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INFORMATION NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: 4th EASTERN PARTNERSHIP YOUTH FORUM (EaP)
Marking the 10th Anniversary of the Eastern Partnership in the field of
Youth
Summary of Round-Table Discussion (19 June 2019, Vilnius)
- Information from the Lithuanian delegation

Delegations will find attached an information note from the Lithuanian delegation on the above subject, which has been put on the agenda under 'Any other business' for the next Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 21-22 November 2019.

4th EASTERN PARTNERSHIP YOUTH FORUM (EaP)
Marking the 10th Anniversary of the Eastern Partnership in the field of Youth
Summary of Round-Table Discussion (19 June 2019, Vilnius)

2019 marks the 10th anniversary of advanced cooperation between the European Union and Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. The 4th EaP Youth Forum took place in Vilnius on 18-19 June 2019 and was hosted by the President of Lithuania. It brought together more than 250 youth participants from EU Member States and Eastern Partners (24 countries). The main theme was: ‘Critical thinking through media literacy and active participation’. The forum adopted a manifesto (namely, a set of recommendations in the form of a contribution made by young people to develop a new set of objectives for the EaP post 2020).

Within the EU, a renewed EU Youth Strategy outlines a number of priorities for cooperation set out under the heading 'Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy'. The 20 Eastern Partnership deliverables or targets for 2020 have a strong youth focus, the purpose of which is to help develop stronger societies in the target countries. It is expected that the renewed Eastern Partnership policy will aim to place a stronger focus on youth. This also applies to the priorities of the proposed EU multiannual financial framework post 2020.

Much has been done since the Eastern Partnership was launched in 2009. The progress made includes the signing of the Association Agreements with Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, the implementation of visa free regimes for the citizens of these three countries, and the conclusion and implementation of the Visa Facilitation Agreements between the EU and Armenia and Azerbaijan. The above has significantly facilitated people-to-people contacts and youth mobility. Over 30 000 young people from the EaP countries have participated in Erasmus+ volunteering, exchanges and youth mobility projects. In addition, over 6 000 young people have benefited from the opportunities provided by the EU4Youth since 2018. And students from the Eastern Partnership region now have the opportunity to attend the first European School established outside EU borders - the school in Tbilisi opened its doors in September 2018.

Supporting youth is a key concern and a priority for both partner countries and Member States. The objective is also in line with the United Nations Strategy on Youth 2030. The Eastern Partnership continues to play a significant role in strengthening democratic values, processes and institutions in the Partner States. It also enables young people to become agents of change in their societies and to develop their potential to the full. Through active participation in social and political life, young people can shape the future of their countries.

There is therefore a strong need to invest more in youth development in the context of such cooperation. This is particularly relevant in terms of promoting education and employment prospects, developing civic competences and raising awareness. We need to continue discussing new challenges and exploring opportunities to invest further in youth development and to increase the participation of young people in decision-making processes. Strong cooperation between the European Union and EaP countries plays a key role in improving prospects for young people.

The Ministry of Social Security and Labour and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania held an expert round-table discussion. Participants were EU Member State and Eastern Partnership high-level officials responsible for youth policy. The purpose of the discussion was to exchange views on good practice in the field of youth, find solutions to problems, seek agreement on innovative and improved cooperation between the EU and EaP countries in youth policy implementation in the near future and to exchange ideas on possible cooperation priorities within the Eastern Partnership in the youth policy area over the coming years.

The main achievements, challenges, and suggestions for the development of the Eastern Partnership in the youth policy area presented during the round-table discussion are listed below:

1. ACHIEVEMENTS

1. Youth is seen as a priority at horizontal level and not only as an instrument of the EaP policy.

2. There is an effective structure in place that supports voluntary work and youth employment measures in the area of youth policy within the framework of cooperation between the EU and EaP countries.
3. Such cooperation has played a key role in promoting closer ties between the EaP countries and the EU.
4. The best examples of youth cooperation and exchange are the growing number of participants in the Lithuanian-Ukrainian Youth Exchange Council and the increasing number of beneficiaries from the Lithuanian-Polish Youth Fund. Indeed, the number of applications and participants has been growing each year.

2. CHALLENGES

1. Involvement of young people from rural areas and young people with fewer opportunities, in particular young people with disabilities, in Eastern Partnership programmes.
2. Finding and involving international partners.
3. Finding resources and means with which to help and motivate young people at the local level.
4. Support capacity building in local organisations (more funding could be an option).
5. Exchange programmes and conferences are not enough to promote and strengthen cooperation between the EU and EaP countries.
6. Additional measures are needed, e.g. debate simulation programmes, involvement in InterRail.
7. Simplification of regulations and of the grant application process is needed.
8. A need for more investment in civil society (NGOs, academic community, youth organisations, and others).

9. A need for the more active promotion of EaP benefits.
10. Possible fraud cases and assessment of ways in which to prevent such cases.

3. SUGGESTIONS FOR BETTER COOPERATION AND POSSIBLE PRIORITIES

1. A more active role in the process of inclusive structured consultation on the future goals of the EaP in the area of youth policy.
2. Strong support for the European choice and aspirations of Partner countries.
3. Focus on critical thinking, active participation, media literacy, soft skills, youth engagement, employment, health care (especially mental health problems), digitalisation (in the area of youth policy), identification and solutions to demographic and environmental challenges.
4. An integrated approach to youth problems through cross-sectoral cooperation.
5. Stronger cooperation and communication between the EU and EaP countries to reconcile and coordinate the financing and implementation of programmes.
6. More pilot projects, e.g. Work&Travel Europe, modest grants at a local level could be developed - with a focus on rural areas.