



## ERADICATE POVERTY

YOUNG PEOPLE FACING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN EUROPE:  
CIVIL SOCIETY AND ITS ANSWERS

ACTS OF 17 OCTOBER, INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

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Speech of Anna Rurka  
President of the Conference of INGOs

"I first want to welcome everybody present today for this 17 October, International Day for the eradication of poverty. You know that this day is always celebrated together with persons who are directly living in poverty and those who are supporting them.

And now I would like to begin with a piece of good news: according to the data published by the World Bank the last two decades have been historically the most successful ones in combating poverty as the rate of persons living in poverty has indeed decreased by half in the whole world, from 43% in 1990 to 20% twenty years later.

However, in the European Union over 122 million people are exposed to poverty and social exclusion. The European Union committed itself to getting at least 20 million people out of poverty by 2020 by asking the States to launch national action plans fighting against poverty, social exclusion and discrimination.

It's a long way to go. Let's just observe the growing youth unemployment, those whom we call now the NEETs, (Not in Education, Employment or Training). What is really worrying is that, in the EU, the youth unemployment rate has increased more rapidly – or decreased more slowly – than for the older workers for example. This shows that protection measures for the most vulnerable have been weak even though austerity measures hit first young people between 15 and 25.

We know that poverty is a complex problem, a structural problem that is not only about access to employment. It is a problem of social cohesion that covers access to rights as the rights, to housing, to health care services, education and vocational training. Poverty increases the level of stress and contributes to the citizens' feeling of insecurity which is expressed in the electoral choices of Europeans, both those who vote and those who do not vote, do not even register on the voting rolls and therefore do not use the right to vote. The non-use of rights is a particular aspect of the need for civic information.

The creation of the Council of Europe in 1949 marked the beginning of a new era in which the founding States embodied peace in Europe in a common democratic and legal area organised around the European Convention on Human Rights, human rights that sometimes seem closer to those who survived the Second World War than to young people today, who are far away from public institutions - who have been distanced from public institutions - and for whom human rights no longer have any meaning. This disenchantment goes hand in hand with the loss of confidence in public institutions, which is a normal reaction in a world where inequality is growing and where economic success benefits only a few.

Now the question is: how to build up a fairer world? Or, if we follow Rawls's thinking, "in what kind of society would reasonable citizens consent to live?" It would be helpful if young people, professionals and activists gathered here today could provide some answers to this question and share their vision of the world.

Every year since 1996, the date on which the commemorative stone for the refusal of poverty was laid in the forecourt of the Council of Europe, the Conference of INGOs marks the International Day

for the Eradication of Poverty. It is an opportunity for all of us, and especially for policy makers, to change our modes of representation in order to better understand concrete realities and seek solutions.

Vulnerability can turn into strength provided that on our journey we encounter someone; that we have a moving experience that allows to understand that another way is possible and that we are the actors of our destiny. To liberate means to leave behind a state experienced as a fatality, and a confinement in determinisms or in guilt<sup>1</sup>. As Jean-Paul Sartre said, "the important thing is not what has been done to us, but what we do with what has been done to us."

If we are here today, it's because we refuse to be confined in ready for use socio-political categories, we refuse that the persons for whom we are working be reduced to that. We refuse it because we recognise them as persons. Recognition has an active dimension, "I recognise"; it has a pronominal dimension "I recognise myself" and a passive dimension "I am recognised". Recognition raises the question of social justice, of a just society. It is about one's place in the world, about knowing if we have a place there and what is that place<sup>2</sup>. Lack of self-esteem and lack of access to rights are the major barriers preventing someone from participating and thus from belonging to a collective dimension of political, social, economic and cultural life.

Poverty is a violation of human rights. Lack of access to rights means failure to respect the rule of law. Non-recognition weakens democracy because it does not allow people to develop their abilities and interact with others.

What a waste for Europe to see these young people who for all these reasons cannot develop their energy and potential!

Recently the Committee of Ministers has adopted two Recommendations directly concerning young people. This means that the 47 Member States have agreed to follow the rules set by the Organisation and commit themselves to seeing that the necessary measures will be adopted by their administration.

The first Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 is about the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights. It stresses, in the preamble, that the European Social Charter with all its articles applies to the situation of these young persons.

We underline again here that the European Social Charter is a key instrument for the Council of Europe and in particular for civil society and that the Protocol providing for the collective complaints procedure allows for submitting difficult situations to the Committee of Social Rights which is an independent body receiving complaints about non-access to the rights listed in the Charter and ratified by the States.

However, not all States have yet ratified the revised European Social Charter, in which one article, the article 30, deals with the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion. It is urgent that

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<sup>1</sup> *Mary Yvonne Caillaux, De la misère à la pauvreté, les relations comme chemin de libération (From misery to poverty, relationships as a way to freedom)*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

with our organisations, each one of us undertakes to encourage governments to ratify the provisions of the Charter concerning the collective complaints procedure. This ratification depends essentially on political will, as Greece recently demonstrated.

The second Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers is the one adopted on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2016 and which invites member States to suppress the legal, political and social barriers faced by young people for accessing to their rights. The measures that the Member States should undertake for tackling this issue are notably "To invest in inclusive and quality education, to encourage decent paid internships and apprenticeships in order to facilitate flexible transitions between education and the labour market, to continue to promote equal access to mobility for all young people, in particular volunteers, by widely applying existing European schemes and mobility programmes, by simplified procedures for obtaining visas and by drawing on the experience of youth organisations fighting discrimination".

What seems to be useful and interesting, what makes a difference in this Recommendation, is its article 4 in Chapter I providing that the Member States are invited to

"undertake a critical and profound knowledge based analysis of the problems faced by young people in accessing rights, including consideration of intergenerational solidarity on policies with a long-term impact. This analysis should involve experts, policy makers, youth workers, and representatives of youth organisations, trade unions and other civil society organisations. Where possible, disaggregated data should be analysed in order to identify the experiences of excluded or marginalised young people."

With this paragraph we are approaching a youth participation based on their experience including the participation of the most vulnerable ones in an institutional functioning, which is tantamount to recognising that "their" problem is a problem of all.

Speech of Giuseppe Palmisano  
President of the European Committee of Social Rights

“It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this important event devoted to the answers that civil society can bring to young people facing poverty and social exclusion. First of all let me thank Mrs Anna Rurka, President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe and also its Human Rights Committee for keeping up this traditional meeting which marks the international day for the eradication of poverty. We have no better partner than this dynamic pillar of the Organisation for promoting democracy and active citizenship in Europe.

Today I would like to underline the importance of vocational training and employment, as well as of housing, for young people, and also to highlight the role of the European Social Charter in shaping policies and finding good practices in this area. In other words the question is: how will social rights, and therefore the ratification of the European Social Charter by the States, improve the situation of young people as regards housing, professional training, employment and working conditions? As among the participants in this meeting today we have NGOs from Poland and Greece please allow me a moment to talk about the positions of Greece and Poland as regards the European Social Charter.

In these times of economic difficulties, employment for young people is the most important issue for public authorities. A lot has already been said and written on this issue. Yes, in 2016 youth are suffering because of obstacles they find in their road, unemployment, a series of short-term contracts and a low recognition of their diplomas. Young people are faced with the crisis that has brought down the labour market. Today, in addition to social plans and job cuts, many companies have put a freeze on hiring, especially at the expense of young people. For many jobs, companies demand that candidates have experience and references; but for young people, how can they have this experience if they are not given any opportunity to acquire it? And it is even more difficult for a young person with no diploma. It is clear that this leads to poverty and social exclusion.

What can we do for these young people, for those who are the most vulnerable and furthest removed from the job market, for those who need time to gain qualifications and job experience, for those who have diplomas but who nevertheless do not find a job?

It is well known that we are living in a period of generational inequality which leaves more and more young people thinking that their lives will be less easy than those of their parents. It is our responsibility to do everything to reverse this trend. It is precisely in this spirit that the European Committee of Social Rights interprets the relevant provisions of the Charter, which are of great importance in the field in question since the Charter poses genuine legal obligations for European states to respect fundamental social rights and to protect young people from poverty and social exclusion.

