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Subject: Building Europe's future - listening to and supporting young people
- *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 22-23 May 2017.

Building Europe's future - listening to and supporting young people

Presidency discussion paper

The leaders of the 27 Member States and EU institutions, meeting in Rome on 25 March 2017, to mark the 60th anniversary of the signing of the treaties of Rome, declared that

The European Union is facing unprecedented challenges, both global and domestic... Together, we are determined to address the challenges of a rapidly changing world and to offer to our citizens both security and new opportunities... In the ten years to come we want a Union that is safe and secure, prosperous, competitive, sustainable and socially responsible, and with the will and capacity of playing a key role in the world and of shaping globalisation. We want a Union where citizens have new opportunities for cultural and social development and economic growth. We want a Union which remains open to those European countries that respect our values and are committed to promoting them.

In these times of change, and aware of the concerns of our citizens, we commit to the Rome Agenda, and pledge to work towards: a safe and secure Europe...; a prosperous and sustainable Europe...; a social Europe, a Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent; and a stronger Europe on the global scene.

Malta's Presidency of the Council of the European Union comes at an important turning point in the Union's history. There is a sense that the achievements of the past sixty years, while historically unprecedented, and politically, economically and socially far-reaching, must make way for a new vision, a renewed commitment, a stronger sense of unity and purpose in building the Europe of the future.

During recent years, the challenges facing the European Union have probably never seemed greater. The effects of the financial crisis are still being felt, particularly by young people who were the most adversely affected. New realities have emerged: the impact of new technologies and digitalisation on society and working life; the inequalities and opportunities resulting from globalisation; concerns about security, migration and the rise of political extremism and populism.

Meeting these diverse challenges is not only the responsibility of European governments, politicians and institutions: it is also the responsibility of all European citizens. But to shoulder that responsibility, citizens must be consulted and actively participate and must have the knowledge, skills and opportunities to do so. This is particularly true of young people, starting out in life, without the financial resources, experience and material advantages of an older generation.

As with the Union itself, the youth sector is also experiencing the winds of change - bringing the prospect of new opportunities, as well as challenges.

Over the next few years a number of significant European policies, strategies and initiatives will come to an end, most notably, the Renewed Framework for European cooperation in the Youth Field, which will conclude in 2018, and Europe 2020, the ten-year jobs and growth strategy, which includes the flagship initiative Youth on the Move, and the Erasmus + programme which will conclude at the end of 2020.

Measures and initiatives, however, are already underway to shape future European youth policy and its implementation. Of particular significance are the Communications from the European Commission on "Investing in Europe's Youth" and on "A European Solidarity Corps". The Council Resolution on "A New Skills Agenda for an Inclusive and Competitive Europe" and the review of the Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning are significant developments in terms of supporting young people's development of relevant competences.

A new youth strategy for European cooperation in the youth field, post 2108, provides the opportunity of developing for, and with young people, innovative and exciting ways to help and encourage them to build the future of Europe, to confront its many challenges and create greater opportunities, prosperity and most of all, hope and trust in each other and in our institutions.

The Maltese Presidency is of the view that while there are many aspects and dimensions to building the future of Europe, two in particular are of fundamental importance to young people.

First, young people's voices must be heard, clearly and distinctly, and it behoves us all to find ways and means of facilitating this. It is only when all young people feel and accept that they are being listened to, their voices are being heard, their needs, concerns and aspirations considered and addressed, that they can truly participate and be actively involved in the civic, cultural, and economic life in Europe.

Second, in responding to the voices of young people and in taking account of their expressed needs, concerns and aspirations, we need to clearly articulate a vision for the future of Europe. Such a vision should be based on recognition and respect for the individuality, worth and dignity of all young people, on their right to have their voices heard and to be informed on all issues that concern them and for the right to determine their own future. Such a vision should provide sustained support for all young people, helping them to develop their competences and promoting their well being, fostering their potential and meeting their needs. Such a vision should promote the solidarity of all young people with their families and communities and the greater European Union and ensure their active civic participation and sense of civic responsibility.

Policy debate

In this context and in responding to the questions submitted below, Ministers are invited to exchange views, share their experiences, and provide brief examples of good practices.

- 1. How can we engage in innovative, meaningful and constructive dialogue with young people? Are we prepared and able to listen? Can we respond with empathy, but also with honesty and realism?**
- 2. Can we articulate a vision for the future of the European Union that will both inspire and empower young people? What, for you, are the most important features or aspects of such a vision?**