



Reaction of the European Youth Forum to the Council Resolution on the overview of the structured dialogue process including social inclusion of young people

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1. Introduction

From the outset of the structured dialogue, the European Youth Forum has been fully engaged in designing and coordinating the process. We have been heavily involved in making it a sustainable process ever since. We strongly believe in and defend the right of young people to participate in the development of policies that affect them and we believe that the structured dialogue process should be one of the ways to ensure that this right is effective.

The Council Resolution on the overview of the structured dialogue process adopted on 20 May concludes 18 months of a vivid exchange on social inclusion between young people and decision-makers and is the third such Resolution on structured dialogue adopted by the Youth Ministers in the past five years. With this document, the Ministers in charge of Youth of the 28 EU Member States committed to improve EU Youth Policy, providing some limited answers to the challenge of young people's social inclusion. Nevertheless, this limited commitment fails to answer young people's expectations.

2. A resolution that introduces a new perspective for EU Youth Policy

More cross-sectorial cooperation and a better recognition of young people's rights

The Forum is pleased that the Council of the EU refers more and more to the rights of young people may it be only in the Annex of its Resolution. In particular, the Forum welcomes the priority endorsed by the Council of ensuring equal access of young people to their rights and to equal opportunities to fully participate in society. For the Forum, such shift in the EU youth policy towards a stronger acknowledgement and protection of the rights of young people, is important and constitutes a first step in removing the obstacles youth face making use of them. We regret that the Council removed from the text the provision for putting in place legal frameworks to prevent discrimination against young people based on age. The Forum strongly believes and advocates young people's right to the same employment conditions, remuneration and rights as other workers.

The European Youth Forum also welcomes the importance given to strengthening cross-sectorial cooperation at all levels of decision-making. Indeed, such cross-sectorial cooperation is much needed to ensure coherent social inclusion policies. We have been calling for a long time for stronger cooperation between ministries, directorates and institutions across policy areas because we are convinced that formulating solutions for young people's social inclusion only from the youth policy perspective cannot be sufficient to fully address all challenges. We now expect that the Youth Ministers will deliver on this commitment and work with their

counterparts in other ministries to ensure proper implementation at national level while making the cross-sectorial cooperation a constant practice in EU youth policy and the structured dialogue with young people.

A more focused and simplified process of dialogue

The European Youth Forum is pleased that the repeated calls for focusing and simplifying the structured dialogue process have been heard and taken on board by the Youth Ministers. Focusing the process on one single priority that is chosen together with young people is essential to ensure the consistency and the relevance of the dialogue both for policy-makers and young people. A simplified and clearer process will give more continuity in the discussions between youth and policy-makers and will allow more time for quality debates and real exchange of views, hence building a deeper, genuine dialogue.

We note a positive development in formally introducing a feedback mechanism to report back to young people on the feasibility of the proposals they put forward in the structured dialogue. Young people deserve to know what happens with the ideas and suggestions they call for in the dialogue and why some of their proposals are not taken on board. We expect that future Presidencies will make it a constant practice to give a comprehensive feedback to young people on how their proposals are followed upon as well as the explanation of why some are not.

3. The Resolution does not address crucial aspects of Structured dialogue

Not all youth organisations are involved in the dialogue

Despite the Resolution's rhetoric of involving youth organisations in policy-making at local, regional, national and European level, International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations (INGYOs) are still not properly included in the structured dialogue with young people. The Forum is concerned that even though 17 different INGYOs have organised consultations with young people throughout the last 18 months and contributed with their results and expertise to the three EU Youth Conferences, all their efforts have been disregarded as no reference is made to their participation, consultations or contributions.

INGYOs can reach out and connect hundreds of thousands and even millions of young people from different EU countries sharing the same goals, principles or values. Without INGYOs' involvement, there is little European dimension in the process, but rather a sum of national realities, that is why we believe that this Resolution is a missed opportunity for acknowledging their role and including them as formal actors in all steps of the dialogue process.

Lack of concrete policies to enhance social inclusion of young people

The European Youth Forum is deeply disappointed that no proposals for fostering social inclusion of young people were integrated in the Resolution itself. Though we can understand that not all young people's proposals could be taken on board, the fact that the Ministers decided only to mention four of the many proposals put forward in the process and that they placed these in the Annex is a worrying sign of the lack of commitment of the Youth Ministers to respond to

young people's calls on how they can and wish to be better included in society and to access their rights as full and equal citizens.

For 18 months, young people have engaged in a dialogue with the aim of improving social inclusion policies together with policy-makers. The three Presidencies of the Council of the EU repeatedly reaffirmed to young people that their voice is heard and their proposals listened to. Yet, we see that the Resolution, which was expected to wrap-up the 18 months of discussions, fails to reflect even the core aspects of social inclusion resulting from the dialogue such as quality employment, access to welfare, well being and solidarity. Therefore, the present Resolution represents, by all means, a missed opportunity for making changes towards the better integration of young people in wider society as well as to prove youth that their voice actually matters in shaping policies for them.

We are also concerned that with this Resolution the Council misses again the chance to address the biggest concern and weakness of the process. The lack of follow-up and deficient implementation of the results from the structured dialogue, already highlighted in the EU Youth Report 2012, remains un-tackled. No proposals is made for Member States to strengthen the implementation of the measures agreed in the Council, not to even mention those put forward at EU Youth Conferences. If Member States do not step-up their commitment for concrete actions and follow-up, we believe that the structured dialogue cannot be sustainable. It will fall short of its objective of bringing concrete improvements to youth policy and to the life of young people across Europe.

4. Conclusion: one step forward, one step backwards

Young people are tired of nice promises and, instead, they need strong commitment and concrete actions. This Resolution brings a limited progress towards a simpler and clearer process in the future, but takes a big step backwards in terms of the disappointing political result: despite prior promises, the 28 Youth Ministers in the Council did not clearly commit to any concrete policies to foster the social inclusion of young people, leaving calls from young people unanswered.

The European Youth Forum is disappointed that the Council of the EU did not match the commitments shown by young people in the process. Instead of following the call from the EU Youth Report 2012 to take recommendations from young people more fully into account, Member States continue to increase the misbalance between their lack of commitment and young people's dedication, hence questioning the very core of the *dialogue*. Therefore, we call upon the Member States to respond to young people's disappointment by making real and urgent progress in turning their proposals into reality as well as involving them in the evaluation of these policies through the future EU Youth Report.

Now that the fourth cycle of structured dialogue is about to start under a simplified and more focused process, we expect that it will deliver much more and more efficiently to convince young people that their voice matters and their participation can be impactful, rather than simply branding of the dialogue.