In this regard, let me first recall Article 1§1 of the Charter, which lays down the right to work. As we know, this provision imposes on States an obligation of means rather than an obligation to achieve

results, in the sense that failure to achieve full employment or the existence of a high rate of unemployment does not, as such, lead to a finding of non-compliance with the Charter<sup>3</sup>. However, the efforts of the States Parties in the employment policy must be sufficient to combat unemployment, especially youth unemployment, and to promote job creation.

And since vocational training obviously favours the integration of young people into the labour market, I would like to refer to the positions taken by the European Committee of Social Rights in relation to Article 10 of the Charter, which guarantees the right to this training.

The Committee has recalled that, according to article 10§1 the State Parties have to:

- Ensure secondary general and professional education, university education and non-university higher education as well as other forms of vocational training;
- Establish pathways between secondary vocational education and higher university and non-university education;
- Promote mechanisms of recognition and validation of skills and work experience gained by vocational training and on the job in order to acquire a qualification or to gain access to general education, higher technical education or university education;
- Take measures making that the qualifications that have been obtained in general secondary education and general higher education are taken into account for professional inclusion into the labour market;

And as to article 10§2, the Committee stresses that the Charter ensures the right to apprenticeship and other systematic arrangements for training. Apprenticeship is the training provided on the basis of a contract between the trainee and the employer whereas the other systems may be based either on such relationships or on vocational training in a school. This training has to combine theory and practice and strong links have to be established between school and work. I underline that the Committee, under this paragraph, looks especially at the forms of apprenticeship that are based on a labour relationship between employer and apprentice and are aimed at vocational learning.

In addition to vocational training and the right to vocational guidance (as established under article 9 of the Charter) I would like to stress that the Charter deals also with the working conditions of young people, ensuring that they are not exploited in matters of salary or subjected to unfair working conditions because of their need or willingness to work. This is to be found in particular in article 7, §§ 5 to 7 of the Charter according to which the States undertake:

- to recognise the right of young workers and apprentices to a fair wage or appropriate allowances;

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<sup>3 3</sup> Conclusions I (1969), Interpretation of article 1§1

- to provide that the time spent by young persons in vocational training during the normal working hours with the consent of the employer shall be treated as being part of the working day;
- to provide that employees under 18 years of age shall be entitled to a minimum of four weeks annual holiday with pay;

But young people are not only the first victims of the employment crisis; they are also the first victims of the housing crisis. In fact, both are linked: on the one hand, the lack of housing prevents some young people from seizing their first job and, on the other hand, precarious employment does not allow them to meet obligations in terms of guarantees requested by a number of landlords or the often too high amount of rent. Yet access to housing is a fundamental element in the process of access to independence; it is one of the keys to successful integration and autonomy.

The right to housing is guaranteed under article 31 of the European Social Charter. This article does not impose an obligation of result to the States. However the rights provided by the Charter are rights that are bound to concrete and effective undertakings; the Charter is not about theoretical rights.

Article 31§1 obliges the States to take measures designed to promote the right to “access to housing of an adequate standard<sup>4</sup>” for all. They have in particular to provide access to housing for vulnerable persons, this means persons on a low income, the unemployed, single mothers, young people with disabilities (in particular people with psycho-social impairments)<sup>5</sup>.

It is obviously up to the public authorities to ensure that the housing is of an adequate standard, using various means such as the analysis of the characteristics of the housing stock, injunctions to owners who do not respect their obligations, urban planning rules or maintenance obligation imposed on landlords. Public authorities must also ensure that essential services such as water, electricity and telephone are not disrupted.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, Article 31§3 provides that affordable housing must be provided to persons who do not have sufficient resources. And the Committee considers housing affordable when the person or the household occupying it can bear the initial costs (deposit, rent in advance), the current rent and other costs such as operating expenses, maintenance and management, over a long period of time, while maintaining a minimum standard of living.

It is easy to see that the right to housing is well protected by the European Social Charter, notably the revised Charter. Unfortunately paragraph 1 of this article 31 has only been ratified by 13 States and paragraph 3 only by 9 States. (I would like to underline here that Greece which ratified the revised Social Charter in March this year, has ratified all three paragraphs of article 31).

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<sup>4</sup> *Conclusions 2003, Italy*

<sup>5</sup> *Conclusion 2003 France*

<sup>6</sup> *Conclusions 2003, France*



However, the Committee considers that the right to housing is very important, as it is closely linked to the right to life, and is crucial for the respect of the human dignity of every individual. It is of the opinion that the respect of this right permits the exercise of many other rights - civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights - and is of paramount importance to the family.

For this reason, the Committee decided to examine the situation in States, not bound by article 31, in particular the States Parties to the 1961 Charter, such as Poland, under article 16 of the Charter guaranteeing the right of the family to social, legal and economic protection. In order to comply with Article 16, States Parties shall endeavour to propose adequate housing for families, to take account of their needs in housing policies and to ensure that existing housing is decent and equipped with essential amenities (heating and electricity in particular).

It is important to underline that article 16 obliges not only the States to have a broad enough offer of housing adapted to the needs of the families but also to help young families which is very important for their full inclusion into society and for combating poverty and social exclusion.

On this point let me stress that, according to the revised European Social Charter, protection against poverty and social exclusion is not only a general aim and a basic value, it is a real legal obligation, established as such in article 30 of the Charter.

I just said that Greece has some months ago ratified the revised European Social Charter and accepted nearly all its provisions. But it is important to say that it has also ratified the Protocol providing for the system of collective complaints.

Let me quote, in the context of our meeting, a collective complaint made precisely against Greece, so as to show how it is possible to use the Charter to defend the rights of young people. It is the complaint n°66/2011 that has been lodged by the General Federation of Employees of the Companies of Public Electricity (GENOP-DEI) and by the Confederation of Trade Unions of Public Officers (ADEDY).

The two trade unions have argued in this complaint that the new Greek legislation on special "fixed-term apprenticeship contracts" between employers and young people between the ages of 15 and 18, as well as the new legislation enabling new entrants to be hired on the labour market of the under-25s with a remuneration of 84% of the basic or daily minimum wage, violates the Charter because it discriminates against persons on the basis of age and does not provide them with an equal remuneration and a decent standard of living.

The Committee in fact agreed for the greater part with the complainants and unanimously concluded that there had been a violation of articles 7§7, 10§2, 12§3 of the Charter of 1961<sup>7</sup> as well as of article 4§1 in the light of the clause of non-discrimination.

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<sup>7</sup> It has to be noted that in 2011 Greece was still bound to the Charter of 1961 but had already accepted the collective complaint mechanism

The Committee stated also :

- That these young people are excluded from the realm of the labour law and not have the right to three weeks annual paid leave;
- That the impugned provisions do not provide for an adequate apprenticeship system or other training means for young boys and girls in their diverse forms of employment;
- That the extremely limited protection against social and economic risks granted to minors bound by 'special learning contracts' under the legislation in force has the practical effect of establishing a separate category of workers who, in practice are excluded from the protection afforded by the social security system as a whole;
- That the impugned legislation provided for a minimum salary for all workers under 25 that was below the poverty line, and that this was also a discrimination.

On this latter aspect I would like to add that, from a general point of view, the Committee considers that it is possible to pay to young workers a lower minimum wage under certain circumstances (for instance when they are in apprenticeship or following a vocational training ). Such reduction of the minimum wage could be in favour of the access of young people to the labour market and could also find its justification in the statistics according to which they have on average lower expenses than other categories of workers for housing, family support and other costs of life. However such reduction of the minimum wage should never be below the State's poverty threshold. In this case against Greece, the Committee has considered that the importance of the reduction of the minimum wage and the way in which it was applied to all workers under 25 is disproportionate even when taking into account the particular economic circumstances of the country.

The Greek Government stated that the measures constituting a violation of the Charter were provisional and would be withdrawn as soon as the economic situation of the country allowed. Unfortunately, in December 2015 these measures were still in place.

