

Speech
Of the Chairman of the Youth Board of Cyprus
Mr Andreas Vyras
EU Youth Conference & DG Meeting

Tuesday, 11 September 2012, 12:30
Famagusta Gate, Nicosia

Dear Commissioner Vassiliou,
Honorable Minister of Education and Culture,
Dear Member of Parliament,
Dear Mayor of Nicosia,
Distinguished guests,
Dear Youth Delegates and representatives of Ministries,
Dear friends,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you in Cyprus for the EU Youth Conference and the Directors-General Meeting for Youth!

These events are organised in the frame of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Cyprus Presidency is working towards a Better Europe, on the basis of the fundamental principles and values of the European Union. This means working towards an EU which is more relevant to its citizens and to the world; a more effective Europe, contributing to sustainable growth, social cohesion and job creation through efficient and integrated policies. The ultimate goal is the achievement of an EU operating on the basis of the underlying principle of solidarity, committing itself to a better future. In this context, the Cyprus Presidency efforts are aiming towards bringing Europe closer to its citizens. All efforts are directed towards a better Europe for the younger generations.

For the second 18month cycle of the Structured Dialogue, for the period 1 July 2011-30 December 2012, the Team Presidency of Poland, Denmark and Cyprus in cooperation with the European Commission and the European Youth Forum made a common decision to implement the Structured Dialogue on the theme of *Youth Participation in Democratic Life in Europe*.

The primary aim of the EU Youth Conference is to provide a forum for joint reflection and dialogue among young people and policy makers. As such it is with great pleasure that we have with us today more than 200 Youth representatives and Directors-General for Youth, from all Member States of the European Union, candidate and EFTA countries, as well as representatives of the Cyprus Youth Council, European Youth Forum, International Non Governmental Youth Organizations, of the European Commission, Youth Partnership, Council Secretariat, Eurodesk and Eryica.

The priority of the Cyprus Presidency and the main theme of this conference and the consultations, that took place across Europe, is participation leading to social inclusion of all young people, with emphasis on the inclusion of young people with a migrant background. The topics of Participation and Social Inclusion are among the eight fields of action of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018).

Cyprus Presidency has chosen to focus on this specific topic, since the participation of youth organizations and all young people in social and democratic life, especially in decision making processes, is crucial for the creation of inclusive and democratic societies. Young people and youth organizations need to be involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of all policies, especially the ones which affect them. By taking into account the voice of young people in decision making and in the shaping of policies, more meaningful and sustainable solutions pertaining to the challenges young people face, as well as to various societal problems can be found.

It should be stressed that in Cyprus, throughout the years, the participation of youth organizations in the decision-making process has been of great importance. According to the founding Law of the Youth Board of Cyprus, most youth NGOs are members of the Advisory Body of the Youth Board and influence the youth policies. It is the policy of the Youth Board of Cyprus to support young people's active involvement in the society, the exchange of views, ideas and concerns in order to contribute to the development and implementation of policies that affect them.

Moreover, we would like to emphasize the role of Youth organizations and youth work in the establishment of democratic and inclusive societies where all young people, including young people with fewer opportunities, are supported, motivated and encouraged to become active citizens.

Cyprus has assumed the Presidency of the Council of the European Union under the burden of the economic crisis, which has affected almost every aspect of young people's lives, such as employment, education and housing. One of the consequences of the ongoing crisis is the increase of youth mobility within the EU, as well as migration from outside the EU.

It has been observed that certain circumstances and obstacles prevent these young people from participating or, in certain occasions, lead them to choosing not to participate. The successful integration of all young people, including those with a migrant background in the wider society is a pre-condition for democratic participation and social cohesion. The Cyprus Presidency has recognized that there is an urgent need to strengthen policies that enhance the participation and lead to social inclusion of young people with migrant background. To this end, young people from all Member States were invited to identify these barriers, discuss with the policy-makers and provide concrete proposals to feed into future European Youth policies. The ultimate goal is to achieve social inclusion, through the active participation of young people.

It is of utmost importance to note that the EU Youth Conference is organized together with the Meeting of the Directors General for Youth, in order to provide an opportunity for dialogue between young people and officials/decision-makers. Both groups (youth delegates and DGs) will have the opportunity to exchange views and opinions on the themes of the conference namely: information, Education and Language, Attitudes, Equal Opportunities, Support mechanisms and tools, participation and youth organisations.

The joint recommendations for policy actions to be adopted at the end of the conference will contribute to the Council Conclusions on youth participation and social inclusion with emphasis on young people with a migrant background.

Additionally, they will provide input to the Council Resolution on the second cycle of Structured Dialogue process on youth participation in democratic life in Europe. Both documents will be adopted by the Council of Ministers for Youth in November 2012.

To conclude, I would like to express our commitment to work towards a Better Europe; where young people will have their voice heard and the power to influence the youth policies at national and European level. On the basis of the fundamental principles and values of the European Union, the ultimate goal is to achieve the inclusion of all young people, regardless of their background, through their participation and active engagement in civic life.