

Speech
Of the Minister of Education and Culture
Mr George Demosthenous
EU Youth Conference

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

Dear Commissioner Vassileiou,
Distinguished guests,
Dear Youth Delegates and representatives of Ministries,
Dear friends,

It is with great pleasure that I am here today to address you at the opening of the EU Youth Conference, taking place in the framework of the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union. To all the participants who have come from abroad, I extend a very warm welcome to Cyprus.

First of all I would like to thank all those who have paved the way, which has let us here today:

The stakeholders involved in the European Steering Committee for the Structured Dialogue: the European Youth Forum, the European Commission and our trio partners Poland and Denmark.

The National Working Groups in all of the EU countries and the International Non Governmental Organisations whose commitment has facilitated the participation of thousands of young people across Europe in the consultations.

The Cyprus Youth Council, which had a leading role in the work of the Cypriot National Working group.

Finally, the Youth Board of Cyprus, which has steered the process on political and organizational level and has taken all appropriate initiatives to make this Youth Conference a reality.

The Youth Conference is indeed a unique event. It creates a valuable forum for discussion and reflection on youth policy in Europe, involving all key stakeholders in the youth sector. It uses a bottom up approach in policy formation, through which dialogue between young people and policy makers is supported and synergies between governmental and non-governmental organisations are enhanced. At the same time, being an integral part of the Structured Dialogue process, the EU Youth Conference, has the potential to take stock of the opinions of thousands of young people who are not physically present in it; thus making each time an ascending number of young people voices heard.

You, the youth delegates and the representatives of the Ministries, shall take the compilation of national consultations as a starting point and work together to reach your joint recommendations. While the process to reach these recommendations has a value of its own, it is also crucial to see these results having a direct impact on youth policies and practices on a European and national level.

We, as Cypriot Presidency, are committed to take these recommendations seriously under account, for the formation of the relevant Council Conclusions to be adopted by the Council of Ministers in November, namely the “Council Conclusions on the participation and social inclusion of young people with a migrant background”. Furthermore, the results of this phase of the Structured Dialogue will be highlighted in a Council Resolution overviewing this 18th month cycle of the Structured Dialogue.

At the same time, I would encourage you to take the opportunities given by the process of the structured dialogue and the Youth Conferences to network, to exchange good practices and gather ideas, which can be implemented through your initiative at a local and national level.

Dear Friends,

The Cyprus Presidency has youth in general and youth participation in particular at the heart of its priorities. Our overall priority is to work **Towards a Better Europe**; meaning a European Union 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; a European Union working on the basis of the underlying principle of **solidarity**, committing itself to a better future. All efforts will be directed to bequeath a better Europe to the younger generations.

At this particular socioeconomic context where Europe is faced with a serious economic and fiscal crisis young people has been negatively affected the most. We believe that all necessary reforms should be based on the fundamental principles, upon which Europe was founded. Solidarity is one of these main principles that should guide our choices and our actions: solidarity between the people of Europe, solidarity between the organs of the EU and the citizens, solidarity between the EU and its neighboring countries. Most importantly solidarity should be demonstrated towards the most vulnerable groups in our societies. Our priority for the support of the participation of young people with migrant background is a concrete way to transform this intention into political action.

Dear friends

We are sitting in the alley of one of the most historical sites of the old city of Nicosia: the Famagusta Gate. It is a gate which opened to welcome thousands of people for hundreds of years. It is also a gate which closed to exclude the unwanted. Gates in sense signify a limit which, according to its functioning, can include or exclude. We can all look back and see “the gates”, real or

virtual, which have made us who we are on a personal, communal, national, European level. We can also see the political decisions and actions, which lead to the closing or the opening of “the gates” along with the consequences that those actions had. It takes political wisdom and courage to handle “the gates”; to reflect upon the policies and practices which include or exclude and make conscious decisions that will lead to a better Europe and a better world.

Seeking ways towards a better Europe is a challenging effort which demands vision, creativity and determination. I am convinced that young people and youth organisations, have a lot to contribute in this effort. The city has opened its gates to welcome you. I invite you to keep your hearts and minds open and allow for honest and fruitful discussions to take place. We, at the policy making level, promise to have open ears for your recommendations.