



**PROPOSALS FOR A NEW YOUTH AGENDA FOR THE EU:  
THE YFJ'S MAIN EXPECTATIONS OF THE NEXT MANDATE OF  
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT & EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
(2009-2014)**

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## Introduction

As young Europeans, sharing a vision of Europe based on the values of democracy, peace, solidarity, sustainability, equality, human rights and freedom, and recognising the success of European integration, we stress that we can successfully face future challenges only if the EU is able to speak and to act as a real Union. We expect brave and innovative decisions from our national and European leaders and institutions and we want concrete benefits from the EU in our everyday lives.

The European Parliamentary Elections, the renewal of the Commission and the subsequent legislative period present a unique opportunity in which the citizens of Europe have a direct say on the policy development within the EU. It is important to make the elections a truly European affair, focusing on issues that concern all EU citizens and not 27 (or more) Member State elections. In order to get young people and all citizens interested in participating in EU decision-making, we need to inform them what the institutions do and why they matter. Politicising and personalising the EU policy-making is a natural step forward in European integration and the best way of guaranteeing a cross-border debate on issues affecting our lives.

In the pursuit of a more transparent Europe, the European Youth Forum (YFJ) hopes that the composition of the Commission will reflect the results of the elections and therefore we demand that the European political parties propose their candidates for the Commission President.

The YFJ further supports the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and hopes for a thorough debate on the future of Europe in the upcoming years. The youth of Europe should be an integral part of the launching of a roadmap towards a European constitution.

The current legislative period of the European Commission and the European Parliament saw some important developments in policy areas that are important for young people. Unfortunately, at the same time, on some priorities that young people and youth organisations put forward in the run-up to the European Parliament elections and the appointment of a new European Commission in 2004 - or even earlier - not much progress has been made.

However, despite the increased importance of youth on the EU agenda, the development of specific across-the-board policies remained difficult. The mobility and status of volunteers, visa obstacles to youth work, a legal status for European associations, a coherent approach to youth autonomy are, *inter alia*, still issues that have not been properly addressed, mainly due to difficulties in overcoming divisions between fields of competence. The YFJ hopes that such divisions can be overcome in the period 2009-2014, and that the increased attention to youth will lead to specific policy improvements for young people and youth organisations.

In view of the above, the YFJ puts forward the following proposals for a new EU youth agenda: to realise them and ensure their impact, the YFJ calls upon the incoming European Commission and Parliament to include them in their priorities for the next legislative term and counts upon corresponding commitment from the Member States.

Further to these proposals, we consider that the gender dimension and other equality issues should be mainstreamed in every youth policy, giving a concrete and measurable overview of how each policy affects different persons differently.

## **YFJ PROPOSALS FOR THE EU AGENDA 2009-2014**

### **EDUCATION**

#### **1. A European framework for indicating and assuring quality in non-formal education**

A great deal of learning happens in non-formal education and many competences are best acquired through being active as a volunteer, participant, member or leader in youth organisations - the latter being the main providers of non-formal education to young people. To increase the recognition of the worth and the quality of this education, the European Union should support the development and co-establish a framework for quality assurance in Non-Formal Education in cooperation with youth organisations.

#### **2. More and better student representation**

Democracy, and becoming a citizen, begins in school. Young people are more motivated and learn better if they are given ownership over their education. Having a democratic system in all formal education systems is therefore key to both democracy and ownership. The new EU agenda on educational institutions should have as a specific target to ensure the right of all students to be represented by students in the board of their formal education institutions.

#### **3. Realising the promises on education and training**

Education forms the basis for self-development and self-fulfilment of all individuals. The EU Education and Training 2010 Programme, with its benchmarks, and the European Youth Pact offer a good framework for advocating for young people's needs in terms of education. The EU must realise the promises it has made in cutting early education leaving and functional illiteracy by 50% by 2010 with the complete eradication of functional illiteracy by 2020.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZENSHIP

### **4. A legal statute for European associations**

In order to further develop a European civil society, the European Youth Forum favours EU initiatives that strengthen the development of NGOs at the European level. The European Youth Forum regrets that the adoption of a legal statute for European associations was put on the back burner for many years before being withdrawn by the European Commission. The European Youth Forum calls on the new Commission to present, after consultation with civil society, and taking into account the new article 11 TEU resulting from the Treaty of Lisbon, a revised proposal for such a legal statute for European associations.

### **5. Decent and sustainable funding**

Youth organisations need the appropriate institutional support for their valuable work (and their contribution to civil society). Access to appropriate and sustainable funding of youth organisations is crucial. However, we feel that especially international youth umbrellas and networks encounter serious difficulties in securing structural administrative funding. The EU should provide substantial improvements in the core funding of International Youth NGOs to enable them to increase their capacity and professionalisation, as well as allowing them to focus on their strategic priorities.

### **6. A period abroad for every young European**

Spending time abroad for education, training, work or volunteering allows young people to develop a range of skills, learn languages and the importance of their diversity, and increase their opportunities in the labour market. A period abroad also strengthens the mutual understanding between youth of different nationalities and brings Europe closer to young people. The current European mobility programmes have contributed to facilitating the mobility of many young people over the past two decades. However, their scope remains limited. The European Youth Forum calls on the European Union to expand and improve the quality of its mobility programmes and to reduce the financial and bureaucratic burden in order to ensure a possibility for every pupil and student, including those in vocational training, to an international educational exchange, as well as to provide increased opportunities for volunteers and young people already in the labour market.

