

FINAL REPORT

EU YOUTH CONFERENCE

Košice, Kulturpark / Kunsthalle | 4 - 6 October 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the previous EU Youth Conference in Amsterdam, participants identified the main challenges that young people face in order to live in a diverse, connected and inclusive Europe. Based on those challenges, the guiding questions were drafted.

The objective of the EU Youth Conference in Kosice was to develop policy recommendations based on the input and ideas collected across Europe. Throughout this consultation process, **28 national working groups and 13 international non-governmental youth organisations carried out vast consultations** using a wide range of methodologies from online surveys to meetings, focus groups, school workshops and street actions. **In total, more than 65 000 young people were reached.**

Apart from the common thematic priority, the Trio Presidencies of the Netherlands, Slovakia and Malta had also tried to bring some innovations to the methodology and setting of the EU Youth Conference. Prior to the conference, newcomers had a chance to **follow a webinar** in order to understand the process of the structured dialogue and the role of Kosice Youth Conference in it. Another new features were the **sli.do interactive tool, live stream** and **online feedback** from outer world during the Agora session, **parallel national conference** on the same topic in Zilina and **joint youth - ministerial session** on national consultations' findings which served as a basis for negotiations in following working groups:

WORKSHOP 1: Access to quality and critical information

WORKSHOP 2: Young people under pressure: building resilience and self-confidence

WORKSHOP 3: Beyond fear and intolerance: experiencing diversity

WORKSHOP 4: Towards an education system that aims at realising young people's potential

WORKSHOP 5: Fostering young people's engagement in society, in particular for vulnerable groups

WORKSHOP 6: Rebuilding trust of young people in the European project

WORKSHOP 7: Mobility programme: employment and education for all

WORKSHOP 8: The impact of youth work and youth organisations for all

Videos of **15 finalists to the Shining Stars of Europe contest** were premiered as an integral part of the EU Youth Conference. Shining Stars of Europe is a Video Contest inviting people from all over Europe and beyond to express their ideas for the future in a short video clip. Current edition attracted more than 500 submissions from 37 countries. In this context, audience of the EU Youth Conference was addressed by **Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President of the European Commission.**

Mr. Šefčovič in his video message expressed a belief that Slovakia lies in the heart of the European project and appreciated talent put into the creation of videos reflecting issues such as climate change.

Moreover, to link the conference with the priority of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU in the field of youth, **organisers tried to involve as many young people** into the different parts of the conference **as possible**. Therefore, all the meals were prepared and served by students. Visual identity was designed and produced by different vocational schools. National and Regional Youth Councils formed a core team behind the conference as well.

The **conference venue** was chosen on purpose due to the fact that premises of K13, a former military camp, were reconstructed to serve as cultural hub. City of Kosice, also known as **European Capital of Culture 2013** and **European Capital of Sport 2016**, leads by example in creating space for youth engagement. Digital agenda provided an overlap with private sector and as a result, representative of **T-Systems Slovakia** was able to introduce emerging trends of The Millennials in enterprise environment.

Central to the idea of relating youth voice to the policy-makers, selected **youth speakers shared personal stories** that forged their personalities, thus providing invaluable input to working groups that followed plenary sessions. **Ranging from NEET situation to social exclusion background, youth panelists proved that with dedication and commitment, their examples are worth sharing.**

In total, EU Youth Conference in Kosice brought together:

- 92 youth delegates
- 88 ministry representatives
- 16 representatives of European Youth Forum and international youth organizations
- 15 representatives of the European Commission and other institutional stakeholders such as Council of Europe, UNESCO, European Parliament and Committee of the Regions

PLENARY: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

*The new architecture of the Structured Dialogue was endorsed by Council Resolution “Overview of the Structured Dialogue process including the social inclusion of young people”, of 20 May 2014, which introduced **a one and a half year cycle that focuses on only one thematic priority**. The Council Resolution “Encouraging the political participation of young people in democratic life in Europe” of 23 November 2015, sets down the overall **thematic priority for the V cycle of the Structured Dialogue as “Enabling all young people to engage in a diverse, connected and inclusive Europe - Ready for life, ready for society”.***

Eva Masárová, Director of the Youth Department of the Slovak Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, opened the conference and urged its delegates not to forget the consultation outcomes from their own countries; to keep in mind the results of the informal summit in Bratislava a couple of weeks ago; and to acknowledge that youth is the voice of Europe.

