

# Dialogue on the agenda Youth mission in the trio presidency process

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Just like wisdom, the interest in politics increases with age. When their own interests are at stake, young Europeans consider participation in debates with decision makers to be the most important political action to ensure that their voice is heard.<sup>1</sup> Thanks to the joint initiatives of the Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian Presidency Trio of the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, European Youth Forum and national representatives of young people, the implementation of an effective dialogue between young people and decision makers is now at the centre of attention in the youth sector of the EU.

For the first time in history, in the Council Resolution on a new framework for European co-operation in the youth field adopted in November 2009, the Member States of the European Union committed themselves to launching an inclusive, long-term process that gives young people and their organisations the opportunity to participate in order to have a say in the shaping of those decisions that affect their everyday lives: the structured dialogue.<sup>2</sup>

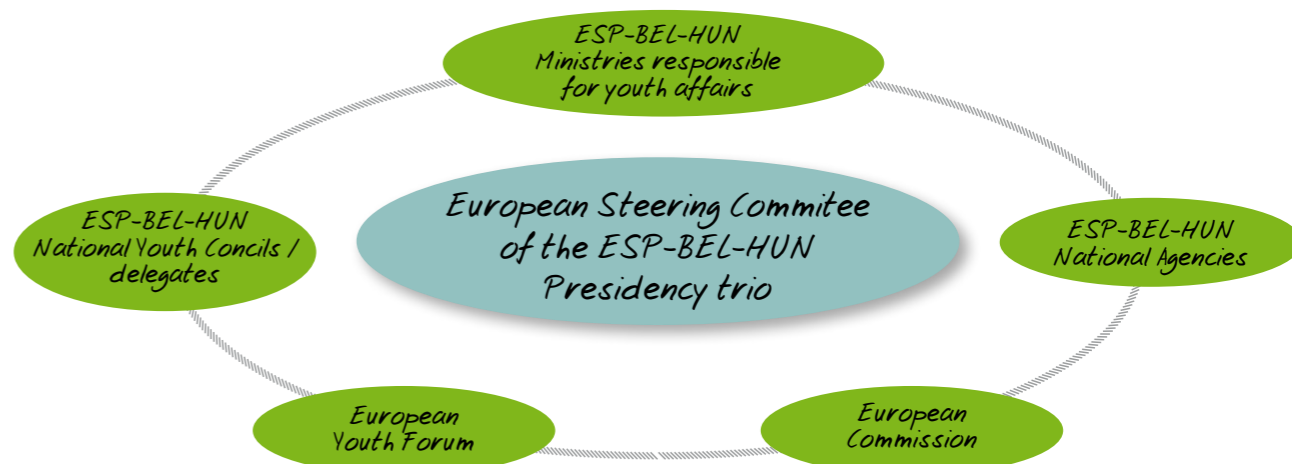
The structured dialogue with young people and youth organisations, which serves as a forum for continuous joint reflection on the priorities, implementation and follow-up of European co-operation in the youth field, should be pursued and developed [...] The dialogue should be as inclusive as possible and developed at local, regional, national and EU level and include youth researchers and those active in youth work.

(Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European co-operation in the youth field (2010-2018) Council of the European Union, 2009)

## Structured dialogue from the youth perspective

The structured dialogue for the majority of young people may sound like any other EU jargon, for which you have to give an explanation. But I believe that if we take a look at it, the essence of the structured dialogue is something unique and at the same time very simple: it is an answer to a real challenge that starts with young people.

*European Steering Committee, responsible body for the implementation of the process*



Recent Eurostat statistics clearly show that youth unemployment has become a serious problem that we have to face in European countries. The unemployment rate for young people under the age of 25 in the 27 countries of the EU has drastically increased and by February 2010 it was more than two times higher than that of all economically active people.<sup>3</sup> In line with other targets, the Member States therefore agreed that in the framework of the first 18-month work cycle of the structured dialogue, youth employment should be discussed between young people and the EU institutions as the overall thematic priority for the period from 1 January 2010 to 30 June 2011. In addition to this, social inclusion, youth work and participation are the national priorities of the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies, and will serve as further important topics for discussion.

To initiate the process by reaching out to young people at local, regional and national level, the Member States were invited to establish national

working groups, which are composed of diverse young people; National Youth Councils; the representatives of Ministries for Youth Affairs and youth researchers. National working groups are new components of the political arena and are entitled to carry out three rounds of national consultations with young people. The information gathered by them is channelled to the European level through the three EU Presidency Youth Conferences in a way that keeps the process youth led. The first round of national consultations identified the main challenges that young people face and the second round listed concrete measures to address these problems. The third round, which will take place during the Hungarian Presidency, is designed to lead the process to a joint political commitment of the Member States. The illustration on the next page sums up the process and is based on the 'Structured dialogue a bridge between young people and decision makers' (27<sup>th</sup> August 2010), presentation of the three national youth councils of Belgium.



