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**EURO-ARAB YOUTH COOPERATION
POSITION PAPER**

**Prepared by
the Advisory Council on Youth
(with comments by the representative of the French government)**

Item 3.4 on the agenda

Introduction

This document was prepared by the Advisory Council on Youth to reflect the experience acquired by the Youth Department and its partners in Euro-Arab and Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and to provide a reference framework for the future of this cooperation within the mission of the youth sector of the Council of Europe.

The process before the Arab Spring

Euro-Arab youth cooperation was initiated more than 20 years ago by the Council of Europe with a series of activities of Euro-Arab Dialogue. Nonetheless, the most important area of cooperation in the recent years has been in the Euro-Mediterranean region, in particular through the human rights education and intercultural dialogue of the partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth, supported by the publication of Compass in Arabic.

The South-Mediterranean youth policy cooperation of the partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, the League of Arab States and other actors started in 2005. Since 2006, other national and international stakeholders of youth policy in European and South Med countries have become involved and extended the framework of this informal cooperation. The activities undertaken brought together youth researchers, governmental institutions responsible for youth policy and non-governmental youth organisations in European and South Med countries. Following an initial invitation to the first forum held in Ain Sokhna (Egypt) in 2007, the Council of Europe participated in 2008 in the 2nd League of Arab States Youth Forum (LAS Youth Forum)¹ "Youth and Cultural Dialogue: towards a Transnational cultural Approach", held in Amman, Jordan, November 2008, aiming at promoting dialogue among Arab youth, and between them and European youth, decision makers as well as researchers and experts.

In the same framework the 1st Euro-Arab Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations (EACMYO)² was organised; the meeting adopted the Framework for Euro-Arab Cooperation Amongst Youth Organisations, a statement of principles and recommendations regarding the Euro-Arab youth cooperation.

In November 2009, The Council of Europe partnered with the League of Arab States and the European Youth Forum in the **3rd LAS Youth Forum on “Youth and Migrations: A Human Rights Based Approach”** in Assilah, Morocco, November 2009. Its involvement in this conference reflects its interest in the cooperation and in the matters related to youth, migration and human rights. This forum was held in the framework of strengthening the Euro–

¹ The **League of Arab States Youth Forum (LAS Youth Forum)** was organised annually since 2007 and is attended by a number of youth leaders, officials from youth sector, and parliamentarians from Arab countries. The Forum had held three editions throughout the years 2007-2009 in Egypt, Jordan and Morocco, respectively. Throughout its three editions the forum has been aiming to: Facilitate a dialogue between youth leaders, decision makers and representatives of regional and international organisations concerned in youth issues; Strengthen the exchange, the partnership and the networking among youth leaders and their respective organisations; Develop a solid knowledge in youth issues and develop the leadership skills for young leaders; Build a regional youth policies and advocating for stronger youth agenda in the national policies; Strengthen the dialogue and exchange between the youth leaders in the Arab and Europeans countries.

² The **2nd EACMYO**, with the participation of European youth representatives in the LAS Youth Forum, that resulted in the adoption of the “Assilah Appeal” for facilitating youth mobility, promoting youth exchange and ensuring equality, non-discrimination and the rights of young migrants.

Arab partnership, and in follow-up with the recommendation of the Second LAS Youth Forum, which called on the third LAS YF to address the various dimensions of youth and migration, and to focus on cultural exchange, dialogue and the role of youth organisations in migratory issues. The forum, attended by around 140 youth leaders from Europe and the Arab States, adopted the “**Assilah Appeal**”³ on migration and youth mobility.

The first joint training⁴ activity between the Council of Europe’s Directorate of Youth and Sport and the League of Arab States was a “**training course for youth leaders on democratic youth leadership and participation**” organised in 2009. Such training reflected the shared approach that Euro-Arab youth cooperation needs to involve in first place the non governmental youth organisations and, secondly, that the cooperation could only develop if new opportunities for training and preparation of youth workers and leaders are created. One of the conclusions from the 2009 course was the necessity to secure the sustainability of the learning process of participants and to enhance participants’ abilities in and implementing concrete Euro-Arab youth cooperation projects.