The second speaker, Mr. **Jens Nymand-Christensen**, Deputy Director General of the European Commission's DG Education and Culture, underlined the key role of the youth in Europe in the current and future time. In specific, it shouldn't be possible that the youth during the period of last 70 years would be poorer than their parents. Mr. Nymand-Christensen reminded us of what Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, declared during the Bratislava summit: Youth is one of the priorities for the European Union. Last, but not least, the Deputy Director encouraged the European youth to speak up for themselves so as to be heard in the public space.

Matej Cibik, Political Affairs Officer of the Slovak Youth Council, furthered the Mr. Nymand-Christensen's speech and urged the delegates to be proactive and represent interests and needs of the European youth in the politics.

Luis Alvarado Martínez, the Vice-President of the European Youth Forum and the last speaker of the opening session, started his speech with the question: What kind of Europe we want? Then, he described the youth generation as a survival mechanism for Europe and a crucial element in the European politics. Mr. Martínez urged the youth representatives to keep being passionate and creative in their work and argued that NWGs and INGYOs, organisations working in the youth field, can't keep moving forward in the Structured Dialogue without the help of the European Commission. The Vice-President of the European Youth Forum finished his speech with the fact that the European Steering Committee¹ is right now implementing proposals of the Structured Dialogue from 2014. Thus, he stated that the proposals from the EU Youth Conference should have a real impact on the European youth work.

PLENARY: LIVE STORIES

EU Youth Conference in Košice continued with the personal stories of four young people, for who diversity is at the centre of their lives and who can be an inspiration for the European youth not to be afraid of the obstacles on their way to a better life.

Celeste Buckingham shared her personal journey to having become a famous Slovak musician, singer, songwriter, author and entertainer only at the age of 21. She considers herself to be strange. But as she says, it doesn't have to be a weakness. The thing is to change it into our uniqueness. As Celeste stated, our weaknesses can be our strengths. Our shortcomings can become our advantages. Moreover, we can succeed in life without having to compromise our values or apologize for who we are. Celeste left the delegates with the motivational message: If you want to be, you will be.

Danjel Hyseni with the background in a Roma family comes from Albania. Danjel had to work when he was a child to collect money to go to school. In the last six years he voluntarily contributed to many actions, activities and programs related to vulnerable communities and their better inclusion in the society. He is currently working in the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth as a Roma affairs specialist at the Directorate of Social Inclusion. As he says, he never gave up and always believed in himself.

Tara Brown from Malta worked at Inspire, a non-governmental organisation supporting persons with disabilities. Her main role was in helping out in horse riding lessons for persons with disability. She is currently following the Level 2 course of an alternative educational program using a youth work approach. Tara underlined two things, according to her key aspects for the youth: to make meaningful friendships and to be who we really are. As she found herself in NEET position, relations she developed thanks to youth work helped her to overcome obstacles and eventually become youth worker.

The last young speaker was **Thymen Rutten** from the Netherlands, who is a transgender. He was born as a girl. But Thymen didn't feel to be a girl. In the recent years he has been going through a gradual gender change. Young Thymen left the delegates with three main remarks:

1. people don't accept diversity many times even if they say they do,
2. to listen not only closely, but truthfully,
3. and to live our own life.

¹ The European Steering Committee works on the basis of striving for consensus. It is very important that all stakeholders take full responsibility, are involved and do their work in all stages of the process. ESC is comprised of representatives of the Trio Presidency countries, the European Commission and the European Youth Forum.

