

Youth Opinion

Electronic newsletter of the European Youth Forum

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Dutch Presidency to host a youth event

“...Thinking of Holland, I see broad rivers move slowly through unending lowlands...”. While reading this phrase from the Dutch poet Hendrik Marsman, one might wonder what else the Netherlands has to offer besides unending lowlands. But there is much more.

While holding the Presidency of the European Union until the end of this year, youth and youth policy also will have a prominent place on the European agenda. Therefore

the Dutch presidency will host a Youth Event, 27-29 November in Rotterdam.

During the course of the Presidency, the Department of Youth Policy of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) will be responsible for youth issues on the European level and so also for the upcoming youth event. In October, the Presidency will send out the official invitations to the Member States, requesting them to select two youth representatives to attend the event

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Young women demand more power and participation to MEPs

On 17-21 September 2004, the European Youth Forum (YFJ), the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) and the European Women's Lobby (EWL) organised a joint meeting to discuss young women's participation in society. The event, entitled “Power and participation, how can young women in Europe create the missing links?”, gathered 40 young persons from across Europe, who discussed the barriers that prevent young women from achieving their fullest potential in society and the ways on how to address these barriers.



From left to right: Cécile Gréboval (Women's Lobby), Heather Roy, (WAGGGS) and Pascale Boulanger (Bureau Member of the European Youth Forum)

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Click on the logo to go to the Youth Forum website

The European Youth Forum is an international organisation composed of more than 90 national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations. It endeavours to serve the interests of young people from all over Europe, promoting their active participation in the construction of a common Europe. It is the only democratic youth structure in Europe representing youth organisations in its work with international institutions -mainly the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations. It serves to channel the flow of information and opinions between young people and decision-makers.

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in Rotterdam. In addition to the EU Member States, invitations will also be sent out to the EU-candidate countries and EFTA-members.

The Dutch Ministry are not organising the event on its own. The Dutch National Youth Council (Dutch NYC) and the Netherlands Institute for Care and Welfare (NIZW) will give their input in co-organising the event.

As in most youth events, it will take place prior to a meeting with officials involved in youth policy. The event is scheduled before the meeting of the Directors General (DG's). On the 29th of November there will be a joint programme for the DG's and the participants in the Youth Event.

One of the novelties of this Youth Event will be the fact that mixed working groups are planned during the programme for DG's and participants of the Youth Event. In contrast to former events, the Dutch Presidency aims to establish true interaction and participation of young people during their meeting with the DG's. Therefore the programme will be structured in such a way that there will be mixed working groups, consisting of both young people and officials.

But what are the main themes on the agenda during the Youth Event and the mixed working groups? At the last Youth Event in Ennis (Ireland), the second set of common objectives was one of the main topics to be discussed. The upcoming event aims to link current topics to the future of youth policy at the European level and beyond. With a new European Parliament and a new European Commission, the central question during this event will be: 'What are the most important new issues concerning young people for the new European youth agenda?'



Rotterdam

In order to tackle such a broad question, it will be split up in three sub-themes. The first sub-theme will be the evaluation of the Open Method of Coordination and the White Paper process until now. Five years ago, a proposal for a white paper on youth was launched. By evaluating the White Paper, the questions to be raised are, firstly, what has been the influence of the process in the further development of youth activities and, secondly, how can young people better associate with the Open Method of Coordination.

By looking back to previous years, we can have a good basis for the second topic. Youth representatives will have the chance to propose and discuss new priority areas in the youth field; youth mainstreaming has frequently been raised as one of the priority areas.

The final theme will be the new generation youth programme, "Youth in Action". It was launched by the European Commission earlier this year

in July. It has a proposed budget of 915 million euro and, in terms of operation, is more flexible and transparent than its predecessor. Central questions would be if the proposal is better than the current programme and if it is good enough. Not only the budget, but also the accessibility of the programme and other key elements will be discussed.

The aim of the Youth Event is to come up with concrete suggestions, comments and viewpoints on all the themes mentioned above. In the discussion on Monday, the participants of the Youth Event have the possibility to present and discuss these outcomes with the DG's. They will be encouraged to actively participate and state their opinions on all the proposals. Besides hard work, there will also be time to relax and enjoy Rotterdam at night.