After having presented a specific case that concerns Greece which shows the potential of the collective complaints procedure as a means of protecting the rights of young people, I cannot – unfortunately - present you a similar case for Poland. As I already said, Poland is one of the 9 States that are still under the Charter of 1961 and have not accepted the collective complaints mechanism. This is why I strongly encourage the authorities of this country to ratify the revised Charter and the Protocol establishing the collective complaints mechanism so as to reinforce the protection of social rights and also the protection of young people in their country.

In conclusion, there is no need to recall here the essential role civil society plays in the emancipation of young people, in the formulation of policies affecting them and in the protection of young people against violations of their rights. The particular challenge for civil society in this period marked by an economic crisis and social difficulties is to restore hope to young people. Learning a trade, access to housing, these are the first moments of economic empowerment, which mark a change of status, goodbye to childhood. Civil society must be mobilised to accompany young people on this road.

The European Social Charter, through the collective complaints procedure, offers an exceptional opportunity for civil society to act directly on behalf of young people, in order to respect the rights of young people, including those living in poverty. Many of our States still have to accept this procedure. But here again, civil society has its role to play - raising political leaders' awareness to the importance of accepting this procedure for strengthening guarantees of respect for human rights. I urge you to promote this instrument.

I wish you courage and success in your actions for the well-being of young people and thank you for your attention. "

## Report of the day

After these two introductory contributions it has been chosen not to follow the contributions as listed in the programme and to sum up this very rich day under the heading of four questions

- I. Unemployment, precariousness and poverty..... are they linked?
- II. Policies at local, regional national and international level.....do ? they make a difference
- III. Vocational training..... are helps available?
- IV. Hope for young people .....how to give it back?

Some preliminary remarks

1st remark: In order to shorten the text, we do not quote the many statistics on unemployment mentioned by the speakers from different countries. They are based on various sources, and as Martyna Wanat (Polish Forum of Young Diplomats<sup>8</sup>) has pointed out, in Poland they are related to different age groups and are therefore difficult to be compared with those from other countries. But all statistics confirm the general trend towards a steady, long lasting and worrying increase of unemployment among young people aged 15-25. Guillaume Petot (association of young teams for education JEEP<sup>9</sup>) says that in a district of Strasbourg 65% out of young people have no employment which shows the existence of population groups that are particularly far from employment. According to Eurostat, the youth unemployment reaches 20% in Europe.

In addition, it was said several times during the day that the real unemployment rate for young people is higher than the official numbers based on statistical data that don't consider the number of young people in short vocational trainings, mostly very short trainings, neither those having a precarious job, a seasonal job, nor the young migrants who are waiting for their regularisation. Statistics also do not include unemployed persons who are no more on the lists of job seekers because they think that they will never find a job in this way and that it needs too much paper work for trying to get a benefit.

About precariousness, Jason Konstandaridis (Popular Solidarity, Greece)<sup>10</sup> quotes figures on part-time jobs that have increased by 320% during the last three years in Greece.

2nd remark: One should read between the lines of this report the long collective work achieved for preparing the different contributions. Some speakers organised neighbourhood meetings, others have conducted surveys of young people supported by the service of which they are themselves the users, others have brought videos with testimonies, others have presented new initiatives mobilising enterprises of their geographical area to give just a few examples.

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<sup>8</sup> This Forum is an association of students in Law and Political Sciences in Poland

<sup>9</sup> JEEP is an organisation of volunteers that does exist since 50 years in Strasbourg

<sup>10</sup> Popular Solidarity is a young organisation that was created for working on issues of long lasting unemployment and respect of labour law

## I. Unemployment, precariousness and poverty..... are they linked?

The title given to the meeting was: young people facing poverty and social exclusion in Europe. The word "unemployment" was not mentioned. But it happened that almost all interventions began by quoting unemployment. This is enough to show how much society is affected by the burden of unemployment in general and its impact on young people in particular. But it could also wrongly suggest that unemployment is the sole cause of poverty, thus reducing poverty to a financial issue without taking into account the other contextual and political factors contributing to its persistence.

One of the lessons we learned during this day is - and several speakers underlined it - that poverty is not only a financial problem. May Darwish and Benjamin Sow, young immigrants accompanied by the service ASE<sup>11</sup> in Paris, created a group of young adults over 18 who have been granted ASE support until the age of 21, a measure that makes it possible for them to finish their high school studies. We give them the floor:

"We all agreed that poverty is not only a financial issue. Being poor is also having nobody to encourage us, to support us and give us hope. Wealth is not only a matter of money; it is about knowledge, respect, human values, helping others, fulfilling dreams with somebody's help.

However, it should not be forgotten that the support by ASE gives us financial helps for our accommodation, for eating, buying clothes ... But we also need adults who support us in our projects. Money is not enough to ensure our future. "

Benjamin praises the service; he says "ASE gave me physical and moral health for my life".

Despite these positive observations concerning the support service they emphasize the general weakness of the measures put in place by the State:

"Lack of housing, precarious housing in hotels creates poverty. Without money to take the bus, without a motorbike, it is difficult to find a job or an internship in a company".

The problems of housing have also been mentioned by Anne Wery (La Touline)<sup>12</sup>. This organisation works as a day service with volunteers involved in spending a lot of time helping young people to find accommodation. Often it is only temporary access to a precarious housing or even a hotel for a few months. The financial impact is mitigated by state helps but the feeling of great precariousness and of "no place for me" remains.

Several other speakers said that there are some benefits given to young people, especially to those who have no access to employment; the aim is to support their daily living and to encourage them to undertake a training session. These benefits could be seen as positive measures but, because of their low amount (some 400 €/month in France) and their short duration they contribute to linking together unemployment and poverty.

In Greece, access to unemployment benefits is very limited because of complex administrative procedures for getting them. It has even been said that many people give up these benefits when they see that their file is not successful.

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<sup>11</sup> ASE means « social help for children » it is a French service for children

<sup>12</sup> La Touline is a new service of the organisation called Apprentis d'Auteuil France

Many interventions refer to this effect of weariness and of being crushed under the weight of too frequent humiliations and harsh administrative behaviour. As an example we were told that a group of persons gathered to prepare the intervention of this 17 October 2016 had suddenly to undergo a strict identity check by the local police; this is a complete denial of the right to freedom of expression (Convention on Human Rights, article 10) and the right to freedom of association (article 11 of the same Convention).

Léon Dujardin, (founder of ESAN), rightly recalled how important it is to recognize the legal personality of the most vulnerable ones. Ms. Wim (ATD Fourth World) cites a testimony she heard: "we are treated with scorn and fear and this hurts us".

This link between unemployment or precariousness and being pushed at the boarder of the society was clearly described by Mickaël Michel (ATD Fourth World, Seville); When speaking about how unemployment is lived by a group of young parents he quotes a short talk he had with Gonzalo, a member of this group, somewhere in a very poor district of Seville:

M : Do you know someone who has a fixed job in our district ?

G : Yes, yes I know one ; he is 47 and is an officer at the city hall

M : OK. But do you know people who are employed in enterprises?

G : Yes, I know ...4... that's all

M : How many people do you know who are working?

G : But they all work, of course they do, they pick up scrap, cartons, sometimes fruit...it's jobs that are ... half allowed...

Sometimes unemployment questions even the law!

Unfortunately this economy based on "just coping" can also become the privileged place where underground economy is developing, as it was pointed out several times during the day.

Jason Konstantaridis ( Popular Solidarity, Greece) showed how unemployment pushes youth on the boarder of the society:

"Nowadays it becomes more and more difficult to find a job; one can speak of a real "job hunting" where lesser chances are given to the younger population. Unrealistic expectations of employers regarding professional skills and work experience discourage young jobseekers and show them a future that can be best described by the words " uncertain" or "blurry".