PLENARY: PANEL DISCUSSION ABOUT CHALLENGES THAT YOUNG PEOPLE FACE

The opening speeches were followed with a panel discussion about the challenges that young people face in a diverse, connected and inclusive Europe. The panel consisted of the previous young speakers and experts in the youth field, **Maurice Devlin** from Ireland, the Jean Monnet Professor and Director of the Centre for Youth Research and Development at the Department of Applied Social Studies at NUI Maynooth, **Miriam Teuma**, a lecturer in Youth and Community Studies at the University of Malta and a founding member of the Maltese Association of Youth Workers, **Howard Williamson** from the United Kingdom, a qualified youth worker and academic researcher, who coordinates the Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policies and is a Trustee of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award for Young People, and also **Leo Kaserer** from Austria, who is a project coordinator for the governmental organisation Arbeiter Kammer Tirol (Chamber of Labour) and a lecturer at the University of Applied Sciences in Innsbruck at the Department of Social Work.

The panel discussion brought several prospectful insights into the topic of the conference and urged the delegates to think about the challenges they are currently facing more deeply.

Namely, Howard Williamson labelled **empathy and acceptance** as a way for youngsters on the side of the society for their better future. As he stated, we need to start locally and hear their voices, as they don't have support from their families, don't have enough representatives and are not sufficiently seen. Maurice Devlin claimed that **there shouldn't be any exclusion of any difference** and we should support those, who are in need, to do their best. Miriam Teuma stated that **many young people lack self-confidence** and that **formal education has failed them**. Thus, we need to rethink and reform it from the scratch.

For the question whether **intercultural learning** should be a subject at school, Mrs. Teuma brought it to the next level. In her opinion, it shouldn't be only a subject, but rather **holistically present all over the school curriculum**. Mr. Devlin furthered it that **teachers need to be trained** in this field, as they are carriers of the education system.

Danjel introduced one-year internships offered by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Youth of Albania, a programme that has been running for 2 years and met a great success in combating unemployment. He underscored that vulnerable groups need to be represented and being part of decision-making process. That is why Danjel would appreciate **quotas introduced to the parliament, not only at universities**.

Mr. Kaserer also questioned whether we are all equal. In his opinion, we should reconsider this concept and rather declare that **we are all special** and promote equity instead of equality in the societal discourse. The panel discussion ended with the thoughts from Mrs. Teuma and Celeste. Mrs. Teuma stated that it is a high time that **our European strategy is about to end and needs restarting again**. Celeste brought into the light two groups, which influence the youth field. The first one, which intentionally or unintentionally blocks the change (mainly politicians). The second one, which is fighting the system from within and in her opinion, should be given more space to make a difference.

WORKING GROUPS: CREATING JOINT RECOMMENDATION

Three half-days followed by Agora feedback session were led by 18 professional facilitators and have been dedicated to critical and structured work on **Joint Recommendation in 8 areas**. Participants chose these workshops based on their preference and thematic expertise while minding geographical, delegation and gender balance. Youth, ministerial and institutional participants were mixed in order to achieve the best possible outputs and ensure political will to go through with the implementation process within the third phase of the V cycle.

PLENARY: OPENING REMARKS

The last day of the conference started with the speeches from Andrej Kiska, the President of the Slovak Republic, and Jens Nymand-Christensen, the Deputy Director for DG Culture and Education, who replaced Tibor Navracscics, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport.

Andrej Kiska in his video address had several remarks upon the current and future role of the youth in political life. He started with the fact that the youth in 20 years will lead our countries and thus we should envisage in what kind of society we want to live in a 20 years' time. Mr. Kiska continued with the importance of critical thinking in our education. The most important is not what to think, but rather how to think.

Then the Slovak president reminded us that politics is about, for, but mainly with young people. Young people should be involved in the political structures and proactive in political life. Therefore, the duty of politicians is to create opportunities for young people to participate in politics and the duty of young people is to do best out of it.

