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THE EUROPEAN STRUCTURED DIALOGUE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Basic concept and activities 2007-2008

(Information from the Commission)

1) Background, Principles and Challenges

a) Background

According to DG EAC's Communication on European policies concerning youth participation and information (COM 2006 417 of 20 July 2007) there is an important need for "an improved structured dialogue with young people on the European Agenda". The reason for this is that there is the need to "actively involve young people in policy shaping debates and dialogue...in relation to the European agenda". This approach is a direct follow-up of the **White Paper on youth** and the Council's agreement on common objectives, particularly in the area of enhancing young people's participation and active citizenship. It is also a logical consequence of the **European Youth Pact** which stresses that its success depends first and foremost on the involvement of national, regional and local youth organisations.

The structured dialogue is the contribution of the youth field to the implementation of the Commission's **Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate**. Plan D stresses the need to give citizens – particularly the young – the tools to actively participate in the European decision shaping process and to reinforce their sense of ownership of the European project. The structured dialogue is an instrument that contributes to achieve this objective. In this context the structured dialogue is also a tool to involve young people in the debates on the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome and the **Constitutional Treaty**.

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Young people themselves have confirmed the need for structured dialogue¹ and expressed their will to play a bigger role in the progress of the European Union and thereby develop their active European citizenship.² They call for continuous, credible and constructive spaces for dialogue on European issues; the latter should be developed and structured at European, national, regional and local levels.

On proposal of the European Commission, the **Council of Ministers has adopted a resolution**³ which establishes a structured dialogue with young people, those active in youth work and youth organisations, and youth researchers. It allows to take into account the opinions and concerns of young people through bottom-up, as well as top down dialogue processes. Due account should be taken of this structured dialogue and its outcomes in policy-making at the relevant levels.

b) Principles

The structured dialogue is based on some main principles which are in coherence with the Commission's White Paper on Communication⁴:

- The structured dialogue follows essentially a **bottom-up approach**, i.e. from the local, regional, national level to the European level. In the long run it should be progressively decentralised and developed essentially at national, regional and local level; dialogue at European level will be maintained.
- Young people, youth organisations and those responsible for youth policy-making are **main actors** of the structured dialogue. At the European level the existing dialogue between the European Youth Forum and the Commission's DG Education and Culture will be intensified and become more regular; it will serve as an example of good practice.

¹ See European Youth Forum Press release of 27 July 2006 which states “strong support for the initiative of ensuring structured dialogue with young people on the issues that concern them, at all levels – from the local to European.”

² See among others conclusion the European Youth Week event in Brussels in December 2005 (“no policy about us without us”) and of the Presidency youth event in Bad Ischl in March 2006 which both stress the need to create space for structured dialogue between young people and decision-makers.

³ Resolution of the Council on participation by and information for young people in view of promoting their active European citizenship, JO C 297 of 7.12.2006

⁴ Fair information, inclusiveness, diversity and participation.

- The structured dialogue is **not a dialogue among ‘elites’**. Therefore the participation of disadvantaged young people and also those who do not belong to any structures is of particular importance. **Inclusion and diversity** are basic principles of the structured dialogue. They maximise the legitimacy of the outcome of the structured dialogue. This must be insured through the openness of the participating youth organisations and with the help of youth moderators / youth trainers / youth workers who insure that all young people have a chance to raise their voice. An additional tool constitute **online consultations and chats** which allow in principle that any young person has the possibility to contribute to a debate.
- The structured dialogue is open and should bring together **all actors dealing directly or indirectly with youth** (i.e. policy makers, youth people, NGOs, youth workers, trainers, youth information networks,⁵ teachers, youth experts / researchers etc.). This should enable to have a coherent and cross sectoral approach to youth issues.
- The structured dialogue should be **organised in an efficient way and produce concrete results** in terms of “youth declarations” or “action plans”. The latter have to be taken seriously and should have a direct impact on youth policy shaping. Any “false dialogue” or tokenism should be avoided since it undermines the credibility of the involved authorities / EU institutions and leads to frustration, especially among young people.
- The organisation and outcome of the structured dialogue **should be made visible**. Whenever possible relevant media should be invited to follow the structured dialogue (especially at the moment of the Presidency youth events and the European Youth Week).

c) Challenges

Following the negative votes in France and the Netherlands Heads of State and government called for a period of reflection. According to the Commission’s analysis it should be used for a broad and intensive debate on European policies. To this end the **Plan-D** has been proposed in order “to stimulate a wider debate between the European Union’s democratic institutions

