

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth



League of Arab States

In partnership with the



Observatoire
National
de la Jeunesse

Symposium

“Arab spring: Youth participation for the promotion of peace, human rights and fundamental freedoms”

Presentation and call for participants

28-29 August 2012, Tunisia

Background

The South-Med youth policy cooperation of the partnership between the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, the League of Arab States (LAS) and other actors started in 2005. The cooperation aims at developing a common understanding and exchange of ideas on specific issues of concern for youth policy in Europe and South Med region. Since 2006, other national and international stakeholders of youth policy in European and South Med countries have become involved and extended the framework of this informal cooperation. The activities undertaken brought together youth researchers, governmental institutions responsible for youth policy and non-governmental youth organisations in European and South Med countries. Among other results, this cooperation has supported the process of the Euro-Arab Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations (EACMYO), created possibilities for direct exchanges between South Med and European youth leaders through relevant youth fora, and provided opportunities for capacity-building of civil society youth organisations through training courses on human rights education, intercultural dialogue and youth participation. These activities have also greatly contributed to the objectives of intercultural dialogue and exchange among its different partners and stakeholders. The possibility to meet and learn about and with each other is an essential component of dialogue in the same way that cooperation ought to be built on a genuine desire to go beyond stereotypical mutual perceptions.

The process of changes brought about by the “Arab Spring” in various countries provides the context and drives the need for re-visiting this cooperation so as to respond to all stakeholders' expectations and to ensure a long-term perspective. As a first step in this direction, a seminar on [“Empowerment of youth organisations and youth-led civil society initiatives in the South-Mediterranean framework”](#) was organised in Malta with the main aim of providing youth non-governmental organisations and stakeholders with the opportunity to reflect upon recent developments and their implications for the empowerment and participation of young people.

In the context of this event the following issues have been repeatedly raised by young Arab leaders:

- Stakeholders should go beyond the level of analysis of Arab spring and act quickly in order to support (youth) civil society initiatives and progressive forces to establish inclusive democracies;
- A majority of young people who contributed to the developments of Arab spring are no longer participating in the transition to democratic societies: they did not vote in recent elections and do not feel represented by traditional parties;
- With many civil society movements focusing on competing as regards participation in power, other relevant issues such as human rights and equal opportunities risk being downgraded.

In light of these statements, this symposium aims to raise awareness and establish understanding of needs identified by young people in Malta, by supporting a structured dialogue between civil society, policy makers and international stakeholders.

The exchange on future cooperation is being taken up and continued by two events: the Euro-Arab and Mediterranean Youth Leaders Meeting: Networking and Partnership Development (Rome, 7-12 May 2012) organised by the European Youth Forum and the Italian National Youth Council as well as by the League of Arab States Youth Forum and 4th Euro-Arab Meeting (Ramallah/Palestine, 2-7 July).

“Arab spring” and social movements in Europe

The events in a number of countries in the Arab region since the beginning of 2011 have imposed a new perception of young people’s capacities and aspirations. As crucial actors in the processes of political changes, young people have stood up for more freedom, equality and justice. But they also stand up for better future perspectives in education and work, economic and social development.

Young people have legitimate aspirations to be listened to and respected, and to participate in decision-making about their present and their future and that of their nations. Youth is demanding a voice in the transition process towards real democracy. The new political environments need to take into consideration the strong civic engagement of young people. Similarly, the role and organisation of youth policy needs to be reviewed. International youth policy cooperation has also an important role to play.

At the same time, in many countries all over the world, young people are paying a high price for the financial and economic crisis affecting their societies; youth unemployment rates have risen sharply since 2009 and the foundations of the welfare states are being shaken in several European countries. Many young people are growing up in Europe with the perception that their living standards will be lower than that of the preceding generation. The “indignados” movements, very much inspired by young people in Tunisia and Egypt, may be considered the tip of the iceberg of social movements. The new realities the crises call for a review of political processes and practices in favour of more equity, social justice and democratic governance.

Despite the obvious differences between the Arab and European regions, it is clear that both are affected by consequences of globalisation processes. The massive spread of global communication, and particularly social media, has become a new and powerful vehicle for young people to get organised and participate.

The processes of change seem to have been triggered by economic, social and political conditions perceived as unbearable and unsustainable by some young people. Social media have been a vehicle, catalyser and facilitating factor, but it is people, especially young people, who have been the main factors and actors.

Eastern European countries have a recent history of engaging in political transition processes towards democratic societies. Their experiences with regard to the construction of democratic societies and the development of citizenship and participation cultures can provide an enriching background for the current events. Youth organisations in Europe might be interested to learn from the efficient use of social networks and online media by youth organisations in the South-Mediterranean region.