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During a 3-day seminar, the discussions were organised around 3 themes: “Politics - young women in public life”; “Young women in power in the social and economic sector” and “The image of young women in relation to power and decision-making” Moreover, an information session was organised, on Young Women and the Enlargement of the EU and on European Gender Equality Policies, with the participation of Barbara Helfferich, from the Cabinet of European Commissioner for Social Affairs.

The three leading themes of the event were approached by highly interesting and motivating speakers: Aysun Sayin, KA-DER - Association for Supporting and Training Women Candidates (Turkey) on women in political decision-making, Juliane Bir -European Trade Union Confederation-, on young women’s participation in the economic sector, by Maria Pereira -Portuguese Network of Young People for Equality- on the construction of gender identities and finally, Sara Lindquist - Swedish mediacritical network Allt är Möjligt (“Everything is Possible”) on the image of young women in the media and its impact on women’s self image. These young women managed to give the tone of a dynamic and fruitful seminar, whose outcomes were successfully presented in the European Parliament.

Participants had the opportunity to present the outcomes of their work to MEPs Lissy Gröner (PSE, Germany), Hiltrud Breyer (Greens/EFA, Germany) and Catherine Stihler (PES, United Kingdom), on the occasion of the Conference organised in the European Parliament for the closing of the event, on Monday 21 September. The conclusions highlighted the need to:

- re-examine the role of women and get rid of stereotypes through educational initiatives;
- fight against all kinds of violence against women;
- create support networks for young women at local, national and European levels;
- introduce ethical rules applicable to the media to stop the production of degrading images of women;
- get political decision-makers take part in such action.

Lissy Gröner underlined the under-representation of women in the politics, such as at the European Parliament where “the average of women parliamentarians is only 30% and these do not occupy key positions”. Hiltrud Breyer called for “a quota system to guarantee sexual equality at a European level” and Catherine Stihler stressed the fact that women had to get more involved into politics and show that they wanted to change reality. “We have to have the confidence that we can do it”, she insisted.

All participants left Brussels with a strengthened confidence that young people can create the missing link to ensure more power and participation for young women across Europe. One crucial element to achieve this aim is the cooperation between key actors committed to youth and gender, representatives of both public authorities and civil society. This event has greatly contributed to paving the way for this cooperation, through the successful partnership between the European Youth Forum, Waggs and the EWL who co-organised the event, and built the bridge between key partners in the European Parliament.

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The Youth, Development & peace Conference



Giacomo Filibeck, president of the European Youth Forum and James Wolfensohn, president of the World Bank

The YDP2 Conference took place in Sarajevo on 4-7 September. It was again organised jointly by the World Bank, WOSM and the Youth Forum, and built upon five objectives agreed by the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations (ICMYO).

- To establish a framework for continuous dialogue between the World Bank and youth organisations at the global, regional, national and local levels.
- To bring relevant World Bank actors to Sarajevo for the follow-up of the conference.

- To consult for political input with membership-based, representative and accountable youth organisations in order to ensure the multiplier effect and credibility.
- To use the Compact Report (the YDP Paris report) as the basis for the one-year progress evaluation.
- To bring youth organisations into the process of elaboration, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of regional action plans.

YDP2 created a space to identify challenges and possibilities of the one-year experience of cooperation in the different fields and regions and to design strategies to overcome future obstacles. YDP2 served also as a starting point for a three-year sustainable and continuous dialogue in a form of an inclusive and loose network with youth organisations.

Youth Employment Network (YEN) meeting

The YEN has finally secured funds to implement the decision to create a Youth Consultative Group (YCG). The YCG holds YEN partner status and is composed of 13 organisations on a rotation basis, as proposed by the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations (ICMYO). The aim of the YCG is to serve as a peer review panel for the High Level Panel and the work of the YEN.

The first formal joint meeting took place in Washington on 26-28 September to discuss the strategy for the network and its work together with the High Level Panel. The representatives to the

first meeting came from the Youth Forum, AYN, and ASA from the side of the Regional Youth Platforms and from ICFTU, IFLRY, IMCS-Pax Romana, IUSY, IYDU and WOSM from the side of the INGYOs.

