



**European Youth Forum's  
Reaction to the European Commission  
Communication on European policies  
concerning youth participation and  
information**

---

*Adopted at Bureau Meeting IV 2006  
2-3 September, Brussels*

## *Introduction*

This reaction is based on the European Youth Forum Policy Paper on Future of EU Youth Policy Development accompanied with European Youth Forum Shadow report on the implementation of Common Objectives on participation and information and the European Youth Forum Study on the Methodology of the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field.

As stated in the Council resolution in November 2003<sup>1</sup>, the Member States were asked to evaluate and report on the first phase on the implementation of the common objectives on information and participation. Even if the implementation phase of the Common Objectives on participation and information has not been long, the European Youth Forum is convinced that it gives a good overview on the process and the success of the methodologies used in the implementation.

The launch of the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field in 2002 was landmark event in European youth policy. The willingness of the Member States to commit to this form of political integration of youth policy was a great step following the White Paper, *A new impetus for European Youth* of November 2001. The Open Method of Coordination process has clearly given Member States the opportunity to share and exchange views on youth policy and to identify common interests and challenges regarding policies targeting young people. Nevertheless, the YFJ remains concerned that the implementation of the Common Objectives in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination has been slow and disappointing.

In order to give youth organisations a voice in this process, the European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations made their own evaluation of the progress so far, by producing a shadow report. This report incorporates the reports made by National Youth Councils on the implementation at the national and regional levels and the European Youth Forum, on the implementation and the evaluation of youth policy at the European level.

The report shows that National Youth Councils and Youth organisations had significant expectations from the OMC, such as progressive national strategies for the implementation, constant consultations and proper partnerships. In contrast, after a couple of years it appears that in many cases the structures, even if existing, are not efficient and do not deliver results. A second important finding is that most of governments do not refer to the OMC process and work on their own priorities. While accepting that the OMC process cannot be the sole element of national youth policy, however the youth organisations believe that it is now time for member states to actually implement the working agenda agreed by all.

## *Information*

*The European Youth Forum welcomes the proposals of the Commission concerning youth information. However it would like to stress the some key issues on information and young people not outlined in the Communication.*

As emphasised in the Policy Paper and in the Shadow report, the European Youth Forum shares the alarming analysis of the Commission that “*virtually no actions have been taken*” to implement the priority of participation by young people in the information and stresses that effective measures have to be taken immediately in this regard.

---

<sup>1</sup> Council Resolution of 25 November 2003 on common objectives for participation by and information for young people (2003/C 295/04)

- There is clear need for national strategies for youth information. These have to be developed in partnership with the National Youth Councils.
- The quality, relevance and outreach of the information is a crucial issue. Beyond the European Youth Information Charter developed by ERYICA, already firmly supported the European Youth Forum, we see the need to involve young people and their organisations also in the design of the content of the information tools and supports. They are best placed to know what content and what design will coincide with young people interests. Youth organisations on all levels are also in the best position to promote the information services through their networks and direct involvement of young people
- National youth and information portals should be developed with full partnership and direct involvement of the National Youth Councils to ensure the relevance and outreach of the information provided.
- In relation to the obstacles met with the coordination of the work of different authorities having competence in the field youth policy, the European Youth Forum emphasises the need for effective national policy planning and monitoring which is cross-sectoral. This national planning can take form of a National Youth Policy Plan, government programme, youth legislation etc.

At the European level, the European Youth Forum invites the European Commission to take a more coherent approach in implementing this Common Objective. An information strategy should be developed also at the European level, in partnership with all relevant Directorates-General and youth organisations. The European Youth Forum is ready and willing to contribute to this process.

### *Participation*

*The European Youth Forum supports the proposals of the Commission concerning youth participation. We do not however share the Member States and Commission's analysis that support to representative structures and notably to the National Youth Councils has evolved significantly during the period of implementation of the Common Objective. Both the Shadow reports of the National Youth Councils and the YFJ Study on OMC process show clearly that there is considerable lack of involvement of the National Youth Councils and youth organisations in general to the policy development. This is a crucial issue that needs to be addressed in future. Consultations are not enough and the need for more structured dialogue is evident.*

At the European level efforts should be made to promote greater participation of young people in the forthcoming European Parliament elections. Concerning participation at the local level, the European Youth Forum considers that the Revised European Charter on Participation of Young people in Local and Regional Life would provide good basis to develop actions such those as outlined by the Commission.