Jens Nymand-Christensen also had several remarks upon the role of the youth in political and social life, now more from a European level. He started with radicalization as one of the key issues that Europe is currently facing. This is also a result of the fact that many young people are left behind during or after school. And what also influences the younger generation is a generational divide. The older generation is currently using environmental and financial resources that the younger will miss in the near future. Thus, it is important to reach more young people in the bottom-up process, based on the Mr. Navracscics's plan, 1 000 000 by the end of 2019. The European Commission is currently running the "European youth portal: Make your voice heard", a survey for the European youth to speak up for themselves.

Mr. Nymand-Christensen also touched upon the importance of volunteering in the life of young people. In his opinion, volunteering is an instrument to put our societies together. The plan of the European Commission is to register 100 000 young people by the end of this year. European Voluntary Service also celebrates the 20th anniversary this year with the results that its participants are more capable of cooperating in a team, have a more-developed vision of what they want to do in their life and have developed their competences useful for their future jobs.

PLENARY: HIGH-POLICY DEBATE

The speeches of Mr. Kiska and Mr. Nymand-Christensen were followed by the High Level Policy Debate on Volunteering as a tool for combating radicalization and engagement of young people in diverse, connected and inclusive Europe. The panelists were **Jens Nymand-Christensen**, **Alexander Schischlik**, the Chief of the Youth and Sports Section at UNESCO and **Matthew Johnson**, the Director of Democratic Citizenship and Participation at the Council of Europe.

The panelists started with opening speeches on the topic of volunteering. Matthew Johnson questioned how to engage young people in the design and implementation of volunteering. Alexander Schischlik stated that volunteering is beautiful, but shouldn't replace decent jobs and praised volunteering that it helps young people adopt competences necessary for their future. Jens Nymand-Christensen introduced the Solidarity Corps as a current volunteering flagship of the European Commission.

For the question "How can volunteering help combat radicalization when disconnected young people tend not to volunteer?" Mr. Johnson underlined the importance of volunteering in building a community of the diversity of opinions. Mr. Schischlik added that not only the diversity of opinions, but volunteering also brings empathy into the community. Mr. Nymand-Christensen picked up the sense of belonging and participation that young people experience when volunteering.

For the question how the panelists' bodies practice volunteering on a national, regional and local level, Matthew Johnson shared that the Council of Europe runs ongoing consultations with young people. Alexander Schischlik used as an example the UNESCO project, NET-Med Youth, which is located from Morocco to Syria to discuss youth unemployment, foster in young people critical thinking and media literacy. Lastly, Jens Nymand-Christensen explained that one of the goals of the Erasmus+ Programme, not very often seen, is to reach unprivileged young people.

The last question that the panelists elaborated on was "Volunteers are happy to contribute, but what are the states doing to address refugee crisis?" All of the panelists agreed upon that volunteering shouldn't replace the responsibilities of any country. Mr. Johnson claimed that volunteering must be sufficiently funded and its outcomes shouldn't rely on volunteers. Also, volunteers play an important role in linguistic integration and shouldn't be left alone, but rather supplemented by the governments. Finally, Mr. Nymand-Christensen described NGOs as a natural extension of the EU, but it also needs to be structured and organized. In his opinion, it is important to use all possible tools to reach out to young people before radicalization actually happens.

PLENARY: JOINT RECOMMENDATION

Eight recommendation areas of the V cycle of the Structured Dialogue were presented in the plenary.

The presentation was followed by the experts' reflections. In particular, Jens Nymand-Christensen, the Deputy Director General of the DG EAC, Miriam Teuma, CEO at Agenzija Zghazagh from Malta, and Csaba Borboly from the Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Nymand-Christensen considered the recommendations to be highly topical. Then he touched upon the matter of investing in the mobility program and argued that the Erasmus+ programme has increased its funding by 40%. Increasing of the investments in the mobility program should however happen with the support of young people. The second area that the Deputy Director General covered was related to teachers. To his mind, many classrooms are outdated and don't reflect the social reality. Teachers educate the content, not critical thinking itself, which makes the process of education unconstructive. Mr. Nymand-Christensen also urged young people to study not only in order to find a job, but also to become an active and critical European citizen. And lastly, he stated that volunteering is not an answer for everything and has become a new dimension for the Solidarity Corps.

