

## 40th EYCA Conference, 20 June 2024, Lecce, Italy

Dear EYCA President and EYCA members,  
Dear guests and colleagues,  
Cari rappresentanti italiani,

It is a great pleasure for me today to address you on behalf of the Council of Europe on the occasion of EYCA's 40th Conference.

Forty is an important anniversary, for people and organisations alike. By that time, they have lived through a variety of experiences, both positive and negative leading to a greater sense of self-awareness, wisdom and confidence.

On the one hand, this is the time to reflect on one's accomplishments, goals and overall direction. And on the other, it's a time of reassessment and re-evaluation of one's priorities and values. A turning point with the potential for new beginnings. A time to make even better decisions and pursue goals with more clarity.

Preparation of your new Strategy for 2025 – 2030, which is on your agenda today, is certainly an occasion for these reflections. The Council of Europe is looking forward to these new horizons. It has been accompanying and supporting the growth and strengthening of EYCA and its European Youth Card scheme since 1991.

That year the First Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth held by the Council of Europe recommended the creation of a Partial Agreement later named «Youth Mobility through the Youth Card». The representatives on the Committee of Ministers of France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Portugal pledged “to develop the Youth Card scheme, particularly at European level in the best interests of young people [...] with a view to facilitating their mobility as well as their access to the various goods and services necessary for their personal and cultural development”. This is a noble goal.

In 2021 we have celebrated the 30th anniversary of co-operation between the Council of Europe and EYCA. Since 1991, EYCA has grown to encompass almost forty member organisations and is reaching out to over 8 million card-holders. The Partial Agreement has grown from seven to twenty five member governments. We hope to soon welcome Italy back to the family of the Partial Agreement.

Since 2013, forty five activities took place in the framework of this partnership bringing together decision-makers from member states, practitioners, experts, researchers, youth card organisations, youth civil society and youth card holders. All of them resulted not only in networking and sharing of experience, but also in recommendations, new partnerships and projects. One of them I am glad to see today at your Conference – the EYCA Youth Panel.

The subjects we have been working on together are the challenges young people are still facing today and are top of their priorities: inclusive youth mobility, youth participation, employability, youth work, active citizenship, access to rights, prevention of radicalisation, mental health, intercultural dialogue... It is impossible to name it all.

EYCA has been an active partner in our youth Campaigns such as All Different – All Equal, NO HATE speech, Democracy Here/Democracy Now!, as well as in our European Universities on Youth Policies, our 50/50 trainings (for decision-makers and civil society representatives on a half-half basis), statutory meetings and Committee of Ministers' presidencies. All this excellent work is also due to you, people going every morning to work to make the lives of young people better.

Allow me now to turn to the follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration which was the result of the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe member states who met in Reykjavík in May a year ago. The Declaration has set out a novel approach for the Council of Europe, namely including a youth perspective in all the sectors of our Organisation's work. This is a great opportunity to increase relevance and sustainability of our policies and

activities. As our Advisory Council on Youth likes to say “Youthless policy is a useless policy”.

Right after the Reykjavik summit, elements for a Council of Europe reference framework for a youth perspective, were prepared by the Joint Council on Youth and adopted by the Committee of Ministers in February 2024.

These conceptualise the Youth Perspective as:

- an Attitude – Think with Youth;
- an Experience – Learn from and with Youth;
- a Skill – Participate with Youth;
- an Action – Act with and for Youth.

The Youth Perspective builds upon the existing principle of co-management, the programme of the European Youth Centres and of the European Youth Foundation which are developing practices, benchmarks and standards for youth policies and youth work.

Work is underway to develop a fully-fledged reference framework for a youth perspective, which will include a policy document, methodological guidelines and an action plan for the integration of a youth perspective into the work of the Council of Europe and in member States. The objective will also be to ensure that committees and other bodies think more spontaneously about engaging with young people, and see that they do have expertise in all areas that do affect their lives – we, older people, are witnessing this with AI related topics, climate change, peacebuilding and war for example.

Moreover, there have been and there are important political developments showing that the youth sector of the Council of Europe enjoys a strong political support: young people were at the forefront of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the Council of Europe; the 10<sup>th</sup> Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth will take place next year under the Maltese Presidency of the Council of Europe. The long-awaited Conference aims at reinvigorating the Council of

Europe's youth dimension and at modernising the European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life.

I believe that all that I have just said contradicts those who name **FORTIES** a time of the "mid-life crisis". I would like to wish us long-life health, lasting energy, excellent co-operation and success in empowering our young people – not only our future but already our present.

Clementina BARBARO  
Head of the Youth Policy Division  
Council of Europe