



European Youth Forum
Position Paper on

Implementing Common Objectives to
enhance the participation of young
people and improve information for
young people

*Adopted by the Council of Members,
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BACKGROUND

The European Youth Forum welcomes the Commission Communication on Common Objectives for participation and information of young people published on 11.04.03 and looks forward with interest to the Council's decision on how to implement policies in the areas of youth information and participation, based on ambitious Common Objectives¹.

This Commission Communication on Common Objectives will contribute to the initiation of the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC), proposed in the European Commission White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth" and developed in the Council Resolution on establishing a framework for European Co-operation in the Field of Youth.² It is based on questionnaires transmitted in July 2002 by the Commission to the Member States and the candidate countries on two of the four priorities: youth participation and information.³ The Commission Communication includes a summary of the responses to the questionnaires and proposals on the Common Objectives.

The European Youth Forum welcomes the fact that it has been recognised as a formal partner by the Commission - as put into practice in a consultation meeting on the Commission's proposals for Common Objectives in February 2003 - and on the evaluation of the method as such. In addition, the Youth Forum finds the Commission's willingness to consult the Youth Forum on the formulation and drafting of the next round of questionnaires in 2003 very positive and constructive.

The European Youth Forum would like to stress the importance of the governments' in the EU Member States and the candidate countries commitment to consult, actively engage with and seek to encourage the participation of young people and youth organisations throughout the process. In order to get an overview of how the governments consulted youth organisations in answering the questionnaires, the European Youth Forum has collected information from the NYCs on their involvement in the process and summarised the information in a synthesis report⁴. It is clear from our synthesis report that much still needs to be done, primarily by national governments, in building a real partnership and proper mechanisms at a national level to ensure the full involvement of young people and youth organisations at all stages of the process. We believe it is vital that

1 The Council of Ministers responsible for Youth will discuss the Commission Communication on Common Objectives in their meeting on 5-6 May and make a proposal in the autumn.

2 European Commission White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth.
http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/youth/publ/fl_youth_en.pdf ; Council Resolution on European Co-operation in the Field of Youth Official Journal C 168/2 of 13 July 2002:
<http://www.youthforum.org/organisation/members/briefingnotes/Council%20Resol/Council%20Resolution%20En.pdf>

3 The other two priorities identified in the Council Resolution were voluntary activities and better understanding of youth.

4 European Youth Forum Synthesis Report: National Youth Council reports on the Consultations on Questionnaires within the Open Method of Co-ordination 0108-03

shortcomings are tackled if the process is to achieve its full potential and we urge the Commission to address this fundamental issue.

As a basis for the discussion on the common objectives, the European Youth Forum adopted a policy document in its General Assembly in November 2002, outlining its guiding principles for participation and information⁵. This position paper is a contribution to the Council discussion on the Commission Communication on Common Objectives. It draws both on that policy document and the indications given by the Commission in the consultation on 20 February, where the first ideas for Common Objectives were presented by representatives from the Commission, to highlight the issues that are important for the implementation of Common Objectives to enhance the participation of young people and improve information for young people. The position paper focuses on the elements that the European Youth Forum would like to see adopted by the Council as Common Objectives in order to ensure that they will make a difference to the opportunities and to the situation of young people in Europe.

PROPOSALS FOR COMMON OBJECTIVES

The European Youth Forum found the Commission consultation on the proposed Communication for Common Objectives in the field of participation and information of young people very constructive and we strongly hope that the issues raised by our members at the consultation, some of which were included in the Communication, and outlined below will inform the debate in the Council. Furthermore, we believe that strong and clear measures will be necessary to achieve the proposed objectives.

The European Youth Forum, while recognising many of the positive proposals in the Commission Communication, feels that it is necessary to emphasise the following points concerning youth participation and youth information. We thereby reiterate our call for the Council to adopt the ambitious and far-reaching Common Objectives complemented by strong and concrete measures to achieve these objectives in order to fully assess the development of youth policy in Europe. Moreover, we ask the Member States to efficiently and effectively implement and monitor these measures at the national level and to actively involve young people and youth structures in this work. It is of the utmost importance that adequate financial resources are allocated to this process.

1. Participation

The European Youth Forum welcomes the overall objective to encourage young people as active citizens and to reinforce their active participation in democratic life. We also concur with the importance of the three sub-

⁵ European Youth Forum Policy Paper on Guiding Principles on Common Objectives for Participation and Information 0809-02 <http://www.youthforumorg.ae.psiweb.com/publications/reports/0809-02-e-FINAL.pdf>

objectives identified by the Commission: participation in community life, participation in representative democracy and learning to participate. However, we strongly believe that it is crucial that these sub-objectives are followed by strong and concrete measures in order to achieve the objective of increasing participation.

Participation in community life

The European Youth Forum would like the Common Objectives to **ensure that**:

- Young people are given the access to exercising the civil and political rights and duties recognised by democratic society and therefore are given the opportunity, support and tools to participate in community life, particularly at a local level⁶ level where they have the greatest possibility to influence decisions and actions that affect them in their daily lives.
- Obstacles to young people's participation are identified and cross-sectoral plans and actions to overcome those obstacles are developed so as to promote equal opportunities and sufficient social, cultural, educational and economic conditions are provided to facilitate participation;
- Young people are encouraged and supported to participate in decision making and activities in all aspects of their lives such as in school and formal education, in the workplace, in local community organisations and associations, in formal and political structures.
- Autonomy and independence of youth organisations is respected and that their importance in developing active citizenship is recognised by providing sufficient financial resources and other supports and by ensuring that a legal framework to support youth and other NGOs is in place.