"It is a scourge for modern societies, where solving daily living problems gets increasingly difficult. Victims of these new living conditions are, amongst others, young people, who are forced to suffer radical changes, without having either the experience to react efficiently or a job for covering their first and more pressing needs. In the present situation people are powerless; they are able and eager to work, but they have no chance to produce anything and to earn their living; this is something that it is slowly leading them to losing their identity and getting socially excluded. Alienated from the society they can't take part and play their role in the political, economic and social life of the country."

Indeed, it can be said that all unemployed persons, regardless of their age, suffer from the consequences of this situation, which undermines their daily lives, their families and their social relationships. But it must be pointed out that young people, even before they can enter an adult life, see all the doors closed for them. The strength of their youth is not enough to open them; they need the support and experience of the older generation. NGOs are, each in their own way and with their history, attempts to create a relational network for sharing this necessary experience.

Because the first professional experience is difficult even for young academics, Martyna Wanat (European Forum of Young Diplomats) pointed out that in Poland, "in order to create more opportunities for young people, especially students leaving universities, associations like ours have created professional career centers throughout the country. These centers list job offers, vocational training or internship opportunities so that young people can acquire a real professional experience which is often difficult for them. Without access to internships, how could they acquire professional experience?"

This intervention casts a light on the current role of the NGOs; they appear to be something like companies specialized in the repair of the social fabric torn by the crisis and neglected by the States whose greatest interest would however be to repair it.

Alkistis Kalantzi (Popular Solidarity, Greece) gives precise details on this fragility of the social fabric torn thread by thread by the many daily difficulties encountered by the inhabitants of the districts of Athens. The Citizens' Ombudsman conducted a survey in the districts in which Popular Solidarity is active.

"Some results of this survey showing that "some families do not have a fixed telephone connection or access to a computer or the Internet. 17% of respondents said they had been cut electricity or water from the house because of unpaid bills. 48.5% of respondents have had difficulties over the last five years in paying their loans, taxes, rents, but also tuition fees that are necessary since private schools are almost mandatory in Greece, where the Educational system has deteriorated".

This list, which would undoubtedly be valid for many neighbourhoods in other European cities, shows this pernicious deterioration in the living conditions of people who previously had a home with water and electricity, and whose children went to a good school. Then unemployment arrived with its train of cuts, doors closing, rights that are no longer respected.

Is it necessary to quote Article 31 of the European Social Charter on the right to housing<sup>13</sup> with the wording "Housing of an adequate standard"? The formulation is modest, but many young people dream of it!

The links between unemployment, precariousness, poverty and changes in social life become clear

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<sup>13</sup> *European Social Charter article 31: The right to housing «With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to housing, the Parties undertake measures designed to promote access to housing of an adequate standard, to prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination, to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources.»*

with the different interventions. Several speakers stressed that the loss of confidence in one's own future, together with a strong feeling of helplessness, creates an increasing tendency among young people to turn away from both local and international political institutions.

As Georgios Vellis (Director of Social Services, Municipality of Fylis) said, young people are sometimes quite very far from citizenship but they remain open to participation<sup>14</sup>

"In Greece, following the impact of the economic crisis, we see that young people are looking for forms of participation, but their political commitments have decreased while their participation in cultural and social activities has increased."

Almost all speakers cited young people's efforts to participate as a means of fighting social exclusion, finding places and activities where they could be involved in, be it in their group, their community, their country or in another country.

Georgios Antonopoulos, deputy mayor of the municipality of Fyli, shows with figures that this situation of exclusion has a very damaging effect on Greece, namely the emigration of young people. "The number of people aged 15 to 64 who left Greece due to the crisis exceeds 500,000. This is the largest emigration movement ever seen, involving young doctors, academics, interpreters, scientists, who went to Germany and the United States in the three last years. Most of them will not return to the country and it is a considerable loss".

It is well known that this brain drain and loss of labour forces is, for a country, "a formidable effect of the economic crisis as it is questioning the capacity of the political authorities to manage its consequences. The real exclusion of a significant part of the workforce is causing youth to feel that there is no alternative to going elsewhere. "As their dynamism is not usable on the spot they emigrate courageously".

Martyna Wanat (The Polish Forum of Young Diplomats) notes that having a university degree is no longer a guarantee of finding a job and that young graduates are increasingly facing unemployment or having jobs that do not correspond to their qualifications. "So, many young people leave their country and work abroad; often the job they find does not match their level of education or skills, but they are much better paid."

Are policies facing this challenge?

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<sup>14</sup> Information given by Mr Vellis: The United Nations General Assembly distinguishes the following areas of youth participation:

\*economic participation – relates to employment and work in general, to economic development, eliminating poverty, building a stable economic situation in a society, a region or for young people as a group;

\*political participation – relates to authorities and governments, public policies, exercising power, the influence on the distribution of resources at different levels;

\*social participation – relates to involvement in the life of a local community, addressing local problems and challenges;

\*cultural participation – relates to different forms of art and expression (visual arts, music, film, dance, etc.).



## II. Policies at local, regional national and international level ....do they make a difference?

To this question some are tempted to answer that there is not very much to do and that at the local level only very poor means are available.

It is clear that the term "local level" does not cover similar realities in different countries. Local administrative systems are more or less autonomous depending on the administrative organisation of the countries. Services for young people can be based on local decisions with local funding or, on the contrary, on policy decisions made at state level, with government funding, and implemented in a decentralized way,- closer to people's needs - by the municipal services. At the national level, one observes a declining trend in funding social policy whereas people's needs are increasing. This is not just a problem of limited financial resources, but a problem of the readiness of the States to invest in young people who, nevertheless, represent their future economy and society.

The contributions made during the seminar clearly showed that in urban and semi-rural areas municipal services collaborate with local associations and sometimes delegate to them a large part of the tasks involved in helping people to have access to employment, services or socialisation.

At the local level, that is to say, at the level closest to people it is a huge task. Article 30 of the European Social Charter<sup>15</sup>, stipulates the right to protection of "all persons who live or risk living in a situation of social exclusion and poverty, as well as their families".

On the spot, the issue is very precise: how to help young people to have access to employment, to attend a vocational training course and to find employment? what initiatives of States or local organisations are to be promoted?

For some population groups, access to employment is all the more difficult that these young people have had a difficult school career and little or no vocational training.

The interventions made during the seminar show the multiplicity of initiatives both at the local level, - as shown by the deputy mayor of the municipality of Fyli - and at the regional or national level. Public or semi-public services have been created, and associative actions have been carried out with or in parallel with these services. Their goal is to meet the basic needs of young people so that they can think that they have a future in the society and a professional future as well.

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<sup>15</sup> Article 30: *The right to protection against poverty and social exclusion.*

*With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, the Parties undertake:*

- a. *To take measures within the framework of an overall and co-ordinated approach to promote the effective access of persons who live or risk living in a situation of social exclusion and poverty, as well as their families, to, in particular, employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance.*
- b. *To review these measures with a view to their adaptation of necessary.*

## Three good practices

Three contributions described local applications of French government initiatives taken some thirty years ago with the aim of facilitating access to employment of young disadvantaged people. These are examples of good practice, although limited, that should be multiplied.

### 1. Sylvie Schrenck (Director of the Local Employment Mission in Strasbourg) explains:

" As early as 1982, the growing awareness of the difficulties encountered by some young people in gaining access to work resulted in the creation of a public service called "local employment missions" <sup>16</sup> responsible for monitoring each young person in training and transition to work. These services have acquired a great expertise in 35 years. They are not just facilitators of employment, but they develop comprehensive support for young people. The purpose is "to consider all difficulties of inclusion as employment, training, guidance, but also mobility, housing or health. This comprehensive approach is the most effective way to remove barriers to integration into employment and wider social life.

These young people experience different degrees of precariousness, from lack of employment to a situation of multiple difficulties such as financial difficulties (no individual means of transport, no wages, no unemployment benefits), family (young single women with a child) or no housing<sup>17</sup>".

Like the other participants coming from different countries, Mme Schrenck highlights the increasing number of young people living in great precariousness. She says that among the 6600 young people supported by the Local Mission of Starsbourg in 2015, only 524 had access to the „Income of active solidarity" (Revenu de Solidarité Active (RSA)<sup>18</sup> and that in reality in some areas, one young person out of two lived in a situation of precariousness.

