

**Messages to the 8<sup>th</sup> Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth**  
**by the President of the European Youth Forum,**  
**Bettina Schwarzmayr**  
(10<sup>th</sup> of October 2008, Kiev, Ukraine)

Dear Deputy SG, dear ministers, distinguished delegates,

It is impossible to describe the development process of the Agenda 2020 in ten minutes as it lasted over almost three years and it was based on several consultations, senior officials meetings and a youth event. Henceforth I will share the 3 key elements of our work that served as the basis for all our work, the 3 elements are:

1. What can we, as youth organisations offer?
2. What are the basic requirements we have?
3. What are we asking from you?

**1. What can youth organisations offer?**

Youth organisations offer an outreach and multiplying effect and therefore play a key role in reducing the gap between where decisions are made and where they are implemented. We are engaged in opening up political processes at all levels, and making them accessible to young people. Our wish and ability is to contribute with a spirit of enquiry, new thinking and competence. While the list of problems that need to be tackled continues to grow, the willingness and enthusiasm of young people to contribute to Human Rights and pluralist Democracy remains unbroken. Investing in youth will contribute to stability and prosperity of our countries.

**2. What are the basic requirements we have?**

The basic requirement for this work is consistent spaces and support. True cooperation between Governments and youth organisations needs a reliable framework, needs programmes to support both - young people in decision-making and youth-led initiatives. If we want to make sure the concerns and challenges of young people are addressed it needs to be possible that youth organisations can meet and work with each other. Youth organisations need to be partners when policies are defined, implemented, monitored and evaluated.

In this sense the Council of Europe is a unique space as it bases its work on co-management between governments and youth organisations like no other international institutions does. This exceptional characteristic of the youth sector needs to be continuously strengthened and progressively implemented at national and regional levels.

Whilst there are many challenges the Council of Europe is facing - we believe in its importance and its strength to build better societies together with young people. Our badges when we come to the Council of Europe say expert and this is the only credible approach for emancipatory youth work.

“Participation and active citizenship are about having the rights, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support, to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society,” this is a quote from the preamble to the *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*;

This sentence spells out very clearly what our basic requirements are.

Today we have 25 young people that are included in national delegations, which is a respectable amount, but we hope that there are many more youth representatives in national delegations in 3 years time.

### **3. What are we asking from you?**

It is essential that you live up to the targets you set for the Council of Europe and for your countries in the Agenda 2020. We are committed to work with you on the implementation of the agenda 2020 from today on and we can build on a legacy of experience, knowledge and good practise as well as on fresh and innovative ideas. An Agenda that is aiming at the year 2020 must ensure that the necessary resources are guaranteed to allow its realisation. To be able to fulfil this responsibility both human and financial resources need to be in place.

For a truly effective and sustainable youth policy we need however a transversal approach to youth matters, allowing a youth perspective in all public policy spheres and we need a multi-disciplinary methods and tools to address the complexity of today's problems.

Many young people seem to be stuck in a lifetime of disadvantages; the problems faced are multiple, entrenched and often passed down across generations. To break such enduring cycles of adversity, urgent action is continuously needed, allowing people to realise their aspirations and potential. Such action implies the genuine extension of opportunities and the access to rights to the most marginalised in society, this means supporting young people as peer educators or reaching out to oppressed youth and making sure they are provided the space to speak for themselves, are listened to, and are heard.

This can, however, unfortunately not counter balance the inadequate representation of youth in parliaments or in governments. The marginalisation of many young people and the discrimination of many women, migrants, people with disabilities or those living in poverty, leads to exclusion. Racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia are still, like other forms of discrimination, not abstract but a sad and daily reality and hinder the full participation of many people living in Europe today.

We need to start a serious discussion about youth rights. Youth Rights that deal with the right to live in peace, to have decent working conditions, to have access to quality education, to grow up in a safe environment, to have a trustworthy health system or affordable housing and transport and many other issues of existential concern for young people.

Let me conclude:

- It is imperative to cooperate with youth organisations.
- It is fundamental to have reliable participation structures.
- It is indispensable that you live up to your own commitments.
- It is time to start discussing Youth Rights.

Thank you.