COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 8 November 2011

15952/11

JEUN 67
EDUC 260
SOC 907
RELEX 1087

REPORT

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
to:	Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 1) / Council
No. prev. doc.	15441/11 JEUN 60 EDUC 250 SOC 868 RELEX 1040
Subject:	Draft Council conclusions on the Eastern dimension of youth participation and mobility

At its meeting on 24 October, the Youth Working Party reached an agreement on the draft Council conclusions, as set out in the Annex.

The Permanent Representatives Committee is accordingly invited to forward the text to the Council for adoption and subsequent publication in the Official Journal.

ANNEX

Council conclusions on the Eastern dimension of youth participation and mobility

The Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council:

RECALLING THAT

1. Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides for European Union action to be aimed at encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors, and the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe;

2. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union has allowed the EU to strengthen the delivery of its foreign policy; cooperation with neighbouring countries can now be broadened to cover the full range of issues in an integrated and more effective manner;

3. Mobility is significant in promoting mutual understanding and economic development, while raising awareness of different attitudes to life and the different situations of young people all over Europe. Among other advantages, mobility is indispensable for exchanging ideas, spreading innovation, tackling employment and social issues, establishing strong relationships between people, assisting personal development, and encouraging the acquisition of soft skills, as well as promoting intercultural competences and fighting prejudices; it is, besides other issues, a key to unleashing all young people's potential and achieving the Europe 2020 objectives;

4. In the context of an overall increase in mobility, which leads to frequent interactions between people of different nationalities, cultures, religions and beliefs, the European Union has a growing role at the international level in promoting respect for democracy, freedom, equality and human rights and appropriate standards of intercultural dialogue;

5. "Participation" and "youth and the world" were included as two priority fields of action in the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018);

6. The EU Youth Conference was held from 5 to 7 September 2011 in Warsaw, Poland, during which it was stressed that there was a particular need for:

- cross-sectoral cooperation between youth NGOs and decision makers as well as for further research to assess the impact of youth cooperation and mobility;
- accessible information about EU Member States and Eastern European and Caucasus countries, both via online and offline channels;
- overcoming visa barriers which remain the most persisting obstacle to youth cooperation between the EU and its neighbouring countries;
- strengthening and expanding resources and programmes such as the *Youth in Action* Programme in order to focus more on mobility issues and the involvement of young people in decision-making processes;
- prioritising youth participation in democratic life in Europe in EU policies, e.g. by launching special programmes that support youth cooperation between Eastern European countries (EEc) and EU Member States.

RECOGNISE THAT

7. The enlargement of the European Union on 1 May 2004 brought about a historical shift for the Union in political, geographical and economic terms, further reinforcing the need for cooperation between the EU and its neighbours, including those from the EEc[1];

8. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)[2] of the European Union, which has recently been evaluated and included in a new framework by the Communication "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood", sets ambitious objectives based on commitments to shared values and effective implementation of political, economic and institutional reforms; the democratic developments and transformation that are taking place in the European Union's closest neighbours to the East and South, have also increased the strategic importance of the European Neighbourhood Policy and of measures strengthening civil society and on enhanced opportunities for exchanges and people-to-people contacts with a particular focus on the young people.

9. In this context, the Eastern Partnership (EaP)[3] is an initiative of strategic significance for the stability and security both of the Eastern European countries participating within the framework of the ENP and of the EU as a whole. Its important aim is to strengthen civil society, which is one of the foundations of an efficient democratic state. That area of cooperation, which includes, youth participation and cooperation, should have an even more prominent role within the EaP;

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1 For the purposes of this document the Eastern European countries are the following: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia.

2 The ENP framework covers 16 of the EU's closest neighbours – Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.

3 The EaP initiative covers the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

10. Facilitating people-to-people contacts and enhancing dialogue with civil society have been identified as essential elements of the EU-Russia Partnership for Modernisation[4];

11. The European Union has already made efforts to provide special residence permits to third-country nationals who apply for admission to the territory of a Member State, in order to get involved in voluntary activities[5], which is an important step forward;

12. The need to establish mobility partnerships with the Southern and Eastern European countries (EEc) has recently been emphasised by the European Council[6]. With a view to the future shape of these partnerships, there is a need to take into account the strengthening of young people's mobility for learning mobility, including non-formal learning in another country, which can take such forms as youth work, including youth exchanges and voluntary activities;

