



French Presidency of the Council of the EU - Youth Event *Conclusions of the Working Groups*

In the framework of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, a Youth Event was organised on 5—9 July 2008 in Marseille. This event, organised by the French EU Presidency with the support of the European Commission brought together around 100 participants from EU and EFTA Member States, EU Candidate Countries as well as other countries from South-East Europe and around the Mediterranean.

In five workshops, the youth delegates at the event debated the topic of intercultural dialogue, the theme of the year 2008 in the European Union, in the Euro-Mediterranean context. The topics discussed were the following:

1. Intercultural dialogue in everyday life
2. Youth participation in intercultural dialogue
3. Counselling as part of the process of intercultural dialogue
4. Challenges and opportunities in intercultural dialogue: Mobility in question
5. A practical approach to intercultural dialogue: tools and means of communication

The five workshops, each working on one of the above themes, arrived at the following conclusions:

Workshop 1: Intercultural dialogue in everyday life

Civil society plays an important role in building intercultural dialogue through everyday actions. Intercultural dialogue is interrelated with education, cultural identity, religion, family, friendship, media, legislation, labour, mobility, cultural associations and informal time. Measures should be taken in all these categories, however, we highlight the following proposals:

1. Education

- Work to provide equal opportunities and prospects for education and training in different methods within different institutions for **all** young people. This would be adapted to the standard of individual countries.

2. Labour

- Remove discrimination from the process of job application. Namely, through anonymity and confidentiality (e.g. replacing names with codes in the application process).
- To recognise qualifications (not only academic) throughout the European Union and Mediterranean in order to contribute to the European and the Mediterranean Communities.

3. Legislation

- To facilitate the work of youth NGOs and networks that function in intercultural dialogue by creating rules that would exempt them from taxes, allow them to act with less bureaucracy and/or by creating national youth programmes and policies.

4. Media

- Introduce a system of media related internships in order to give young people from all backgrounds an opportunity to get to know this industry through practical experience—for instance through government subsidies.
- To launch competitions through various types of media. The competitions could take the form of essays or small film productions on cultural topics. For example, the winner would be granted a scholarship. In addition, programmes dealing with the intercultural dimension in daily life should be aired on the national level, ranging from talk shows to game shows and other popular formats.

5. Leisure and free time activities

- Governments should become aware of the importance of non-formal educational organisations in free time activities. Youth centres must be a meeting point for different cultures, generations and social groups, and ultimately become more attractive to these social sectors.

6. Cultural identities

- The integration of cultural identities through intercultural dialogue. Individual cultural identities will not disappear; however, a common cultural identity needs to be developed. In order to create this common cultural identity, good integration policies should be initiated in all EU member states and the Mediterranean and stipulated through the European Union and the region. The integration policies could include e.g. language courses. The implementation should be found on the local level. Lessons in cultural history, not just for our own history, will promote our understanding of other cultures and countries, eliminating racism and the ignorance which feeds fear and discrimination.
- Young people should be aware of other cultural identities. This can be realised through e.g. festivals where education and entertainment are combined, or through national and international youth exchanges between different subcultures. The initiatives should be stimulated by the European and national politicians and should be co-organised by young people, NGOs, and local constituencies.
- Promote 'Freedom of Expression' within all institutions concerning discriminated minorities and religions, e.g. allowing the use of religious symbols.

Workshop 2: Youth participation in intercultural dialogue

Youth participation and volunteering are essential elements in the promotion of intercultural dialogue within and across national and regional borders. Even if many policies recognise this fact, very few have so far been fully implemented or put into practice. We recognise that youth organisations, EU institutions and their national counterparts have a joint responsibility in achieving this. We also want to highlight the need for political action enabling youth organisations to strengthen and support youth participation.

