
1158 Meeting, 12 December 2012

8 Youth and sport

8.1 9th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth (Saint Petersburg, 23-25 September 2012) –

Report of the Secretary General

Item to be prepared by the GR-C on 29 November 2012

Introduction

At the invitation of the government of the Russian Federation, the 9th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth took place in Saint Petersburg from 23 to 25 September 2012.

The main theme of the conference was “Young people’s access to rights: development of innovative youth policies”. The objectives were:

- to take stock of the major achievements regarding youth policy development within the Council of Europe and the member States since the last conference in Kiev (2008), bearing in mind the Committee of Ministers Resolution CM/Res(2008)23 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe (Agenda 2020);
- to offer the possibility for ministers to share examples of good practice as regards youth policy in their respective countries;
- to examine possible youth policy strategies and actions to improve young people’s access to rights;
- to mark the 40th anniversary of the Council of Europe youth sector.

Two hundred and fifty-two participants and observers attended the conference, including one hundred and seventy-one members of national delegations from forty-four States Party to the European Cultural Convention, as well as ninety youth representatives. Twenty nine countries had included at least one youth representation in their national delegation; additional youth delegates had been selected by the Advisory Council on Youth, by the European Youth Forum and the National Youth Council of Russia. The Committee of Ministers was represented by the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports of Albania, Mr Abaz Hado; the Parliamentary Assembly by its President, Mr Jean-Claude Mignon; and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities by its President, Mr Keith Whitmore. The conference was also attended by representatives of the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH), the Steering Committee for Education Policy and Practice (CDPPE), the Conference of INGOs and the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ). Observers from the Commonwealth of Independent States, the League of Arab States, OECD, UNHCR, UNICEF, the European Wergeland Centre and the World Bank were in attendance. The complete list of participants can be obtained from the secretariat.

The conference also provided a framework for celebrating the 40th anniversary of the first permanent youth structures of the Council of Europe, the European Youth Centre of Strasbourg and the European Youth Foundation; all participants received a compendium of key youth policy and youth work issues, illustrating the specific approach of the Council of Europe (human rights education with children and young people, intercultural learning, youth policy development, non-formal education, youth participation, youth information).

¹ This document has been classified restricted at the date of issue; it will be declassified in accordance with Resolution Res(2001)6 on access to Council of Europe documents.

A youth event on the main theme of the conference was held on 22 and 23 September prior to the conference. It was organised jointly by the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), the European Youth Forum and the National Youth Council of Russia and brought together some 150 youth representatives (including national delegation representatives and representatives from national youth organisations, national youth councils, international youth NGOs and Advisory Council members). The event provided an opportunity to discuss and formulate opinions about young people's access to rights.

Opening session

The conference was opened by the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni.

Mr Dmitry Livanov, Minister of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, and then, Mr Vasily Kichedzhi, vice-Governor of Saint Petersburg, welcomed the ministers, members of national delegations, youth representatives and observers.

Mr Abaz Hado, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports of Albania, on behalf of the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Mr Jean-Claude Mignon, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr Keith Whitmore, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and Ms Maria Paschou, Chairperson of the Advisory Council on Youth addressed the opening of the conference.

Election of the conference Chair and vice-Chair and adoption of the agenda

Mr Dmitri Livanov, Minister of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, was elected Chair of the conference. Mr Yevhen Sulima, first Deputy Minister of Education and Science, Youth and Sport of Ukraine, was elected vice-Chair.

The agenda of the conference was adopted as it appears in Appendix 1.

Presentation of the conclusions of the youth event

The conclusions of the youth event organised prior to the conference (21-23 September) were presented by Mr Matti Niemi, General rapporteur of the youth event, Mr Peter Matjasic, President of the European Youth Forum and Mr Sergey Bagrov, vice-Chair of the National Youth Council of Russia. The conclusions are included in Appendix 2.