### **7. Youth partnerships between the EU and other regions of the world**

Young people are an important resource, as well as a crucial investment, in international cooperation. The European Youth Forum therefore urges the European Union to add a strong youth dimension to its international cooperation. Specifically, the European Youth Forum calls on the EU to promote and support youth partnerships between the EU and other regions

of the world - involving youth organisations from both sides. Such partnerships can contribute to the promotion of democracy, human rights, solidarity and global cooperation and the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals - providing spaces for dialogue, mutual learning and the development of civil society. Official EU programmes supporting mobility must accordingly be accompanied by visa facilitation and waiver schemes.

## **PARTICIPATION AND YOUTH POLICY MAINSTREAMING**

### **8. A true cross-sector youth policy**

A true cross-sector youth policy requires the high-level coordination of policies affecting youth, both at EU and Member State level. To this end, the European Youth Forum calls for the establishment of an intergroup on youth mainstreaming in the European Parliament and a Group of Commissioners on Youth in the European Commission. Moreover, the YFJ calls on the EU institutions, and such new coordination structures, to fully involve young people in the design, implementation and monitoring of the EU youth agenda. The new youth agenda should be passed within the Commission as an Integral Youth Plan for the new mandate.

One consideration that should be taken into account in the planning of the new budget structure is intergenerational solidarity. Concretely, “youth budgeting” should be introduced, as a concrete way of applying youth mainstreaming in the budgetary process. The budget lines should be at all levels assessed also from a youth perspective. When planning the revenues and expenditures, the aspect of intergenerational solidarity and demographic change should always be a point for consideration.

### **9. A European framework for the rights of the volunteer**

Volunteers contribute greatly to society, to citizens’ well-being, to the economy, and to the development of civil society. However, volunteers and their organisations are often hampered by legal uncertainties and inconsistent policies, equally at local, national and European level. Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for a comprehensive European framework for the rights of the volunteer, defining the basic rights and responsibilities of volunteers, and recognising the many dimensions of volunteering.

### **10. Lowering the voting age to 16**

The most tangible form of participation in society is the right to participate in a system of representative democracy and vote in elections. Currently, different voting ages apply across the European Union, with the lowest age for all elections established in Austria at 16. It is the European Youth Forum’s opinion that young people should be granted the right to vote at all local, national and European elections from the age of 16. The European Youth

Forum therefore calls on the European institutions to modify the Act concerning the election of the representatives of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, establishing a common voting age of 16 for the European Parliament elections.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

### **11. A rights-based policy for young migrants**

Minors are a vulnerable category of the population, especially when separated from their parents or legal guardians. There are many international and regional instruments protecting separated children and youth, and in particular, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The European Union should develop a rights-based policy approach to migration. The detention of minors should be banned throughout the EU, and the European Union should ensure that European countries fully implement international conventions and respect the human rights of all children.

### **12. Awareness of multiple discrimination and provision of legal protection for all**

Young people are not a homogeneous group. Young people face discrimination not only on the basis of age, but they are also at risk of social exclusion because of gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, dis-/ability and faith or belief. The European Commission has committed itself to providing equal protection on all grounds of discrimination as identified by Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam. It is important to join efforts to recognise the complexity of issues to do with identities. By definition, young people are particularly more exposed to multiple discrimination, which should be recognised in Human Rights programmes, platforms, Human Rights-related funding and activities as part of the Youth Agenda for the EU in 2009-2014.

## EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

### **13. EU Strategy for Social and Sustainable development – Youth Pact**

After the closing of the last cycle of the Lisbon Strategy in 2010, the YFJ wants to see a new, more holistic policy framework, as the current focus on growth and jobs is too narrow to achieve better living conditions for young people and future generations. Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for a new EU Strategy for Social and Sustainable Development as a follow-up to the Lisbon Strategy. This new strategy should include a strong youth dimension, underpinned by a renewed European Youth Pact, focusing on the autonomy of young people as well as the inclusion of young people in

society. Such a strategy must contribute to the development of a European Social Model based on the principle of the social inclusion of citizens of all generations as well as solidarity between younger and older people. Furthermore, it is essential that this renewed EU strategy devotes attention to reducing child and youth poverty in Europe. The YFJ also expects a stronger focus on the quality and dignity of employment, and ensuring the reconciliation between private, professional and family life for people of all ages.

#### **14. Youth and the future of the labour market**

Labour market structures have gone through big changes in recent years. Problems related to increased demands for flexicurity, access to the labour market, precariousness and seasonal jobs impose challenges, especially for young people and minorities. The fears of a likely global recession are adding a sense of insecurity concerning the coming years. In this global economic situation, the EU must make all possible efforts to prevent the increasing unemployment of youth.

The EU should also call for a high-level round table to discuss and develop common visions on a sustainable labour market for young people.

#### **15. The EU's environmental commitment**

Global warming is a serious threat and fighting against climate change is one of the biggest challenges for future generations. The YFJ urges the EU institutions to take into account the urgency of a determined roadmap that includes immediate and long-term measures to effectively reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The minimal requirement of cutting emissions by 20% by 2020 should not be neglected or sacrificed because of the financial crisis. Furthermore, we call for the EU to involve young delegates in their official delegations to decision-making bodies regarding climate change.