

Your Europe – Your Future
Youth Summit for tomorrow's Europe
Rome 23-25 March 2007

Outcome of the national debate

Introduction

During the year 2006 two of the six topics scheduled for the Youth Summit were especially relevant in Austria: the recognition of non-formal education and youth employment. We now try to highlight the main points regarding these two fields:

Recognition of non-formal education

Unfortunately the recognition of NFE is not as developed as it could be in Austria. Besides from sustainable and sufficient funding for youth work and youth organisations we miss adequate tools that take the specifics of youth work in. We welcome the resolution that was decided during the Austrian presidency and push for concrete measures to follow it.

Youth employment

Just by looking at the figures it may seem that the situation of young people in Austria is not as severe as it is in other European countries. Nevertheless, we still face the same problems regarding employment and the labour market: the new glorified model of “Flexicurity”, which means that employers benefit from flexibility whilst employees have to care of their own job security. We see that the education system itself and the transitional periods from education system and vocational training to labour market are crucial in the question of youth employment.

In the question of youth employment in general we see some good initiatives in the programme of our new government and will lobby for the implementation of concrete measures.

Nevertheless we want to broaden our interests and the activities of our work – therefore we chose two relatively new topics for our statements – we will also participate in these working groups:

The future of the Constitutional Treaty

As pointed out by the Laeken Declaration on the Future of the European Union, it has “to resolve three basic challenges: how to bring citizens, and primarily the young, closer to the European design and the European institutions”. We believe, that in this light, the European Convention presents a huge chance to achieve this goal. But this is only possible, if this to-be constitution is not presented as a finished treaty, but if the citizens, and with them the youth, are actively involved in the process.

The European youth convention presented a step in the right direction, but it has to be seen as a process that is not over yet. The rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by some of the Member States shouldn't merely be seen as a setback, but also as a chance to improve the treaty by actively involving the citizens in the amendment of the concept.

The Austrian National Youth Council itself held some youth conventions in the process of a reform of the Austrian Constitution. Hence, it believes that it is of uttermost importance that there is a process involving a constitutional convention involving all the European citizens, including the youth. The very positive experience of the Austrian youth convention in the process of an amendment of the constitution has showed that the youth has a lot of positive inputs to provide to a constitution, and that the governments must listen to these inputs, or else there cannot be a real legitimation for such a fundamental law. The question what contents should be in the constitution should be cleared by a follow-up youth convention since it is a topic in itself that requires a lot of work.

Sustainable Development

Ever since the creation of the European Union, one of the founding principles was that it should be a Union of peace. Peace in positive terms (hence not only in the sense of absence of war) implicates sustainable development. Thus the European Union has to lead the way to sustainable development. The last years have showed us, that the need for sustainable development is bigger than ever. Sustainable development has to be seen in a broader sense and includes many aspects that all have to be faced. Many projects and aims have been set forth by the EU and the UN, such as the Millenium Development Goals, the Kyoto Protocol or the Sustainable Development Strategy, but it is important not only to follow their implementation, but be the leader, so that others can follow.

In order to do so, many key policies need to be changed. For this, we need a Europe-wide debate about sustainable development and its meanings. We have to fully understand that sustainable development is the only way to make the world a better place. We have the duty to change things, so that future generations have the opportunity to live in a world free from wars, ecological disasters and social injustice. We are now at a crossroad and the EU needs to take actions now, before it is too late, and these actions need to be binding.

These actions should include the following steps. We need fairer trade policies, so that everyone can benefit from global trade. There is a need for an environmental strategy that covers all important aspects, such as energy (production and consumption), transports, agriculture and industry. Another key issue is the promotion of fundamental rights (including the children rights), humane working conditions, equality amongst all (i.e. the fight against discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexual orientations, ethnic origin, skin colour,...), social justice and democracy. The fight against poverty (both in the EU and worldwide) and widespread diseases (especially the HIV/AIDS) also have to be a priority as these issues are important impediments to sustainable development.

It is our strong belief, that those aims not only don't harm economic growth, but that long-lasting economic growth is only possible with sustainable development.

Conclusion

We, the citizens of Europe, are now at the crossroads on the way towards the future of Europe. We have to act now, in order to seize the chances we have, to build a European Union that is based on the fundamental values of democracy, peace, and human rights. It is essential that we, the youth (as well as all the other European citizens), are included in this process, in order to give the Union, in which we will spend most of our lives, the shape we want. A European identity can only arise if we are given the chance to participate in the shaping of our European future.

The Austrian youth has proven in the past and is eager to do so again, that we want to participate actively in this process. We fully support most of the policies of the YFJ, and we are looking forward to the Youth Summit in Rome in order to continue this cooperation for the common sake of the European youth, for Our Europe - Our Future.