Conclusions of the working sessions (panels)

Panel 1 "Social Inclusion of Young People"

A general consensus emerged regarding the following points:

- social inclusion is a wide-ranging and cross-cutting issue;
- more attention needs to be paid to average achievers, as opposed to high or low achievers, in terms of education and employment prospects;
- evidence of good practice and successful initiatives and programmes needs to be collated in order to maximise the effectiveness of such measures.

A number of solutions were discussed in addressing the issues raised above:

- employment: social entrepreneurship programmes should be developed, and entrepreneurial advice and support encouraged in the face of the ebbs and flows of the entrepreneurial environment. Micro-credits play a key role in supporting young entrepreneurs, though such financial support should be combined with entrepreneurial advice.
- education: non-formal education, which complements and enhances formal education in a mutually-supportive manner, should be developed and encouraged due to the high level of cross-over between the two.
- participation: the inclusion of young people in local, regional and national policy-making bodies is central as it gives them the opportunity to get involved in decision-making processes.

- discrimination: no young person should be discriminated against because of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and all should have full-access to their human and democratic rights.
- mobility: some participants expressed their concerns about a “brain-drain” in Europe which could ultimately lead to inequality of opportunities and a poorer quality of life, others supported the view that young people should be able to move wherever there are labour opportunities

There was a general consensus that the present social and economic crisis needs to be tackled through greater job opportunities, life-long learning, greater support for young people, their families and the community in general and recognition of the role and potential of all young people.

Panel 2 “Democracy and participation”

The presentations delivered by the speakers and the comments and questions from the audience primarily addressed the issue of youth political participation.

1. A consensus emerged regarding the following points:

Young people are interested in participating in political life and are already involved; account should be taken of all the different forms of political participation and not only of the most institutionalised ones.

Political participation is a process which requires both method and time:

- a project for democratic education, including in non-formal education;
- an inclusive society with the aim of involving all citizens and therefore young people;
- a reciprocal relationship of trust between the institutions and young people;
- equal opportunities and duties between generations, hence a renewed social contract.

Young people are significantly underrepresented in political institutions and this does not seem to be seriously questioned by society. However, this is, in some respects, a violation of their right to participate.

2. A number of concrete solutions were proposed and discussed:

- The lowering of the voting age to 16: this has already been done in Austria and the initial results have revealed that the 16 to 18 year olds vote as much as the rest of the population; such a measure increases youth participation and provides young people with more opportunities to get their voice heard, but does not address the issue of under-representation.
- The introduction of quotas in favour of young people in political and public institutions, private companies etc.

Panel 3 “Living together in diverse societies”

There is a need to accurately comprehend the concepts pertaining to the recognition and perception of diversity and the ensuing differences in order to enable policy makers to work with these concepts.

We must understand how the differences are perceived in all the Council of Europe's member States and measure the level of acceptance of these differences. There is also a need to understand which differences are deemed bad and which are deemed good, and in which countries such a distinction is made, as the differences can be accepted differently depending on the country.

Moreover, it is necessary to find out how different people are living in different cultures. Likewise, we have to establish whether these differences are economic or political issues and to find out the right methods and approaches that best resolve these issues. We also need to organise the relationships in these societies in order to enable people to live next to each other peacefully.

The main solution to all the above issues is education. Education can prepare us for the differences and diversity. The behaviour of the teachers is another important aspect of the equation. The teaching process is a process where one familiarises oneself with the unknown and with diversity. This can be done through new curricula and specific training of teachers.

The issue of citizenship is also important as it is linked with the question of access to rights. For some particular groups of young people such as young migrants, it is still very difficult to access their rights and participate in the society in which they live in.

Diversity and the differences are still today perceived as a problem and this is why we have to find the right approaches to best resolve these issues. Living together in diverse societies in a mutually respectful and peaceful manner is of prime importance to all the member States.