### 2. The effort to answer multiple needs in the form of a comprehensive support is also at the heart of the Social Assistance to Children (ASE), a national service that intervenes at the level of each district ("Department in France).

This service that was created for children, as suggested by its name, is increasingly used by young people over the age of 18, i.e., who are above the age limit of the service :

"A young person supported by the ASE can then benefit from educational and social support, comprehensive care (housing, health, nutrition, etc.)"

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<sup>16</sup> In France there are 447 Local Employment Missions. The one in Strasbourg is among the 10 most important ones after Marseille, Paris, Lyon or Lille. They are a proximity public service and help youth between 16 and 25 who are no more in education to overcome the barriers they face for their professional and social inclusions. Each year some 1.4 million young people are supported by these services.

<sup>17</sup> 51 % of the young people supported by this service are living with their parents – who often have a very low income as well- and 21% have their own home. Nearly one third have no fixed housing: they live in public homes, hotels, with friends and some are homeless. (Details given by Sylvie Schrenck)

<sup>18</sup> The amount of this benefit given in France to young job seekers depends on the family income ; it is around 400 €

The young people who came to testify to their difficulties but also to their successful academic career insisted on their need for support in many areas so as to have the feeling of security that is necessary for being able to think of their future.

3. Anne Werey (Apprentices La Touline) runs a recent initiative of "Les apprentis d'Auteuil"<sup>19</sup> to support young people in the period of transition into adulthood. This is an experimental project called La Touline, echoing the name of the rope used to moor a ship. It is used especially by young people who have to leave the service for children (ASE) because they reached the age limit.

"Each Touline accompanies about 50 young people leaving ASE. It is run by a coordinator, a paid professional, with the support of volunteers, in liaison with public institutions and services (local mission, employment center, platform for professional remobilization, etc.). It offers a space of encounter, listening and support favoring human anchoring. Young people in very precarious situations are supported in the access to their rights and directed to a network of institutions and associations able to meet their basic needs (health, food or housing). Strong partnerships with accommodation settings make it possible to respond to the most urgent situations".

The coordinator builds on good relationships established with the main local economic and social stakeholders and on a team of volunteers who act as sponsors and:

- "coach" one or more young people having a professional project but also gaps in terms of skills and social networks;
- propose collective workshops on job search techniques / job interview simulations.

Each Touline is established in the heart of the youth's living area so as to facilitate their participation and to foster synergies with their environment. The term "coordinator" used to designate the facilitator shows that it is all about networking and partnership with all the actors in the local fabric.

However, these good practices face institutional limitations: May Darwish and Benjamin Sow have shown that this so necessary comprehensive support encounters geographical limits. This means that, according to the place where they live, young people are not entitled to same helps. They point out that it is, in theory, possible that ASE cares for young adults aged between 18 and 21, but that this recently adopted "young adults' measure" is implemented differently according to the districts and even sometimes not implemented at all.

This extension of child welfare to very young adults is also subject to administrative constraints. Young people must apply for it and document their real difficulties of social and professional integration. This is one more barrier to overcome.

Such institutional limitations of possible support at the local level were mentioned by several speakers: "sometimes good laws do exist, but the local administrations are slow for implementing them".

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<sup>19</sup> *A catholic organisation helping youth all over the world*

Institutional limitations related to the person's situation were also mentioned: the Local Mission in Strasbourg, and Touline as well, pointed out the difficulties of young migrants to obtain their regularisation, which is essential for accessing to vocational training and employment.

The members of the ASE gave the example of a young migrant who was supported by the service since a couple of years and who is now over 18 and because his situation is still not regularised, he is in danger of being deported. It is both an illogical management of public expenditure and a loss of the right to help for this young person. He is now really in danger as, being deprived of housing aids he has to return living on the street and on the margins of society.

Several speakers confirmed the existence of such limitations. For example, sometimes training or internship offers cannot be accepted by individuals because of their personal situation. Mickael Michel cites what happened to a young father in Seville who, after several months without any answer to his request, was finally offered a vocational training located at the other end of the city and for several weeks.

"He could not accept it because he had to try every day to find food for his family and how could he pay for the trip? This is a real institutional discrimination".

He then adds with a smile:

"It did not really matter, as he often participates in picking of olives; He does not have to sit in a classroom for learning from a video how to pick them up".

These few examples of faced limitations show the crucial role of NGOs in helping young people to become the actors of their lives and to invent everyday ways to overcome the difficulties they experience.

Guillaume Petot (JEEP) points out how particular each situation is, making it difficult to move from the micro to the macro level (and vice versa) and this requires multiple forms of specialized prevention of exclusion. NGOs benefit from an intermediary situation between institutional help systems and people. He gives an example of possible interventions to combat early school leaving that had been decided with the families in one area. As the professional of the NGO is not part of the school system nor of official institutions he is in a privileged position for acting and mobilizing the inhabitants of the neighbourhood to help young people succeed at school.

This particular position, this freedom of action of the NGO, allows giving back the power to act to the local population, with theater projects, housing improvement projects and others. Short events and trips organised with young people, by "doing with them" according to their wishes and skills, restore their self-confidence, develop their abilities to act together with their own relational skills and thus make them regain the motivation needed to find a job and undertake training while knowing that it may be difficult to reach professional qualification.

"The important thing, concerning access to employment, is to acquire the necessary know-how in good manners."

### III. Vocational training..... helps available?

Several speakers shared their experience regarding the necessary involvement of young people in a vocational training project.

Léon DUJARDIN (ESAN)<sup>20</sup> stressed the need to "do with and for" vulnerable young people with adapted vocational training programs and cited the European program entitled "training without exclusion" in which ESAN took part during six years.

"It is indeed essential that the organisers of training know and recognise the capacities of people to be co-authors and co-actors of their access to employment and their future in the society. Everyone has abilities and the purpose is to invest time and money for restoring them and to offer a training that corresponds to what the young person would like to do, the profession he/she would like to exercise. This also implies that the proposed training prepares to future professions, that training centers provide access to advanced techniques".

He gives the example of the "Institute for Street Children" in Lisbon that aims to get young people back to school or to attend training sessions. For this to happen, after long interviews with the young person, a contract is signed with the volunteers who will support him/her for finding internships and vocational training. This contract is reviewed every week so as to make sure that the young person is really a co-author of the project. He added that the Secours Populaire<sup>21</sup> in France has more than 50 partner companies for internships. Using retired professionals for sponsorship is also a good way for young people to get to know the trades and the world of work.

Several speakers insisted on the big number of young people living very far away from this world of work, where their parents themselves often have no more their place. It is indeed a great challenge to make employment attractive, when near to them the informal economy offers opportunities for earning money in an apparently very easy way.

Antoine MARTIN (Vice-President of the International Federation of Production Schools)<sup>22</sup> shared with the participants of this conference the experience of the "production schools" set up 20 years ago to meet the needs of young people in difficulty. He stresses that the young people who are living in these boarding schools are often at a disadvantage in formal education. They seem to have no culture, but they all have talents that they can make fruitful. Some already have a painful experience of life, as currently the isolated migrant minors. For them, the aim is to obtain the regularisation of their stay and a "young adult contract" in order to be able to follow the training which is planned for people aged from 15 to 19 years old.

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<sup>20</sup> ESAN European Social Network

<sup>21</sup> The organisation called Secours Populaire was created in France short after the second world war. It is one of the founding members of ESAN

<sup>22</sup> The Production Schools are private non-for-profit technical education settings They are grouped in a federation that has now become an international federation.

The training is based on 2/3 practice and 1/3 school time. The fact of having 2/3 practice allows young migrants who do not speak French to have a first contact and to learn the language gradually on-the-job. The purpose of these particular schools, confirmed by experience, is to train in practice, "learning by doing". The proposed trades are those that meet the needs of the local companies with which the school is in regular contact since these companies are on the one hand places of training and on the other hand subcontracting clients of the School. It is then a win-win relationship.

