



European Youth Forum response to the European Commission's White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth

Adopted by the Bureau of the European Youth Forum, 30 January 2002

Introduction

The European Commission White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth, adopted on 21st November 2001, represents the results of a lengthy and wide-ranging consultation process. The latter had involved various different groups not only from the EU Member States but also from the European Economic Area and the candidate countries. The launch of the White Paper took place at the Ghent Colloquium at the end of November and was broadly welcomed by the participants as a first step towards developing action in the youth field within the European Union. The European Youth Forum also welcomed the White Paper, particularly in light of the uncertainty that there had been about its status in the preceding months.

During the course of the consultation process, the members of the European Youth Forum adopted two position papers on their vision for an expanded European youth policy.¹ Following the adoption of the White Paper, the European Youth Forum conducted a consultation of its members. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to respond to the particular contents of the White Paper adopted by the European Commission by

¹ 'The Initial Contribution of the European Youth Forum to the White Paper on Youth Policy' adopted by the YFJ General Assembly in October 2000 and 'Strategy and Key Objectives for a Youth Policy in the European Union' adopted by the YFJ Council of Members April 2001.

taking into account the responses of our Member Organisations.² This paper also outlines the elements that the European Youth Forum believes are needed to turn the suggestions contained in the White Paper into policy measures which will have a genuine impact on young people in the European Union and beyond.

Although there had been an indication at the Ghent Colloquium that a reference would be included in the Laeken declaration giving support to the White Paper, youth only received a short mention.³ However, the Spanish Presidency has shown its commitment to taking the process forwards in the first half of 2002.⁴ The Spanish Presidency has indicated that it will draft a Council Resolution for adoption at the meeting of the Youth Council of Ministers on 30th May 2002. The Council Resolution will thus represent the next step in taking the process forwards.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section examines the White Paper itself and asks whether it will lead to a genuine youth policy in the European Union. The second section examines the role that youth organisations should be allowed to play in the development of youth policy. The third section makes some concrete proposals for establishing a European Youth Policy that genuinely makes a difference to the socio-economic situation of young people and their ability to participate fully in society as active citizens.

I - Does the White Paper represent a new impetus for European youth?

A New Ambition?

The stated aim of the White Paper adopted by the European Commission is 'to promote new forms of European governance'. The White Paper is divided into two sections: a first part which includes the Commission's 'suggestions' to the Member States and the regions of Europe for putting 'youth-related measures' into practice, and annexes which include a synthesis of the results of the consultation and an overview of existing Community policies and programmes which impact upon young people.⁵ Although the results of the consultation are mainly presented in the annex, four key messages are outlined in the main text. These are: active citizenship for young people, expanding and recognising

2 These responses can be found on the European Youth Forum's web site at the following address: <http://www.youthforum.org/start/whitepaper/wpeng.htm>.

3 The Laeken Declaration states that the Union needs to resolve the basic challenge of 'how to bring the citizens, and primarily the young, closer to the European design and the European institutions'. 'The Future of the European Union - Laeken Declaration', 15 December 2001.

4 'Youth: Priorities and Objectives' España 2002.

5 It is important to note that although the 'Commission has tried to reproduce as faithfully as possible the proposals which emerged from the consultation in order to pass them on to *Europe's decision-makers*', it also includes a disclaimer that 'the suggestions ... do not necessarily reflect the Commission's views'. European Commission White Paper 'A New Impetus for European Youth', COM (2001) 681 final, p.23.

areas of experimentation, developing autonomy among young people and the European Union as a champion of values.⁶

Despite the Commission's claim that the 'White Paper addresses the full range of questions which were raised during the consultation exercise, regardless of the level of competence', it is clear that among the young people and youth organisations consulted both at the national and the European level there has been considerable disappointment with the results. Although there is a general recognition that the White Paper represents a first step, many feel that it could have been more ambitious and clearer in defining the objectives.

In preparing this paper, the European Youth Forum consulted its member organisations, many of whom felt that although the consultation exercise had been extensive, the results – particularly from young people – had not been adequately taken into account in the final proposals of the White Paper. For example DUF, the Danish National Youth Council stated that 'in spite of the extensive consultation process and hundreds of suggestions from youth, researchers and public authorities, only a few areas are covered in the White Paper. The ones mentioned are relevant but it does not hide the fact that some central issues are absent,'⁷ and the National Youth Council of Ireland stated that the 'document is tokenistic and ignores many of the key issues'.⁸

In particular, our member organisations highlighted the lack of references to candidate or EEA countries, despite their inclusion in the consultation process.⁹ ATD Fourth World stressed the need for more consideration of the particular difficulties faced by the poorest and most disadvantaged young people and the need for employment and education for all young people. Similarly, ETUC Youth identified 'employment and social integration, education and mobility and discrimination and racism' as areas which received 'little more than a passing reference in the White Paper'.¹⁰ OBESSU 'regretted the fact that although education plays such a large part in young people's lives there were relatively few references to education in the main text and that many of the interesting ideas on education which emerged from the consultations were only mentioned in the

6 In the annex, five major areas are identified as those 'pinpointed' by young people: participation; education; employment, vocational training and social inclusion; well-being, individual autonomy and culture; and European values, mobility and relations with the rest of the world.

