



League of Arab States



## Youth Partnership

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



## Symposium

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

*28-29 August 2012, Tunisia*

## Executive summary

*This report has been prepared for the Partnership on Youth between the Council of Europe and the European Union by an external consultant and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the European Commission and the Council of Europe.*

in cooperation with



## Background and context of the seminar

While the Council of Europe, the European Union, and the League of Arab States have long cooperated on youth policy in the southern Mediterranean region, the Arab Spring has forced a rethink of this cooperation. In December 2010, in a small town in Tunisia, Arab youth began what became an outpouring of energy and willpower to change their societies to better reflect their role and importance in their societies.

While the expression of popular anger resulted in immediate changes for many governments around the southern Mediterranean, this energy has to now be transformed into institutional structures. The development of civil society and the institutionalization of youth policy remain works in progress across the region.

The symposium *“Arab spring: Youth participation for the promotion of peace, human rights and fundamental freedoms”* is the latest meeting of some of the principal actors in youth work from around the region. The event aimed to provide 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 both from a policy and a programmatic point of view.

## The institutional framework

In 2005 the EU-CoE youth partnership, together with several national and regional partners, initiated a process of youth policy cooperation in the broader Euro-Mediterranean region, with a view to foster greater cooperation between youth policy stakeholders. This process has gathered strength over the ensuing years, bringing in other bilateral and multilateral actors, such as the League of Arab States. The activities undertaken have brought together youth researchers, governmental institutions responsible for youth policy and non-governmental youth organisations in European and South Mediterranean countries.

The events of the Arab Spring have shown the need to re-examine the existing cooperation and to respond to the needs of youth from across the region. This re-examination takes into account the requirements of all stakeholders, especially youth, in order to ensure the long-term viability of the cooperation process. The first step that was taken was a seminar on [“Empowerment of youth organisations and youth-led civil society initiatives in the South-Mediterranean framework.”](#) This seminar was organised in Malta, in cooperation with the Euromed Youth Platform 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. The results of the Malta seminar, and a subsequent follow-up seminar in Rome set the agenda for the Tunis Symposium.

In Malta, the following needs for the benefit of youth NGOs and youth led civil society organisations had been identified:

- The **concept of ‘youth’ and young people’** varies a lot from region to region. Future partnerships may require agreement on a common definition of youth, which may also lead

to – at a later stage though, the elaboration of an international declaration on youth and youth rights.

- The need to create a **common [Euro-Arab] youth platform** as to favour sharing good practices and experiences, have online consultations with specialists and experts, and increase the possibility to gather information about partners and funding opportunities.
- **Knowledge, research and documentation** should ensure the [online] publication of youth oriented material and research should enhance the knowledge about youth [policy] issues. This area of work ought to include **mappings/baselines for measuring the situation of young people** in the different countries as well as ensure tackling the issue of **youth rights**. The creation of a **think-tank** with young people from both Europe and the Arab region as to carry research-related work could also be considered. Communication should consider the **use of new technologies and in particular of social media and social networks** and – in the case of education and training, the development of more **e-learning** platforms.
- **Capacity building through specific training** should form part of institutional and youth organisations strategies as they guarantee empowering young people to take an active role in matters that concern them. Specific attention should be dedicated to **human rights education and to targeted and thematic campaigns and advocacy**. Amongst other issues mentioned are training in organisational management and democratic leadership.
- **Cooperation between formal and non-formal education** needs to be reinforced as to maximise the learning outcomes and the competence development of young people. **Youth work ought to be recognised** and seen as an added value to other education mechanisms. Schools should also consider creating spaces for participation within the existing structure such as, for instance, [school] youth councils.
- **Legislation** should aim at enhancing affirmative actions or introduce quotas of young people representatives in governmental bodies and structures. Thus, **'co-management'** of structures dealing with youth, sport and education issues (for instance) should be considered based on the models already applied within the Council of Europe or following the path of the EU's structural dialogue. Evaluation and monitoring systems involving young people should also be created.
- There is an urgent need to **review existing funding mechanisms for youth organisations** and to make sure that representatives of the latter are involved in developing/elaborating the former (e.g. through co-management and/or consultation mechanisms). Funding should also guarantee **inclusion of all young people**.

### Purpose of the Tunis symposium

Given the recent political developments, the symposium's goal was to provide 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.

