

The Declaration of Vienna and Bad Ischl

**Declaration on the outcomes of the Youth Event hosted
by the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the
European Union**

Vienna/Bad Ischl, 28-31 March 2006

DECLARATION OF THE AUSTRIA YOUTH EVENT 2006

Preamble

Since the year 2000, Youth policy in the European Union has gradually evolved and the engagement of young people in these processes has progressed. A number of policies has been launched in the field of youth; the Open Method of Coordination and the European Youth Pact have been developed, but the implementation is lagging behind. In the last year youth issues have been receiving progressively higher attention within the institutional agenda, but now we need to move from declarations to action.

We, the youth representatives from the EU member states, accession and EFTA countries as well as representatives from European youth organisations, met in Vienna and Bad Ischl from the 28th until the 31st of March 2006 to discuss the current priorities on the youth agenda. We explored new ideas and underlined previous demands in the fields of youth and jobs, the value and significance of non-formal and informal learning and the future of youth in Europe.

Youth unemployment and social inclusion are some of the main concerns of young people in Europe. The adoption of the European Youth Pact one year ago was an important step forward in realising the objective of taking the specific needs of young people into account across policy areas. However the Pact, so far, does not seem to materialise into concrete measures and realise its potential of promoting a true cross-sectoral approach, bringing greater social cohesion as well as inclusion of young people.

Europe cannot develop into the most competitive economic area in the world, as foreseen in the Lisbon Strategy, if a new approach to education is not found. The aim of establishing a European Qualifications Framework and policies on recognition of non-formal and informal learning as well as life long learning strategies has to be thoroughly pursued together with youth organisations.

Considering the current uncertainty about the future direction of the EU the views of young people need to be heard and taken seriously. A Plan D on democracy and debate cannot take place without listening to those who will have to live in this future Europe. Participation is an essential element of democracy. Young people need to be given the space, the means and the necessary support to be engaged into policy development in the areas that directly affect their daily lives.

In these three fields we have developed the following concrete demands:

Youth and Jobs

Quality of jobs: What is a quality job?

*Every human being has the right to be safe and socially secure in their job. Under fair employment we understand not only the respect towards the employee but also towards the work a person delivers.

*Working conditions need to be adapted to the needs of young people. Salaries should be fair, corresponding to the job.

* A balance between flexibility and security is essential; therefore we are interested in further exploring the concept of "flexicurity". Measures increasing flexibility should be accompanied by corresponding measures increasing security.

* A good working atmosphere and personal satisfaction are key to a quality job. Offering young people a job provides them the opportunity to become more autonomous.

*Minimum wages for employees should be guaranteed in all EU countries.

*Legal work contracts outlining the actual work to be done are essential to avoid abuse and exploitation; all relevant aspects of the job must be clarified in the contract.

Combatting youth unemployment and implementing the European Youth Pact

*Internships offer the possibility to train and prepare young people for future jobs. However internships should not be used to exploit young people. Long unpaid internships that replace normal employment are not acceptable. All internships should be adequately paid. Social security and a certain job quality should be guaranteed. Additionally internships should be recognised EU-wide, so as to facilitate internships or future employment in any EU member state.

*Taxes for companies that hire inexperienced employees should be reduced.

*Tools and measures should be developed to inform young people in advance about potential demand/supply of the labour market. This would require cooperation and interaction between the private and public sectors as well as universities and schools.

*There is a need for a new approach in education, so as to focus on the importance of young entrepreneurship in order to encourage initiative and thus create new job opportunities.

*Many young people have the necessary skills required on the labour market but they cannot present themselves well enough. It is important that free trainings are offered for young people enabling them to write CVs and demonstrate all their skills in a job interview.

*The transition from school to work is often particularly difficult for young people coming from minority communities and should therefore be actively supported.

*National Youth Councils should be consulted equally with social partners in the development of employment policies.

*Trade unions should also consider focusing on defending the rights of young people looking for their first employment.

*In order to give the European Youth Pact more visibility, ensure its implementation and a real cross-sectoral approach we propose to develop National Youth Pacts involving all stakeholders. We also consider it very important that local and regional stakeholders are involved in the implementation of the Pact.