Presentation and adoption of the final declaration

In spite of an agreement among member States on most of the content of the draft final declaration of the conference, it proved impossible to arrive at a consensus on a draft final declaration. The only controversial point was whether to include, or not, an explicit reference to “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” in the list of reasons for discriminatory practices against young people. A proposal for compromise consisting of including in the draft final declaration a reference to a recommendation of the Committee of Ministers dealing with this specific issue (CM/Rec(2010)5) could not be agreed upon by all the member States.

Presentation of the conclusions of the Chair

Mr Yevhen Sulima, first Deputy Minister of Education and Science, Youth and Sport of Ukraine, on behalf of the Chair, began his address by noting that the attendance of the Conference by a wide range of participants demonstrated a strong shared commitment to young people and youth policy. He underlined the key role of youth in all spheres of today’s society and stressed the fact that young people are a valuable resource for social and economic development as long as they are involved in all processes of societal development, including political ones. He also warned against the inability to instil fundamental democratic values in young people as this can ultimately result in a threat to democracy. He concluded his address by underlining the need for a systematic study of the social, economic, political, cultural and historical dynamics impacting young people today. He suggested that such a research agenda should be promoted both at the level of the Council of Europe and the member States.

Closing session

Ms Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Director General of Democracy of the Council of Europe addressed the closing of the conference.

Several ministers and heads of delegation took the floor to express their disappointment over the fact that it had not been possible to adopt a final declaration

Appendix 1

Programme and agenda of the Conference

Sunday, 23 September 2012

- 19:30 *Official dinner for Ministers hosted by Mr Dmitry Livanov, Minister of Education and Science of the Russian Federation*
- 19:30 *Ceremonial dinner for other participants, hosted by Mr Dmitry Livanov, Minister of Education and Science of the Russian Federation*

Monday, 24 September 2012

09:30 Opening of the conference

- Opening of the Conference by Ms Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe
- Welcome address by M. Dmitry Livanov, Minister 'Education and Science of the Russian Fédération and M. Vasily Kichedzhi, vice-Governor of Saint Petersburg
- Address by Mr. Abaz Hado, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports of Albania, on behalf of the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe
- Address by Mr Jean-Claude Mignon, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
- Address by Mr Keith Whitmore, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
- Address by Ms Maria Paschou (Chairperson of the Advisory Council on Youth)
- **Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the conference**
- Address by the Chair of the Conference
- Address by Ms Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe
- **Adoption of the agenda**

10:30 Presentation of the results of the youth event held from 21 to 23 September 2012

- 11:00 *Coffee break*
Press conference of the hosts of the conference

11:30 Keynote presentation on the main theme of the conference, by Mr Ad Melkert Debate

- 13:00 *Luncheon hosted by the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe for the Heads of Delegation*
Luncheon hosted by the Russian Government for the other participants

14:30 Afternoon session (three panels held in parallel)

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| Panel 1: "Social inclusion of young people" |
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Chair: Mr Pascal Smet, Minister for Education, Youth and Equal Opportunities of the Flemish Community of Belgium
Keynote speaker: Prof. Dr. Howard Williamson
Rapporteurs: Ms Miriam Teuma (European Steering Committee for Youth) and Mr Sandu Coica (Advisory Council on Youth)

Panelists: Ms Marie-Josée Jacobs (Minister of Family and Integration of Luxemburg), Mr Luca Volontè (Parliamentary Assembly) Ms Eunice Campbell-Clark (Congress of Local and Regional Authorities) and Ms Ilaria Esposito (Advisory Council on Youth)

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| Panel 2: “Democracy and participation” |
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Chair: Mr Alexandre Mestre, Secretary of State for Sports and Youth of Portugal

Keynote speaker: Dr. Lihong Huang

Rapporteurs: Mr. Alexis Ridde (European Steering Committee for Youth) and M. Gerard Tosserams (Advisory Council on Youth)

Panelists: Ms Evelyne Huytebroeck (Minister of Youth and Aid to Youth of the French speaking Community of Belgium), Mr Michael Connarty (Parliamentary Assembly), Ms Natalia Pilius (Congress of Local and Regional Authorities) and Ms Anna Dobrovolskaya (Advisory Council on Youth)