The Tunis symposium aimed to go beyond the identification of needs and towards practical proposals. As a result of this dialogue, participants were asked to provide concrete proposals at

an institutional, policy, and practical level and to consider the following objectives set forth in the symposium concept paper:

- To discuss how the empowerment of youth, including their 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 discussions concerning 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.

These objectives formed the basis for participants' proposed regional action plan to be supported by specific stakeholders.

### **Results of the symposium**

120 policy-makers, experts, researchers, youth organisations and young people from European and the South Med region participated in the symposium "Arab Spring: Youth Participation for the Promotion of Peace, Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms" of the EU-CoE youth partnership and their partners.

The President of Tunisia Dr. Moncef Marzouki opened the symposium. In his speech the President referred to the fact that the Tunisian revolution had been led by youth and needs to succeed, as the price for a possible failure would have to be paid mainly by young people. Youth State Secretary Mr Hichem Ben Jemaâ called for a joint international support of the Youth and Sport Ministry's and the Tunisian Youth Observatory's efforts in the youth field.

Representatives of EU and Council of Europe underlined young people's role in the democratic development of post-revolutionary Arab countries and called for the development of national youth policies, youth research and support of civil society and in particular of youth organisations.

The EU Youth Strategy with its Structured Dialogue, which makes young people a part of decision-making of EU youth policies, was presented as inspiring model, and the Youth in Action and the Euromed Youth IV Programmes were highlighted.

From Council of Europe side, the Co-management of the youth programme between youth NGOs and Member States Ministries was mentioned as another example for effective youth participation.

Khaled Louhichi from the League of Arab States ensured full support for a regional centre to train youth in Tunisia which could help strengthen youth civil society, spread cultural values, and help improve opportunities for young people to help job creation, education, and the environment .

Keynote addresses, by researcher Cristina Maria Flesher Fominaya and AbdelBasset Ben Hassen, President of the Arab Institute for Human Rights, provided evidence on youth social movements and challenges of the post revolution era in Tunisia.

### **Towards a common understanding of youth policy and youth work: Mutual learning workshops on participatory youth policy & youth work**

The Tunis symposium provided critical inputs into the youth agenda across the Arab world and in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The unique political and social situation across the Arab world, in which political realignments have been a result of youth activism, provided an ideal backdrop to the symposium's discussions. The result of these discussions was general agreement from key stakeholders and youth leaders on concrete actions that could be taken forward at national, regional, and inter-regional levels.

Youth experts provided context for the discussions, setting the framework for the Symposium's workshops.

In the first set of working groups participants exchanged on various thematic aspects of youth work in the cooperation regions, including Youth participation and citizenship, Cross-sectoral youth policies, Social inclusion and solidarity, and Intercultural dialogue in youth work.

Participants used the discussions to answer key definitional questions, such as what defines citizenship, participation, and inclusion. They also highlighted the necessity for programs to provide exposure to more than one theme and to include structured mobility experiences. Youth leaders emphasized that because of the global youth jobs crisis it is important to extend the dialogue beyond youth workers and policy makers – but also to business leaders and entrepreneurs. There was broad consensus that educational systems in the region were not providing the soft skills needed to tackle the employment problem in the region. The groups also highlighted two key elements to successful cooperation on youth programs - youth involvement at all levels, including at the planning and management stages and the importance of a balanced relationship between European and Arab partners.

### **Youth work in the Arab world: Proposals for change**

The second round of workshops examined the four major priorities for the Euro-Arab and Euro-Mediterranean youth cooperation identified over the course of the Malta meeting:

- **Arab youth platform:** online consultations with specialists and experts would share good practices and experiences and increase the possibility to gather information about partners and funding opportunities.

- **Youth research:** Knowledge, research and documentation should ensure the online publication of youth oriented material and research should enhance knowledge about youth policy issues.
- **Youth training centre:** The creation of a Euro-Arab training centre would enhance capacity building for youth policymakers and youth organizations.
- **Youth university:** Using the already developed format of the university on youth and development, an Arab youth university should be launched as a physical space for youth from across the region to share best practices, learn, and collaborate together.

The working groups formulated ideas for concrete projects, with an emphasis on ensuring that funding is systematic, long term, and inclusive, both organizationally and demographically; they used inputs from the first working groups' reports to propose projects with relevance for both Arab and Euro-Mediterranean regions.