In July 2010 the participants of the **Euro-Arab Youth Conference Mare Nostrum – Youth, Migration and Development**, organised by the Italian Youth Forum in cooperation with the European Youth Forum, the Council of Europe and the League of Arab States, held in Tunis and in Ragusa (Italy) with the organisation of the **3rd EACMYO meeting**, recommended both institutions “*to continue their support in the Euro-Arab Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations and to continue their cooperation in youth policy, youth participation and intercultural dialogue*’. *Euro-Arab youth cooperation requires time to develop and for experiences to be acquired and evaluated as learning processes*”. The 120 participants from both Arab and European countries adopted the “Ragusa Declaration”⁵ on Youth and Migration.

The process after the Arab Spring

The Arab revolutions movement injected a new impetus to the cooperation introducing new priorities and new partners.

The so called “Arab spring” broke the status-quo by putting in the core of the cooperation subjects such as Democracy, Human Rights, Social Justice, and the right of all part of the society to participate to the public life.

Numerous activities and meetings were settled in the period following the Arab revolutions. The multiplication of activities is easily explained by the context of positive change, it was then a priority for the Youth sector of the Council of Europe to understand the new situation and try to “read the pulse” of the post-revolutionary young civil society.

3

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Documents/2009_Assilah_Appeal_Youth_Migration_en.pdf

⁴ This Training course was followed by other capacity-building activities, including a long-term training course concluded in December 2011.

⁵ http://www.poplas.org/uploads/news/2010_Ragusa_Declaration_en.pdf

“The seminar on Empowerment of youth organisations and youth led civil society in the South-Mediterranean framework”⁶, organised in Malta in March 2012 by the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the Field of Youth in cooperation with the league of Arab States, the North South Centre of the Council of Europe and the Maltese Youth Agency, was a first step in this direction. The meeting provided an opportunity to reflect upon recent developments and their implications for the future youth policy cooperation so as to safeguard ownership of the process among stakeholders and to ensure a sustainable long-term perspective.

Other stakeholders undertook activities in order to carry forward a new cooperation agenda. This was the case of the Youth Organisations that in cooperation with the European Youth Forum and the Italian Youth Forum organised the 1st Euro Arab Youth Leaders meeting, Networking and Partnership Development, held in Rome in May 2012, with the aim to build a common strategy and action-oriented plan for the implementation of the recommendations resulting from the Euro-Mediterranean and Arab meetings.

At this occasion a coordination meeting among International Stakeholders on Euro-Arab Youth Cooperation was organised to share the results of the Youth Leaders Meeting and to coordinate the actions of the institutions and youth organisations⁷.

To culminate this process the symposium “Arab spring: Youth participation for the promotion of peace, human rights and fundamental freedoms”⁸ was co-organised in August 2012 by the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, the League of Arab States, the Tunisian governmental authorities, the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe, the Euro-Med Platform, the United Nations Population Fund and the European Youth Forum. The event provided a high-level setting for the exchange of perspectives on how international and regional organisations, governments and civil society should adjust to the new realities both from a policy and a programmatic point of view.

Four main proposals came out from the meeting:

- The establishment of a Mediterranean Youth and Development University
- The creation of a Maghreb or Arab Youth Centre for Training and Development
- The development of a Euro-Arab online youth platform
- The creation of a network of European and Arab youth researchers.

The democratisation development initiated with the Arab Spring resulted also in a Joint Project between the Council of Europe and the European Commission – the “**South**” programme – aimed at “strengthening democratic reforms in the Southern Neighbourhood”. The Youth component of this programme for 2013 and 2014 is focused on Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia (while open to other countries). In this framework, a training course for trainers on democratic youth participation was initiated in Rabat in April 2013, together with a seminar on

⁶ http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/Euromed/YouthPolicy/Executive_Summary_final.pdf

⁷ http://www.forumnazionalegiovani.it/media/32750/prot_443-12_report_euro_arab_youth_cooperation_meetings_rome_2012.pdf

⁸ http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/Euromed/YouthPolicy/Draft_Executive_summary_report_Tunis.pdf

the role of youth research in promoting the democratic participation of young people. This programme will continue in 2014 with similar activities complemented by the translation of educational materials and resources.