7 Danish Youth Council response to the White Paper.

8 National Youth Council of Ireland 'A Missed Opportunity to put Youth at the Centre of Europe' initial response of the NYCI, incorporating the views of the group of Irish young people involved in the White Paper Consultative Conference in Paris, p.2.

9 Norwegian Youth Council (LNU) opinion on the White Paper. The Czech Council of Children and Youth also stressed how important the White Paper was for the Czech Republic 'which is approaching the EU'.

10 ETUC Youth Reaction to European Commission White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth. The European Youth Forum's partner organisation - the Forum of European Muslim and Student Organisations - emphasised the importance of tackling issues of discrimination, particularly Islamophobia, following the events of 11th September 2001.

annex'.¹¹ Another important issue which was neglected was that of gender equality, despite the fact that there are still considerable inequalities between young men and young women in some countries. On the basis of the reservations of youth organisations and the many issues which are not covered in detail in the main text of the White Paper, the European Youth Forum believes that the suggestions included in the White Paper are too modest.

The European Youth Forum believes that a European youth policy should be more ambitious than the White Paper proposes. It should have concrete objectives and address all the key areas relevant to young people.

The Methodology

The White Paper proposes a 'new cooperation framework' which is 'both ambitious, fulfilling young people's aspirations, and realistic, setting priorities from among the great many issues raised during the consultation process'.¹² This framework consists of a proposal to introduce an open method of coordination in the specific field of youth and to take 'more account of youth in other policies'.

The open method of co-ordination, which has been used in key policy fields such as Economic and Employment policy, was formalised as a method for co-ordinating policies at the European level by the Heads of State and Government at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000. The Lisbon conclusions both defined the method and its use to promote the strategic goals of the European Union.¹³ More recently, the European Commission's White Paper on Governance proposed that the Open Method of Coordination should be used on a case by case basis to 'achieve defined Treaty objectives' and encourage co-operation, the exchange of best practice and agreeing common targets and guidelines for the Member States'.

The Open Method of Coordination model proposed by the Commission in the White Paper is very unclear and does not reflect accurately either the description in the Lisbon conclusions or the White Paper on Governance. In particular, there are no strategic objectives defined in the context of a timeframe such as those for the European Employment Strategy or the Social Inclusion Process.

The European Youth Forum believes that the Open Method of Coordination model proposed by the European Commission needs to be better defined and supported by a revised Treaty article providing a clearer basis for action. The latter issue needs to be

11 Meeting held between the Organising Bureau for European School Students and the European Youth Forum on the White Paper, January 4th 2002. The proposal to establish an Open Method of Coordination relating to the 'Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems,' following a report to the Barcelona European Council is not addressed in the White Paper.

12 European Commission, op.cit. p.14.

13 See paragraph 37 of the Lisbon European Council conclusions.

taken up by the Convention on the Future of Europe in order to address the need to involve young people more closely in the European project, as expressed by the Head of States and Government in the Laeken Declaration. In addition, the European Council at either Barcelona or Madrid should recognise the initiative to introduce an Open Method of Coordination in the youth field in order to provide greater political impetus to the process, as has been the case with other processes using the Open Method of Coordination.

The European Youth Forum believes that the elected representatives of the citizens also need to be closely involved in the process of the Open Method of Coordination, in particular in agreeing on the priority themes. The European Parliament's role and its interaction with the other institutions in the process should be clarified from the outset, based on an agreement between the Parliament, Council and the Commission.