The **working group on capacity-building: networks, platforms and training** focused on the need for a centre for knowledge, both to produce and share. The minimal cross-sector and regional research on youth was identified as a major impediment to youth work in the Arab region. The Arab Spring, for the first time in many countries, opened up the possibility to create a research centre that could address these needs. While the need for a research centre was universally acknowledged, participants also noted that this would require years of investment and the support of not only the participants present, but also policymakers within the region.

The working groups also looked at **mobility & exchange programs**, highlighting the need to evaluate existing programs and their real impact on youth. It was acknowledged that while on-going Euro-Mediterranean youth exchanges have been important, there is a need to increase their ability to reach vulnerable populations. The changes in the region since 2011 have also shown that previous models of mobility and exchange programs may need to be re-examined.

Symposium participants studied the importance and viability of **virtual spaces** through a workshop on **sharing expertise & knowledge**. Proper targeting of youth inside and outside youth organizations is seen as a critical element of any intervention. Concerns raised in the workshop focused on the resources required, not only funding mechanisms, but also information and knowledge transfer as well as the way a virtual space can adapt to the needs of working with partners, managing (virtual) events, and sharing and dialogue. The participants identified four steps that would be required to go forward: 1) Identification of key partners to be involved; 2) Quality standards charter of the network – to be accepted and recognized by youth etc.; 3) Mapping what is already there; and 4) the acknowledgment that this is a process, not an end.

A fourth workshop examined **mechanisms for youth policy development**. Three steps were identified for action: 1) The need for research on the current state of youth policies in the region (recognizing that in some countries there are none). In 2-3 years research should be conducted in European/Arab countries to map current structures, resources and legal frameworks across the regions. 2) Mapping of current structures. Resources and legal frameworks are needed;

these can be supported from the research network. 3) Training - Youth involvement can add a voice. To ensure the voice is heard, youth must be trained to be represented. Training centre must provide experts. These training centres can train trainers. Research must reach youth and NGOs.

### **Stakeholders strategies and position towards future cooperation**

Stakeholders at the symposium used inputs from the two rounds of participant workshops to agree upon strategies for future cooperation among Euro-Arab and Euro-Mediterranean youth actors. Organizations emphasized their interest in various aspects of the four projects agreed upon at the Malta dialogue.

Institutional representatives, which had some history of joint cooperation and together had organised the Malta seminar on Arab spring, focused on positions towards regional projects proposed by young people in Malta and Rome such as the youth platform, a regional youth research network, a Mediterranean youth university, and a regional centre for training and development

#### **Box 1: Stakeholder strategies and positions**

**League of Arab States** **Centre for training and development:** Strong support for a regional centre for training and development, including an advisory board. Visas present a major challenge for Arabs travelling to Europe; thus having a centre would allow Arab countries to avoid this problem.

**Research centre:** Research meets a very strong need in the region, especially at the national level, which often lack real

data on youth. Studies that rely on data are limited. The question remains, how do we develop a participatory approach for youth within this research?

**Euro-Mediterranean youth platform:** a repeated request among youth and an urgent need.

**Youth university:** remains important and if designed well could join activities together.

**United Nations Arab youth training centre:** UNFPA's first concrete contribution will be its commitment to subcontracting feasibility study (risks, mitigation measures) for the Arab youth training centre.

**Agencija Euro-Med youth platform:** Malta remains committed to the Euro-Med youth platform and is willing to cooperate further to bring the projects to fruition. Specifically, they are willing to be partners in capacity building, networking and support and experience.

**Council of Europe** of The Council of Europe's participation can be made exclusively on the basis of invitation. He noted that the Council has started cooperating with Morocco and Tunisia, and has designed a program that aims at 3 things (capacity building of CSOs – starting a training program on human rights and development of participation and youth policy (Tunisia, Morocco); capacity building for public authorities on developing youth policy (Tunisia); cooperation in research on youth – a complicated effort that aims to pool experience and methodologies.

**Research network:** this proposal leaves deliberately open the idea of regional cooperation (Euro-Mediterranean and Arab). Ideally, this could be managed by a supranational body. To create a new network of researchers (in addition to all of the existing research networks), seems challenging.

**Euro-Arab training centre:** there is a strong demand and need for this. He also stated that it should be an Arab centre first (a regional before an inter-regional centre). A European centre could be perceived as an outside intervention. Realistically, building a centre resembling what the Council has done will take 10 years.