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| Panel 3: “Living together in diverse societies” |
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Chair: Ms Petya Evtimova, Deputy Minister of Education, Youth and Science of Bulgaria

Keynote speaker: Dr. Manfred Zentner

Rapporteurs: Ms Lea Benirschke (Advisory Council on Youth) and Mr Petyo Kanev (European Steering Committee for Youth)

Panelists: Mr Azad Rahimov (Minister of Youth and Sport of Azerbaijan), Mr Gvozden Flego (Parliamentary Assembly), Ms Hande Özsan Bozatli (Congress of Local and regional Authorities) and Mr Mihai Floran (Advisory Council on Youth)

16:00 *Coffee break*

16:30 Panels continued

19:30 *Reception for Ministers, hosted by Mr Georgy Poltavchenko, Governor of St. Petersburg*

19:30 *Art dinner for other conference participants*

Tuesday, 25 September 2012

09:30 Final session

- Presentation of the conclusions of the panels
- Presentation of the draft final declaration, followed by debate
- Adoption of the final declaration of the 9th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth
- Presentation of the Conclusions of the Chair
- Closing address by Mme Snežana Samaržić-Marković, Director General of Democracy of the Council of Europe

13:00 *Lunch*

13:00 *Press conference on the results of the conference and the youth event*

Appendix 2

Conclusions of the youth event

The youth representatives gathered at the youth event held in St. Petersburg on 22 and 23 September 2012 prior to the 9th European Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth,

Considering that:

- a) youth policies should ensure the inclusion of young people in society ;
- b) the current economic and social crisis in the Council of Europe's member States is having a crucial effect on the lives of young people;
- c) in order to avoid exclusion and alienation the issue of youth participation has become even more important;
- d) rights are not always known and easily accessed by young people;
- e) youth policies need to be adapted to changes in society;
- f) mobility is one of the core freedoms and learning opportunities for young people;
- g) embracing diversity can ensure peaceful cohabitation in today's diverse societies,

Concluded that:

Social inclusion of young people

1. We strongly encourage member States to invest in quality and inclusive education that can promote retention and reengagement in learning, support personal development, appreciation of diversity and facilitate a quality transition from education to the labour market. In this framework a better interaction between formal and non-formal education/learning is fundamental as well as the promotion of tools such as entrepreneurial education and quality internships.
2. The inclusion of young people with migrant background should be further promoted. Member States should set up free programmes aimed at introducing these young people to the new culture, language, law and services in line with Council of Europe recommendations and guidelines.
3. Access to social rights should be facilitated by strengthening the implementation of the Social Rights Charter provisions. It is crucial to make people more aware about the mechanisms available to protect social rights. Projects such as ENTER 2 represent a valuable platform to link policy- making and work at local level and to increase capacity building in this regard.
4. Continued participation of young people is needed in setting up strategies and action plans regarding the promotion of equality of opportunities and inclusion in relation to for example gender, disability and rurality highlighting the significant role of youth workers in supporting pathways to social inclusion.
5. A "youth guarantee" should be established within all social protection systems to ensure employment, further education or training for all young people after a certain period of being unemployed or out of education and training.

Democracy and participation

6. To ensure meaningful participation of young people in the creation of youth policy, co-management mechanisms should be introduced at local, regional, national, European levels. All parties of the mechanism should be defined through a democratic transparent process and have equal power and responsibilities. Society should have the opportunity to contribute to the work of co-management structures as well as visibility of the process and the outcomes should be ensured.

7. We recognise youth organisations and national youth councils as a channel of participation and involvement of all young people. In this view member States are asked to set new and improve existing schemes for information and awareness raising in this regard. Therefore, we demand sustainable and accessible financial support mechanisms.

8. The Council of Europe in co-operation with member States and NGOs, should improve existing tools or establish new tools in order to systematically assess the implementation of adopted policy documents.

9. We call on the member States to further the recognition of non-formal education and youth work through the implementation and recognition of common mechanisms ensuring non formal education quality standards.