⁵ Such as Eurodesk, ERYICA and EYCA.

and citizens ... where citizens are given the information and tools to actively participate in the decision-making process and gain ownership of the European project.”⁶

In this context the following **concrete challenges** can be identified:

- The **positive attitude of young people** (especially of the European Youth Forum) towards the idea of the structured dialogue should not be deceived; there is the need for a real, open, credible and constructive dialogue with young people.
- **Young people and youth organisations should be involved** at an early stage in the preparation of events.
- The structured dialogue needs **moderation**, especially to involve disadvantaged young people and those who are not members of any organisation. There is the need to identify, mobilise, inform and **train competent youth workers / youth leaders / moderators** who will ensure that the dialogue between policy-makers and young people is working and leads to concrete results.
- The structured dialogue must be understood by young people at the grass root level. There is **need for “translation” into easy language / symbols** and the creation of ownership among young people.
- In order to attract attention of the **media** the structured dialogue should at particular moments allow for public youth debates involving the highest political level (Heads of State and Government, President of the Commission, President of the European Parliament etc.) This would need good preparation with the help of professional services in order to have tangible media impact (TV, radio, written press).

2) Thematic framework

The European structured dialogue should follow a thematic structure which is in line with the European political agenda, the resolution adopted by the Council of Ministers on proposal of the Commission and the thematic focus of the next three Presidencies, i.e. Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. The thematic framework is the following:

⁶ See the Commission’s contribution to the period of reflection and beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate, COM (2005) 494 final, 13.10.2005, p. 2-3.

Main Theme in 2007- mid 2008: Social and professional integration of young people	
1 st sub-theme: Equal opportunities and participation of young people in society – German Presidency	Permanent vertical sub-theme: Future of Europe
2 nd sub-theme: social integration of young people through volunteering and entrepreneurship – Portuguese Presidency	
3 rd sub-theme: Social integration of young people in a multicultural society - Slovene Presidency (tbc)	

The **‘future of Europe’** should be a permanent theme for all youth events and will be particularly addressed at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. Depending on decisions of the European Council it is expected that the debate on the **future EU treaty** will constitute a further thematic priority of the structured dialogue with young people, along with the run up to the **EP elections** in mid-2009.

The Slovenian presidency would have the task to ensure transition between the first main theme (i.e. social and professional integration of young people) and the subsequent main theme (i.e. intercultural dialogue).

3) Organisation and Finances

In practical terms the European structured dialogue would work in the following way (see also the attached scheme):

- First step: organisation of **youth seminars at national level** that would focus on the particular sub-topic of the general theme; these events would be organised by the responsible national authorities in cooperation with national youth councils, youth NGOs, schools, youth information centres etc. The participating national youth councils would be open to non-organised youth and would have the particular task to ensure that young people from socially disadvantaged background are involved. The national youth councils would ensure that the youth seminars produce concrete results, in terms of written conclusions, recommendations etc.⁷ Selected representatives of these events should in

⁷ Results can be formally adopted conclusions and recommendations but also minutes, reports, messages, slogans etc. The results should have some degree of “representativity” without however been fixed to any

principle be invited to participate in the events at European level (Presidency youth events + European Youth Week) allowing them to present the results of their national youth seminar. The Youth in Action Programme would financially contribute to the organisation of these events (especially with the help of the so-called “**youth seminars**” of the new **Action 5.1**; 1st April and 1st September deadline for funding would be the most appropriate for activities to take place between July-November and December-March). National Agencies, SALTOs and Eurodesks would have a mobilising role and undertake specific information and training measures to ensure that youth seminars of high quality would be submitted by beneficiaries.

- Second step: the results of national youth seminars would feed into the debates at the **Presidency youth events**. The Presidency youth events would have the objective of preparing a synthesis of national debates and draw common conclusions at European level, in terms of a formally adopted text. Youth trainers would be involved as moderators / facilitators ensuring that all participating young people have a chance to participate in the debates. The debate would be enriched by findings from Eurobarometer surveys and online consultations via the European Youth Portal. The Commission, researchers and representatives of national youth ministries should be present at Presidency youth events and be available to enter into debate / dialogue with the participating young people. The latter would present their common conclusions at the end of the Presidency youth event (preferably in form of a type-written text) after having adopted the conclusions either by consensus or by vote (depending on the working method of the youth event). The conclusions would be largely disseminated to all partners involved (national youth authorities, Commission, researchers, youth organisations etc.), especially via the European Youth Portal and the Presidency website.
- Third step: The conclusions of the Presidency youth events would be discussed at **informal fora between Presidencies, Commission, European Parliament and youth representatives (so-called ‘Troika’)**, at the sidelines of the Youth Council meetings. To this end a delegation composed of representatives of the Presidency youth events and the European Youth Forum would be invited to come to Brussels in order to present the main

particular formula or type of presentation. In order to facilitate communication local, regional and national events should be invited to produce their results in one of the main EU languages, especially English.

