

## **Informal Meeting of Youth Ministers and Youth Event 29 – 31 March 2006**

### **Background note and proposed questions for the discussion of Ministers 30 March 2006, 10:00 – 1:00 a.m. Bad Ischl, Austria**

#### **I - Introduction**

Within the framework of the open method of coordination and as a follow up of the common objectives for participation by and information for young people, the Commission will present a Communication that takes stock of Members States reports as to how the common objectives for the above priorities have been implemented in their countries as well as of recommendations made by young people at the “Youth takes the floor” event in Brussels during European Youth week last December not forgetting the stress laid by the European Council on young people’s participation for ensuring the success of the European Youth Pact.

The informal Ministerial meeting scheduled under Austrian Presidency on 30 March 2006 constitutes a valuable opportunity for Youth Ministers to exchange views in an informal setting about the main topics to be developed in the proposed Communication and provide estimable input for the aforesaid Communication.

#### **II - Background for discussion**

##### **A – Information of young people**

In general terms progress has been made to improve access for young people to information enabling them to increase their participation in society and facilitate the realisation of their potential as active, responsible citizens.

However youth information often remains related to employment, education guidance and health. Further progress could thus be made on better informing young people about participation in democratic life. This is particularly true when it comes to informing young people about participation in democratic life in Europe as developed in point C hereunder.

##### **B - Participation of young people in democratic life**

The main purpose of youth policies in Europe is to develop active citizenship of young people and ensure their full integration in society. This by nature implies actively involving young people in democratic life.



Progress has been made in so far as youth participation is concerned, especially as to young people's participation in civic life (participatory structures, projects...) and in the system of representative democracy (elections, representative structures...).

Steps have also been taken to develop spaces for discussion between policy makers and young people at various levels (national regional and local). These have generally proved effective in terms of increased participation of young people, particularly at local level. This is why more and better organised opportunities should be given to young people to debate and dialogue with policy makers on issues that have a direct impact on their daily lives. Such spaces for dialogue are but another opportunity for all young people – members of representative or participatory structures or not - to play an active part in democratic life.

### **C – Actively taking part in policy shaping debates on Europe**

Recent events such as the rejection of the Constitution in certain Member States by a large number of young people illustrate that developing opportunities for young people to dialogue with policy makers is particularly important when it comes to discussing the European Agenda. Policies and actions discussed at the European level have indeed a growing impact on young people's daily lives. Young generation's interest in European affairs should be encouraged and spaces developed for them to express their views.

The importance of better involving citizens – including the young – in the development of the European Union was recently highlighted by the Heads of State and Government at the 2005 Spring Council and by the Commission in its initiatives setting up a long term plan to reinvigorate European democracy and help the emergence of a “European public sphere, where citizens are given the information and the tools to actively participate in the decision making process and gain ownership of the European project” (sic)<sup>1</sup>;

Advantage should be taken of the impetus given by the above initiatives to set up spaces for dialogue and debate that would provide young people with the opportunity to actively participate in the development of policies that concern them.

This message was confirmed during last December's European Youth Event where young people showed determination to actively participate in shaping Europe. They clearly expressed their desire to be given regular forums to debate and make their voice heard at all levels. They called for such possibilities to debate and dialogue to be **continuous, credible and constructive**, allowing young citizens to actively participate in the elaboration and the implementation of the European agenda and thereby gain ownership of the European project.

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<sup>1</sup> *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions : « The Commission's contribution to the period of reflection and beyond : Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate », COM (2005) 494 final, p.3.*



### III – Questions for the discussion of the Ministers

1. How could information for young people go beyond the core issues of employment and training so as to cater for increased participation of young people in democratic life?  
*(Ministers could share specific initiatives taken in this area in their countries which could be identified as best practices).*
2. Can specific and formalised spaces for participation of young people, particularly at local level, increase their involvement in all relevant aspects of democratic life? How could the specific issue of young people who are not members of participatory or representative structures be better tackled?  
*(Ministers could share specific initiatives taken in this area in their countries which could be identified as best practices. The role of municipalities and schools in providing such spaces for dialogue with policy makers could also be discussed).*
3. How could continuous, credible and constructive spaces for dialogue and debate about European issues be set up – chronologically starting from the local and reaching to the European level - where young people are given the opportunity to express their opinion as to the European agenda and gain ownership of the European project?  
*(Ministers could discuss how issues on the European Agenda could be better anticipated locally and nationally in order to ensure timely, informed and active contribution of young people to policy developments in the European Union e.g. before Presidency Youth events, before European Youth Week, before reporting within OMC or Lisbon, before treaty ratification process, before European elections.....)*