The European Youth Forum believes that the role that youth organisations will play in the cycle of the Open Method of Coordination should be clarified and stated explicitly, given the role foreseen for NGOs in the Lisbon conclusions and the emphasis in the White Paper itself on promoting the participation of young people in decision-making.¹⁴ Although the White Paper mentions that 'young people are consulted on the priority themes and their follow-up' it is unclear exactly what is meant by this. The European Youth Forum, as the representative body of youth organisations in Europe, believes that national youth councils should be closely involved through consultation at each step of the Open Method of Coordination process at the national level, and that the European Youth Forum should be similarly involved at the European level. Furthermore, international non-governmental youth organisations should be consulted on those policy fields on which they have specialist knowledge. This would also be consistent with the European Commission's proposals to promote youth participation, and reflect some of the positive experience coming from the Council of Europe's co-management procedures.¹⁵

The White Paper suggests using the open method of coordination for four 'priority themes': participation, information, voluntary service among young people and promoting a greater understanding of youth. The suggestions included under each of these headings in the White Paper are very vague and are more the types of activities which could be promoted by programmes or information campaigns, rather than by an Open Method of Coordination. There is very little which could be defined as having a policy impact. This has created the need for 'the EU itself ... to walk one step further and

14 Paragraph 38 of the Lisbon conclusions states 'a method of benchmarking best practices on managing change will be devised by the European Commission networking with different providers and users, namely the social partners, companies and NGOs.

15 In the youth field, the Council of Europe's decision-making structures include representatives of both youth organisations and governments, who work together to define the institution's policies and programmes, which are then submitted to the Committee of Ministers for adoption. The principle of co-management is defined in the Committee of Ministers' declaration of 12 January 1971 (CM/Del/Concl 571) 196 XXII) and 'Reform of the Council of Europe Youth Sector' of November 1998 CM(98)195.

define clearer objectives, priorities and the resources it is willing to implement so that the White Paper makes a difference for young people.¹⁶

In developing the objectives of the Open Method of Coordination for youth policy, the European Youth Forum would like to see a broader conception of youth policy, in line with our proposal for an integrated and cross sectoral youth policy which could have a genuine impact on young people. The four themes proposed represent a very narrow view of youth policy, and for many Member States it is hard to envisage how the proposals will contribute any added-value to national youth policies which are already much broader in their remit. The White Paper shows a lack of ambition by failing to push out the parameters of youth policy and it is not clear how the measures proposed will make a real difference to young people in Europe.

If these four priority themes are to be developed further, there is a clear need to define objectives and explain how they will be implemented under the Open Method of Coordination. This will be central to ensuring that the suggestions are developed into a tangible policy to improve the situation of young people and their representation in society.

In addition to the Open Method of Coordination, the White Paper also proposes 'taking more account of youth in other policies', which we have understood as a form of mainstreaming of youth in other policy areas. Member State Ministers responsible for youth policy would 'ensure that youth-related concerns are taken into account in these other policies, at national level as well as in implementing European policies'. The White Paper proposes that education, lifelong learning, mobility, employment and social integration, and racism and xenophobia are the priority areas for action. One of the key arguments that the European Youth Forum made in its earlier position papers was that a European youth policy should be integrated and cross-sectoral. In order for the youth perspective to be properly considered in other policy areas the method for 'taking youth into account' will be vital.

One existing example of mainstreaming in current Community policy is equal opportunities, under which all Community policies should consider the equal opportunities impact.¹⁷ This could provide a model for action in the youth field. In consideration of the number of other policy areas relevant to youth, both at the national and the European level, a clear and detailed proposal is needed for an effective way of taking youth into account in other policies. This is important in order to ensure that youth policy is coordinated and cross-sectoral. Furthermore, the proposal for areas to be

16 International Movement of Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth (MIJARC) comments on the White Paper.

17 European Commission Communication 'Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities' COM (96)67 final. Currently each Directorate General in the European Commission is responsible for mainstreaming equal opportunities into its policy areas. This work is given direction by the Group of Commissioners on Equal Opportunities and supported by an Inter-Service Group on Gender Equality.

taken into account in the White Paper should be broadened to include additional policy areas such as gender equality and discrimination.

There are also a number of questions which arise from the White Paper at the level at which the measures are directed. The Open Method of Coordination has typically been used to coordinate national policies where the policy area remains the competence of the Member State (for example in employment, economic and social inclusion policies). However, in the White Paper mention is made of the national, regional and local levels without a clear indication of which measures are directed at which level and how they can be implemented. The European Youth Forum therefore calls on the next steps in the process to define the levels of action to be taken. In addition, although the candidate and EEA countries were included in the consultation process and the White Paper frequently uses the term 'European' and not just 'European Union', it is not clear how candidate countries, in particular, will be included in the process in the run-up to enlargement. The White Paper on European Governance foresees the inclusion of candidate countries in the Open Method of Coordination, and a shadow process (such as the one under the European Employment Strategy where Joint Assessment Plans are produced each year) would very much contribute to the development of a coherent youth policy in an enlarged European Union in the future.