In the geographical area of the School cited as an example the needs of the companies concern the area of general mechanics and iron and steel metallurgy. The School therefore trains these trades and has the same equipment in machines as the companies which makes it possible for young people to have access to advanced technology and to ISO 9000 standards while learning, at the same time, the respect of conviviality rules.

The training that lasts two years is based on real production for companies that are likely to hire these youngsters later on. Thus in 20 years 250 young people have been hired in these local companies.

The role of NGOs acting as inventors on a day-to-day basis has already been mentioned by several speakers. This happens also with this school, which is currently training only boys but plans now to offer training for girls in the field of medical textiles. This example has already been followed at national level where 7 schools have recently been given the award "France goes ahead" and at international level with schools in Germany, Austria, Denmark and Finland joining the Federation.

These last two speakers have highlighted a number of conditions to be fulfilled so that vocational training makes sense for young persons who are far away from employment. Other speakers show that there is still a lot to be done.

Alkitis KALANTZI (Popular Solidarity) while deploring the current deterioration of the school system in Greece for want of financial resources, insists in particular on the inadequacy of the vocational training system which does not aim at developing the skills required in the rapidly changing labour market. Training in obsolete trades further weakens young people from lower-income neighborhoods.

The active involvement of young people in a training project is only possible if they have a minimum financial security for their survival on a daily basis during the course of the training. It is this security that an initiative at the level of the EU: the Youth Guarantee, sought to provide for with substantial funding. These measures are aimed at young NEETs, those who are neither in education, nor in employment, nor in training. The aim is to ensure that any young person in difficulty is offered a training or employment proposal within four months of registration. Several services or NGOs (in Poland, Greece, France and Spain) reported using this Youth Guarantee, which, in addition to helping young people, gives a subsidy of € 4,000 per year to the employers who hire a young person within the Youth Guarantee programme. But several speakers pointed out the weaknesses of the system.

Mickael MICHEL reported how, with the team of young fathers in Seville, they experienced the limits of these measures and then went as far as Brussels to get explanations and to make useful proposals for a better implementation. He tells what happened to a young father, with this Youth Guarantee:

"He got the agreement to do a storekeeper training. He was excited to learn how to handle the forklift and to do that job later on. But anxious not to be able to read, not to be able to decipher the labels quickly enough, he enrolled in an evening class to improve his reading. It was then that the Youth Welfare officials told him that from now on he was excluded from the Youth Guarantee and the training since he had resumed education. We can see here how measures decided at a high level can miss their target and turn against the weakest ones. "

He cites figures illustrating the shortcomings in the application of this European measure: the aim was to help 800,000 NEETs in Spain, but after three years only 120,000 young people had benefited from it, while 70% of the funds were already spent, which caused the anger of this group of young fathers. Gonzalo said:

"We have to bear the shame of being always controlled, of authorities being always suspicious; they come to see if we did not steal something .... But what with them? This money, where is it? Indeed, how is it possible that a measure is undertaken without real control of its implementation? "

This is where the association of young fathers reacted: instead of yielding to criticism, anger and even violence they went to Brussels, explained the limits of this measure for people in great difficulty. They obtained that an opinion on the application of the measure would be sent to the States advocating intensification of the application of the measure to the most disadvantaged populations. With this in mind they contacted the Municipality of Seville and submitted proposals for better implementation. These proposals, based on their experience, were made in a few sentences full of meaning; they say that it is necessary to:

- "require employers to acknowledge the experience of young people, as they have already done a lot of work in different trades without recognition, without certification<sup>23</sup> but they have acquired skills.
- privilege on-the-job training: work first and then training.

These proposals will be made everywhere in Andalusia. Is it a new hope?

#### 4. Hope for young people .....how to give it back?

To give back means to restore something that has been stolen.

Restoring this hope that has been stolen by the mechanisms of finance and politics, by the chain of circumstances, means to return to young people their main characteristic and force: their confidence in life.

This issue raised by Mr. PALMISANO in his introductory speech to the day was accompanied by a call for mobilization to which the representatives of the local authorities and NGOs who intervened at

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<sup>23</sup> In Spain it is very hard to get a certification of one's experience because it is only possible to register the request once a year during a period of time limited to 15 days.

the conference echoed. Maritchu RALL justly quoted the French philosopher Levinas "Faced with poverty, one must always keep a horizon of hope."

At the end of this conference, we can glean from each other's contributions five main opportunities to restore hope, still wishing that there could be more.

1. Action plans made by Municipalities, such as those adopted by the Municipality of Fyli, can be a source of hope for young people.

Giorgios ANTONOPOULOS (deputy mayor of the municipality of Fyli) cites the means used by his municipality to combat social exclusion by multiplying the opportunities given to young people to express their capacities and to gain self-esteem. The local authorities have decided:

- To leave the schools open all day long and in the evening and to organize activities for young people, seminars, life-long education and others
- To create cultural activities managed by young people themselves
- To support the creativity of young people (creation of an orchestra, a theater group)
- To make municipal information programs for young people on topics such as environment, traffic, social solidarity, food hygiene, preventive and alternative medicine. "

He suggests that local governments could take up the challenge of exclusion of young people by means such as:

- Clear support for youth employment (competitive prizes for employers recruiting Greek graduates)
- Organisation of apprenticeships
- Collaboration with NGOs
- Reduction of local taxes for companies supporting young entrepreneurs.

This list is not exhaustive but it shows that the municipality has chosen to mobilize all the available resources, buildings, inhabitants, companies and associations and especially the young people themselves so as to prevent that they have no other aim than to be passive users of social helps. By giving them an opportunity to experience their citizenship, by mobilizing their creativity they are given back their power to act.

All the realistic and comprehensive support proposals made by public services show that the young people they supported have regained confidence in their future and are talking about their wealth. For example, May Darwish and Benjamin SOW who prepared the ASE intervention by organising several meetings asked young people about their representation and their experience of poverty " and their first observation was that

"Poverty is not only a matter of money. To be poor is also to have no one with us, to encourage us, support us and give us hope "

To this poverty they oppose wealth:

"Wealth is not only having money, it is knowledge, respect, human values, helping others, realising your dreams with somebody's help."



This help, young people find it in the networks mobilized by the services to make their action more effective and increase the chances of success of their projects. Several speakers cited the importance of having good relationships with all the services and other actors at the local level. The support service is a hope for young people to have at their disposal a useful address book as they did not have the time or the opportunities to build up their own one.

2. Hope is given back to young people whenever they can experience that they have rights and that these rights are respected, when they find the necessary help to exercise their right to housing or their right to vocational training, when an internship opportunity brings them closer to employment, when their work experience is recognised. The testimonies often refer to experiences of respect of rights and dignity.

3. Young people told us when they found a reason to hope: "It is every time we are given a place in the society, in a society that accepts young people, every time we are given the floor and we are really listened to ", they said, stressing the role of NGOs.

Yet the proposals made to young people are often paradoxical. To those who are in difficulty, who have no money, no work, seemingly very little to share, NGOs speak of solidarity and sharing with others. To young people who feel lost and say they need help from adults, NGOs respond "come and help us". The Association Popular Solidarity in Greece has invited young unemployed people to take part in the "act in emergency" program for refugees. These persons were first sheltered under tents and then in the Olympic Village of Athens and for these families, these children and young people everything had to be done. And the conclusion is that "for Greek youth it was an opportunity to feel useful and recognised in their civic commitment ".

3. Children's involvement prepares a citizenship source of strength for everyone.

For this to happen we must start very early, as shown by the activities developed by the NGO "The Smile of the Child" <sup>24</sup>Ourania Christina PAPADOPOULOU explains the mission of this NGO which is:

- to encourage voluntary actions of children and young people at local, national and international levels
- to support children in difficulty
- to bring together children and young people and make their voices heard by the adults so that their rights are guaranteed and respected.