The European Youth Forum believes that there is a need to reflect on the issue of online youth participation in general and sees new technologies as useful tool to enhance youth participation. When it comes to specific participation, namely online consultation of young people, the European Youth Forum refers to "Guiding Principles for Successful Online Consultation" it has established and developed. Online consultations in particular cannot be seen however as being the sole mechanism in which to develop youth policy.

In relation to "support for various forms of learning to participate", the European Youth Forum wants to emphasise the necessity of support for youth organisations as key providers non formal education on skills, attitudes and competences required for active participation in the

society. We also wish to highlight the need to include participation in the formal education system, and citizenship education in the curricula.

### **Structured dialogue and participation in the development of EU**

The European Youth Forum warmly welcomes the Commission's proposals for structured dialogue. This has been asked by youth organisations from the beginning in order to ensure a relevant and constructive participation of young people in the development of EU and its policies concerning youth. We welcome also the role that is foreseen for the National Youth Councils in the proposal. National Youth Councils bring together the wide variety of opinions of young people and are able to channel the results of the debates to their wide membership and their networks. The European Youth Forum acknowledges the responsibility that youth organisations have to constantly strive to reach out to young people who are not yet members of any organisation and who represent new forms of active citizenship. We are however convinced that if youth councils are given the role to coordinate the participation in the structured dialogue, this role will be carried out with responsibility, inclusiveness and respecting diversity.

In the Communication a number of references to structured dialogue, genuine partnerships and "systematic structured manner" to consult young people are done. This is a real improvement in the recognition of the role of young people and their organisations, but also regarding the quality of the implementation of the Common Objectives, at all levels.

At the European level, we welcome the proposal of the European Commission on the framework of the structured dialogue. In order to facilitate and ensure a coherent and result-oriented process, the European Youth Forum proposes to coordinate the work of the National Youth Councils and is ready and willing to take responsibility and represent views and opinions of youth within the consultative meetings taking place before the Education, Youth and Culture Councils Council meetings in Spring and Autumn.

The European Youth Forum stresses that the structured dialogue should not be seen only as means to provide young people possibility to meet and discuss with decision makers (i.e. youth participation initiative) but as a governance tool for developing and coordinating youth policy in partnership between public authorities and youth representatives.

At the European level the European Youth Forum sees that the structured dialogue should be developed first and foremost to be a governance tool for the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field and more generally on youth policy, i.e. European policies affecting and concerning young people such as issues relating to the implementation of the European Youth Pact. The European Youth Forum considers that the informal bi-annual forum proposed by the Commission should gather all relevant Directorates-General and European Parliament Committees as well as representatives of the Council in order to create a cross-sectoral approach to youth policy.

### **Presidency Youth Events/EU Agenda**

The European Youth Forum welcomes the suggestion to involve National Youth Councils more in the debate on EU youth policy. Nevertheless the diversity and independence of the priorities of the National Youth Councils should be respected. It is important that heavy demands in terms of structuring the agenda and working methods are not placed on the National Youth Councils. The European Youth Forum itself is willing to take a greater role in facilitating the contributions and/or inputs to the process from the national level.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge the willingness of the European Commission to fund such national events through the Youth in Action Programme (more specifically, through the action 5). Therefore we believe it would be important that the European Commission establish the

goals of these Presidency Youth Seminars (action 5) and give a clear role in such events to the National Youth Councils.

### **European Youth Week**

As it was highlighted during the Finnish Presidency Youth Event, such events require a coherent agenda, developed from the target groups, with the objectives of the events clearly identified in advance. The European Youth Forum sees the Youth Week as a positive =participation initiative bringing young people together to meet decision-makers and giving them a European perspective to their activities. However such events should not be considered as either the sole or central means for consulting young people on youth policy development in Europe.