The YDG together with the High Level Panel proposed ways to promote the implementation of the recommendations of the YEN by the 10 lead countries; encourage the engagement of more countries and increase the visibility of the YEN; ensure the full involvement of youth organisations in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Actions Plans.

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The European Youth Forum welcomes the Youth in Action Programme

The Youth Programme has been a practical and tangible example for young people of the benefits and positive contribution of the European Union. Youth groups, organisations, networks at local, national and international level have been key actors in decision-making and implementation since its beginning. With the new proposal on the future Youth programme, entitled Youth in Action, the European Youth Forum and its member organisations welcome the constructive efforts of the Commission to take into account the concerns of young people.

In general, we are positive about the Commission's proposal. However, there are a number of weak points which should be addressed.

Funding

The first one is about the overall budget. In fact, the amount suggested by the Commission for a period of 7 years equals to the amount spent by the EU on subsidising the production of tobacco in the single year of 2004. We believe that the European Parliament and the Council should allocate €1200 million instead of only € 915 million because of the enlargement and the extension of the scope and nature of the programme.

Furthermore, the funding for international NGOs per year will decrease compared to the funding foreseen for 2005. While we are very happy to have the financial support integrated into the programme for the first time, it is not much of a help if the budget is reduced.

Balance between the actions

We have concerns about the proposed balance and budgetary allocations between the various actions. In particular, we are surprised that the Commission is proposing to allocate about a third of the budget to Action 2, European Voluntary Service. While we support EVS, we do not believe it should be prioritised to the extent proposed by the Commission. Given the capacity of other actions, in particular Action 1, to reach larger numbers of young people, to have a greater impact and to better support young people with fewer opportunities, it should be prioritised and receive a greater share of the funding than currently proposed. Therefore, we suggest that the amount for resources allocated to action 2 is maintained

as the level of the (old) 2000-2006 programme, namely 25 % of the total costs for actions.

Participation

The European Youth Forum works for greater participation in all stages of the programme. This means that we would like to see a legal basis providing a guarantee for young people being consulted in the operation of the programme, especially in the work of the National Agencies. Young people are not merely consumers of the programme but citizens, and the programme should not only be for young people but also by young people.

The Age Range

We are very pleased that the Commission has taken into account of social changes where the phases between childhood, youth and adulthood are less clearly defined and tend to overlap. So we welcome the extension of the age limits both at the lower and the upper end i.e. from 15-25 to 13-30.

Participating countries

Two issues cause concern. Youth in Action is open for countries which have signed association or cooperation agreements with the European Union, the so called "partner countries". However, we are disappointed that they are excluded from some of the actions of the programme. Partnership with these countries and the development of youth work and civil society in the countries (namely the EU's neighbours) would greatly benefit from the actions of the programme. Furthermore, it is rather worrying that the three South Caucasian countries, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, are not even on the list of partner countries. Following the European Neighbourhood Policy they should be included.

The Commission's proposal on Youth in Action is now being debated at the first reading in the European Parliament, where the rapporteur, Lissy Gröner, is responsible for drafting the report, including remarks and amendments. The Forum is looking forward to cooperating with both the Parliament and the Council to improve the promising proposal from the Commission.

Click here to go to the Youth in Action website:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth/program/index_en.html

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Developing Viable Long-Term Cooperation in Eastern Europe

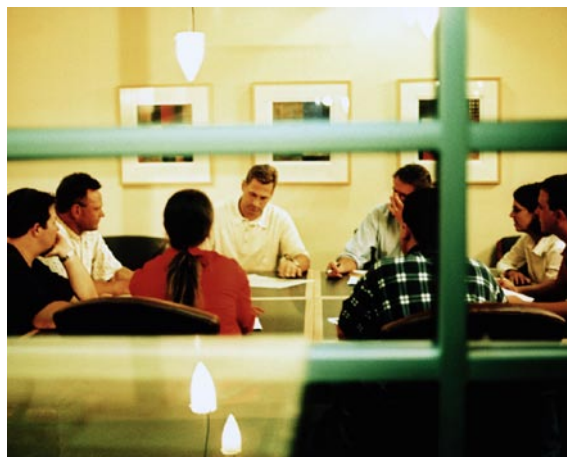
In recent years, Europe has seen a decrease of interest and support towards youth work. This trend has affected the sustainability of youth NGOs Europe-wide. The lack of a full and effective involvement of youth NGOs as partners and beneficiaries of youth policies is an issue of concern to more than half of all European countries. National youth platforms find it more and more difficult to reach the decision makers when it comes to partnership with the state.