# Dialogue on the agenda

## Structured dialogue consultation process

Phase	Activity	Period
1. Identify priorities	1st round of consultation of young people, 27 Member states	January- March 2010
	EU Youth Conference in Jerez de la Frontiera (Spain)	13-16 April 2010
Recommendations	2nd round of consultation of young people based on the outcomes of the 1st phase, 27 Member states	May - August 2010
	EU Youth Conference in Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium)	2-4 October 2010
3. Refine recommendations	3rd round of consultation of young people based on the outcomes of phases 1 and 2, 27 Member States	October 2010 – February 2011
4. Political translation and evaluation	EU Youth Conference in Hungary	March 2011
	Evaluation	April – May 2011
	Council of Ministers	May 2011

## Youth voice in the process

The European Youth Forum is one of the key stakeholders involved, representing the voice of millions of young Europeans. Ms Xenia Constantinou (Vice-President of the European Youth Forum) chairs the European Steering Committee which is responsible for the co-ordination of the implementation of the entire process. I asked Xenia about the challenges of the dialogue.

*Ildikó: We are in the middle of the first cycle of the structured dialogue, how would the European Youth Forum evaluate the nine months of hard work behind us?*

**Xenia:** Structured dialogue is finally structured! This is a milestone in the history of consultation and co-decision with young people. The European Youth Forum always advocated for the need to use this tool of 'structured dialogue' in an efficient way that would engage young people in the dialogue that concerns them. We asked young people to design the dialogue, to participate in it, to evaluate it and to monitor its results. I think that after receiving the first results of the consultation, we can have a confident smile on our faces! Already, out of the 27 member states, 22 have engaged actively in the dialogue on national level and have sent their results to the European Steering Committee. This has set the bar quite high. The second phase of consultations is expected to finish by the beginning of September. We expect at this stage to collect the opinions of young people on concrete tools, methods and measures that will boost and facilitate their access to employment.

But the most challenging part is ahead of us: the third phase of the consultation under the Hungarian Presidency, where we will seek to transform the tools into policies and where we will be preparing the political outcome of the entire process. I consider the commitment of the trio on youth employment and the high level of youth participation as the two crucial factors that will push for concrete political results in this field.

*Ildikó: How do you see the effectiveness of the new process when it comes to the consultation between young people and the decision makers?*

**Xenia:** The decision makers are still a bit reluctant to discuss openly and frankly with young people on such a 'difficult' topic as youth employment. In many member states decisions makers still have the mentality that 'we decide for them' and we may be questioned by them. But we are still far away from the culture of designing new policies for young people, deciding on and monitoring them with young people on board. Concerning the involvement of young people in the debates, we

have seen various examples that show a vast gap in the practices that each national working group is using. We have seen member states that involve a few dozen young people and member states that involved several thousands young people in the discussion.

*Ildikó: Taking the long-term perspective, how do you think the outcomes can have an impact on young people living all over Europe?*

**Xenia:** We can change the perception of youth policies for young people. This is our dream. Concerning the specific issue that we are discussing, youth employment, we aspire to be able to create tools that will facilitate the access of young people in employment, that will link better education and the market, that we will be able to offer more and more quality internships for young Europeans, that we will offer the policies that will empower them to become young entrepreneurs, and lastly we envision putting an end to discrimination against young people. The European Youth Forum believes that we should invest in young people because they are the driving force of our economy, our society, our future!

## Looking ahead to the Hungarian Presidency

The process set clear goals and high expectations for young Europeans who are now looking ahead to the first half of 2011 – to the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union – to place the results of the first eighteen months of the structured dialogue at the highest levels of the political agenda when the European Council of Ministers for Youth takes place.

As the Youth Delegate of Hungary, actively involved in the process, I am convinced that the structured dialogue and the presidency itself are key opportunities for young people and their organisations in my country as well as in other Member States. Holding the presidency can lead to further steps towards strengthening national partnerships and allowing cross-sectoral co-operation to emerge in the long run. The presidency is an occasion where European democracy literally visits every country, giving young people the chance, at their doorsteps, to engage in dialogue with their decision makers.

I believe that when taking advantage of the above-mentioned opportunities, young people have to respond with increased responsibility and ownership. The youth mission of ensuring the future of the process is of paramount importance for the future of Europe of all generations but most of all for young people themselves.

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, 2009. European Youth Report 2009. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/youth/pub/pdf/eu-youth-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/pub/pdf/eu-youth-report_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Council of the European Union, 2009. Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European co-operation in the youth field (2010-2018). Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/youth/pdf/doc1648\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/pdf/doc1648_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat, February 2010. Euro area unemployment rate at 10.0% [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_PUBLIC/3-31032010-BP/EN/3-31032010-BP-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-31032010-BP/EN/3-31032010-BP-EN.PDF)