13. Youth exchange programmes are a good tool, especially for young people with fewer opportunities to gain intercultural experiences and develop personal and language skills;

14. Developing the international cooperation of young people, youth workers and youth leaders from the European Union and the EEc constitutes a significant contribution to building confidence in the region, thus shaping future relations in Europe in the context of potential difficulties;

15. The European Neighbourhood policy involves the European Union's and the Member States' activities in relation to sixteen countries neighbouring the EU. In this context and considering their potential contribution to the ongoing democratization processes, it could be envisaged to apply similar initiatives to the ones set out in this document in the relationships with the Southern Mediterranean countries.

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4 http://eeas.europa.eu/russia/index_en.htm
5 Council Directive 2004/114/EC of 13 December 2004.
6 Conclusions of the European Council (23/24 June 2011), EUCO 23/11

IDENTIFY THE GENERAL NEED TO:

16. Support international youth cooperation, dialogue and mutual understanding between young people, youth workers and youth leaders from the EU and EEc as an important tool to support European citizenship and democratisation processes;

17. Facilitate the access of young people to learning mobility, including young people, youth workers and youth leaders from the EEc travelling to the European Union, as well as young citizens of the European Union travelling to any country of Eastern Europe;

18. Encourage mutual learning between the Member States, youth organisations and young people in the area of cooperation with third countries, in particular with the EEc, through raising awareness of youth policies and strengthening the quality of information on mobility opportunities and participation;

ACCORDINGLY AGREE THAT

19. Supporting two-way mobility and greater participation in non-formal learning activities of young people, youth workers and youth leaders from the EU and EEc can bring numerous advantages for:

    a) young people, in developing their skills and competences so that they increase their employability, learn innovative approaches, and develop their understanding of other cultures in an increasingly globalised, multicultural world, and in giving them the opportunities to reflect upon ways to increase their participation in democratic life in various contexts;

b) civil society organisations, particularly youth organisations and those working with and for young people, enabling effective peer learning on how to empower young people and increase their participation, in terms of intensifying various types of cooperation among young people;

c) communities in the EU that host young people from EEc and local communities in the EEc region hosting youth from the EU, especially for the development of their intercultural competences;

d) the family and peer groups of the young people involved in mobility, after their return to their home countries, in the context of their perceptions of the EU and intercultural sensitivity;

e) civil society of the EEc due inter alia to their experience of a culture of democracy and the information they receive on the practicalities of democratic life, as well as on sustainable development, and the promotion of common values such as mutual understanding, democracy, solidarity and respect for human rights;

f) Europe as a whole, in building up the intellectual capital that will further shape and influence civil society.

20. Supporting active participation in society by young people, cross-border mobility and contacts between people will support the exchanging of ideas, spreading of innovations and building of partnerships and may thus facilitate changes in the long term, reducing socio-economic disparities between societies;

21. Supporting the delivery of quality information tools, exchanging good practice between the EU and EEc, and ensuring access to information on reliable partner organisations would help to strengthen networking, deepen cooperation between youth organisations in the EU and EEc and ensure safety of participants involved in this cooperation; the SALTO (Support for Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities) Resource Centres and Eurodesk have been an important network for support in this regard;

22. Further developing and promoting voluntary activities, youth work and entrepreneurship has the potential to have a positive influence on young people's employability and to facilitate their active involvement in society;

23. Due to the fact that geographical distance in some cases may be an obstacle to cooperation and mobility, the potential of virtual mobility in ensuring access to and exchange of information regarding youth participation and youth employability should be developed further;

24. Greater mobility and cooperation depends much on interest about and knowledge of the partner country and, in particular, its youth culture as a whole; in order to raise this interest and the level of knowledge, it is of special importance to present and promote culture to motivate young people to cooperate with each other;

25. Young people can find lack of language skills a considerable obstacle to communication. The role of European educational and youth programmes is one of many routes to raise their language skills and promotion of learning of foreign languages should be supported;

26. Easier access to visas for young people from outside the EU, in particular the EEc, can be made possible e.g. by visa facilitation agreements, which are one of the most efficient tools to boost mobility in general;