The White Paper 'A New Impetus for European Youth' was described by a Commission official as 'unlocking the door' to the development of youth policy in the European Union.¹⁸ The European Youth Forum concurs with this statement to the extent that it regards the next stages - notably the Resolution which will be adopted by the Council of Ministers in May - as crucial to taking the process forward. However, the European Youth Forum is not satisfied with the scope of the White Paper, particularly relating to whether the implementation of the objectives will make a genuine difference to young people. It is important to remember that youth policy is defined and implemented in very different ways in the Member States, and that in those Member States which already have a comprehensive and coordinated youth policy the measures suggested in the White Paper may have little additional impact.¹⁹ One of the most valuable aspects of the consultation exercise was that it highlighted some of the areas where existing policy-making had not been effective in tackling the problems faced by young people, yet the suggestions contained in the White Paper for an Open Method of Coordination only pertain to a few limited issues and the proposal for taking youth into account in other policies is not clearly defined.

The European Youth Forum can support the proposal to combine an Open Method of Coordination in the youth policy sector with a form of mainstreaming of youth in other

18 At the Ghent Colloquium, Mr Vale de Almeida, a director in DG Education and Culture, used this analogy to describe the role of the White Paper.

19 The IARD 'Study on the State of Young People and Youth Policy in Europe' includes a comparative section on youth policy in 18 European countries.

policy areas, provided that these methods are implemented in such a way that they result in a real cross-sectoral youth policy which is of benefit to young people in Europe. For these processes to be effective, the European Youth Forum believes that it is necessary to revise the legal basis in the Treaties relating to action in the youth field. In addition, it is particularly important that the candidate countries should be included in these processes both in the run-up to and following enlargement of the Union.

II – Youth Organisations and the White Paper

The White Paper and its annexes emphasise youth participation and the role of youth organisations and youth representation structures like National Youth Councils and the European Youth Forum. This emphasis is welcomed by the European Youth Forum.

The White Paper also makes references to the fact that not all young people are members of the existing structures. While recognising this fact, the European Youth Forum and many of its member organisations were disappointed by the proposals made in the White Paper because they showed a lack of understanding on the part of the Commission both of the work of democratic youth organisations and reasons for the low levels of membership of civil society organisations in some countries.²⁰ The Spanish Youth Council, for example noted that the 'difficulties young people have to participate' are never mentioned, while ETUC Youth were 'shocked that the White Paper does not acknowledge the role currently played by youth organisations and representative bodies in fostering participation of young people'.²¹

Youth organisations, like any civil society organisation, work in accordance with the rules they have themselves established.²² Public authorities must respect the autonomy of youth organisations to agree fair and democratic structures for their own functioning and decide on their own priorities. National youth councils and the European Youth Forum define how they can best fulfil their objective of reaching out to as many young people as possible themselves.

A recent Eurobarometer study has shown that in many countries, young people's membership of youth organisations is not high.²³ This has always been and remains one of the key challenges to youth organisations: how to extend and broaden their membership and thereby increase the outreach of their organisations. The key factor which has restricted the efforts of youth organisations in this direction is resources. In countries such as Finland, where civil society structures are given state recognition and support,

20 This was one of the key issues brought up by the Youth Forum's member organisations in their responses to the White Paper.

21 See the CJE and ETUC Youth responses on the White Paper.

22 See the statutes of the European Youth Forum and the European Youth Forum's 'Policy Paper on the Independence of National Youth Councils', adopted by the Council of Members, Athens 15-17 November 2001.

23 Eurobarometer 55.1 Young Europeans in 2001, August 2001.

the membership levels of civil society organisations are much higher.²⁴ Youth organisations have never shown a lack of willingness to reach out to young people who are not members of organisations and have only been hampered by the lack of resources to do so. While willing to use new communication tools such as the Internet to extend their work, youth organisations nevertheless believe that their democratic structures are central and should be respected rather than challenged.

The White Paper also neglects the very valuable and specialist knowledge that international non-governmental youth organisations have and could contribute to policy development. Many of these organisations work in specific fields such as education, social inclusion, agriculture, employment, the environment, anti-racism and discrimination, mobility, leisure and well-being, and peace and reconciliation. These organisations have a very specific understanding of the impact of other policy areas on young people and represent the interests of young people in relation to these areas. The youth work carried out by youth organisations at all levels, whether they are members of national or international platforms, is very important and the value of promoting this kind of work must be underlined, especially in consideration of the differences it makes to the lives and opportunities of so many young people all over Europe.

