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Subject : Reflection paper on the future perspectives for European youth policy
Exchange of views

Delegations will find attached the above reflection paper as a basis for the exchange of views to be conducted in Council on 16 February 2007.

Reflection paper on the future perspectives for European youth policy***Questions for the Council meeting on 16 February 2007*****A – Background**

1. The European Pact for Youth, adopted by the European Council in March 2005, and the Commission Communication of 30 May 2005 on *Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe – implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active Citizenship*¹, form an essential basis for the development of youth policies in Europe and for further initiatives over the next ten years.

2. The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) adopted as a follow-up to the European Commission's White Paper *A New Impetus for European Youth* provides a reliable framework for European cooperation in the field of youth. It was most recently strengthened by the Council Resolution on promoting young people's active European citizenship, adopted on 14 November 2006² as a follow-up to the Commission Communication of 20 July 2006³.

¹ Doc. 9679/05

² Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on implementing the common objectives for participation by and information for young people in view of promoting their active European citizenship (OJ C 297/6, 7.12.2006)

³ Communication from the Commission to the Council on European policies concerning youth participation and information: *"Follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth: Implementing the common objectives for participation by and information for young people in view of promoting their active European citizenship"* (COM (2006) 417 final.

3. The general framework for European cooperation in the youth field, which was established in 2002 and in which the Open Method of Coordination was introduced, will be evaluated in 2009 in accordance with a Council request issued in 2005¹. In preparation for this forthcoming evaluation, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia propose to initiate within the Council a reflection process on the future perspectives for youth policies in Europe. They recall the debate held among youth Directors General and initiated by the European Commission on a 10-year perspective for European youth policies, and suggest that the Council should actively involve itself in that debate and provide political guidance at an early stage.
4. This paper, and the debate it wishes to initiate within Council, will more particularly focus on the 18 months to come and consider how the existing framework of European cooperation in the youth field can be strengthened, especially insofar as issues relating to the European Pact for Youth are concerned.
5. This debate initiated under German Presidency is expected to pave the way for Council conclusions in May. This debate will also be followed up under the subsequent Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies. The next Presidency team is invited to deepen the discussion so as to enable the Commission, on the basis of those discussions, to conduct its own reflection process, the structured dialogue and the 2009 evaluation of the framework for European cooperation in the youth field, as well as to draw conclusions and make proposals for continued cooperation beyond 2009.

¹ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on addressing the concerns of young people in Europe – implementing the European Pact for youth and promoting active citizenship (OJ C 292/5, 24.11.2005).

B – Youth policies over the next 18-month period

6. Germany, Portugal and Slovenia suggest using the new concept of the “team presidency” to achieve greater coherence, consistency, efficiency and visibility in the development of European Youth policies and in the work of the (Youth) Council, in particular by interrelating existing processes more extensively. In doing so, the following guiding principles should be borne in mind:
- a) A cross-sectoral approach in the field of youth is crucial to ensuring a specific political focus on the future perspectives and options for young people, in line with the European objectives of economic growth and social cohesion in a community of values. Youth policies are therefore a core element within the framework of the renewed Lisbon strategy.
 - b) Youth policies actively advocate the need to take account of the youth dimension in all relevant sectoral policies. To support this strategy, youth policies should be developed in cooperation with the relevant partners, which includes actively involving civil society. In this context, network-building is of great value.
 - c) Youth policies promote young people's participation in discussions and in decision-making processes affecting their daily lives. In this constant structured dialogue with young people, it is also particularly important directly to address and consult disadvantaged young people.
 - d) Youth policies follow a preventative approach, which can thus comprehensively contribute to all policies that have an impact on young people's circumstances.
 - e) Youth policies are primarily effective at the local level. It is therefore appropriate that the responsibility for steering such policies should be placed as closely as possible at the local level. European cooperation could be strengthened in a cross-border exchange of local knowledge, experience and practice. The European Union offers a valuable framework for mutual advice and support, for the creation of “study partnerships” and for consensus-based agreement on common objectives in the interests of young people.

7. Cooperation within a team presidency, its collaboration with the following team from an early stage, as well as continuous coordination with the European Commission, need to be established as the Council's key instruments for promoting the efficiency, visibility and coherence of youth policies in Europe.
8. In this context, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia have tabled a joint team programme to mark the beginning of a medium-term planning perspective. They have agreed jointly to propose the 'Social and Professional Integration of Young People' as the central theme for the (Youth) Council over the next 18 months, thus singling out one of the lines of action suggested in the European Pact for Youth.
9. The European Pact for Youth represents a horizontal policy for the benefit of young people, their active citizenship and autonomy. Within its lines of action, policies for social and professional integration, for a better quality of life, for better learning, education and training, and for the reconciliation of professional and private life should be shaped in a holistic way, taking the entire spectrum of young people's needs into consideration. The period of youth should not be regarded simply as a preparation for adulthood, but as a self-contained stage of life, during which young people are able to develop their own experiences and learn for themselves. In order to enforce these youth-policy aspects, European Ministers for Youth and other youth policy stakeholders should play a decisive role in further implementing the Pact for Youth.
10. As a result of the increasing significance of European experiences (languages, intercultural skills, periods spent abroad) with respect to employment opportunities and employment quality, a European youth policy should aim to ensure that particularly those young people who are threatened or affected by social exclusion – for regional, social, demographic, ethnic or health reasons – gain greater benefit from Europe. European cooperation in the field of youth and its priorities make it possible to create new perspectives, including for young people with fewer opportunities.

