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**NOTE**

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From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

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Subject: Future priorities for EU Youth policy  
- *Policy debate*  
(*Public debate in accordance with Article 8(2) of the Council's Rules of Procedure*) [*proposed by the Presidency*]

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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 at the EYCS Council on 23 May 2018.

## **Future priorities for EU Youth policy**

### *Presidency discussion paper*

The Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union comes at a time when the debate on the future of the Union is in full swing and faces many challenges.

In March 2017 the European Commission presented the White paper on the future of Europe, offering five possible scenarios for how the Union might evolve by 2025. In the same context, the leaders of the European Union, meeting in Rome on 25 March 2017 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, reflected on past achievements and debated what our shared future could and should look like.

Resilience, cohesiveness and openness to all communities is the future of our Union. In this respect and bearing in mind that young people can be the strongest force in creating communities, the issue of how we can better support and engage youth is of great importance. Young people must have opportunities and the necessary skills and competences to become active and involved European citizens who can take control of their lives, are ready to support others and who are able to benefit from all the advantages offered by a globalised and knowledge-driven world.

One of the overall priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency is the "Future of Europe and Young People". Believing that the future of Europe and society at large depends on young people, the Presidency is focussing its efforts on the role of young people as a driving force for sustainable development and equality in Europe.

The current EU Youth Strategy - adopted in November 2009 by the Council in its resolution on a "renewed framework" for cooperation in the youth field - is coming to an end this year. This means that there will be over the coming months a unique opportunity to rethink and further improve how the EU works for and with young people.

The Council has already provided substantive input to the process of preparing a new EU Youth Strategy in the form of its conclusions - adopted on 22 May 2017 - on "strategic perspectives for European Cooperation in the youth field post 2018. Without repeating these conclusions in full, it is worth recalling a number of the key points. Member States and the Commission were invited to:

- develop and support a new framework for European cooperation in the youth field for the period after 2018, with **a clear added value at EU level**;
- consider that the framework for the future cooperation is **cross-sectoral, flexible, responsive and transparent** and takes account of the rapidly changing political, social, cultural and economic circumstances in Europe and beyond;
- ensure that **Erasmus+** and other programmes and instruments contribute, and where appropriate, are **aligned to the implementation of the Framework**;
- **evaluate, review and renew the Structured Dialogue** and its objectives with a view to facilitating innovative, meaningful and targeted constructive dialogue not only with young people from youth organisations but also those **young people from diverse backgrounds, fewer opportunities and non-organised youth**;
- further consider the **competences and values** that young people need in order to fulfil their personal, social and working lives and, in particular, to reach out and include young people with fewer opportunities;
- have regard to the role that the **internet, social media and digitalisation** can play in promoting solidarity, political participation and active citizenship among young people and in combating political alienation, populism, propaganda and radicalisation that may lead to violent extremism;
- ensure that the development of the framework for future European cooperation in the youth field is **evidence-based, informed and underpinned by broad-based and inclusive consultation** with all relevant stakeholders, including young people, youth work providers, youth workers (both professional and voluntary) and policy makers at all levels so as to build consensus on, and commitment to future youth policy aims and objectives.

As this last point makes clear, broad-based consultation is important when preparing the new strategy. The Commission has been carrying out its own consultations, notably in the context of its mid-term evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy to assess the Strategy's role in shaping EU-level and national measures and policies in the area of youth. Preliminary findings, amongst others, included that the general level of awareness of the EU Youth Strategy needs to be improved, the new EU Youth Strategy should take into account the varying needs of policy-makers at local and regional levels, and there was a strong view that it was important to consult and listen to Member States and citizens on their real priorities.

Among those that should be consulted first when reviewing the EU Youth Strategy are young people themselves<sup>1</sup>. Although it is clear from the Council conclusions of May 2017 that the "structured dialogue" with young people - established by the 2009 resolution - needs to be improved, it is nevertheless a useful tool for consulting with young people.