results of their work to ministers. Whenever possible and appropriate the Council of Youth Ministers would put the conclusions of the youth event on its agenda, discuss them and ensure a follow-up.

- Fourth step: The Conclusions of the Presidency youth events would also be discussed at particular meetings between youth representatives and the EU institutions in the framework of the **European Youth Week**. The European Youth Week would allow summarising the results of the events and have a discussion between young people and representatives of EU institutions. It would be organised regularly (every 18 months), preceded by a European Youth Portal consultation whenever possible, and allow for direct encounters and debates between youth representatives and representatives of EU institutions (particularly from the Commission, European Parliament, Economic and Social Committee and Committee of the Regions). The results of these debates would have an impact on the EU policy-shaping debates. They would be presented at the next youth seminars at national level and feed into the next round of debates during the Presidency youth events. Both, the outcome of the discussion within the Youth Council and the European Youth Week would give an impulse to the preparation of the following Presidency and would feed into the next round of youth seminars at national level (see attached scheme).

The **Youth in Action Programme (2007-2013)** should financially support the activities (i.e. national and transnational youth seminars, Presidency youth events, European Youth Week), relevant actors (European Youth Forum, international youth organisations, cross border networks of young people) and the visibility of the structured dialogue (especially via the European Youth Portal and the youth information networks Eurodesk, ERYICA and Youthcard). The structures supported by the Youth in Action Programme, particularly the National Agencies / SALTOs and Eurodesk, have a vital role to play as channels of information / communication and to mobilise the various actors involved at the national, regional and local level.

In parallel, the European Commission will organise in close cooperation with young people and youth organisations a **Youth Summit** in Rome to deal with the theme ‘future of Europe’ at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. The results of this event will be

taken into account at the Presidency youth event in Cologne, the Troika meeting and the European Youth Week.

The European Youth Forum, National Agencies, SALTOs and Eurodesk would have the task to promote the idea of the structured dialogue at the level of potential beneficiaries and invite them to submit applications of high quality allowing to organise youth seminars at national level.

4) Roadmap

Within this framework the following youth events will take place:

Date	Title	Place
February 2007	Structured Dialogue Director DG EAC/D – YFJ	Brussels
17-21 January 2007	Preparatory meeting for the Youth Summit in Rome	Brussels
24-25 March 2007	Youth summit "Your Europe – Your Future" at the occasion of the 50 th anniversary of the signature of the Treaty of Rome	Rome
13 - 16 April 2007	German Presidency youth event on 1 st sub-theme	Cologne
May 2007	Ministerial meeting with young people	Brussels
3-10 June 2007	European Youth Week	Brussels and Member States
July 2007	Structured Dialogue Director DG EAC/D – YFJ	Brussels
July-October 2007	Youth seminars at national level	Member States
Autumn 2007	Presidency youth event in Portugal on 2 nd sub-theme	Portugal
November 2007	Ministerial meeting with young people	Brussels
December 2007-March 2008	Youth seminars at national level	Member States

January 2008	Structured Dialogue Director DG EAC/D – YFJ	Brussels
Spring 2008	Presidency youth event in Slovenia on 3 rd sub-theme	Slovenia
May 2008	Ministerial meeting with young people	Brussels
July 2008	Structured Dialogue Director DG EAC/D – YFJ	Brussels
July-October 2008	Youth seminars at national level	Member States
November 2008	Ministerial meeting with young people	Brussels
Autumn 2008	Presidency youth event in France on new theme to be decided by next team Presidency	France
Autumn 2008	European Youth Week	Brussels and Member States
Autumn 2008	Conference on inter- religious dialogue	Brussels
December 2007-March 2009	Youth seminars at national level	Member States
Spring 2009	Czech Presidency youth event on new theme to be decided by next Team Presidency	Czech Republic
June 2009	European Parliament elections	Brussels and Member States