The European Youth Forum believes that the development of the suggestions contained in the White Paper must take better account of the role of youth organisations and the contribution that they can make to supporting the participation of young people in society. In particular, mechanisms should be introduced to ensure that young people are consulted at every stage of the process of an open method of coordination, whether it be at the national or European level. The appropriate structures for such consultation are national youth councils and the European Youth Forum, as the democratic and representative structures at these levels.

III – Opening the Door to a European Youth Policy

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the Spanish Presidency has already indicated that it plans to draft a Council Resolution for adoption by the Council of Ministers for Youth on 30th May 2002. The weight of responsibility is now on the Council to develop a genuine youth policy in the European Union on the basis of the suggestions made by the European Commission in the White Paper. This will not be the first Council Resolution on matters relating to youth, although the European Youth Forum hopes that this Resolution will have a more significant impact than previous Council Resolutions in the field have, and that it will also contribute to a move forwards in Community youth policy.²⁵ The European Youth Forum understands the initiative to adopt a Resolution, but

24 Allianssi, the Finnish Youth Council noted in their response that 50.2% of young people were members of NGOs in 2001.

25 Notably the Resolution of Council of Ministers for Youth meeting within the Council of 8 February 1999 (OJ 1999 C42/01) and Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the

hopes that all future action resulting from it will be consolidated by a clearer basis for action in the Treaties. The Resolution and the question of a stronger reference to youth in the Treaties should be taken up by the Convention on the Future of Europe.

Whilst the European Youth Forum notes that its proposal to develop a genuinely cross-sectoral youth policy both at the European and the national level were not taken into account in the White Paper²⁶, it believes that the framework proposed by the Commission could be better developed in order to make a youth policy which could genuinely make a difference to the socio-economic situation of young people and their ability to participate in society as active citizens. In particular, the European Youth Forum calls for the following steps to be taken:

1. The commitment to a real co-ordination of policies which affect young people, through a detailed proposal for taking youth into account in other policy areas, which:
 - identifies a larger number of policy areas than those listed in the White Paper, in line with the results of the consultation exercise;
 - would be supported inside the Commission by the establishment of a Group of Commissioners on Youth, an Inter-service Group on Youth and an Advisory Committee on Youth (including Member State representatives and representatives of youth organisations),²⁷ in addition to the role foreseen for the Council of Ministers, to ensure that youth are taken into account in the development of Community policies. This would be supported by similar mechanisms at the national level to cover national, regional and local policies.
2. The clarification of the Open Method of Coordination process for youth policy, including:
 - fixed strategic objectives with defined aims, a timeframe and policy proposals to achieve them;
 - an elaboration of clear policy measures to be followed up at the Member State level and at the Community level;
 - the establishment of the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field as an annual process and a clear outline of how it will operate with an allocation of responsibilities between the institutions;
 - the development of a clear system for benchmarking, reporting and evaluation, including national action plans which feed into an annual European report;
 - the development of a framework for the participation of young people in the process, notably with the consultation of national youth councils at the Member

Member States, Meeting within the Council, of 14 December 2000 on the social integration of young people.

²⁶ Strategy and Key Objectives for a Youth Policy in the European Union, second contribution of the European Youth Forum to the European Commission's White Paper on Youth Policy. Adopted by the Council of Members, Brussels April 2001.

²⁷ These structures reflect those which are currently in place to ensure that equal opportunities are mainstreamed in Community policies.

- State level and the European Youth Forum and INGYO with specialist knowledge of certain fields at the European level.
3. A commitment to involving the candidate countries in the process from the very beginning in accordance with the White Paper on Governance's recognition of the possibility of including them in the Open Method of Coordination processes and the current practice under the European Employment Strategy.
 4. An agreement to allocate adequate resources for the implementation of the proposals and a consideration of how youth can be taken into account in terms of other programmes and funding opportunities.

Conclusion

The European Youth Forum welcomes the fact that the European Commission has published its long awaited White Paper 'A New Impetus for European Youth'. This document represents the basis for developing youth policy in some areas at the European level. However, the European Youth Forum believes that the role of the Council of Youth Ministers will now be vital to ensuring that the White Paper can be developed into a youth policy that can have a positive impact on young people in the European Union and beyond. The European Youth Forum therefore calls on the Council of Ministers to take into account the comments in this paper on both the strategy and the objectives for following up on the White Paper, and looks forward to being able to contribute on the development of the priority themes in the future. The expectations of many young people from all over Europe were high following the consultation exercise and they will now look to the Council Resolution as a means building on the European Commission's White Paper to improve the opportunities and situation of young people.