Miriam Teuma started her reflection upon the recommendations with the question: "When are we going to burst the balloon that we have created around the Structured Dialogue?" According to her, changes of the Structured Dialogue are not enough. Mrs. Teuma underlined the importance of the next EU youth strategy and pinpointed the value of the Structured Dialogue, as European policy-makers get to hear the voice of young people. Miriam Teuma is realistic that not all the recommendations will fit the politicians' agenda, but they do reflect the opinions of young people. The question now is what we can do with them. She urged young people to come prepared to Malta as to be relevant in the dialogue process. The last thing that Mrs. Teuma covered in her speech was how young people are currently accessing information. Thus, it is important for the European bodies as well as youth representatives to reach out to young people and provide them with the right information.

Csaba Borboly from the Committee of the Regions highlighted several areas where the Committee invests its resources, e.g. to combat youth unemployment, to improve higher education, to modernise schools, to set up high-speed internet, to urge young people to learn a second foreign language or to prepare them for their first job. He also pinpointed the issue of brain-drain in Central and Eastern Europe, which affects the demography of the regions and from a long-term perspective is not sustainable for the benefits of the whole Europe.

PLENARY: CLOSING CEREMONY

The EU Youth Conference in Košice ended with two closing speeches. The first speaker was **Peter Krajňák**, the State Secretary at the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. European Youth Conference in his opinion provided a unique opportunity for young people to become creators of policies that will ultimately affect their lives in the new changing European society, perceived as a diverse, interconnected and inclusive. After the Bratislava summit, youth agenda is one of the priorities for the European Union. Far-right extremism is a major problem of the current political developments, and the solution can be seen in a greater emphasis on tolerance and mutual meetings among diverse groups.

Slovak Presidency, as stated in the presidency program and in accordance with the Strategy Europe 2020, will support every effort to better integrate young people in the labour market, including proposals to increase financial support through existing programs and initiatives as well as to increase the awareness of youth on those programs. New mechanisms to promote a positive attitude of young people towards the EU project should give more focus on the development of values and attitudes of young people. Mr. Krajňák also tackled national consultation outcomes that showed critical opinion prevails among young people on the political affairs and frustration that policies may be ineffective.

Allan Päll, the Secretary General of the European Youth Forum, opened his address with the fact that young people generally agree with the values of the European Union, but not with how it is governed. He also touched upon, in his opinion, insufficient funding of the Erasmus+ programme, as it monthly costs only 2 EUR per young European. He highlighted that funding to increasing number of youth organisations is being rejected due to missing resources and thus engagement is lowering.

Another area that Allan Päll covered was the responsibility of European policy-makers to implement the inputs of young people into practice. Therefore, processes like the Structured Dialogue are very valuable, as young people have lost trust in traditional politics. But decisions made by European policy-makers need feedback-loop, also to increase trust of the youth in the European project.

Allan also talked about an increasing amount of hate speech on social media, while European legislature on anti-discrimination in this field is still lacking. He finished his speech with motivating young people to be ambitious, and thus be heard.

Tibor Škrabský, the Chair of the Youth Working Party, concluded the conference with the plan to continue discussing the topic at various meetings including the informal breakfast at the Council and meeting of the Ministers at the Council of the EU in November this year.

After handing the upcoming phase of the V cycle to Malta, he closed the conference with a short, but succinct, comment: *"We should be more radical in what we want."* **2017 Maltese Presidency** in the field of youth will focus on the importance of skills for young people for their active participation in community and working life.

ATTACHMENTS

Joint Recommendation, Conference Agenda, Short Video Message, Photo Gallery

PERMANENT LINK TO SLI.DO INFOGRAPHICS

<https://www.sli.do/event/rrrhp0bu/infographic/c/001b>