In reaction to the political changes in their Southern neighbouring countries, the European Union and the Council of Europe are strengthening their joint efforts to support these developments towards democracy. Young people in Egypt, Tunisia and other parts of the South-Mediterranean hold the key to the sustainable and peaceful development of their societies based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Understanding and taking into account their expectations and needs is very important for all the institutional stakeholders, such as the League of Arab States, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), national youth policy authorities and youth organisations. The experience of young people from the Maghreb diasporas in Europe and their role in and perception of recent developments can also positively contribute to this process.

Symposium “Youth participation for the promotion of peace, human rights and fundamental freedoms”

The symposium “Youth participation for the promotion of peace, human rights and fundamental freedoms”, will be co-organised by the partnership between the European Commission and the

Council of Europe in the field of youth, the League of Arab States, the Tunisian governmental authorities, the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe, the Euro-Med Platform, the United Nations Population Fund and the European Youth Forum. It follows an invitation from the Tunisian authorities to host the seminar in Tunisia and hereby give an impetus to the current revision of national youth policies in the country.

1. Objectives

Given the recent political changes, the symposium aims at providing a high level setting for the exchange of perspectives on how international and regional organisations, governments and civil society can and must adjust to the new realities from a policy point of view, taking into account existing and future programmes. Awareness should be raised on implications of the proposals made for advocacy and partnerships with existing and emerging youth networks.

In order to come up with well-grounded youth policy recommendations, young people, policy makers and international organisations, supported by experts should be given an opportunity for discussion in the framework of working groups. Ideas voiced by young people during the youth empowerment seminar in Malta and existing instruments of youth policy for enhancing young people's participation and democratic citizenship and their relevance for the regional context will be presented in this framework. Special attention should be paid to the circumstances and specific needs of youth policy actors in transition countries.

In line with the exchange of the symposium, stakeholders engaged in Euro-Arab youth cooperation should develop ideas for a follow-up for further cooperation to serve as a basis for coordinating instruments for supporting youth participation and human rights in the process of transition to democracy.

The **objectives** of the symposium are:

- On the basis of the needs analysis made by youth activists in Malta, to discuss how the empowerment of youth in view of active participation in a democratic society could be supported and enhanced through strategies and projects promoting civic participation;
- To present youth policy and participation models and discuss their relevance for the regional context;
- To develop concrete proposals for the development and support of youth participation, youth policy institutions, and youth research;
- To strengthen and support the role of civil society and non- governmental youth led organisations and networks;
- To reinforce and further develop youth cooperation with the Southern Mediterranean region through the adoption of a conference statement based on the common-based approaches, objectives and programmes of international organisations, youth policy institutions and youth organisations.

2. Participants

The symposium will bring together policy makers, youth leaders and representatives, researchers, youth workers and other experts in youth policy from Europe and the Southern Mediterranean region and from the networks and projects of the co-organisers. The organisers aim at a total of 120 -150 participants.

3. Profile and Selection of participants

The symposium is be open for professionals and volunteers closely involved in youth policy processes in their youth organisations and countries, young multipliers closely involved in democratic youth movements in their countries, leaders of youth organisations having an active role in the developments of the Arab spring, bloggers and youth workers. Furthermore experts from foundations and agencies supporting youth policy programmes and studies will be invited.

Participants will be selected through an open call and nominated among selected experts and cooperation partners.

4. Language:

The languages of the seminar will be Arabic, English and French. Interpretation will be available for the plenary and also partly for the working groups.

5. Draft programme

Please find the draft programme online at http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/euromed/Euromed_Youth_policy.html (as from 6th June)

6. Practical and financial conditions

Eligible participants

This call for participation targets only participants residing in the member states of the European Cultural Convention¹.

Interested persons residing in Arab countries should direct their **requests for application** to the League of Arab States on the following e-mail address:
youth@poplas.org, admin@poplas.org

Timetable

The symposium will start at 17:00 on Monday 27th (arrival) and finish at 18:30 on Wednesday 29th August.

Venue and accommodation

The seminar will be held in Tunis (Gammarth), Tunisia and accommodation and meals will be covered by the organisers. Hotel venue will be confirmed to selected participants.

Travel and subsistence expenses

Travel expenses to and from Tunisia will be covered by the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, and reimbursed according to the rules of the Council of Europe. The reimbursements will be made by bank transfer after the symposium.

Application procedure

The deadline for submitting applications: **17 June 2012**. Candidates will be informed about whether their application has been accepted or rejected, and if they have put on the waiting list, by 20 June 2012.

- ⇒ All those interested from the **European** countries in applying to take part in the symposium are kindly requested to fill in their application **on-line** at http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/seminars/seminar_18.html
- ⇒ Interested persons residing **in Arab countries** should direct their **requests for application** to the **League of Arab States** on the following e-mail address: youth@poplas.org, admin@poplas.org

If you face any difficulty with the online application form, please contact the person below.

Further information:

Council of Europe member states: viktorija.karpatska@coe.int

League of Arab States countries: admin@poplas.org; youth@poplas.org

¹ In a member state of the European Cultural Convention: 47 Council of Europe member states, Belarus, the Holy See and Kazakhstan.