With this in mind, the Trio presidencies of Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria, in the framework of the 6th Cycle of the Structured Dialogue (July 2017 – December 2018) – entitled "*Youth in Europe: What's next?*" – have chosen a topic that focuses on strengthening the well-being of all young people through the development of life skills. The first discussions under the 6th Cycle were held during the EU Youth Conference in Tallinn, 23 – 26 October 2017, and the next step took place under the Bulgarian Presidency at the European Youth Conference in Sofia (17 – 19 April 2018). The views expressed during consultations with 50,000 young Europeans and the deliberations of the Steering Committee allowed the Conference to identify 11 thematic areas, which were subsequently transformed into a set of European Youth Goals (attached in Annex). These goals represent very useful input from young people, especially those that are actively involved and engaged in youth organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, inspiration can be drawn from young people's declarations on the future priorities for Europe, made in January 2018 under the "New Narrative for Europe" action. (c.f. [https://europa.eu/youth/have-your-say/new-narrative-for-europe\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/have-your-say/new-narrative-for-europe_en))

As announced in the Communication "Investing in Europe's Youth" (7 December 2016) the Commission will prepare and soon present the revision of the European Youth Strategy for the period beyond 2018.

Against this background the Bulgarian Presidency invites the Youth Ministers to discuss and exchange views on the future priorities for co-operation in the youth sector. In order to bring structure to the debate, the Presidency would like Ministers to focus on the following questions:

- 1. What do Member States consider to be the key priorities for the future EU cooperation in the area of youth policy?**
  - 2. How can the inputs from the Structured Dialogue (the 11 Youth Goals), as well as input from other stakeholders, contribute to these priorities?**
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The Youth Goals are the outcome of the Structured Dialogue with Youth 2017-18. They represent views of young people from all over Europe.



Read Youth Goals online!

## 1 CONNECTING EU WITH YOUTH

*Foster the sense of youth belonging to the European project and build a bridge between the EU and young people to regain trust and increase participation.*

An increasing number of young people lack trust in the EU, encounter difficulties in understanding its principles, values, and functioning. Democratic deficits in EU processes have also been identified as one of the reasons for rising euroscepticism among young people.

- Guarantee meaningful youth involvement and dialogue in all stages of EU decision making by improving existing participatory mechanisms and creating new ones.
- Ensure equal access to quality impartial and youth-friendly information about how the EU works, how to engage in it and what opportunities it offers.
- Introduce and increase education about Europe and the EU in formal and non-formal settings.
- Guarantee fair representation of all member states in political and administrative EU bodies, in line with the principle of equal citizenship.
- Increase the budget and the impact of the EU youth programmes.
- Build young people's trust in the EU project by addressing the democratic deficit, lack of transparency and visibility.
- Institutionalise the assessment of youth-friendliness, impact and effect of EU policies.

## 2 EQUALITY OF ALL GENDERS

*Ensure equality of all genders and gender-sensitive approaches in all areas of life of a young person.*

Gender-based discrimination still affects many young people, especially young women. Equal opportunities and access to rights need to be ensured for young people of all genders including non-binary and LGBTQI+ young people.

- Tackle discrimination and ensure equal rights for all genders in cultural, political and socio-economical life.
- Achieve universal awareness of gender-based inequality and discrimination, particularly in the media.
- End gender-based violence by addressing and tackling it effectively in all its forms.
- Eliminate stereotypical gender roles and embrace diverse gender identities in education systems, family life, the workplace, and other areas of life.
- End gender-based structural discrimination in the labour market and ensure equal rights, access and opportunities.
- Ensure equal pay for equal work and the equal sharing of the responsibilities of care work.
- Ensure equal access to formal and non-formal education, and that the design of education systems follows gender-sensitive approaches.



### 3 INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

*Enable and ensure the inclusion of all young people in society.*

One third of young people in Europe are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Many do not have access to their social rights. Many continue to face multiple discrimination, experience prejudice and hate crimes. New migratory phenomena brought several social and inclusion challenges. Therefore, it is crucial to work towards the fulfillment of the rights of all young people in Europe, including the most marginalised and excluded.

### 4 INFORMATION AND CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE

*Ensure young people have better access to reliable information, support their ability to evaluate information critically and engage in participatory and constructive dialogue.*

Young people experience difficulties to verify the accuracy and reliability of information. They need to be more adequately equipped to navigate the media landscape and to participate in constructive dialogue.