These continuous efforts enabled the creation and implementation of numerous activities and projects. Moreover, and this is one of the main realisations of this cooperation, an elaborated network has been set up, gathering around the same objectives, Inter-regional institutions, foundations, youth organisations, public agencies and local associations from the broader Euro-Mediterranean space sharing similar values and purposes for the cooperation.

In December 2012, the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and the League of Arab States organised, in the framework of the pilot experience of the Mediterranean University on Youth and Global Citizenship⁹, a Training course for trainers on democratic youth participation to support democratic youth participation and intercultural dialogue.

The pilot experience of the Mediterranean University on Youth and Global Citizenship was another step forward to put into action the needs expressed by the youth organisations during the activities done after the Arab Spring.

For this reason in July 2013, in Hammamet, the 1st Mediterranean University on Youth and Global Citizenship¹⁰ was organised by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe in cooperation with the National Youth Observatory of Tunisia and in partnership with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, the EU-CoE youth partnership, the League of Arab States, the Italian National Youth Forum and other youth organisations. The university was generally considered a success and an experience to be integrated in the future of the cooperation.

Cooperation with the League of Arab States was consolidated in 2013 with the 4th Arab-European Youth Forum, co-organised by the Council of Europe and the League of Arab States in cooperation with the European Youth Forum, and held in Qatar in December 2013. The forum issued the Doha Youth Declaration on Human Rights, Participation and Intercultural Dialogue, the three themes of the forum. The partners also are committed each other to organising this forum every second year and alternate the venue between an Arab and a European country.

9

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/nscentre/MediterraneanUniversity_pilot%20experience_final.pdf

¹⁰ The University is inspired by the model of the University on Youth and Development that takes place annually in Mollina, Spain, since 2000. It is the youngest University of the Network of Universities on Youth and Global Citizenship (together with the 3 others organised in Spain, Cape Verde and Uruguay) that is facilitated by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe. The Network has identified Democratic Citizenship as the joint theme for all Universities in 2013. Partners have identified the issues of education for democratic citizenship, new media and new ways of youth participation and involvement of young people and youth organisations in decision/policy-making processes as three main dimensions for discussion.

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/nscentre/Youth/2013_MedUniv_presentation.pdf

Future perspectives

Because of the new political context in the Mediterranean and Arab regions, there is a clearly defined need for strengthening cooperation and the further development of interregional youth cooperation processes. The Council of Europe has an irreplaceable role in this respect.

It is now crucial for the Youth sector of the Council of Europe to consolidate the work done and to take a leading role in developing innovative activities corresponding to long-term goals.

In order to adequately adapt programs to the needs and demands of young people, it is necessary to closely associate them with all phases of the projects. In this way, the Council of Europe would reaffirm its leading position in the Euro-Arab youth process, especially its role of precursor in the field of participative democracy. Moreover it would enable the youth sector to remain consistent with the principles it promotes and the system of co-management.

Vis-a-vis the international partners, and more specifically Arab institutions and civil societies, these should be further enhanced as a successful example of direct and high level cooperation with the youth civil society. Highlighting this would be a clear political position on youth participation, and a strong encouragement towards Arab regional institution, states and civil society to try to implement the same system locally.

The structuring and recognition of the local, national, and regional youth civil society in Arab countries must be a priority of the Euro-Arab youth cooperation, corresponding also to demands from Arab NGOs to provide expertise and training in this matter. The Advisory Council on Youth has also a role to play by developing peer-to-peer learning programmes on capacity-building to concretely help Arab youth to build solid mechanisms of representation.

The partnership for Euro-Arab youth cooperation must be an open space where all kinds of youth participate in activities, share experiences, learn and develop common projects. The question of representativeness of the networks should not prevent the cooperation from growing, but one ought to remain firm on the principles of youth participation, independence of youth organisations and freedom of association applying to all the partners involved in the cooperation. The League of Arab States remains the main institutional partner, but this must not exclude cooperation with other regional and national partners.

