

Dear Friends,

The European Youth Forum is very happy to be able to welcome you to the Stakeholder Forum. These two days will be an opportunity for us to discuss and shape the three education and youth programmes that we are working with.

When preparing this Stakeholder Forum, I realised how much I am a product of two of the programmes. I come from a very small town and until I was twenty, I was expecting to be a teacher in my hometown, build a house and a family. Exactly like my family has done for the last 5 centuries.

But then I went on Erasmus and it opened up the world to me. And it opened me to the world. I got interested and later passionate about cooperating with other young people on issues that concern us.

And then I went to a Youth in Action seminar. And I knew I found my purpose in life and the like-minded young people from all over Europe that I wanted to realise this purpose with.

Both were opportunities I would not get from anywhere else. And both have allowed me to go beyond my culture, my expectations and my belief of what can be done.

In the next two days, we'll discuss how we can ensure that all Europeans, young and less young, have such opportunities. As a first input to the discussion, the European Youth Forum would like to share some points for reflection. Key issues that we believe have to form the core of the debate on the new generation of Programmes.

The main challenge is to have a clear vision on education when designing the programme and not to fall in the trap of just seeing it as financing instrument. The European Youth Forum believes that we have to keep seeing education as a holistic process where all educational fields are interdependent. Education is from cradle to grave, but also learning from friends, media, in organisations as well as in class. It is about developing as a person, how to deal with challenges in life. It is preparing ourselves for jobs that do not exist in which we will use technology that has not been invented yet. It is developing as an individual but within a society. Education needs to prepare people for living together, for dealing with diversity and finding the commonalities to build neighbourly relations on as well as states. This vision on education should be the life breath of the programmes. The programme should be about new skills for new jobs, new ways of participation for a new European democracy and about new ways to find one's place in life.

This vision we can only implement if we deal with several challenges and make full use of the opportunities that we have.

Mobility is such a key opportunity and this was recognised by president Barosso when he made the pledge that by 2020 all young people must have the possibility to spend a part of their educational pathway in other Member States. This is a pledge that must be realised by all, both on national and European level. However the European Commission should lead this by example and make a clear choice on investing in people within the next financial perspectives.

The Lifelong Learning Programme and Youth in Action have the unique aspect on being implemented on two levels; centralised and decentralised, on national/regional and European level. Through that they contribute to the development of a European demos, a civil and political entity that goes far beyond a simple cooperation of 27 member states. The European Idea is crucial to the future of Europe and the well being of all its citizens. The programmes should not be a collection of 27 national programmes but structurally build on all levels the idea of one future for

Europeans.

As the platform representing young people in Europe, the European Youth Forum has always been very involved in the youth programmes, in both design and implementation. When I saw this week the draft report on the interim evaluation of Youth in Action, I saw success. I saw a programme receiving good marks, not for how nicely it communicates or how much it is in the news but for the effect it has on the lives of young people. The chances it gives to young people that are life changing, that are not offered somewhere else.

Unfortunately only a minority of young people can take part and currently demand on centralised level is three times more than the budget allows.

The European Youth Forum believes Youth in Action is crucial to young people and will work with the European Commission to let the programme evolve to one that gets top marks, one that all young people can take part in.

The future Youth in Action programme will contribute to Youth on the Move and EU2020 and it should even more strongly than the current one. It needs to do that by complementing the other EU programmes, Structural funds, Progress, LLP, etc, and not by doing the same as them.

YIA is a programme about participation and complements labour market measures and a better formal education. The current youth employment crisis is not only a crisis of the labour market or of education but foremost a crisis caused by a lack of participation of young people. The European Union has been given a duty in the new Lisbon Treaty. It got the new competence to encourage the democratic participation of young people. Youth in Action will be the way to fulfil this duty.

But YIA as a programme on participation has more outcomes than participation, it gives young people the chance to learn, in a non-formal manner, various competences that are of increasing importance to employers: intercultural skills, teamwork, sense of initiative and responsibility for others, etc. These are acquired exactly because the activities and the learning process is youth driven, because young people can organise youth exchanges on animal rights, on climate change, on issues they care about. And because they cannot do these things in school. It is precisely because it allows young people to design education that it is successful. YIA should therefore not change neither its aim nor its method but ensure that all the learning outcomes are properly recognised. Youthpass is a good start but it needs to be taken further and be fully integrated in Europass and in the European Skills Passport. Learning should be equally valued regardless of where it was done.

We are all here together because we believe, and the European Commission believes, in Stakeholder cooperation. It is very good that we have the chance to have a yearly stakeholder forum but it is not enough. This stakeholder forum should not be the end of the consultation but just the beginning of the structural involvement of education stakeholders. The youth field has been, under Director Mairesse, a pioneer in stakeholder involvement by developing the Structured Dialogue. Maybe our Stakeholder Forum can be the start of the Structured Dialogue in Education?

But we, stakeholders are not just beneficiaries and are not just involved because we have interesting opinions. The LLP, YIA and Erasmus Mundus are not the programmes of the European Commission; they are not a joint programme of Member States. It is our programme! We implement it; it is us who learn through it, it is us who pay for it through taxes and co-financing. And it is us who are responsible to build a new programme by helping the Commission with the design but equally importantly by making all our national governments and the members of the European Parliament fully aware of the importance of our programmes. By making them

understand the need to invest in education and participation and the important results it yields.

The European Youth Forum does not take the programmes for granted. We will earn them! Today the fundamentals of the new programmes are laid. It is up to us in the next two years to reflect, discuss, and build! But this we can only do if we work together, in a LLL society all education providers depend on the quality of other providers. For the LLP, we will all build and design different rooms of the house but we have make sure they all fit under the roof and that the doors are in the right place to connect the different rooms. In our work on the new generation of programmes we all depend on the common effort we make to convince decision makers of the need for it. So let's start to work today for a great programme tomorrow!