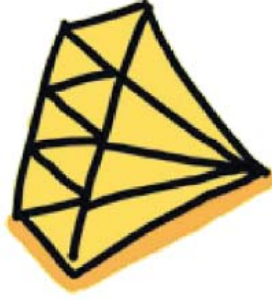
### 5 MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

*Achieve better mental wellbeing and end stigmatisation of mental health issues, thus promoting social inclusion of all young people.*

A significant and increasing number of young people across Europe are expressing their concern at the prevalence of mental health issues such as high stress, anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses amongst their peers. Young people cite the immense societal pressures they face today, and express a need for better youth mental health provision.

- Provide legal protection and enforce international legal instruments to fight against all kinds of discrimination and hate speech, recognising that young people are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination.
  - Strengthen outreach of information to marginalised young people, to ensure they are aware of spaces, opportunities and experiences available to them.
  - Empower young people to be critical and responsible users and producers of information.
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  - Ensure young people have the ability to recognise and report repeatedly misleading news and verify the accuracy of news sources used.
  - Encourage the development of self-awareness and less competitive mindsets by fostering appreciation for individual skills and strengths.
  - Safeguard the rights to work and to study of people with mental health issues both during and after illness to ensure their ability to pursue their own ambitions.
  - Develop an inclusive intersectional approach to mental health
- Ensure that all marginalised young people have equal access to formal and non-formal learning environments, addressing all the dimensions of inclusion.
  - Strengthen the capacities of educators to work with marginalised young people.
  - Provide more spaces, opportunities, resources and programmes to foster dialogue and social cohesion, and combat discrimination and segregation.

- Ensure young people have the ability to recognise and report hate speech and discrimination online and offline.
- Ensure young people can engage in respectful, tolerant and non-violent dialogue, online and offline.
- Ensure easy access to understandable youth-friendly information that follows codes of ethics and quality standards.



- Focus on prevention measures that ensure young people are equipped with the knowledge and the skills required for better mental wellbeing.
  - Fight stigma about mental health issues by developing awareness programmes.
- Encourage the development of provision for all, especially marginalised groups.
  - Provide all professionals working with young people as well as family and friends with quality mental health first aid training.
  - Provide inclusive, respectful and well-funded treatment by incorporating high quality mental health provision across all medical institutions.



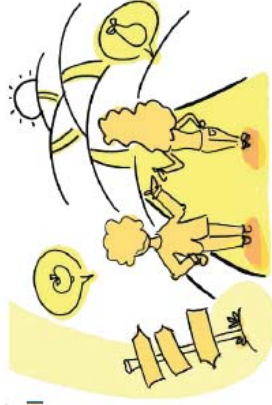
## 6 MOVING RURAL YOUTH FORWARD

*Create conditions which enable young people to fulfill their potential in rural areas.*

Despite the EU wide commitment to rural development and given the fact that by 2015 almost one third of the EU population were living in rural areas, prevailing differences exist between living in urban and in rural areas<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, it is important to ensure equality for young people in urban and rural settings.

- Ensure appropriate infrastructure in rural areas in order to provide equitable delivery of public services, data connectivity and housing opportunities for young people.
- Ensure that sustainable, high quality jobs, accessible to young people are created in rural areas.
- Ensure the decentralisation of different activities by, for and with young people in order to support their inclusion and to benefit local communities.

<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics\\_on\\_rural\\_areas\\_in\\_the\\_EU](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_rural_areas_in_the_EU)



## 7 QUALITY EMPLOYMENT FOR ALL

*Guarantee an accessible labour market with opportunities that lead to quality jobs for all young people.*

Young people are suffering from high youth unemployment, precarious and exploitative working conditions as well as discrimination in the labour market and the workplace. The lack of information and suitable skills for future employment are preventing young people to be fully integrated in the labour market. Thus measures need to be taken in order to ensure quality employment for all.

- Create quality jobs which guarantee fair working conditions, working rights and the right of living wage for all young people.
- Safeguard social protection and healthcare for all young workers.
- Guarantee fair treatment and equal opportunities for all young people in order to end discrimination in the labour market.
- Ensure equal access to quality information and adequate support mechanisms to prepare young people for the changing labour market and future of work.