The value and significance of non-formal and informal learning

We recognise the significance of Non-Formal Education in the context of young Europeans' lives. We agree that Formal and Non-Formal Education are complementary. We believe that Non-Formal Education has a European added value connected to the future of the enlarged Union, the promotion of active citizenship and the successful implementation of the Lisbon strategy. The promotion and recognition process should involve all stakeholders at local, national and European level. The significance of Non-Formal Education must be fully recognised in the European societies; all stakeholders, such as young people, the public bodies, the non-governmental sector and the private-business sector should be involved in the process.

Recognition and greater visibility of Non-Formal Education will make participating in youth activities more attractive. This will lead to the creation of a more skillful workforce, active citizenship, increased mobility, enhanced social cohesion and provision of new learning opportunities. Taking this into account, we believe that co-ordination between stakeholders, the development of common recognition tools and also an enhanced promotion of Non-Formal Education activities among young people are essential issues to address.

Recognition should not lead to formalisation of Non-Formal Education as it could affect its character negatively. Therefore we call for a development of dialogue and partnership between all stakeholders in Formal and Non-Formal Education in order to enhance communication and cooperation. The decision-makers should engage with National Youth Councils to launch such partnerships. This dialogue should seek to identify current needs, goals, means to achieve them and benchmarks for the evaluation of the progress of the recognition of Non-Formal Education.

We welcome the progress made so far in the field and we urge all stakeholders to increase their efforts in creating tools for recognising Non-Formal Education and demonstrating its learning outcomes. We are anxious and willing to develop in partnership a common recognition

framework for every Member State, as well as the European level, which could be adapted and used by youth organisations on a voluntary basis to meet their needs.

We urge governments to work towards the opening of schools to the Non-Formal Education opportunities offered by NGOs. However, Non-Formal Education cannot replace the responsibility of governments to offer young people proper education.

We encourage the development of national and European policies for raising awareness of the skills acquired through Non-Formal Education. We call for the support of all Member States and the European Commission for a Europe-wide communication campaign for the promotion and recognition of Non-Formal Education.

The time has come to implement the commitments made in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination and the European Youth Pact.

The future of youth in Europe

Young people want a two way process, consultation alone is not enough. We want to create a real dialogue. Therefore a structured dialogue needs to be established on an equal basis between youth representatives and decision-makers. This should be implemented from a local to a European level through all political structures. Furthermore, young people should be involved in every aspect of the decision-making process, from the beginning to the end. This is only possible if the structures allow for participation in a democratic and transparent way. We support the debate initiated through the Plan D, standing for democracy, dialogue, debate. Following on, we also strongly suggest to implement and develop in all Member States a youth proofing article; this avoids tokenism and ensures young people's voices are heard. Youth organisations ought to be taken more seriously with rights as well as responsibilities, working at a suitable level for young people. One concrete way to implement this would be to establish social partnerships between youth representatives, decision-makers and service providers (i.e. education, health, etc.).

Information such as annual reports from the governments and the Commission on implementing youth policy should contain measurable elements, which allow the actors from social partnerships to monitor and evaluate the implementation of policies affecting young people.

To stimulate active participation of young people in society, the voting age should be lowered, in combination with citizenship education from primary age in schools using non-formal methods to make sure that every young person has an equal base of information.

Therefore:

- We call for cross-sectoral social partnerships, involving all relevant actors, such as youth representatives, decision-makers, and service providers. This should be done on a European level and implementable on a local and national level.
- In order to ensure an effective gateway for youth in political structures, we ask for youth coordinators in key areas accessible for all young people and a youth ombudsman.
- We call for measurable quality indicators to give real tools for monitoring and evaluating the policies affecting young people and their implementation.
- We demand tools for youth participation across Europe, such as the Youth Programme, efficient information and sustainable funding.
- The voting age should be lowered to the age of 16. One reason behind this is to increase participation in the political process.
- Therefore we call upon education ministers to introduce citizenship education in the curriculum from the primary level onwards, which would focus on ways for young people to fully participate in community life.

Conclusion

The debate that took place during the Event suggests a number of ambitious and forward looking proposals, which require serious consideration and immediate action by the Member States and the European Commission. We expect that this declaration can be the basis for an open dialogue with youth organisations and leads to further policy development. In order to arrive to more sustainable participation of youth in European policies, these Youth Events need to be evaluated and developed in a way that they provide more continuity and lead to real impact. Therefore we also invite Youth Ministers and the Commission to provide a progress report on the implementation of the demands of this declaration at the next Youth Event in Finland.