies that the support to NGOs will have to be reinforced, as expectations of the EU institutions towards these NGOs are increasing.
- Emphasises that policy initiatives need to be made public in an easily understandable way for increasing transparency. The role of NGOs as facilitators

of the information flow should be encouraged. Furthermore all stages of policy formulation and legislation need to reflect the will to consult with civil society, and access to documents by citizens and their organisations must not be restricted at any stage. Civil society platforms must be provided the opportunity to consult their proper membership on responses to policy initiatives of the EU, in order to enhance both representativity and internal democracy of the platforms.

- Calls on the EU institutions and the national authorities to involve youth organisations in consultations on EU policies on all levels. The competent national authorities and the European Economic Social Committee (ESC) itself should encourage and facilitate an adequate representation of young people and their organisations within Group III of the ESC, building on the positive recent practice, i.e. by appointing members put forward by national youth councils. The EU presidencies shall permanently involve youth NGOs through the participation of the National Youth Council in the Presidency work.
- Welcomes the proposal to include civil society organisations in the preparation of the Intergovernmental Conference on Institutional reform of the European Union and requests that a “Youth Civil Society Forum” is convened to assure full consultation of the young citizens through their organisations.
- Clearly emphasises that participation of NGOs from applicant countries is essential for the future of the European Union as well as for the civil society in the pre-accession countries. We believe that their early involvement in the debate will raise awareness of challenges to European Governance. The European Youth Forum as a pan-European structure can multiply knowledge and experience and has the capacity to involve youth NGOs from the applicant countries in EU-related discussions and consultations.

The European Youth Forum finally wishes to reiterate its commitment and willingness to further contributing to the discussions on European Governance and the Future of Europe, as well as to developing a European youth policy² and to contributing to all initiatives that aim to enhance youth participation on European level.

² Cf. Strategy and Key Objectives for a Youth Policy in the European Union – Second Contribution of the European Youth Forum to the European Commission’s White Paper on Youth Policy (0042-01final). Adopted by the Council of Members, Brussels 6-7 April 2001