## 8 QUALITY LEARNING

*Integrate and improve different forms of learning, equipping young people for the challenges of an ever-changing life in the 21st century.*

Education remains a key for active citizenship, inclusive society and employability. That is why we need to enlarge our vision about education for the 21st century, focusing more on transferable skills, student-centered learning and non-formal education to achieve a truly equal and universal access to quality learning.

- Guarantee universal and equal access to quality education and lifelong learning.
- Ensure that all young people have access to adequately funded non-formal education at all levels, that is recognised and validated.
- Promote open-mindedness and support the development of interpersonal and intercultural skills.
- Create and implement more personalised, participative, and cooperative learner-centered methods in every step of the education process.
- Guarantee that education equips all young people with life skills such as money management and health education including sexual and reproductive health
- Incorporate methods within formal and non-formal education settings that enable the learner to develop personal skills including critical and analytical thinking, creativity and learning.
- Ensure that young people have access to citizenship education to provide them with solid knowledge on political systems, democracy and human rights, attained also through community-based experiences in order to promote active civil participation.



## SPACE AND PARTICIPATION FOR ALL

*Strengthen young people's democratic participation and autonomy as well as provide dedicated youth spaces in all areas of society.*

Young people are underrepresented in decision-making processes which affect them although their engagement is crucial to democracy. They need access to physical spaces in their communities to support their personal, cultural and political development.

- Ensure young people can adequately influence all areas of society and all parts of the decision-making processes, from agenda setting to implementation, monitoring and evaluation through youth-friendly and accessible mechanisms and structures, ensuring that policies respond to the needs of young people.
- Ensure equal access to everyday decision making for all young people from different backgrounds.
- Increase youth participation and thus equal representation in the electoral process as well as in elected bodies and other decision-making organs at all levels of society.
- Provide youth-led physical facilities and infrastructures called youth spaces defined by being autonomous, open and safe, accessible to all, offering professional support for development and ensuring opportunities for youth participation.
- Ensure sustainable funding, common recognition and development of quality youth work in order to strengthen youth organisations and their role in inclusion, participation and non-formal education.
- Provide youth-friendly, relevant, comprehensive information, also developed by and with young people, in order to enable youth participation.

## SUSTAINABLE GREEN EUROPE

*Achieve a society in which all young people are environmentally active, educated and able to make a difference in their everyday lives.*

Nowadays we consume in a way that our environment can't handle. Society needs to act against climate change and the growing environmental threats. But our society cannot solve a problem that it is not willing to acknowledge. That is why everyone including young people has to start taking responsibility for their actions, and impact on the life of future generations. Becoming sustainable is not a choice, it is an obligation.



- Ensure everyone including young people knows the effect of their actions on the environment.
- Empower the entire society especially young people to act as agents of change for environmental and sustainable development.
- Take into account the environmental impact of every policy and life decision while ensuring that young people are included in sustainable development policy-making on all levels.
- Increase international cooperation to eliminate environmentally harmful production and consumption.
- Support and strengthen opportunities for young people to volunteer in the environmental sector.
- Ensure everyone especially young people has access to eco-friendly infrastructure for living a more sustainable lifestyle.
- Expand research and innovation into eco-friendly solutions and technologies.

## YOUTH ORGANISATIONS AND EUROPEAN PROGRAMMES

*Ensure equal access for all young people to youth organisations and European youth programmes, building a society based on European values and identity.*

Youth organisations and European youth programmes involve millions of young people to support their active citizenship and to develop their life skills. However, youth organisations and European youth programmes remain underfunded and lack recognition and accessibility.

- Ensure visibility and provide quality information on youth organisations and European youth programmes for all young people.
- Ensure sufficient resources from EU programmes for youth organisations to develop projects and access structural support to carry out their missions and to support their work.
- Ensure youth organisations and European youth programmes are better bridged with the educational systems and acknowledging them as actors fostering life skills and active citizenship.
- Increase the accessibility of European youth programmes, ensure a youth friendly administration process and provide support and quality information for all participants and applicants.
- Increase resources, and widen the variety of grants and diversity of initiatives available for youth organisations and youth groups.
- Ensure participation of young people in governance processes of European youth programmes.