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NOTE

from : General Secretariat of the Council
to : Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 1) / Council

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Subject: "Urban" Youth and Europe
- *policy debate*

Delegations will find attached a Presidency discussion paper to serve as the basis for the policy debate at the EYCS Council on 18-19 November 2010.

Presidency background¹ paper / Questions for the exchange of view on 19 November 2010

On 27 November 2010, young people and representatives of youth organisations from Brussels, as well as other cities, will present their projects and ideas to the public at large. In addition, they will discuss their needs, wishes and aspirations with political representatives from Belgium and Europe. Their opinions will be backed up by young people and representatives of youth organisations from Spain, Belgium, Hungary (current Trio Presidency) and Poland (first of the next Trio Presidency), who will come to Brussels especially for this event. It promises to be a hot day in the heart of Europe!

Objective of this day:

- To present young people from metropolitan cities in a positive light and to make the challenges they are facing debatable;
- To provide a platform where young people from different districts and neighbourhoods will have the opportunity to express their creativity, and to demonstrate how “Europe” shows young people from an urban environment in a positive and artistic light;
- To give young people from an urban environment a voice in the European youth policy agenda and to acknowledge their contribution regarding the eight themes of the new framework for European cooperation in the youth field (education and training, employment and entrepreneurship, health and welfare, participation, volunteering, social inclusion, youth and the world, and creativity and culture).

¹ Based on Paul Soto Hardiman & Frédéric Lapeyre (2004). *Youth and exclusion in disadvantaged urban areas: policy approaches in six European cities. Trends in social cohesion No. 9*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/Trends/Trends-09_en.pdf

Context

Social inclusion of young people in deprived urban areas takes place at a crucial time when major pressure to find short-term improvements in physical security could threaten long-term human and social rights. In every corner of Europe, young people of all origins find themselves sometimes in the eye of this storm. They are held responsible for much of the violence and are also said to be among the most frequent victims.

Many neighbourhoods suffer from higher than city-average levels of poverty and educational failure. But most also act as magnets for immigration from developing countries.

Most neighbourhoods are experiencing cycles of rapid economic change driven increasingly by global rather than local events. Changes are driven primarily by the response of the labour and housing markets to widespread economic restructuring. Many of the new service jobs that replace traditional jobs in manufacturing and craft activities are low paid and insecure. The availability of public or private accommodation for low paid groups outstrips the availability of jobs. The education system also loses credibility as the pathway giving access to decent jobs.

Wealthier residents tend to leave the area leading to a further decline in local services, social infrastructure, amenities and physical decay.

These economic developments produce a whirlwind of social and cultural change leading to a loss of personal and collective identity, family breakdown, dependency on state benefits, and inevitably, the social exclusion of certain groups and people. Young people sometime find themselves on the wrong side of the divide. Bridging these rifts requires rebuilding the social and cultural foundations for mutual trust as well as viable economic alternatives, considerable time and resources.

Young people in these areas find themselves in the centre of many types of violence which go far beyond the anti-social behaviour that dominates the headlines and drives much policy. Domestic violence and ethnic violence also stand out. Sometimes there is aggressive behaviour, harassment and violence by the authorities towards young people. Violence in schools or at sports events has tended to be seen as derived from or simply a venue for other kinds of violence rather than something special in its own right, even if it can require particular types of action.

Young people themselves tend to highlight the violence that they are subjected to in the home and the aggressive behaviour by adults and the authorities. They complain of being ignored, insulted and tarnished with the same brush as a minority of troublemakers. They describe the adult violence that surrounds them – domestic violence, drunkenness, the risk of drugs pushed by adults .

So-called “youth violence” displays certain constant features: poverty, disappointed aspirations, lack of prospects, of self-confidence and of confidence in the local environment, official uncertainty, ignorance of the problems, indifference and spatial segregation.

The violence manifests itself in the home and in family life, in the street, towards “outsiders”, towards symbols of authority, towards young people’s own community and towards communal facilities and installations.

One of their first demands is for respect, to be listened to, for the right to be different. But they also describe a longing for economic independence in a context where this seems like an unrealistic fantasy. For many the prospects are of a lifetime of insecurity, humiliation and drudgery. In contrast, there is the immediate gratification and kudos they can get from their peers on the street or the informal economy. **So the key questions are both how to build an environment of mutual respect and how to offer real, tangible ways out of their problems.**

Policy – what to do?

What kind of policy will enable young people to change their lives in neighbourhoods suffering from identity loss and in which identity building is conflict-based (“us”, the minority in the neighbourhood, and “them”, the majority who live on the far side of the mental and social, cultural and economic boundaries that surround young people’s life setting)?

What kind of constructive spaces can we provide for analysing and discussing the older generation’s anger and resentment? In what kind of environment are the political decisions being taken? How do politicians respond to the pressure they are under to make tackling local and street violence the priority rather than developing proper long-term education, training and employment policy (e.g. is there a contribution from Youth on the Move)?

Questions for the policy debate

To facilitate the policy debate of Ministers at the Council meeting, the Presidency has prepared two questions:

Ministers are kindly invited to reflect on either of the two following questions:

- 1. How does the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)¹ reflect the issues that are of concern for urban youth in Europe? How can Youth on the Move be an added value for them?***
- 2. For many young people, growing up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods is a stigma that conditions their chances of social inclusion. Which good practices in your urban areas and cities (youth initiatives or youth organisations/NGO’s) are being developed and are proving to be promising activities for these young people?***

Of course ministers can choose to elaborate on both questions; however, the time for the whole statement is as usual restricted to 3 minutes.

¹ OJ C 311, 19.12.2009, p. 1.