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Subject: Young Europeans at the centre of a modern European Union
- *Policy debate*
(Public debate in accordance with Article 8(2) of the Council's Rules of Procedure [proposed by the Presidency])

Following consultation of the Youth Working Party, the Presidency has prepared the attached discussion paper, which is submitted as the basis for the policy debate to the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 21-22 November 2016.

Young Europeans at the centre of a modern European Union

Presidency discussion paper

Introduction

Changing social and family structures, the lack of a sense of security and justice, poor integration, a lack of opportunities and prospects for a better future for young people are present everywhere around us in European society. In addition, the tendency towards extremism and radical solutions, the rise of ultra-right or ultra-left wing parties, and recent migration waves have contributed to greater polarisation of society. The referendum in the UK has sparked an even more vital discussion about the European project, its foundations and the values on which it was built.

The position and life propositions of young people now are very different from in the past, and have changed very quickly over the last few years. Although today's younger generation is on the whole better educated than any before it, research warns that the current generation of young people will be the first to experience worse life conditions than their parents. This has not happened for the last 80 years. This can also be seen in real numbers across the EU, where of the 90 million young people in Europe, 27 million (close to one third) are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The number of NEETs (those who are neither in employment nor in education or training) has risen to 4 million.

There is also a growing gap between the generations in terms of mutual understanding, as the position and starting point of today's generation is different to that experienced by their parents' generation. Therefore it is important that we monitor and collect information about the newest trends among young people, their living conditions, wishes, interests, sub-cultures and their views about the future. This information needs to be reflected in youth policies and youth work practices in order to connect the real situation of young people and the effectiveness of policies and strategies at European, national, regional and local levels.



It is of the utmost significance that the situation of young people and their future was for the first time in a long time also debated at the highest political level during the Bratislava informal summit of Heads of State or Government in September 2016. That summit agreed on the Bratislava declaration and the key priorities for the coming months have been summarised by the President of the **European Council**, the Presidency of the Council and the Commission in the Bratislava road-map¹. One of the integral parts of these documents is the objective to 'create a promising economic future for all, safeguard our way of life and provide better opportunities for youth'. Within this objective, measures for young people are highlighted. Besides the serious challenge of youth unemployment, other issues should also be tackled, namely how to reconnect the younger generation with the ideas and values of the European project as such. Having been raised almost entirely in democratic societies, young people often do not recognise the risks and consequences of living in a society that is not based on tolerance, understanding and democratic values.

¹ SN 72/3/16 REV 3

We need to think of ways to build or restore the trust of young people in the ideas that the European Union was built upon. As the Heads of State or Government committed to take decisions in relation to a better life for young people in the EU, the Presidency believes that the Youth Ministers should send a clear signal to the December 2016 European Council.



In the face of all the challenges and problems that young people face in modern day Europe, during its mandate the Presidency has tried to focus on the positive sides of youth policies. We should not forget that young people are more sensitive and react to changes more flexibly than older generations. Young people, in general have a natural sense for justice and solidarity. Given that most of them have been raised in a multicultural society, they are broadly positive about diversity and tolerance. This could also be seen in the results of the Brexit referendum, where more than half of the young people were positive about the European Union. Young people who are optimistic about the EU see it as an important factor for positive change that brings the opportunity to travel and gain experience abroad. Such an opinion of the EU can be found mainly among young people who have personal experience of the advantages that EU membership brings to its citizens. Therefore the existing programmes such as Erasmus+ or new ones, as for example the planned scheme for a European Solidarity Corps, should be strengthened.

During the Presidency, a European Youth Conference was organised in Košice during which 250 young people from all Member States met together with policy-makers. Together they drafted and adopted 16 recommendations² for Member States and the Commission within the overall topic of 'Enabling young people to engage in a diverse, connected and inclusive Europe'. Many of these recommendations were linked to the challenges we see in the lives of young people today, including rebuilding their trust in the EU. All in all, eight areas were explored:

1. Access to quality and critical information
2. Young people under pressure: building resilience and self-confidence
3. Beyond fear and intolerance - experience diversity
4. Towards an education system that realises young people's potential
5. Fostering young people's engagement in society in particular for vulnerable groups
6. Rebuilding the trust of young people in the European project
7. Mobility programme: employment and education for all
8. The impact of youth work and youth organisations for all.

Young people who were involved in the consultation process during the fifth cycle of the structured dialogue and young people directly involved in drawing up the recommendations are now waiting to see how their views can be addressed at European and/or national level and how the Member States will react to their ideas.



² Doc. 13457/16

At the policy debate during the EYCS Council on 21 November, Ministers are invited to intervene on the issues raised in this paper. In doing so, they may wish to address one or more of the following questions:

- 1. In the light of the Bratislava summit, how can Member States and the EU institutions better connect young people with the ideas underpinning the European project?**
 - 2. What can be done at EU level and at the level of Member States to renew the links between the younger generation and decision-makers in a way that better takes into account the reality of young people's lives and lifestyles in today's world?**
 - 3. In the context of better connection between the EU and young people across Europe, to what extent do the recommendations from the conference in Košice provide answers to the challenges of today's Europe? Which of them could you take into consideration at national level and in what way?**
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