The cooperation must develop by building on the acquired experiences and the expectations expressed in the documents resulting from the meetings above-mentioned. The cooperation must be carried out in the respect of the following guidelines:

- A commitment to a culture of universal human rights, to equality in dignity, equality of opportunities and to the principles of non-discrimination
- The recognition of the role of youth policies in promoting the autonomy, participation and social inclusion of all young people
- Intercultural dialogue as the basis for respecting and integrating diversity as well as intercultural learning as a basic educational approach of international youth activities
- The participation of young people and youth organisations as fundamental partners and stakeholders in youth policies and programs
- A shared responsibility to develop Arab-European youth cooperation as a way to

overcome prejudice and mutual suspicion, to increase youth projects and cooperation as well as to address common challenges

- A concern to create synergies among various processes and actors and to avoid duplication of processes; coordination and communication with other processes and partners – including the partnership with the European Commission in the field of youth, the North-South Centre, the European Youth Forum, the Euro-Med Youth Programme actors - are thus very important for success.

Decision

The Joint Council:

1. Reaffirms the role of the co-management system in the Euro Arab youth cooperation process and recalls the importance of involving the statutory bodies on youth in all phases of the process;
2. Continues to support the partnership with the League of Arab States and the most relevant activities such as:
 - The Euro Arab Youth Forum as a bi-annual meeting where institutions, youth organisations and young people from the Arab and European regions engage in dialogue about common priorities and concerns, including the processes of cooperation.
 - The follow-up to the Training programme for trainers for democratic youth participation.
3. Supports the activities, aimed at strengthening youth participation in the process of democratic reforms and increasing the quality of youth work and youth policy provisions carried out by youth organisations in the framework of the Euro-Arab youth cooperation.
4. Supports the sustainability of a coordination meeting for youth organisations from both regions as a yearly meeting of coordination and monitoring of the cooperation process such as the Euro Arab Youth Leaders meeting.
5. Encourages the continuation of the Youth Department's involvement and ACTIVE participation in the Mediterranean University on Youth and Global Citizenship organised by the North South Centre and other partners taking into account the role and experience of the North South Centre as a network institution in the Euro-Mediterranean youth cooperation process.

Comments by the representative of the French government

As I said before, I would have preferred a joint working group to deal with this issue.

I have the same position as during the October 2014 meeting of the Joint Council: the AC document is interesting as it enables us to take stock of all the initiatives which were taken in the field of Euro-Arab youth co-operation. However, in terms of developing perspectives, the document raises more problems than suggests responses. Should we try to be coherent and clear we must clarify the framework of action. Euro-Arab co-operation is part of a larger and more complex context, namely Euro-Mediterranean co-operation. Therefore the questions are how the two dimensions are articulated? Who are the actors? What are the objectives? What action do we implement? The proposed recommendations are of different nature and concern different actors; do we propose a framework for the Euro-Arab co-operation or for the co-operation with the League of Arab States, which is not the same. According to the choice which we will make in this regard, we will need to work both on the governance and on contents:

- Governance: it seems that many structures or initiatives are mixed up: Euro-Arab Youth Forum, Mediterranean University on Youth, Euro-Arab Youth Leaders Meeting, Co-ordination Meeting among international stakeholders on Euro-Arab youth co-operation, Euro-Arab Youth Conference, etc. This not very understandable and it is not possible for the Council of Europe youth sector to properly engage in so many frameworks. The first objective of this co-operation should therefore to clarify the co-operation structures.
- Content: It is necessary to define the priorities of this co-operation. Should it be to support the development of democracy in the Arab countries (reinforce youth organisations, promote dialogue between young people and institutions, develop human rights education...); should it be to create an Euro-Arab space for exchange and dialogue (encourage meetings at all levels, promote intercultural dialogue...) or should it be both? It is also necessary to identify deadlocks (i.e. universality of human rights, women's rights, rights of LGBT, etc.).

Moreover, this action cannot be implemented without ensuring coherence with the Organisation's action as a whole. It would therefore be useful to know other forms of co-operation between the Council of Europe and the Arab countries/League of Arab states. Furthermore, if an action plan is established, it should be drawn to the attention of the Committee of Ministers.

Finally, the question of resources should be raised. What resources do we need for this co-operation? It is ok to have geographical co-operation activities (with Ukraine, Russian Federation, Mediterranean, Arab countries) or thematic (Roma youth, hate speech, etc.) but we must be sure that we are able to implement them adequately. It should also be reminded that all commitments we take in this type of co-operation forces the Programming Committee to take the necessary decisions (activities and budget).