

Opening words by Ms Karin Lopatta-Loibl, Policy Officer, European Commission  
(Directorate General for Education and Culture, Youth Policy Unit)

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Dear honourable Clyde Puli, dear Excellency,  
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear participants, young people and friends,

It is a great pleasure to be here on the beautiful island of Malta and at this important seminar. This seminar is important as it aims at providing useful and practical answers to unprecedented youth-led movements in the Arab region. This year we celebrate the 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the “Arab Spring”, and while other international players have already taken action - as the mapping exercise shows – it is high time that the European Union and the Council of Europe, together, in their youth partnership, contribute to this quickly evolving developments and offer young people the support that they ask for and that they need.

During this first-year of democratic movements in the South-Med region we have seen dramatic changes.

While we in Europe - in a context of largely spread political lack of interest and disengagement of many young people - preach active participation, young Arabs are practising it. During this first year of democratic movements in the South-Mediterranean region, we have seen dramatic changes, young people engage actively, participate, loudly claim and fight for the change they want to see in society. They want more freedom, better and more equal chances in education and at the labour market, the wish for better and more chances in life: this is where young people from the South-Mediterranean region meet young Europeans.

While the historic, societal and general living situation is different for young people at both sides of the Mediterranean Sea they nevertheless face joint challenges: the search for better opportunities in life. What would make more sense than offering them the chance to join forces, to learn from each other, to network and to develop projects together? This is exactly what the European Union wishes to support: young people’s global exchange and cooperation. Bringing young people together, allowing them to get to know other people, other cultures, and other ways to deal with pressing issues that concern them. This what ‘Youth in the World’ is about. “Youth in the World” is one of 8 fields of action of the EU Youth Strategy, an 8-year strategy for young people in the European Union, developed together with young people.

Apart from “Youth in the World” the other 7 fields of action are:

- Education and Training
- Employment and Entrepreneurship
- Creativity and Culture
- Health and Well-being
- Voluntary Activities
- Social Inclusion
- Last not least: Participation

And participation it is: young people in Europe say (European Youth Forum’s slogan); “nothing about us without us” and this is exactly what happens. In the EU we have 10 years of youth policy cooperation and from the very beginning young people have been closely involved in policy-making. Young people are an integral part of the policy-making of the EU. Their role has been developed further and strengthened over the years. We are proud to have established a Structured Dialogue, a process run by young people in cooperation with policy-makers.

Milestones of the Structured Dialogue are Youth Conferences of each EU Presidency and the European Youth Week. Preceding the Youth Conferences young people express their views on large consultations and share their concerns and results with policy-makers. The priority themes of the last presidencies were employment, participation and creativity.

This regular involvement of young people in policy-making, this Structured Dialogue is something that Europe could share by inspiring policy-makers and young people from South-Med region. To strengthen the outreach and make results more visible, a new EU Youth Portal and a Youth Card are being developed to benefit engaged young people.

What young people in the South-Med region could share with us and with European young people is –amongst other things – the effective use of New Technology and Social Media to get quickly and efficiently organised, share their goals and to network.

These are only two examples that could inspire the coming two days of our seminars.

I would like to let you know that the European Union, that the European Commission which I represent here, is ready to support you.

Apart from the EU Youth Strategy, we have the Youth in Action Programme, which financially supports young people's projects. This programme is also open to young people from the South-Med region, if they find youth organisations as partners in the EU and other programme countries. In the past 4 years 5.000 young people have benefited from the Youth in Action Programme.

The EU has a second programme at the disposition of young people of the South-Med region: the Euro-med Youth Programme, which in reaction to the Arab Spring stepped up its financial frame by 6 m. €.

Coming to the end of my intervention, I would like to close with words that Commissioner Vassiliou, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, pronounced at her recent visit to Tunisia, where she emphasised the importance of relationships and partnerships of young people with peers in different countries. She said "We have no desire to impose a European identity. We respect the cultural diversity and identity of our Member States and will do the same for the South-Med region".

Thank you to the Maltese government, the Maltese Youth Agency, the Council of Europe and the CoE's North South Centre, the League of Arab States, and the Euro-Med Youth Platform and the EU-CoE youth partnership for their cooperation in this seminar.