

## Youth Partnership

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



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## South Mediterranean – European Youth Cooperation Seminar

### “Youth and Citizenship: focus on youth participation”

*19-21 November 2013, Amman, Jordan*

## Summary report

The seminar organised by the partnership of the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth and the UNFPA took place in Amman, Jordan from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> November 2013. It gathered around 50 participants from Europe and the Arab region as well as representatives of international organisations and institutions.

The opening sessions focused on the objectives of the seminar as well as on the outcomes of former similar initiatives and projects of the partners involved. The introduction also tackled the needs and the challenges for youth work and youth participation.

The first session highlighted the different activities of the organising parties, UNFPA, the European Union and the Council of Europe with regard to youth, youth policy development and youth participation, the promotion of youth NGOs and their role in empowering young people, particularly in the South-Mediterranean region. In addition, the importance of participation of all citizens and in particular of young people for the development of modern societies was underlined. The opportunities for young people themselves and their role in shaping the political landscape and their involvement in decision making processes were emphasised. As prerequisites of participation several key attitudes were highlighted: courage, determination and resilience as personal attitudes and responsibility, respect and consensus as guiding concepts for the functioning of co-managed structures. For changing societies - especially in the Northern African region, the importance and meaning of citizenship is not to be underestimated – since the feeling of belonging to state and nation on

the one hand and the individual rights and duties on the other hand are essential for democracy and freedom.

In earlier seminars the topic of youth participation and the challenge of involving young people in democratic life were already addressed. As a result of the seminar held in Malta in 2012, re-confirmed in the symposium in Tunis in the same year, four areas for further development and cooperation were already identified:

1. Arab-European youth platform
2. Arab-European youth training centre
3. Network of youth researchers in the Arab States
4. Mediterranean university on youth and global citizenship.

First steps were already taken in the development of these areas (especially with regard to a Arab-European youth platform and the Mediterranean University on youth and global citizenship), but need to be further promoted. The next steps – and this seminar was considered to be one of those – would be to establish structures for further implementation of these actions and to foster exchange, understanding and knowledge building.

In a next session, the necessity of addressing the issue of youth, youth policy, youth health, and youth participation was once more pointed out by reminding that every fourth person in the world is young (and in the Arab region it still is 20% of the population). The inputs from researchers based in the USA, Europe and the Arab region focused on the mutual influences of youth development and participation, on dimensions, areas and concepts of participation and on the improvements and benefits for society brought by youth participation respectively. All three inputs highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for participation; it goes without saying that it is crucial to involve young people already at an early stage and to use the dynamics of grass root movements wherever possible. In the past young people were often seen as a problem for sustaining a given situation. Now, they are more and more accepted as partners and seen as an opportunity to promote active citizenship and to profit from their influence in political debates which leads to ongoing changes in political systems.

In this respect the different levels of influence are of importance; the need to learn participation and to understand its impact on the micro- and the meso-level of the environmental systems is important to be able to involve on the macro-system over time. The role of the individual in the environment, in the social and political system and the mutual influences has to be better understood to not only enable young people to participate but also to accept their participation. It is also important for adults and the “establishment” to accept changes (and the intrinsic notion of change) and the dynamic role of youth in the development and the building of democracy. Moreover, it is also essential that young people are empowered and enabled to participate and to influence societies in a responsible manner.

Following these rather theoretical inputs the examples of participation on local, provincial, regional, national, inter- and supranational level were not only presented but also analysed regarding their outcomes. Approaches for cooperation and networking were also presented with concrete examples of community participation in the South Mediterranean region as part of support strategies from other agencies that were discussed.

In World Café settings ideas and challenges on three specific topics – civic participation training, civic participation in HIV response, and participation of refugees – were discussed. These inputs served as models of practice and as examples for challenges faced fostering peer learning and exchange on good practices.

This dynamic was strengthened with a field visit to the University of Jordan where three participation projects supported by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) were presented. The first project focused on awareness-raising regarding the challenges of centralisation and decentralisation for democratic methods. The second project aimed at promoting more participation of students in their local communities by making some hours of community work an integral part of university education. The third project addressed the institutional discrimination of homeless children or orphans via their national ID-number.

In the next session models of different structures to foster participation in various areas like school, university and work were presented and reflected their impact on the educational institutions, companies and the society as a whole. Also campaigns and projects focusing on public awareness raising and virtual participation rather than on information were presented and their potential effect on an increased interest to participate was discussed.

The following workshops on the further development of three out of the four proposals of the Malta seminar (see earlier) addressed a) the potential structure of an Arab youth platform / Arab youth coalition, b) the further opportunities and possibilities for the Mediterranean university youth and global citizenship and c) the ideas for an Arab / South Mediterranean youth training and capacity building centre. The fourth theme, d) the development of a researchers network, was not addressed in a single workshop, since only participants from Europe were interested in discussing this topic. Hence, the issue of a network of researchers was rather tackled in the workshop focusing on the Mediterranean university and linked to the needed resources for the training / capacity building centre.

- a) The debate on the structure of a platform for Arab youth NGOs has proven to be one of the most challenging tasks in further development: the integration of existing structures in a new model. However the structure will look like, it should on the one hand side focus on networking by outreaching and integrating as many youth NGOs as possible and on the other hand collect research and evidence for information provision. The objectives of this structure should be advocacy for young people and their rights as well as capacity building for youth leaders and volunteers in youth NGOs. One of the main problems for the (new) platform is closely connected to one of the main challenges in the region: the multi-dimensional issue of identity

construction of people, of organisations and of networks; by now a common understanding is still work in progress.

- b) After having organised two editions of the Mediterranean university youth and global citizenship (2012 and 2013 in Hammamet, Tunisia) the further development should focus on the creation of a resource centre for youth development where stakeholders from different fields in society meet and work on different youth related topics, which are bound to the realities of the participating countries, but still have a common time together and the chance to meet with experts from other areas. A university like this might be held in close connection – maybe even locally connected – to the below mentioned South-Med youth training and capacity building centre.
- c) The South-Mediterranean youth training and capacity building centre should be located in an Arab country and provide room and opportunities for youth NGOs and other organisations of civil society to meet and build capacities. Such a centre needs a legislative basis, political support and clear budget provided by public funding and donations. It should also be developed based on a clear and common understanding of concepts and realities of youth and youth work, among others. Therefore definite agreements and clear commitments for the centre between the involved states and partner institutions are needed before the centre is set up. If it stands alone or should be connected to an existing structure is not yet defined. The next steps could be the set up of a smaller expert group developing a detailed work plan to which the involved partner states and institutions can agree.

Especially the work in the three groups proved that the seminar had a strong impact on future cooperation and potential activities. New ideas were developed, work steps became more detailed and tasks were divided. The meeting highlighted similar approaches, common values and aims without neglecting existing differences but rather setting them as the framework for further steps. In the closing of the seminar it was once more pointed out that funding for projects is available and that the drive should not be lost. Networks will be developed on personal and professional basis which might and will lead to sustainable institutional connections.

Author: Manfred Zehntner, in cooperation with EU-COE youth partnership