Therefore we make the following recommendations to European bodies and their national representatives:

ACCESSIBILITY:

- Improving the information on youth participation, volunteering and funding

- Easy access to information for young people by involving the media and using modern communication technology as well as traditional ways of providing information
- The promotion and simplification of funding procedures for EU programmes available for youth cooperation
- Ensuring the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, unorganised youth and youth organisations from outside the EU

METHODS:

- In order to reach out to young people in all their diversity and raise their awareness, the use of peer group education, training of teachers and multipliers in society through methods of formal and non-formal education is necessary
- Strengthening the cooperation between educational institutions, NGOs, civil society organisations and representative youth platforms to create a strong dialogue in society and promote active citizenship among young people
- Development of spaces for transregional cooperation, such as preparatory regional events for European Youth Events

POLICIES:

- Youth policies and supporting structures for youth participation must be properly implemented. In order to achieve this aim, we urge the decision makers to build the capacity needed on all levels and reinforce communication channels for exchange of best practices
- Recognise the added value of active citizenship, especially through volunteering in improving young peoples' ability to participate in and foster intercultural dialogue.

Workshop 3: Counselling as part of the process of intercultural dialogue

In a globalised world, we are confronted with situations where intercultural dialogue is required but it is challenged by obstacles. Therefore, counselling in intercultural dialogue is necessary in order to build peace, knowledge and self development, foster tolerance, respect for human rights and equality. Active intercultural dialogue on an equal basis is needed between European member states, and even more between the EU and all its neighbouring countries.

Counselling is manifold and should be adapted to different situations in a cross-sectional approach.

Seeing the need of counselling in a wide variety of fields of intervention and a high diversity of target groups, we ask the member states and the EU to foster a transversal approach and to mainstream intercultural dialogue through counselling in order to achieve social cohesion in our societies.

Recommendations

1. We urge the law-making bodies on both national and EU level to establish an ongoing partnership with youth organisations in the legislative process in all youth-related areas (education, health, housing, sports, unemployment etc), give them the right of oversight during the drafting procedure and take into consideration their proposals and recommendations as part of a co-management approach to youth policies.
2. Taking into account the importance of counselling for achieving a fruitful and effective intercultural dialogue, we ask all actors of the Structured Dialogue to recognise and institutionalise the work of counsellors. European networks of counsellors should be established in order to create basic European standards. Counsellors should be gathered in training pools and provided with all necessary tools and training facilities, especially on intercultural dialogue, to strengthen their position/ role and facilitate their work.

3. Furthermore, all counselling training sessions or diplomas within the EU and neighbouring countries should include full participation of NGOs so that they can share their field experience in the area of Intercultural Dialogue.
4. The EU/Member States should provide an environment where each foreign student is offered support on a regular basis from a mentor or counsellor (for example from a youth NGO), in a view of helping their adaptation, understanding and interactions with the host country culture. Foreign students could get extra points if taking part in NGO activities.
5. Curricula for teachers and educators should include a module about Intercultural Dialogue Counselling.

Workshop 4: Challenges and opportunities in intercultural dialogue: Mobility in question

Mobility is essential to foster intercultural dialogue and to fight stereotypes, helping the foundation of a European identity. It is a liquid concept encompassing both an international and a local dimension. Where mobility is already considered as a resource, migration often has a negative connotation. Nevertheless it is a powerful answer for socio-economic challenges imposed by a shifting demography, and its consequences for the social systems. We call for more mobility, but acknowledge it is challenging in a context of an uncertain energy future.

We young people from the Euro-Mediterranean region want to suggest the following policy proposals:

- We believe it is crucial to stimulate intercultural exchanges co-managed with the youth Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). These actors, together with schools and the government share a responsibility to motivate youth, especially young professionals and volunteers, to be mobile. Youth NGOs need proper and pro-active information and consultation by the national agencies about policies, grants and training for youth-leaders, as they are key actors. Yet a great challenge remains reaching the non-organised youth.
- Member states must create centres to improve the reception of incoming youth. These facilities must involve organised and non-organised youth. The mobility-alumni can motivate peers by training programmes in schools. These centres should provide orientation and language skills in the host countries, as well as helping to maintain relations with the country of origin.
- Mobility policies must foster circular migration movements, offer incentives to return to the home community and to valorise and recognise the experiences gained. Preventing brain drain is crucial for local development.
- We regret that a combination of issues prevented some of the Mediterranean youth from participating in this event. International youth events and exchanges should benefit from the same visa facilitation as business, sport and cultural events (as e.g. Barenboïm's orchestra was given temporary Spanish diplomatic passports to enter the Palestinian territories). Visas must be free of charge. The procedure to obtain a visa has to be clear and transparent. The socio-economic status of the applicant can not be a discriminatory factor. New information technology can cut the red tape whenever possible. Multi-entry visas have to become the rule rather than the exception. In the long term we should strive for a Euro-Med region where visas are no longer needed, cancelling the very idea of a visa.
- The EU must increase its investment in energy-efficient, accessible and widespread public transport and communication infrastructure especially open to young people. We demand that the EU and its current presidency take the lead in negotiating Open Skies agreements, especially with Mediterranean countries.
- Social dumping has to be made illegal in Europe. Social security mechanisms should be adapted to the consequences of employment abroad.
- Financial barriers should not have a significant impact on mobility. The EU must take the lead together with banks into opening their services to students opening an account or applying for a loan. The cost of simple transactions have to be minimised and their use easy

throughout the EU and Mediterranean. Member states must create a fund, offering pre-departure grants for mobility.

- National policies should be in line with the Universal and European Declarations of Human Rights. Detaining human beings, and especially children, in closed immigration centres can not be tolerated. We thus call for an approach opposite to the current EU Returns Directive as adopted by the parliament (T6-0293/2008).

Workshop 5: A practical approach to intercultural dialogue: tools and means of communication

Communication is a tool for intercultural dialogue, especially important in the area of media and education and learning.

Media

1. In order to foster the coordination between national public televisions and also between media professionals and youth (i.e. national youth councils) and to increase participation of youth in media, we propose:
 - a youth TV programme involving young people which will be presenting youth life in all countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region. This programme will be an exchange experience for the young reporters participating. We address this proposal to Member States and we anticipate the coordination between public televisions for this to happen.
 - in the long term, the foundation of an EU TV channel, educational and entertaining.
2. Furthermore, we propose the creation of an interactive new social media, for example being addressed www.my.eu, wherein young people can:
 - network, socialise and communicate,
 - broadcast and upload videos, pictures and podcast from their meetings,
 - be informed about study, educational and job opportunities around the Euromed region,
 - be informed about opportunities to learn each one of the foreign languages in their country,
 - announce their upcoming activities and their organisations' news.
3. We propose an EU strategy to ensure that young people with fewer opportunities, especially persons belonging to minorities (ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic and new), have access to media and new technologies.

Education and learning

4. In order to enhance the common basis of understanding at an early age and to promote youth's critical thinking, to overcome stereotypes and establish the respect of diversity, we propose:
 - a common EU school curriculum and school materials on the subjects of the history of the EU, its Member States, institutions and youth policies,
 - a common EU school curriculum on media education,
 - the extension of the existing language programmes.
5. In order to sustain intercultural dialogue and a common understanding of the Euro-Mediterranean region, we propose:
 - strengthening the exchange programmes, especially focused on journalists, without requiring professional experience and taking into account the inclusion of socially excluded youngsters,
 - reinforcing school twinning, i.e. exchanges of school classes of EU Member States, Candidate Countries, neighbouring and Mediterranean states.
6. To enable young people with fewer opportunities, especially those belonging to ethnic,

cultural, religious, linguistic and new minorities, to fully participate in intercultural dialogue and to increase their understanding of other cultures, we propose to:

- increase funding for youth exchanges with a specific focus on intensive language courses.
7. In order to promote equal access to experiential learning and subsequent development of competences, self-confidence and intercultural understanding, we propose:
- to officially recognise non-formal education and to accelerate the Youthpass process,
 - to increase exchange of best practices between states,
 - to enhance funding possibilities.
8. We propose to strengthen the two-way communication between the youth representatives and policy-makers at the informal meetings at local, regional, national and European level.