

## **Informal Meeting of Youth Ministers and Youth Event 28 to 31 March 2006 in Vienna and Bad Ischl**

### **Presidency Conclusions**

#### **Introduction**

The 2001 Commission White Paper “A new impetus for European youth” was the first milestone for a new youth policy in Europe. It called for developing the active citizenship of young people with the introduction of the open method of coordination, and for mainstreaming the youth dimension in other policies.

The European Pact for Youth adopted by the Spring European Council in March 2005 took the process another step forward. For the first time, the concerns of young people were incorporated into other policy areas, and a start was made on implementing the objectives of the European Youth Pact, primarily under the Employment Guidelines and the European Strategy for Social Inclusion.

The European Council emphasized in its spring meeting 2006 that further progress is needed regarding the implementation of the European Pact for Youth.

Against this backdrop, youth policy is of special significance in current debates on the future of Europe. The Informal Meeting of Youth Ministers in Bad Ischl from 29 to 31 March 2006 tackled the issue of reinforcing youth policy and of providing new perspectives, ways and means for it.

In application of this policy of involving youth, a concurrent Youth Event was organised from 28 to 31 March 2006, with opportunities for the delegates of both meetings, the Youth Ministers’ Meeting and the Youth Event, to get together for an exchange of views.

#### **Working Session of Youth Ministers**

In the morning session, European Youth Ministers discussed issues of information, participation in democratic life and active participation of youth at local, national and European levels. There was an exchange of views on strategies for an improved implementation of youth policy objectives under the White Paper “A new impetus for European youth”, under the European Youth Pact, and within the open method of coordination.

The Youth Ministers agreed that young people’s voices must be heard at all levels. A well-structured dialogue with all stakeholders in the youth field is a proactive way of enhancing the involvement and participation of young people. In agreement with the European Youth Pact, young people and youth organisations must be involved in European policy design in such key areas as employment, education, social inclusion and reconciliation of work and life. Active participation requires proper access to



quality information at all levels. The European Youth Portal and the national youth portals are well-suited for the provision of youth-related information.

### **Joint Working Groups of Youth Ministers and Young People**

To promote the dialogue between ministers and young people, joint working groups were formed in the afternoon to discuss the topics of “youth and jobs”, “value and significance of informal and non-formal learning” and “the future of youth in Europe”. The reports from each of these working groups were jointly presented by one minister and one young person to the final plenary session.

### **Youth and Jobs**

The ministers and young people stressed the importance of improving access to quality education and subsequent employment. There is also a need for improving the employment prospects of young people, in particular of those with fewer opportunities, to increase their social and societal inclusion. The European Youth Pact should be given more room in the National Reform Programmes for Growth and Jobs, while the Member States and the European Commission should provide regular, systematic and transparent reports on the implementation of the pact. The various instruments available at Community level, such as the structural funds, the open method of coordination and the new Youth in Action programme, should be used for implementing the European Youth Pact. Young people and youth organisations play a key role in national implementation efforts. There was general agreement that the European Youth Pact was a good tool for strengthening the horizontal links between the relevant policy fields and thus for paving the way for developing cross-sectoral youth strategies.

### **Value and Significance of informal and non-formal Learning**

The strategy of lifelong learning is based on the equal use of formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities. A system of lifelong learning has to provide ways and means for combining and comparing the great variety of learning processes. Non-formal and informal learning, however, suffers from a lack of social, economic and societal acceptance and acknowledgement. The ministers and young people agreed that youth work should enjoy greater public recognition. This means seeing the complementary character of curricular and extracurricular learning and also recognising its added social and economic value. Youth work plays a major role in civil society and in the development of key qualifications by integrating young people into society, having them participate in society and allowing them to develop tolerance. In view of Europe’s labour market situation we have to ensure greater recognition of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning experiences.

### **The Future of Youth in Europe**

Europe’s future ought to be designed by all those concerned. The Commission Communication “Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate” is an important contribution towards shaping the European Union and stepping up the debate on the European Constitution. Special room is given to the views and concerns of young



people. The Ministers and young people stressed the need to associate young people in all Plan D activities, at national and European level.

Europe needs active participation in order not to lose the confidence of its citizens, and in particular of its younger generation. However, to provide ongoing and targeted information on European policy issues to this younger generation we need specific curricula.

Under the concurrently organised Youth Event, the participating youth representatives adopted a special Youth Declaration that was welcomed by the ministers.

To continue the participatory dialogue at EU level, the Presidency has submitted a proposal for creating an informal forum composed of the current EU Presidency, the two subsequent Presidencies, the European Commission and the European Youth Forum. This informal dialogue-based forum should meet regularly, in particular before the Education, Youth and Culture Council in autumn and in spring in Brussels to promote an exchange of views and ideas between young people and the Presidency.

