

“Youthless politics is useless politics! – Trio Statement of the National Youth Councils of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia”

In the challenging times we are living, the European Union and its Member States cannot afford to not have a socially and politically engaged youth. However, this engagement can only be impactful and meaningful if there are the appropriate mechanisms, spaces and resources to foster it. Taking stock of the Trio Presidency of the Council of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia, the National Youth Councils of Germany (DBJR), Portugal (CNJ) and Slovenia (MSS) believe that it is an appropriate time to reinforce that young people are committed to their communities and are willing to work, together with decision-makers, on solutions that ultimately benefit society-at-large. At the same time, we believe that young people are also expecting clear and transparent mechanisms and spaces for this engagement to happen, as well as concrete outcomes.

This document aims to provide a vision, through the lenses of the Trio National Youth Councils, on the principles and practices that should guide cooperation between young people, youth organizations and decision-makers in the framework of the Trio Presidencies.

EU Youth Dialogue

The core principle and role of the EU Youth Dialogue (former Structured Dialogue) is to enable the discussion between young people and decision-makers on topics that are relevant to young people's lives and should therefore frame youth policies at national, regional and European levels. Therefore, in its essence, it is a political process with political outcomes that should impact how policies are developed. However, throughout the years, the political dimension of the EU Youth Dialogue has faded away and we have observed a lack of political commitment and a discrepancy between discussions and political outcomes, where recommendations by young people were not aligned with Council conclusions' outcomes.

The trio of the 8th cycle started the planning process determined that it will be based on Trio collaboration and synergies and that it will be a coherent 18 months-long process.

The topic of the 8th cycle is more crucial than ever, focusing on Youth Goal #9 “Space and Participation for All” under the title “Europe for YOUth - YOUth for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation”, where it is evident that youth participation shapes democracy and political landscapes. The cooperation between youth representatives and decision-makers on all levels is of utmost importance in putting EU Youth Dialogue as a meaningful political process with political and accountable outcomes, jointly owned and shared by both youth and decision-makers. Everyone involved in the process of EU Youth Dialogue needs to understand that it should not just be a consultation tool but it should be an impact tool that if possible should go outside of the Dialogue process itself but should influence different processes such as the Conference on the Future of Europe and others.

For the process to be well-coordinated, National Youth Councils must be key actors of the National Working Groups and are given the necessary financial and other support. With the current situation and the fact that digitalisation is more and more present in our lives, the EU Youth Dialogue process needs to be able to adapt to digital participation but still bear in mind that digital participation does not replace the “in person” participation.

Communicating the process of Youth Dialogue beyond just one cycle needs to be based on a communication strategy created together with young people and needs to focus on bringing the youth

dialogue to young people. As well it needs to have a clear idea on making the impact of the Dialogue more visible.

The European Youth Goals (www.youth-goals.eu) are the outcome of the 6th Cycle of the Structured Dialogue and incorporate the voices of more than 50.000 young people. They are components of the EU Youth Strategy and represent the views of young people from all over Europe. Making the European Youth Goals more visible, measurable and follow-up able is an important step towards bringing youth participation to the next level.

The first EU Youth Conference of the 8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue took place online from 2nd to 5th of October and brought together youth delegates and government representatives and representatives from European institutions from across Europe. As one result of this dialogue process, seven demands were developed and considered essential to reach the targets on the European Youth Goal 9. Young people demanded:

1. For co-decision-making processes on all levels with young people and youth organisations implemented through a rights-based approach.
2. That decision-makers should encourage and invest in dedicated processes which amplify young minority voices and ensure their direct engagement.
3. To ensure young people's access to formal decision-making by lowering the age of voting and political candidacy to 16 in all elections, while ensuring all youth have the opportunity to gain sufficient skills and motivation to participate actively and passively in elections, as well as removing all barriers to voting.
4. For a new EU Fund to set up and sustain youth spaces.
5. That the European Commission puts the creation of safe digital spaces for young people, along with the support and funding of developing digital literacy activities, as one of the top priorities in all programs along prioritizing it horizontally at European level.
6. Funds to be made available for permanent structures of participation.
7. For critical thinking to become a part of the obligatory private and public school curriculum for at least 1 hour a week from the ages 10-16 in order to fight fake news and disinformation with media and information literacy and to foster youth participation and motivation to be a part of the debate

The outcomes of the German EU Youth Conference will feed into the Council Conclusion on Youth & Democracy as foreseeably to be adopted under the German Presidency. Furthermore, the results will shape the consultation phase of the 8th EU Youth Dialogue cycle and, therefore, build the foundation of the entire cycle. The Portuguese Presidency marks the transition from youth goals to youth actions. In the Portuguese EU Youth Conference, based on the results of the qualitative consultations, representatives will propose and recommend concrete actions that contribute to the implementation of Youth Goal 9. During the Slovenian Council of the EU Presidency, we expect a Council Resolution, mainly based on the results of the entire cycle.

Being into the current Trio-Presidency for about 5 months at this point, the National Youth Councils DBJR, CNJ and MSS want to recognize and express their gratitude for the outstanding collaboration in the European Steering Group, involving the European Youth Forum, the European Commission and all three national youth ministries. This cycle is built on the principles of mutual respect and equality between partners.

Trio Presidency beyond the EU Youth Dialogue

The Governments of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia have developed a trio-programme that serves as “an 18-month agenda, which identifies issues to be addressed during their respective presidencies”¹. One of the goals of the trio-programme, which comes up in different policy areas, is to better the lives of young people. The respective key elements to achieve the goal is the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, building a climate-neutral and green Europe by implementing the European Green Deal and the efforts to overcome the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, the Conference on the Future of Europe has the potential to enable young people and European citizens to create a more democratic European Union.

Taking stock of the topic of the current cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, Youth Goal #9 “[Participation and Space for All](#)”, the National Youth Councils of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia reinforce the importance of ensuring clear mechanisms and spaces through which young people can engage and influence the decision-making processes that impact their present and their future. Youth participation should follow a cross-sectoral approach, from the local to the European level, and go beyond policy areas strictly referred to as *youth policy*.

Despite their engagement and commitment to their communities, young people face many challenges to achieve their full potential and become active citizens – which range from access to quality education, a difficult transition from education to the labour market to the opportunity to access a quality job that can grant them financial independence to afford a house or care for their mental and physical health – is critical to building their resilience and developing and maintaining social and emotional habits important for their life. In addition, empowering young people is of utmost importance in including them in the decision-making process and guaranteeing a sustainable future. Their demands and claims have to be heard. The impact of the current public health crisis is having an extraordinarily hard impact on the lives of the most vulnerable populations, including young people. “Our higher vulnerability today – from the gaps in employment and social policies to the threats of climate change – means that we have a greater stake in the future.”²

Young people are affected by decisions in politics and administration and only by ensuring the right to participation, we will move towards youth friendly societies that will progress sustainably. This can only be achieved by intergenerational commitment.

DBJR, CNJ and MSS will follow a joint advocacy approach in close cooperation throughout the ongoing Trio Presidency. These efforts will go in line with close coordination with the European Youth Forum and its efforts on the European level. This joint trio approach follows the common goal to further foster the understanding of Youth Participation as a cross-sectoral issue. It seeks to use the current Trio Presidency as a door-opener for other National Youth Councils to advocate in the above-mentioned topics in collaboration with their national governments. All of these measures will advance youth participation to become a self-evident reality in the years to come.

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¹ <https://www.eu2020.de/eu2020-en/trio-programme-germany-portugal-slovenia/2359454>

² <https://www.youthforum.org/european-youth-blueprint-recovery>, p. 20