



9th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth
“Young people’s access to rights: development of innovative youth policies”

Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation, 23-25 September 2012

Conclusions of the Chair

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the Chair of this Conference, I would like to underline the importance of this 9th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth and express deep gratitude to the ministers and delegations from 46 signatory states of the European Cultural Convention.

I am pleased also to thank the DSG of the CoE Ms BD. We benefited from the contributions of the President Mr. Mignon and other members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Mr. Whitmore, as well as of high-level representatives of several other institutions of the Council of Europe.

The Conference was attended by representatives of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the OECD, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF, the League of Arab States and the World Bank, as well as a number of international NGOs.

Numerous young people participated in this Conference, either as members of the ministerial delegations or as delegates selected by the European Youth Forum, the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe and the National Youth Council of Russia. We are particularly grateful for the important contributions made by these youth delegates.

The attendance by this wide range of participants demonstrated a strong shared commitment to young people and to youth policy.

Yesterday we heard the report on the interesting results of the youth event, preceding this Conference, which brought together more than 90 young people from across Europe to discuss the topic of young people's access to rights. We would like to point out the successful organization of the Youth event organized by the European Youth Forum, the Advisory Council on Youth and the National Youth Council of Russia with the support of the European Youth Foundation. These results were a rich "food for thought" and a major contribution to the debate in the three panels.

On the results of this event, young people noted the following:

- 1) It is necessary to involve young people in the development process and adoption of strategies and action plans relative to the provision of equal opportunities, for example, for people with disabilities, people living in rural areas and people from disadvantaged regions, highlighting the role of youth workers in the socialization of young people;
- 2) It is necessary to recognize the role of youth organizations and national councils as a way to increase the participation of young people in public life. In this context, the representatives of the Youth of the Council of Europe call upon to establish new and improve existing channels of providing information.
- 3) It is important that the Council of Europe develops and puts into practice the special action plan to prevent and combat violence and incitement to violence against young people;
- 4) States - members of the Council of Europe should work more closely with each other in regard to the issue of visas in the view of reducing the impact of bureaucratic obstacles to increase mobility of young people in Europe;
- 5) Members states of the Council of Europe are called upon to provide young people with information about their rights, and also to provide access to rights for all;

I believe that the conclusions based on the results of the Youth event, of course, will be important for future discussions in the youth sector of the Council of Europe.

I would like to thank our keynote speaker, Mr Melkert, for his inspirational and impressive speech. Mr Melkert reminded us that youth policy does not happen in a political vacuum, and that it must take account of our common global challenges.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to the plenary debate and the interesting panel discussions. International ministerial conferences derive their meaning, to a large part, from such wide-ranging and lively exchanges.

In the three panels, assisted by eminent youth experts and a range of knowledgeable panellists from diverse backgrounds, we looked at key aspects of the access of young people to rights. The social inclusion of young people; the role of young people in democracy and their participation in all areas of society; and the challenges—particularly faced by young people—resulting from the cultural diversity in which we are living, these were the topics of the panels.

The rich debate yesterday showed the common challenges, shared by many or even all countries in Europe. It also showed, however, the progress that is possible as a result of an innovative, energetic youth policy. The examples of good practice presented in plenary and in the panels will be an important source of inspiration.

Summarizing the conclusions of the Conference, I want to stress the key role of the youth of European countries in all the spheres of life of the modern society.

Democracy and the rule of law should be the basis of our political culture on international, national and local levels.

The modern democracy is characterized by the presence of certain freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of choice, freedom of expression and freedom of self-determination.

But not many young people really understand, that the real freedom is the responsibility, that is responsibility for the future of one's own life, future of one's family and future of the country. Therefore youth policy - is a contribution to the development of democracy in the Europe of tomorrow.

The inability to instil fundamental democratic principles in young people is a direct threat to democracy. Any failure to perceive this simple truth entails, no matter how upsetting it may be, the death of the phenomenon of democracy in society. In my opinion, the most crucial issue today is youth policy.

At our conference youth was mentioned many times as a resource for a social and economical development, but we need to understand, that to become such a resource the youth must be involved in all the processes of social development, including political ones.

The main condition for increase of social and political activity of young people today is sharing by them the common human values, their involvement into various social practices and thus, their full inclusion in the of the modern society life.

Today the first priority among the values of our existence is to be in a demand. In economical and in social aspects such a demand is directly linked with a quality education, decent career, wellbeing, mutual respect and tolerance. Lack of such a demand in our world really became one of the main reasons for social tension.

Diversity and a dialogue, dignity and democratic citizenship, social unity and social equality became the main themes of European youth politics in the last decades. And a human being should live in harmony with himself and with the world.

I want to stress, that only through wide and systematic study of the dynamic social, economical and political realities as well as cultural and historical traditions along with specifics in solving problems in youth policy sphere which are there in each of our countries we can face the future.

Such a research work should be promoted both at the level of the Council of Europe and at the level of each country.

We are facing common challenges which can be handled by common efforts.

I particularly thank the youth delegates. A ministerial conference is not necessarily a very youthful event. I hope however that we found a good compromise between the tasks of a conference of specialised ministers of the Council of Europe and the real day-to-day problems faced by young people all over our continent.

On behalf of all the participants and on my behalf I thank the government of the Russian Federation represented by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Secretariat of the Council of Europe for the excellent organisation of the conference: providing favourable conditions for effective work and unforgettable cultural programme.

Special thanks to the team of the organizing committee from the Russian Federation and the Council of Europe which together with young volunteers did their best to make our stay in this wonderful city as agreeable and interesting as possible. I hope you take back with you very good memories and a vivid picture of our country. Many thanks for having been our guests.

Before giving the floor to the Director General for Democracy of the Council of Europe, who will officially close this conference, allow me to thank the Ministers and all participants and guests for their attendance and their interest in the debate.