This NGO is open to all children between the ages of 6 to 16, "they are all equal despite differences in language, nationality, culture, religion or financial situation and can cooperate with adults on the basis of values such as respect and reciprocal acceptance ".

Several short videos showed the different aspects of the NGO's commitment to children and youth. "We have set up emergency numbers for child abuse and we encourage children to use them for

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<sup>24</sup> The Smile of the Child network Athens is an organisation for help to children recognized by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

themselves or when they witness violence."

"The" smilers ", as we call them, are going to visit children in hospitals and play with them. They also participate actively in the distribution of parcels to families in difficulty. Every year, on Children's Day, we welcome children and youth and show them what they can do, how they can participate in the work of the NGO, how they can become volunteers. "

The gatherings "Friends in the world" organized by ESAN are another way for becoming aware of one's "power to act" , to mobilize, to be stronger together. The children who participated in the events organized by this NGO experienced it. This summer 2016, 43 Greek children came to the gatherings "Friends of the World" and 8 out of them were young migrants. Children know how to skip language barriers, share games and emotions so as to "know and recognize each other".

5. Becoming together a force of proposal indicates "a horizon of hope" as Levinas called it. This was demonstrated by the group of young parents in Seville committed to a better implementation of the EU's Youth Guarantee Program. Their hope is also that Spain will soon ratify the revised European Social Charter and the Protocol creating the collective complaints procedure and they are mobilizing for this aim to be achieved.

But these 5 reasons for hope only make sense if young people have a decent minimum of local, national or international financial support to get out of their precarious situation with a feeling of security making that they dare to think of their future, to organize their life, to consider a possibility of vocational training, to look for a job.

The debate which began by the end of the day showed that we should also ask ourselves how to keep up hope for all those involved in helping young people in difficulty. They are sometimes weakened by the harsh situations they meet and tempted to lose courage, as they are steadily facing the high walls of a society that closes its doors to young people. During the debates a fundamental question was raised concerning NGOs: how to move away from the indignation caused by so many difficulties and replace it with solidarity? Indignation is necessary; it is a form of positive struggle that allows NGOs not to be defeated. It forces us to be very strict with the truth that we owe to vulnerable people. Mickaël MICHEL insists "pay attention to the false promises that are devastating half-lies."

But indignation does not mean violence, or, rather, indignation should not be expressed by violence. It is a danger that has been mentioned by several speakers, who stress that when people experience particularly difficult situations lived on a daily basis, they no longer have the strength to seek hope and then there is nothing left but violence. The proposed support should help for finding solutions, for not being discouraged by the obstacles, but it must be a non-violent mobilization. "Professionals should not put the burden of their own indignation on the shoulders of the young people they are supporting," somebody said.

One educator mentioned his difficulty with the financial helps that change all the time, with other rules of the game. Entrepreneurs also end up distrusting the temporary helps they are offered and there is something like a general loss of trust. In these cases, the young person's power to act will

depend on the professional's ability to take a different look, to remain positive. "We have to be close to people living complicated situations, but with a different look" said Guillaume PETOT during the debate. The strength of this different view, the young people find it in their meetings, in the NGO that employs them, in companies that accept young people on probation, in municipalities that facilitate their task, in fact in all the proofs of solidarity.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude this day, Michel AGUILAR (President of the Commission on Human Rights) underlined that the exchanges revealed the existence of many and varied solidarities, with inventions, local initiatives and multiple partnerships that make it possible to remain positive, "to dare and to build". But this has also shown the tension between institutional arrangements financed with narrow budgets and the way in which, on the ground, the organisations try and cope with the means they find. "Yet the reality of the great number of difficult situations of young people forces us to always go beyond all what has already been done".

Anna RURKA warns: "pay attention to emergency," she says, "when we try to give immediate answers, we do not think anymore and we risk making a mistake and this can cause a situation of crisis, a loss of sense of the action which is necessarily collective. And, as Hannah Arendt put it, "all collective actions are political actions". Supporting the struggling young people on a daily basis so that they can become the masters of their own destiny does not necessarily imply an abstract political choice; it is the choice in the ordinary life, there where we can be actors. The question is: in which kind of society, with which concept of life, which concept of justice do we want to live? To these questions we could have dozens of different opinions and that is also our richness!

We have cited ' Do it Yourself' DIY which is one of the characteristics of our actions; but as we know, when this tinkering is going to become regular and institutional, we will have to go further and invent other forms of DIY. This is our strength, as we have seen today and at the same time it raises questions:

- Does this DIY just fill the gaps of public action or is it really empowering young people?
- How can it enrich the society with new visions?
- How to make sure that the young people's say, their actions, do not put them at risk, this requires our full vigilance.

At the end of this day I would like to say once more how important it is that you act in your country for the ratification of the Charter and its Protocol providing the system of collective complaints. These claims, filed by the INGOs, are a real barometer of the implementation of social rights. I thank all participants for their contributions and wish you a safe journey back home.

## Celebration of the International Day for the eradication of poverty

### Speech of Ambassador Katrin Kivi Chair of the Ministers' Deputies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Committee of Ministers, I would like to thank the Conference of INGO's for organising this event to mark the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

Poverty is affecting more and more people. It not only remains widespread in Europe, but continues to grow – and not only among the traditionally vulnerable groups - but also with regard to other sectors of the population. It has serious consequences on the freedom to exercise fundamental rights – not only social and economic rights, but also civil rights. Poverty limits the opportunities for people to participate in democratic processes, to fulfil their potential, to contribute to the economic growth of their countries. It exasperates inequality.

The fact that poverty - sometimes extreme poverty – continues to rise on our Continent is unacceptable for this Organisation. Our main mission is to defend the human dignity and fundamental rights of each and every individual within our territories. Therefore we must continue to use all means available to us to fight against poverty, and the factors that lead to impoverishment and social exclusion.

I welcome that the focus of today's discussions is on the situation of young people, and in particular their access to rights - as in today's Europe it is too often our young people who are, together with other vulnerable groups, most at risk of poverty and social exclusion. This is tragic -- as it is with our young people that the future lies - not least the well-being of our societies and the economic prosperity of each of our countries.

Today's younger generation is faced with unprecedented challenges – high level unemployment and job insecurity. Some face barriers to learning and education, feel excluded and marginalised and have no knowledge of, or belief in an environment where they can fulfil their potential. Lack of opportunity can lead to further discrimination. Many young people struggle to afford decent housing or adequate health care. A sense of despair is unfortunately not uncommon, leading a number of young people to turn to extremist ideologies advocating violence and even terrorism.

It is our responsibility to take all measures in our power to improve the situation. To ensure that young people have the education, training and life tools that can allow them to live fulfilling and successful lives. To this end, we need to provide effective educational, health, social systems and employment opportunities which can support and facilitate the path for all young people. Of course it is something that is much easier said than done. But despite the severe economic constraints in many member States, we cannot be excused from our duty to protect and assist young people. We cannot allow ourselves to sacrifice a whole generation.

In our common Declaration of 2012, it was recalled that the Council of Europe established a set of European standards relevant to the eradication of extreme poverty. These do of course include the European Convention on Human Rights and also the European Social Charter, of which Article 30 specifically provides for the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion. Several other relevant instruments have also been adopted by the Committee of Ministers. Here I shall just highlight two particularly relevant recommendations which have recently been adopted by the Committee — the first is on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights, adopted in January 2015, and the second, adopted last month on the access of young people as a whole to rights. These instruments provide recommendations to member States on a series of issues with a view to improving the situation of young people.

But as we know, legal instruments are of no value if they are not implemented. For the Committee of Ministers, a priority is to raise awareness of and encourage the implementation of these instruments in member States and we all have a role to play in this respect.

I would also refer to the work of the European Social Cohesion Platform, set up by the Committee of Ministers last year. The Platform should address challenges related to combating poverty and promoting access of young people to social rights.

Ladies and gentlemen, today, we shall not eradicate poverty. However, we must act to bring about change on the ground. We must work together if we are to make any real progress to help our fellow citizens, our young people, to access a better and decent life for themselves, a life to which each one of us aspires but which not all are fortunate enough to have. I wish you very fruitful discussions and thank you for your attention.