11. Each presidency will set its own priorities within the joint guiding theme, while endeavouring to ensure that these priorities are interacting and are perceived as part of a joint course of action:
- a) Germany – also bearing in mind the ‘European Year of Equal Opportunities for All’ – will make good starting conditions for all young people a central theme. 'Equal opportunities and social participation for all young people will be the main subject of a Council resolution and will also be the central theme of the German Presidency's youth event. Attention will be paid to young people who are disadvantaged as a result of their socio-economic circumstances. The aim is to implement the European Pact for Youth not only at European and national level, but also at local level, by means of more intensive and consistent cross-sectoral measures.
 - b) Portugal will tackle social and professional integration via the recognition of voluntary activities, as a way of reinforcing social and professional skills and improving the individual and collective performances of younger citizens. Furthermore, mobilising and training young people for self-employment and youth entrepreneurship, as an alternative to youth unemployment, will contribute towards the implementation of the European Pact for Youth at local and national level.
 - c) Slovenia – also in the context of the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue – will continue to promote the integration of young people, focusing on their equal opportunities to live and work in an open multi-cultural environment. With a view to fostering diversity and multicultural dialogue, Slovenia will raise awareness that it is important to foster different cultural identities and their co-existence. To achieve this, efforts will be made to engage young people, including new minorities, in intercultural dialogue on a daily basis, by highlighting good practice that can enrich the co-existence and improve the quality of life of young people in their social and economic environments.

C – Future perspectives for youth policies in Europe

12. By pro-actively using the opportunities of mid-term planning in the context of the “Team Presidency”, cooperation, coherence, efficiency and visibility in the development of European Youth policies can all be systematically strengthened. The (Youth) Council should, in close cooperation with the European Commission, play a central role in shaping horizontal policies, in the interests of young people. To this end, the following approaches could, amongst others, be considered:
- a) Strengthening the coherence of youth policy cooperation in Europe, by considering the individual lines of action set out in the European Pact for Youth as priorities for the future team presidencies and for the Council;
 - b) Within the framework for European cooperation in the youth field, developing sustainable measures for exchange among Member States, involving the local level and the local implementation strategies they use for the European Pact for Youth, as well as promoting cross-sectoral networking processes;
 - c) Emphasising the active participation of the (Youth) Council and youth policy stakeholders in all political discussions and decision-making processes on issues relating to the living conditions of young people (“joint consultation”);
 - d) Monitoring the living conditions of young people in Europe, for instance by means of a regular European youth report and youth-specific statistics;
 - e) Providing for a youth-specific assessment by the Commission of national reform programmes in the context of the Lisbon strategy and of the national reports on strategies for social protection and social inclusion;

- f) Strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness of the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field, by emphasising issues relating to the implementation of the European Pact for Youth within the OMC (for instance, how do voluntary activities contribute to the social and professional integration of young people?)

13. Germany, Portugal and Slovenia all consider it advisable to progressively extend the "thematic" range of issues for discussion in the area of youth over the next few years such as:

- a) children's wellbeing;
- b) health and education through sport;
- c) skills, recognition of skills, equal opportunities;
- d) growing up in structurally weak regions;
- e) transitions into the labour market (apprenticeships, entrepreneurship, youth welfare security (flexi-security), mobility and the balance between professional and private life);
- f) young people's contribution to society: active citizenship and youth culture;
- g) promotion of mutual understanding in multicultural societies;
- h) demography and inter-generational relationships.

This goes hand in hand with strengthening the coherence of cooperation on youth issues, using approaches such as those outlined in point 12 above.

14. During the 18-month team presidency, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia will endeavour to use the meetings of the (Youth) Council to structure the reflection process. As stated in point 5 above, the discussion on this paper and the two questions proposed below should help to prepare Council conclusions in May 2007 and pave the way for further discussions which will feed into the 2009 evaluation process and help to develop future perspectives.

Questions for guidance:

- a) **Within the framework for European cooperation in the field of youth, what kind of sustainable measures could be developed to promote exchange and cooperation among Member States, including at local level, in order to provide added value for further implementation of the European Pact for Youth?**

 - b) **Which instruments ("joint consultation mechanisms") could be useful in emphasising the need for the active participation of the (Youth) Council and youth policy stakeholders in political discussions and decision-making processes on issues relating to young people? On which issues should the development of these instruments be focused?**
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