27. The Council of Europe's experience and expertise in cooperating with the EEc make it an important partner in implementing activities involving young people from the EEc, and the European Union - Council of Europe youth partnership has been a valuable tool, fostering synergies between the European Union and Council of Europe in this respect;

28. Existing programmes and instruments supporting mobility, mainly within the European Union, could be strengthened and broadened to those young people, volunteers, youth workers and other people working with youth from the EEc or wishing to cooperate with those countries; this refers particularly to the "Youth in Action" programme, "Lifelong Learning" programme, the EU-CoE youth partnership including the European Knowledge Centre of Youth Policy, the SALTO (Support for Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities) Resource Centres network, the Eurodesk and the European Youth Portal;

29. The European Youth Forum and youth organisations at all levels, in their activities, can also play a crucial role by representing and advocating the needs and interests of young people in the context of cooperation between youth from the EU countries and their peers from the EEc;

30. Experience gained in cooperation with other neighbouring regions should be used to shape the tools for youth cooperation with the EEc;

THEREFORE INVITE THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE, TO:

31. Promote youth exchanges and mobility programmes for young people and youth organisations, including volunteers, youth workers, researchers and those working with young people in the EU and neighbouring countries, especially from the EEc, by sharing good practices of cooperation between the organisations active in the youth field, so that every young person can have an opportunity for mobility and participation in Europe;

32. Reduce barriers in mobility and participation inter alia by promoting the learning of foreign languages, supporting the delivery of quality information in that field etc.;

33. Report on the "Youth and the World" field of action in the Youth Report 2012 and subsequent EU Youth Reports;

34. Examine the results of the study on "Youth participation in democratic life in Europe", which will be finalised in 2012, with a special focus on its possible implications for young people of the EU and the EEc as well as share the outcomes of research concerning young people and their participation in order to increase knowledge on youth;

35. Consider continuing to organise exchanges of good practices in the field of youth policies between the EEc and EU countries in cooperation with the Council of Europe and other international organisations with a view to promoting youth participation and mobility;

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES, TO:

36. Actively participate in the Eastern Partnership Multilateral Platforms, especially Platform 4, "Contacts between people", within which the development of initiatives for youth could be supported;

37. Reinforce cross-sectoral cooperation between different policy fields and relevant authorities to continue reflecting on barriers to the two-way mobility of young people from countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy, for example by finding possible ways to facilitate the issuing of visas to young people from the EEc, when and where appropriate;

38. Take advantage of cooperation with youth information structures such as the Eurodesk and the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) and make use of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP) to promote opportunities for participation and mobility.

INVITE THE COMMISSION TO:

39. Sustain and enhance the Eastern dimension in future EU programmes for youth, without prejudice to negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework;

40. Continue fostering youth cooperation between the EU and Eastern Partnership countries in the framework of the Eastern Partnership youth programme;

41. Adapt the European Youth Portal to make it useful and accessible for all young people, from all across Europe, including the EEc;

42. Consider developing the European "Youth on the Move" card initiative within the limits of its competence, so as to include young people, from all across Europe, including the EEc.

Political background

- Council Directive 2004/114/EC of 13 December 2004 on the conditions of admission of third-country nationals for the purposes of studies, pupil exchange, unremunerated training or voluntary service.
- Council Decision of 27 November 2009 on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011) (2010/37/EC).
- Decision No 1719/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing the "Youth in Action" programme for the period 2007 to 2013.
- Conclusions of the European Council (23/24 June 2011), EUCO 23/11.
- Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) (OJ C311, 19/12/09).
- Council Recommendation 14825/08 of 18 November 2008 promoting mobility of young volunteers across the European Union.
- Council Conclusions of 19 November 2010 on the 'Youth on the Move' initiative — an integrated approach in response to the challenges young people face (2010/C 326/05).
- Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 "Youth on the move" - promoting the learning mobility of young people (2011/C 199/01).
- Council Resolution of 19 May 2011 on encouraging new and effective forms of participation of all young people in democratic life in Europe (2011/C 169/01).
- Communication from the Commission EUROPE 2020 A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth COM(2010) 2020.
- Joint Communication by the high Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission, "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood – A review of European Neighbourhood Policy", COM(2011)303.
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council of 3 December 2008 entitled "Eastern Partnership" (COM(2008)0823).

- Joint Communication to the European Council, the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "A Partnership For Democracy And Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean (COM(2011)200).