### ***Governance of the Youth OMC - Methodologies used for the Cooperation***

*The European Youth Forum strongly supports the proposal of spreading the Common Objectives of the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field at the regional and local level,* since these levels have most impact on the daily lives of young people. We also need to acknowledge that in many EU Member States, regional or local authorities are very autonomous and therefore possess the actual competences to implement part or all of the Common Objectives. In this regard the European Youth Forum wants to point out that according to the principles of European law, the member states are responsible for the commitments made within the Council and the obligations are equally binding to all public authorities in the member states, not only the national level government.

In order to ensure a national coherence and a pertinent follow-up and evaluation, the European Youth Forum calls for a strong and inclusive national coordination when developing and then implementing the Common Objectives of the Open Method of Coordination. It is the responsibility of the respective national authorities to ensure that the actors on all levels of government possessing the necessary competences to implement policies relevant to Common Objectives are properly guided and resourced to be able to take the actions needed.

The Member States have clearly identified the difficulty they face in properly evaluating the implementation of the Common Objectives. This problem has also been clearly identified by the European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations.<sup>2</sup> Therefore we warmly welcome the proposal of the European Commission to define and establish “*indicators for the implementation of common objectives on participation and information*” and we are willing to contribute to the work.

The European Youth Forum also welcomes the proposal to introduce a system of peer reviews to support and evaluate the implementation of the Common Objectives. Such a system should however not be voluntary, but part of the general framework and methodology of the Open Method of Coordination. The experience from other policy areas where peer reviews have been used is that it has been a good tool. In the absence of a willingness by member states to adopt this approach, and if member states are not willing to deepen their cooperation in the youth field in this way, the European Youth Forum together with its member organisations will explore the possibility to establish its own system of measuring the progress of different member states.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Policy paper on the Future of EU Youth policy Development*, adopted by the Council of Members of the European Youth Forum 28<sup>th</sup> April 2006, Prato, Italy (0119-06) and the *European Youth Forum Shadow Report* on the Implementation of the Common Objectives on Participation and Information (0401-06), see also Nina Rahja, Anna Sell, *Study on the OMC process in the youth field*, 2006

## Conclusions

We are concerned that the implementation of the common objectives in the framework of the OMC seems to be lagging behind and for this reason we welcome the suggestions made by the EC to move ahead while producing action plans and indicators.

In general, the European Youth Forum agrees with the Commission analysis of the need to improve information for young people if we are to support their full involvement in democratic life. In conclusion,

- We strongly support the initiative for structured dialogue of young people on the issues that concern to them at all levels and the intention to ensure greater follow up and coherence between different activities organised in the framework of presidencies.
- We highlight the distinction between youth policy development and visibility raising events. Actions and tools should be made so the latter are not seen as a form of representative consultation on young people in youth policy matters.
- We believe that strategies on youth information must be developed through close engagement of youth organisations in the process. As such, national information portals should be developed with close and direct involvement of the National Youth Councils (NYCs)
- We call on Member States to ensure the quality of the information not only by creating *ad hoc* structures but also by measuring their effectiveness and capacity
- We call for participation at all levels - with a strong emphasis on the local and regional level . This should be enhanced by supporting youth organisations and their work. Also national coordination from the governmental and the National Youth Council side needs to be ensured.
- We believe that the European Youth Forum should have a bigger role in coordinating and facilitating the NYCs efforts since, even if their further involvement in EU youth policy is positive, their priorities and realities could be too diverse

The European Youth Forum welcomes the analysis of the Commission that the success of the OMC depends on the effective involvement of young people in its implementation. The message of youth organisations is clear: the youth organisations are willing in partnership with the decision-makers cooperate in the development and implementation of youth policy.

More needs to be done in order to implement the Common Objectives. The European Youth Forum is convinced that the development of a genuine partnership between youth organisations and the decision-makers will provide leverage to achieve much better results. The Communication by the Commission provides a good basis for such future cooperation both at European and national levels. The European Youth Forum expects that the Member States will support the proposals of the Commission while taking into account and implementing the proposals made by youth organisations designed to enhance the youth policy.