

# The AC Newsletter

*This is the fourth edition of the AC Newsletter and the last one prepared by the representatives elected for the 2009-2011 mandate. It reports on highlights of the AC and CMJ meetings in Budapest in October 2011, as well as the Bureau meeting in January 2012.*

February 2012

## Topics

- Time to say goodbye
- New leadership
- Out with the old and in with the new
- AC Bureau news
- The future of the European Youth Foundation
- Work in progress ... to be continued ...



## Time to say goodbye

As this mandate of the AC has come to an end, I want to take the opportunity to look back at the work done over the last three years. This mandate has been shaped by the on-going reform process of the Council of Europe in many ways, questioning the current workings and priorities of the institution and forcing us to look at the youth sector with a critical eye.

Safeguarding the co-management system of the youth sector was a clear priority from the start. The co-management system enables youth organisations to contribute to the work of the CoE and shape its youth policy, and thereby also provides the CoE with a unique best practice in the field of youth participation. Our advocacy work was successful in this regard and in fact, one could say that the co-management system of the youth sector has been strengthened by the reform process; the institution has renewed its political commitment to youth participation and co-management, notably by deciding to keep its all its relevant structures.

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## The AC

The Advisory Council (AC) is made up of 30 representatives from youth NGOs and networks who can formulate opinions and proposals on any question concerning youth dealt with in the Council of Europe. With its governmental partner – the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) – it forms the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) to develop a common position on the political priorities and programme of the youth sector.



## Time to say goodbye (cont'd)

At the same time, the AC aimed to strengthen the mainstreaming of youth issues, and within the framework of the reform process, the CoE has decided that youth, together with gender and children, should be mainstreamed throughout the organisation. This gives the AC a reinforced mandate to bring a youth perspective to the institution – and how this will be done in practice is a question for the next mandate of the AC!

We have also looked at how the youth sector could contribute to making the CoE a stronger and more relevant actor in today's Europe. Building on the specificities of the youth sector, the AC identified areas of work where the CoE could have more of an impact, and, as a result, launched two high-profile projects. The *Youth Peace Ambassadors* build on the role of young people in conflict resolution and transformation, while the *Online Human Rights Defenders* aim to foster new ways of defending and promoting human rights online.

Looking back at the last three years, young people's access to their rights and the challenges faced in this regard have been high on the AC agenda, and this will also be the topic of the upcoming CoE conference of ministers responsible for youth, to be held in the autumn of 2012. The aim is to look at how youth policy can become more rights-based and better respond to the needs of young people, especially in relation to young people's access to social rights.

With these words it is time for us to say thank you for the last three years and wish the new mandate all the best, and good luck in keeping youth high on the CoE agenda.

*Antonia Wulff, Chair of the AC*



## New leadership



Within the Council of Europe reform process, youth questions are now dealt with by the Youth Department in the Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation. Ms Ólöf Ólafsdóttir was appointed Director on 1 October 2011. Mr Ulrich Bunjes is Head of the Youth Department.

## Out with the old and in with the new

The 30 present Advisory Council members were nominated for a three-year term: 2009-2011. In the framework of the reform process underway in the Council of Europe, the AC will be renewed every two years as from 2012. The Committee of Ministers officially nominated the 30 new members on 15 February 2012. They met for the first time in Strasbourg on 16-18 February for a training course to prepare them for the first plenary meeting of the new Advisory Council and the Joint Council on Youth that will take place in Budapest on 28-30 March 2012.

The AC was aware that, within the reform discussions, some member states were in favour of reducing the number of Joint Council and consequently the AC meetings. At its meeting in Budapest on 17-19 October 2011, the AC sent a letter to the Committee of Ministers, emphasising that the situation of representatives of youth organisations (who were mainly volunteers) could not be compared to that of full-time national civil servants. In order to play their role seriously as the non-governmental partners in the co-management system, in particular the monitoring of activities and the efficient use of the budget, it was necessary to meet twice a year.

As a result, the two annual meetings were maintained.