Speech of Jean-Claude FRECON  
President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Congress I represent here today brings together the local and regional authorities in Europe. These communities are not only involved in programs for fighting extreme poverty but they are also the nearest social body caring for the local population. Conscious of this responsibility, the Congress is present at this commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

Father Joseph Wresinski said on May 21, 1993: "Where men are condemned to live in poverty, human rights are violated". We, at the Congress, share this view.

You, the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe, devote this year's debate to vulnerable youth. Youth is, in fact, hard hit by the economic and financial crisis. However, this crisis is not only related to economy; we see that access to fundamental rights, including social rights, is becoming more and more difficult for young people. It is a struggle for human rights, for the rights of all people.

Sometimes the mere fact of being young is a reason for discrimination. Young people from the most modest backgrounds or immigrants are still more exposed to discrimination in their access to social rights. In my country, France, studies show that young people from some "disadvantaged neighbourhoods" are less likely to be offered a job because of their origin.

And what about the migrants who are now flocking to Europe, fleeing from oppression or war, in search of a safer place to live? These young people, sometimes minors, reach Europe in a total state of destitution and are, in their wanderings, often victims of violence and of trafficking in human beings.

At the Congress, we are very attentive to the situation of young people, especially those who are most vulnerable because local authorities have responsibilities for meeting their needs. In order to examine how to give young people access to work and gain more autonomy at the local level, we will debate on 19 October a report on youth policy and work.

Beyond this strong commitment to young people, our awareness of the dramatic consequences of poverty for all our societies and our responsibilities in this struggle are inspired by the more general struggle for Democracy that is going on in this great house called the Council of Europe.

Thank you.

Speech of Guido Raimondi,  
President of the Court of human rights

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be given the opportunity to speak on the occasion of the World Day for the Eradication of Poverty. A day which, every year, allows the voices of the most disadvantaged people to be heard.

The European Court of Human Rights does not have the power to eradicate poverty. Yet it is regularly confronted with this issue. That is why it has developed a protective jurisprudence of the poorest. Originally, social rights were not protected by the European Convention on Human Rights. However, since the famous *Airey vs. Ireland*, the Court considers that a right which is only theoretical is not a right. There is no "tight barrier" between the Convention and social rights. These rights are much more than an extension of traditional rights: they are the condition of their effectiveness.

We should not forget that the Convention is, according to the formula, "*a living instrument to be interpreted in the light of present conditions*". Our continent is facing exceptional economic and migration crises. They raise the issue of extreme poverty in Europe with gravity.

The Court is aware of the difficulties faced by the States in such a sensitive area as that of social protection. Our judgments, however, bear witness to the attention we pay to the most disadvantaged. Thus, the Strasbourg Court had the opportunity to condemn too drastic reductions in social benefits<sup>25</sup>. It also censored refusals of benefits on discriminatory grounds<sup>26</sup>. Above all, the Court said that in the event of great vulnerability, it is people's dignity that is at stake. This concept is essential in our eyes.

In the area of the right to housing, the Court does not devote any absolute right to it either<sup>27</sup>. Yet, the situation of families reduced to living without decent housing poses a real problem. This is why the Court is asking the States to help families in great economic difficulty.<sup>28</sup> It further reinforced the need for a new housing offer in cases where the evicted persons belonged to vulnerable minorities.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Court cannot do everything. As I said, it cannot eradicate poverty. However, it cannot remain indifferent to the most dramatic situations and takes into account extreme poverty in its jurisprudence. The European Court of Human Rights, so attached to the protection of the dignity of the human being, could not be absent from this world day.

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<sup>25</sup> *NKM vs. Hungria* 14/05/2013

<sup>26</sup> *Gaygusuz vs. Austria*, 16/09/1996

<sup>27</sup> *Chapman vs. United Kingdom*, 18/01/2001

<sup>28</sup> *Wallova and Walla vs. Poland*, 26/10/2006



Speech of Marie-Dominique Dreysse  
Deputy-Mayor of Strasbourg, responsible for local social action

She addressed the audience with moving words and described the different fields of action of the city of Strasbourg. A lot is undertaken for minority groups in difficult situations because of their background or for many other reasons.

In its history, the city of Strasbourg has always been welcoming groups of population seeking a better life. Today, support is organised for children at school, for families looking for housing, for isolated young migrants.

She gave examples from her experience in the framework of her responsibilities and expressed her strong wish that poverty and social exclusion will be diminished in a very near future.

## Testmonies of two young persons from ATD Fourth world (abstracts)

Semyon Tanguy-André

The theme of 17th October this year is "from humiliation and exclusion to participation" and I would like to recall here some principles related to participation. What makes participation successful? What makes each participant an "expert"?

To answer these questions, the first thing to do is to *recognize* the plurality of worlds in which people live, even if we share the same space of coexistence. But it is not enough to know that there are other worlds, other ways of living to successfully take them into consideration in the development of joint projects.

For this to happen, the various actors must be able *to know each other*, to have the necessary space and listening for explaining their own understanding of the issue on which they are asked to participate. Mutual understanding needs a real *translation*, less of the words than of the realities and stakes that the different worlds conceal. This should allow participants to grasp the project, to recognize their own contribution, and increase their power to act through a deeper understanding of the situation.

Moreover, the process of participation is not about getting rid of the anger, frustration, and humiliation arising from the experience of situations of injustice. Expelling all emotional aspects from a discussion amounts to having a truncated vision of the human being. Sharing emotions can be a good means for mutual understanding, and thus help to overcome the obstacles in the discussion, because they show that people are really involved. But it requires an effort from everyone not to reject these emotions simply because we do not understand their origin or violence, or because they take us by surprise. Such rejection would lead to humiliation in a process that precisely claims to avoid it.

A well-understood participation must recognize the plurality of worlds, the persons as such, and their ability to bring an irreplaceable specific light to the problems of interest without neglecting the importance of potential conflicts. In a world where everything goes faster and faster and where the impression of being and appearing under control (hence beyond the reach of others) is a key parameter, one understands that participation is as difficult to implement as it is necessary to dignity in social life.

Ilir Selmani ATD Fourth world

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

**"I am not, gentlemen, one of those who believe that suffering may be suppressed in this world, but I am one of those who think and affirm that poverty can be destroyed. Note it, gentlemen, I do not say diminish, weaken, limit, circumscribe, I say destroy. " With these words Victor Hugo declared his refusal of misery before the French National Assembly on July 9, 1849.**

I think all of us here present share this view with great motivation and hope.

On October 17th 1987, at the initiative of the founder of ATD Fourth World, Father Joseph Wresinski, nearly 100,000 people gathered in Paris to pay tribute to the victims of hunger, ignorance and violence. Five years later on, the United Nations designated 17 October as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. And now, 25 years have passed and we are here today to discuss the same issue.

Today's society and especially young people, find that:

- The rich become richer
- The gap between the richest and the poorest ones is widening
- Youth are most affected by great poverty and unemployment which are the two greatest dangers threatening our democracy
- Job insecurity is increasing
- Tax evasion reaches vertiginous amounts
- Exclusion and prejudice against the poorest remain
- Poverty refers to discrimination that is increasingly visible

Yes, there is exclusion when three million children in France do not go on vacation each year. But young people are committed to act, as is the case of 10,000 young people with precarious life situations involved in the JOC (Christian Young Workers), which is a popular education association under the motto that "A young worker is worth more than all the gold in the world".

In order to stop exclusion, it would be necessary to promote youth employment, increase social minima and public investment, and, why not, set up the basic universal income.

There should be a strong struggle against prejudice, isolation, extreme poverty and unemployment in order to ensure dignity and decent employment for all.

Together we can face these great challenges and eradicate poverty and misery in the world. That is why we must engage in every country for this cause, and also move towards a social Europe.

I thank you.

APPENDIX: the links to the Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers

[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2015\)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the access of young people\[1\]from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights](#)

[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2016\)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people's access to rights](#)