10. We call for lowering the voting age and the age needed to stand as a candidate in elections to the age of 16.

Living together in diverse societies

11. The Council of Europe should develop and implement a specific action plan in order to prevent and combat hate motivated violence and incitement of such violence affecting young people, by issuing policy suggestions and supporting the work of the member States, raising awareness through co-operation with youth organisations and using monitoring mechanisms to assist member States' efforts in developing effective legislation and policies.

12. The Council of Europe and the member States should ensure co-operation between the governmental structures and youth organisations and remove bureaucratic and political barriers in the implementation of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.

13. There is a need to actively involve the pool of youth researchers in order to provide not only data on concepts of diversity, but also approaches to working with it and models of successful practices to provide evidence for the development of youth policy.

14. (Post) conflict trauma should be acknowledged and peace building and dialogue should be promoted and prioritised by the member States of the Council of Europe, the international community and youth organisations in (post) conflict regions by using programmes and instruments, including mass-media, in order to facilitate the re-establishment of a peaceful environment.

15. The Council of Europe and the member States should ensure that Protocol No.12 to the European Convention on Human Rights against discrimination is effectively implemented. We also demand that the Council of Europe urges member States that are not yet party to this protocol to sign and ratify it.

Youth mobility

16. The process of obtaining visas is expensive, complex and time-consuming, resulting in lost opportunities for young people. Thus we call for the member States of the Council of Europe:

a) to grant free, multiple entry and long term visas for study and youth programmes through a simplified application system which requires neither logistical costs nor personal presence to embassies (e.g. online application system).

b) to encourage greater co-operation between member States regarding visa issues thus reducing bureaucracy.

We ask for the implementation of the proposed actions before the next Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth.

17. We call the member States to increase their efforts in implementing the Bologna process and establish frameworks in terms of qualifications and competences recognition in all formal and non-formal education levels, increasing mobility and youth employment opportunities.

18. We call on the member States to continue promoting a common and cross-cutting action plan for European mobility in order to provide equal access to mobility for young people regardless of their country of origin and background, including through wider recognition of the youth card system.

Access to rights and youth information

19. In order to promote awareness of rights of young people, we recommend the establishment of an international day of youth rights and a public campaign.

20. Human rights education tools such as “Compass” and “Compasito” should be made compulsory in formal education curricula of the member States.

21. Member States should provide qualitative and professional information on the rights of young people and make it accessible to all, with a special focus to the needs of young people with fewer opportunities.

22. We urge member States to provide free legal advice and representation to all young people who cannot afford it.

23. We ask the Council of Europe for a compilation of rights related to young people which are already provided by existing international legal documents such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter. Identified gaps shall be addressed by the Council of Europe and the member States.

24. Ombudspersons should be appointed at national and European levels to ensure that the rights of young people are respected and protected.

25. A specific chapter on young people's rights should be introduced in the country reports of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

26. We urge member States to fully ratify the revised European Social Charter and its optional protocol with regard to the collective complaint procedure.

27. The European Court of Human Rights at European level and member States at national level shall promote regular case law compilations to better know the status of violations of young people's rights and to what extent they are protected by existing legal tools.

28. The Council of Europe shall promote specific research and studies on young people's access to rights in Europe with the objective of designing better evidence-based policies. This should involve member States and include a comparative analysis of the gap between duties and rights.

29. In order to ensure the full protection of young people's rights we ask for the promotion of a legal framework at European level.

Implementation and follow-up

30. We wish to emphasise that promoting effective youth policy is a collaborative effort of society. Public authorities, the private sector and the civil society should facilitate enhanced co-operation with regard to the development and implementation of innovative youth policies, including the funding of youth programmes in areas such as mobility, employment and youth information.

31. We call upon the Council of Europe Joint Council on Youth and the Youth Department to follow up on the results of this youth event and to report on the progress to the next Ministerial Conference and related youth event.

23 September 2012