## AC Bureau news

Following the resignation of Loreta Senkute, Lea Benirschke (ESN) was elected to the AC Bureau. Nicolas Puvis (CNAJEP), member of the Bureau, was elected as second Vice-Chair. The final AC Bureau meeting was held on 19-20 January 2012 to prepare the first meeting of the new mandate 2012-2013.

The Bureau will continue to follow ongoing work of the AC until the new Bureau is elected at the March 2012 meeting. Two members of the Bureau participated in a consultative meeting at the end of January on a new priority project of the youth sector: "Young people combating hate speech in cyberspace". The project aims to make online public space safer by mobilising young people for human rights, launching a media youth campaign against hate speech in cyberspace and elaborating policy guidelines.

## The future of the European Youth Foundation

The Joint Council agreed to the proposals made by the Programming Committee on Youth on the future of the EYF. Revised operational regulations of the EYF have been approved by the Committee of Ministers and will come into effect as from 2013. The following changes can be highlighted:

- the merge of Category A and Category B grants into "international co-operation activities", open to international NGOs and national NGOs in co-operation with three partner organisations;
- funding of annual work plans (the EYF could support some or all activities depending on the action plan and its correspondence to criteria and political priorities);
- administrative support through biennial grants for well-established international NGOs;
- a non-renewable one-off grant for new structures to establish a European structure.

2012 will be devoted to the development of new grant application and report forms, a more user-friendly website and enhanced communication with NGOs.



## **Work in progress ... to be continued ...**

The Joint Council on Youth agreed on an opinion on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1978 (2011) "Towards a European framework convention on youth rights", which has been sent to the Committee of Ministers. This includes the Advisory Council's comments on the four points it had agreed on since the beginning of the process:

- young people have difficulties in accessing their rights;
- there is a gap between policy and implementation;
- the need for new instruments has to be justified;
- there is a need to study and learn more about the situation of young people to identify the most appropriate instrument (evidence-based approach).

The new AC will need to monitor the follow-up given to this opinion.

### **➤ Child and youth participation**

The Advisory Council has been involved in the process of drafting a Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18. The Joint Council on Youth approved the text in October 2011 and forwarded it to the Committee of Ministers for adoption.

The draft recommendation sets out ten principles to guide the development of policy and practice in member states with regard to the participation of children and young people. It also contains three sets of guidelines for member states to follow when implementing the draft recommendation: a) protecting children and young people's right to participate; b) promoting and informing children and young people about participation; and c) creating spaces for participation.

The draft recommendation is still being discussed by the Committee of Ministers.

### **➤ Access to social rights**

Building on the outcomes of the long-term project ENTER! and its aim to develop youth work and youth policy responses to the exclusion, discrimination and violence that affects young people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the Youth Department is currently in the process of drafting a Council of Europe Recommendation on access to social rights for Young People from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The latest draft of the recommendation includes a broad range of policy fields and actions, such as eradicating poverty and improving the living conditions of young people by securing accessible and affordable public services in the fields of education and training, information and counselling, employment, housing, health, security, sports, leisure and culture, as well as measures related to gender equality and youth participation and citizenship.

The AC has actively contributed to the process of drafting the recommendation, and is hoping that the next mandate will see it adopted in 2012.





### ➤ Roma Youth Action Plan

The AC has also been involved in the drafting of a Roma Youth Action Plan. One could argue that Roma youth have been rather invisible in mainstream youth policy, while young people have tended to be forgotten when Roma policies have been designed and drawn up, with the result that the situation and needs of young Roma to a large extent have been ignored. The Roma Youth Action Plan builds on the CoE Strasbourg Declaration on Roma, and aims to gather the CoE responses to the situation of young Roma in Europe today.

### ➤ Conference of youth ministers

The main theme of the 9th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth is "Young people's access to rights: development of innovative youth policies". The conference will take place in St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, on 24-25 September 2012. The AC has been involved in preparations and is in close contact with the European Youth Forum and the National Youth Council of Russia to organise a youth event prior to the conference and ensure full participation of youth representatives at the conference itself.