



Reaction of the European Youth Forum to the Council Resolution on a EU Work Plan for Youth for 2014-2015

May 2014

Introduction

The European Youth Forum welcomes the decision of the Council of the EU to establish a EU Work Plan for Youth for 2014-2015 within the framework of European cooperation in the youth field. The European Youth Forum has worked hard to put young people at the core of the EU agenda and ensure consistency within the policies impacting their everyday life. Therefore, we are pleased that this EU Work Plan seeks to reinforce and further define cooperation on youth issues across policy areas.

Striking a balance between youth participation and socio-economic dimension

The European Youth Forum is pleased that the EU Work Plan sets fewer, clearer and more ambitious objectives for EU youth policy for the next 18 months. We welcome the importance given to enhancing cross-sectorial policy cooperation and strengthening the links with Europe 2020 Strategy as well as the focus on youth empowerment and youth rights, which are core priorities of our work.

We have previously raised our view that the aims of youth policy should not be adapted nor fully aligned to the targets of Europe 2020 Strategy. If active citizenship and participation are effectively mentioned as aspects that should be, among others, given priority till the end of 2015, we are concerned that they are not mentioned among the core principles governing the Work Plan. If we understand the potential need for a stronger focus on socio-economic dimension policies given the dramatic challenges young people face in Europe, we believe that this cannot be done without the active involvement of the main recipients of such policies, young people themselves. Taking into account both article 165 TFEU, which encourages young people's participation in democratic life in Europe and the overall objectives of the framework for European cooperation in the youth field, from which this Work Plan stems, we insist that the Council and Member States respect the right of young people to participate in the development of policies affecting them and in implementing this Work Plan.

Enabling the implementation of cross-sectorial cooperation

To fully address the situation young people currently face, the EU cannot only rely on the existing cooperation in the youth field. Therefore, the Forum welcomes the commitment of Youth Ministers to improve the cooperation with their counterparts in employment, education and social affairs fields and to contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy, including through the European Semester. We believe this is a

positive step in the right direction of mainstreaming youth in all relevant EU policies and in the implementation of Europe 2020 and its flagship initiatives.

We notice however that besides repeating the EU Youth Strategy's principle of cross-sectorial cooperation, there are only few elements on how this cooperation will come about and work in practice. Using the same instruments and working methods as for the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy, it remains to be seen how cross-sectorial cooperation can be enhanced and implemented more effectively through the new Work Plan than has been the case until now. The Forum is convinced about the need to move from ad-hoc cooperation with other policy areas to a more structured and regular cooperation and that is why we are ready to propose concrete and effective mechanisms for this, such as increasing the frequency of jumbo meetings with other relevant Council formations.

More efficiency together with young people

The EU Work Plan for Youth establishes a number of outcome-oriented Expert Groups formed of Member States' nominated experts and coordinated by the Commission. We see the potential of these Expert Groups to deepen the reflection before the adoption of more accurate, implementable policies by the Council. Youth organisations are ready to contribute to this better decision-making and have a lot of expertise to bring to such reflection. Therefore, we believe it is extremely important that the newly created expert groups do not turn into closed clubs but allow for an open and transparent discussion on the given topics.

More generally, we are pleased that Youth Ministers made structured dialogue with young people an integral part of both the principles and implementation of the Work Plan for Youth. Nevertheless, Structured Dialogue only covers one of the priorities of the Work Plan, youth empowerment. We are concerned that young people are left outside of the discussions on other priorities as well as outside of the monitoring and evaluation of the progress made in the implementation of the Work Plan. Again, youth participation in decision-making is a fundamental principle of the framework for European cooperation in the youth field. We believe it can only be respected when young people are involved in the discussion on all priorities of the Work Plan, in its implementation, monitoring and evaluation, providing their feedback on the progress achieved through the Work Plan.

Conclusion

The European Youth Forum welcomes the EU Work Plan for Youth as a step forward in a more consistent approach to youth issues in the EU. However many question marks remain on the way it will be implemented. The Commission, the Council and the Member States will need to provide answers on how a genuine cross-sectorial cooperation will be enabled, the way young people will be involved and their plans to feed in the European Semester, so as to make this Work Plan a useful tool for EU Youth Policy. We clearly expect that governments will step-up their commitment in implementing the youth policy they agree on in the Council of the EU and we look forward to being involved and bringing the views of young people in the Expert Groups. Together, with the EU and young people working in partnership, we can make this EU Work Plan for Youth a success!