



# Youth in dialogue?

*A report by the EU youth representatives Simon Lach, Clara Drammeh and Anna-Sophie Kloppe*

The EU Youth Conference took place in Zagreb from 9-12 March 2020. The German "delegation" consisted of 7 persons in total. For environmental reasons we decided to travel together by night train from Germany to Croatia, which of course also strengthened the team spirit. In our luggage we had with us the demands and concerns of young people from Germany on the topic "Bringing young people forward in rural areas" and all the other demands we collected in Germany in the 7th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue.

As the EU Youth Conference in Croatia marked the end of the 7th EU Youth Dialogue cycle, the entire seventh cycle was summarised in retrospect. Thus, in addition to the current Youth Goal #6 "Advancing Youth in Rural Areas", the other two Youth Goals #7 "Good Work for All" and #8 "Good Learning" were also discussed. However, no new approaches were discussed that had not already been formulated as demands in the Youth Goals (European Youth Goals). The demands of the Youth Goals #7 and #8 had already been discussed at the previous EU Youth Conferences in Romania and Finland.

## Who was present?

Due to the corona virus, many political decision makers of the European Union unfortunately cancelled, so that no dialogue between EU youth representatives\* and them could take place. However, Vesna Bedekovic, the youth minister from Croatia and Marko Boko from the European Parliament's liaison office in Croatia were present. Staff members from youth ministries of other EU Member States were also present. The German Youth Ministry was represented by Mrs Kadatz, Mrs Fischer and Mr Fincke-Timpe from the European and International Youth Policy Unit.

During the breaks we had the opportunity to talk to the representatives of the German ministry and explain our points of view. For example, we called for the EU youth dialogue in Germany to be strengthened because it is a good instrument for youth participation. In view of the planned EU Youth Conference in Germany, we demanded that there should be more genuine exchange and discussion between young people and politicians. In talks with the Ministry, we also exchanged views on decision-making processes in youth policy at national level.

In addition to us EU youth representatives, representatives from the National Youth Councils and the European Youth Forum were also present. The exchange between the EU youth representatives and the National Youth Councils was productive and enriching.

## Discussions and results

The results of the 7th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue were presented by researchers and commented by Prof. Tijana Trako and Prof. PhD Howard Williamson. Over 56 000 young people participated in the 7th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue. Their demands were summarised in a report ([click here for the report](#)). We youth representatives should then use an online survey tool to collect our demands on

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the three European Youth Goals (#6, #7, #8) once again. This was unfortunately doubled, because both the European Youth Objectives are results of participation processes, and the results of the 7th cycle had already been presented.

Unfortunately, apart from two workshop phases of 1.5 hours each, which dealt with the implementation of the three European Youth Objectives and the implementation of the research results on youth in rural areas in policy making, there was hardly any time to exchange views with the other EU youth representatives in an official setting. As the facilitators of the two phases of the workshop often interfered with their own opinions, the workshops were not fruitful.

The two panel discussions of the EU Youth Conference were thematically interesting and relevant, but at the same time not adequately interpreted. In the first panel discussion it was discussed to what extent the EU youth dialogue can meet the needs of young people in rural areas. One point that was addressed, for example, also reflected hurdles that became visible in the implementation of the Youth Dialogue in Germany. The poorer the connection to rural areas, whether digital or physical infrastructure, the more difficult it is to reach young people in rural areas. The high diversity of rural areas in Europe is also challenging. The speakers agreed that it is important to adapt the Youth Dialogue and its formats to the local needs of young people in order to be able to respond to the diversity of wishes, problems and challenges. The speakers particularly praised the fact that the topic of rural areas has been given a special place in the field of youth policy by being named a priority topic of the Youth Dialogue for the last six months of the cycle.

The second panel discussion was about an overview of the development of rural areas and the challenge for youth there. We liked the second panel discussion insofar as young people discussed with scientists. The panel was male-dominated. Since more traditional family images are often present in rural areas, it would have been interesting to get more assessments also from non-male persons.

All in all, it was more likely to be an exchange of views than the desired discussions, neither between the EU youth representatives nor with the political decision-makers present. A missed opportunity!

The overall results of the EU Youth Conference could not be presented to the political decision makers. We were not informed whether the results will be forwarded to those political decision makers. Chance missed!

### **Youth Goal Lab**

Following the EU Youth Conference, a Youth Goal Lab was organised by the Croatian Youth Council, in which many EU youth representatives took part in order to look more specifically at "good practices" in implementing the European Youth Goals. The Youth Goal Lab is a partnership between the National Youth Councils of Austria, Croatia, Portugal, Germany and Cyprus for the implementation of the European Youth Goal. The "good practice" method aims at exchanging experiences on specific topics, learning from each other and ultimately benefiting from each other. Compared to the Croatian EU Youth Conference, the workshop phases and discussion rounds of this event were much more effective and good results could be collected and presented. We exchanged views on which issues are important for young people in the different Member States and how we can work together as young Europeans

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to address these issues. This starts with the actual implementation of the European Youth Goals as the results of an EU-wide participation process.



### **Demand of the EU youth representatives in Germany**

In view of the EU Youth Conference in Germany, which is being implemented by the German Federal Youth Council together with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, it would be desirable for the conference to have a similar Youth Lab structure. In this case, an up-to-date report on dialogue results and surveys and exchange and discussion formats at eye level between EU youth representatives and political decision makers, but also a more intensive exchange of "good practices" between EU youth representatives and Youth Councils would be very important.