Participation in representative democracy

The European Youth Forum would like the Common Objectives to **ensure that**:

- Youth policies are developed in co-decision with young people thereby recognising them as full citizens. In this way, the revised and soon to be adopted European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life is an interesting and useful tool in quality standards construction;
- Policies affecting young people implemented by different administrations must be coherent and must be based on the understanding of youth as a

⁶ The draft revised "European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life" Council of Europe February 2003, provides a useful framework in outlining the principles, the policies, the instruments and institutional mechanisms necessary to support and promote the participation of young people at a local and regional level.

part of the citizenry in a specific socio-cultural situation due to their age rather than being measures just responding to problems;

- Participation is meaningful and concrete and that young people and youth organisations are involved and have influence in the development, implementation and assessment of policies in all areas of relevance to them, not only in youth policy;
- Structures and systems are put in place at European level and national level in order to ensure the proper and full implementation of the Common Objectives and that a structured dialogue between the authorities and youth structures, such as the European Youth Forum and national, regional and local youth councils, is guaranteed.
- Young people "make a difference" and have possibilities for real influence by creating assessment mechanisms, taking into account that a precondition for young people's participation is that their participation is taken seriously;
- Public bodies at all levels recognise that our democracy depends on greater participation of citizens in social movements and NGOs and that they are suitable channels for participation and that involvement in youth NGOs promotes such participation from an early age;
- Young people's possibility to fully participate in the political debate is facilitated by giving the voting right and the right to be elected at 16;
- Measures are taken so as to minimise technical and logistical obstacles and to make registration, voting procedures, etc. more accessible and youth friendly;
- Sufficient channels to participate are provided with the aim of strengthening representative democracy by drawing on models of participatory democracy, bearing in mind that participation is an ongoing social process rather than merely the provision of information and consultation.

Learning to participate and learning to promote participation

The European Youth Forum would like the Common Objectives to **ensure that:**

- Social awareness of the educational function of youth associations is promoted, taking into account that this involves overcoming current deficiencies in the dissemination of information;
- Non-formal education is supported and is recognised as a crucial element in increasing the ability of young people to participate as active citizens now and into the future;
- Citizenship education is provided and applied in all schools and that school structures are reformed in a way that allows and encourages young people to take on responsibility for decision-making in schools;

- Room is provided for co-ordination and debate between the different educational contexts in our society;
- The crucial importance of local youth councils in the process of learning to participate is recognised.
- Those working with young people and youth organisations are encouraged to develop their own learning and practises so that they can support the full participation of young people.

By including these elements, the objectives to increase participation are improved and the opportunities to learn to participate can be strengthened.

2. Information

The European Youth Forum also welcomes the overall objective to improve the information available for young people and the three sub-objectives to improve young people's access to quality information to enhance their participation and development as active citizens. Again, we would stress the importance for these sub-objectives to be followed by strong and concrete measures to achieve the result of improved information for young people.

Access to information

The European Youth Forum would like the Common Objectives to **ensure that**:

- Coherent national youth information strategies are developed;
- Member States co-ordinate their youth information strategies together with the Commission in order to create a coherent European youth information strategy;
- Systems to target information to young people are provided in order to reach specific groups, based on the principle of equal opportunities.

Quality information

The European Youth Forum would like the Common Objectives to **ensure that**:

- All information, especially that addressed to young people is free of charge for the user, user-friendly and that a code of standards is developed to ensure the quality of the information services;

Participation of young people in information

The European Youth Forum would like the Common Objectives to **ensure that**

- Capacity building measures are provided and applied in school in order to equip young people with the necessary skills to deal critically with information;
- Systems are developed for youth organisations and young people to participate in the development and implementation of youth information strategies as well as to be involved in the provision of information services and in the dissemination of information.

By including these points it will be possible to guarantee more equality in terms of access to information, ensure that young people can benefit from it and make sure that it provides accessible information of 'added value' to young people.

IMPLEMENTING AND MONITORING

While respecting and supporting the need for subsidiarity and flexibility in the implementation of the Common Objectives, the European Youth Forum is concerned that the approach and proposals outlined in the Commission Communication to implement and monitor the process are vague and open to interpretation.

The experience of young people, youth organisations and National Youth Councils to date, as demonstrated by our synthesis report, has varied widely. We welcome the approach adopted by many governments during the consultation on the questionnaires where the process was structured, clear and co-ordinated. In particular, we welcome the fact that governments not only consulted young people and youth organisations, but supported their active involvement. However, in some Member States, the process to date has been neither clear nor co-ordinated and youth organisations have not been properly consulted or have not been invited or supported to be involved.

We believe that unless these shortcomings are addressed during the next phase of implementation of the Common Objectives, it will undermine the central objective of the process to achieve greater co-ordination and greater co-operation of European Union youth policy.

In that context, the European Youth Forum believes it would be very useful if the Council of Ministers and the Commission were to develop and present models of good practice concerning the implementation of the open method of co-ordination at the national level based on the many positive examples experienced to date. The European Youth Forum would be willing to work with the Council and Commission in undertaking this task.

THE NEXT STEPS

The European Youth Forum looks forward to working with the Council and the Commission in developing and implementing a fully-fledged open method of co-ordination in the youth field for enhancing the participation of young people and improving information for young people. It also very much looks forward to the opportunity provided by the Greek Presidency to discuss the Communication at the Youth Event in Rethymno from 21-24 June. The European Youth Forum recognises that the Communication provides the basis for the development of concrete objectives in these policy areas and seeks the commitment of the Council to ensure that the objectives translate into a tangible reality which will benefit young people throughout Europe.

Regarding the principles of implementation as written in the European Commission Communication on page 10, the European Youth Forum strongly advocates involving youth organisations in the writing of progress reports to ensure efficient and continuing youth involvement in the policy process. We feel that this inclusion of youth will strengthen the implementation of the Common Objectives itself.