**North-South  
Centre**

**Arab youth university:** youth needed space to coordinate and share, not just for youth platforms, but also for actors to come together and develop common approach to tackling issues. The North South Centre will share its expertise and experience to establish an Arab youth university, including at a pedagogical and facilitation level. The Centre will conduct several joint activities before launching university next year for Arab states.

**European  
Union**

In the Neighbourhood South area, the European Union (EU) is supporting the **Euromed Youth IV** regional programme from 2010-2014 with a budget of € 5 million, supporting and strengthening the participation and contribution of youth organisations and youth from the Euro-Mediterranean region towards the development of civil society and democracy. As a response to the Arab Spring, the programme was granted with an extra € 6 million top-up in 2012.

The EU also promotes **mobility of young entrepreneurs** from both sides of the Mediterranean. €1.5 million have been earmarked to enhance the mutual exchange of young professionals between both sides of the Mediterranean, covering also vocational traineeships.

The **Youth in Action Programme** supports projects of young people on active participation and citizenship, intercultural learning, social inclusion and solidarity. It is also open to young people from the EU's neighbouring countries, including the Mediterranean partner countries. Since 2007 about 5 000 young people from the South Med region have taken part in this programme.

Following the Arab spring and the revision of the EU's neighbourhood policy, the European Commission has more than doubled the number of scholarships awarded to students and academic staff from the Southern Mediterranean countries in the framework of the **Erasmus Mundus** programme. Their number rose from 600 in 2010 to 1460 in 2012. Additional funds were also provided for the **TEMPUS** programme. The objective is to contribute to the modernisation of higher education systems and to strengthen cooperation with European universities. The global amount planned for projects involving Southern Mediterranean countries was tripled (29 million Euros in 2012).

The European Commission intends to strengthen the international dimension of the next generation programme "**Erasmus for All**" which will enter into

force in January 2014. Given their political importance, a specific action is envisaged exclusively open to neighbouring countries, bringing together cooperation in capacity building (such as Tempus) with integrated mobility schemes.

**Euro-Med Youth and** On-going work of the Euro-Med Youth cooperation and Salto promotes the mobility of young people and the understanding between peoples through

**SALTO Resource Centre** three types of actions: Euro-Med Youth Exchanges, Euro-Med Youth Voluntary Service, and Euro-Med Youth Training and Networking. Euro-Med also produces a variety of publications serving many purposes, educational reports, practical guides, studies and research. The program works closely with Youth in Action. The Euro-Med youth program IV will be extended, paving the way for more work through 2015.

**Euro-Med Youth Unit, Tunisia** The unit's work with organizations in Tunisia to make sure that they are ready and able to apply for Euro-Med funding. Over 100 organizations have been reached. Civil society in Tunisia has shown its resilience since the revolution. Education and capacity building and project management were the main areas of work in 2012, which was a highly successful year with 12 major events.

**European Youth Forum (EYF)** Support will continue to this global work through EYF 1 per cent solidarity fund, wherein 1 per cent of its budget goes to capacity building to other regions, including undertaking dialogue on interregional level and providing expertise to partners, youth and institutions (thru board and working groups and pools of trainers). European Youth forum welcomes youth research, the establishment of a training centre, and any initiative that provides spaces for interregional dialogue. EYF supports university sister-hood project.

**Anna-Lindh-Foundation** - The foundation currently works in nine Arab countries, including on-going work in capacity building and networking. The foundation is eager to increase partnerships, especially through capacity building via training units at local and national levels.

**World Bank - Youth Programme** - World Bank has on-going analytical tools that can help identify problems faced by youth in the region. These can be used to increase capacity and institutional needs for youth in the region. The World Bank supports the League of Arab States in its work with youth, including the Arab youth platform.

### Conclusions and next steps

The Tunis symposium provided a platform for key stakeholders in Euro-Mediterranean and Arab youth work to lay out strategies for future youth engagement. Based on deliberations at the Symposium, youth leaders and youth institutions now have the fundamental inputs and action plans necessary to begin implementation of the recommendations provided at Malta, Rome, and Tunis.

The result of the symposium was a new agreement among the participants towards future cooperation. A principal characteristic of the initiatives was the ownership of programs by youth and the leadership of Arab countries in bringing these initiatives to fruition. As a corollary, European partners at the symposium expressed their deep commitment to providing support for the initiatives through their decades long experience in youth work and policy development.

General Rapporteur: Erik Churchill