As a response to this situation, the European Youth Forum (YFJ) has increased its focus on supporting Member Organisations that find themselves in disadvantaged political environments. In the framework of Youth Work Development actions, various activities have been developed to open an exchange on sustainability issues that affect youth NGOs all over Europe.

As one of the follow-up actions from a Youth Work Development activity organised in Latvia, in March 2004, YFJ in partnership with its member National Council of Youth Organisations from Georgia (NCYOG) is organising an event on Developing Viable Long-Term Cooperation in Eastern Europe, between 19-24 October in Georgia.

This event will gather around 26 active youth leaders, two thirds of the participants coming

from National Youth Councils in Eastern Europe, and one third from other Member Organisations of the European Youth Forum who have or intend to develop cooperation with youth organisations from the region. The activity will bring together young people from member organisations of the European Youth Forum who are actively involved in youth work development related activities.



The aim of the meeting is to develop a concrete strategy and action plan for the necessary measures that will lead to the development of a high-level long-term cooperation between Eastern European youth councils among each other and with partners from other parts of Europe, facilitating better integration of youth work

from the region into European processes.

The activity will focus on work beyond general analysis of the situation of youth organisations in Eastern Europe, looking at concrete actions to be taken by different stakeholders, whose work affects youth policy in the region. The integration of Eastern European youth work in European processes will be another important focus of the event.

Finally, the partnership with NCYOG will bring an added value to the activity, as the participants will be able to meet representatives of local YNGOs, and develop contacts in the region.

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Council of Europe Affairs Commission (COEACOM)

18 members of the COEACOM took part in this meeting. They followed up the work undertaken by the focus groups of the Commission on the issues of Study Sessions, youth participation and the implementation of the Revised European Charter of the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, the organisation of a European youth campaign to promote Human Rights and Participative Democracy (development of the proposed "Culture of Peace Campaign"), and the evaluation of the statutory commissions of the European Youth Forum.

The members of the COEACOM also had the opportunity to work on issues relevant to the upcoming agenda of the Council of Europe. In particular, they focused on the future priorities of the Directorate of Youth and Sport for the year 2006-2008, and on the organisation of a Youth Summit in 2005, in parallel to the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government that will take place in May 2005 in Warsaw, Poland.

The proposal on the future priorities for 2006-2008 developed by the Commission will be presented by the Advisory Council members of the COEACOM to the statutory bodies of the Directorate of Youth and Sport at their meeting in Budapest on 9-12 October 2004.

The Commission members also had the opportunity to exchange views with the Director of Youth and Sport, Dr Ralf-René Weingärtner, who addressed the Commission at the opening of the meeting, on Friday 1 October. On the Youth Summit, he confirmed the strong commitment of Terry Davis, the new Secretary General of the Council of Europe, to support it. He informed as well about the agreement of the Polish Foreign Ministry to host it.

Following a plenary discussion with Michael Ingledow, who is in charge of the organisation of the Youth Summit in the Directorate of Youth and Sport, a focus group was established to work further on the organisation of this Event. The aim is to ensure a concrete input from the Youth Summit to the 3rd Council of Europe Summit, including a strong impetus to the organisation of the aforementioned Youth Campaign for 2006.

The next meeting of the COEACOM will take place at the end of January 2005 in Strasbourg - the same time as the Parliamentary Assembly meeting. This will allow the members of the Commission to start implementing a lobby action to raise the interest in the Youth sector within the Council of Europe, in order to increase the budget to implement the future programmes of the Directorate of Youth and Sport in the following years.

The e-Youth Opinion is the electronic newsletter of the European Youth Forum. It is made thanks to the effort of the following contributors:

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