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Outcome document – Youth workshop

Amman (Jordan) – 22 September 2018

The “youth” workshop organised in the framework the MAJALAT project on the 22 of September 2018 in Amman (Jordan) has brought together 20 young people (under 35) from 8 Mediterranean countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and France¹). This day has enabled discussions on the global strategy of the European Union for the youth of its southern Neighbourhood. On the basis of the recommendations formulated in previous forums, the participants have identified the issues that should be at the heart of the future European policies.

THE POLITICAL FRAMEWORK: THE EU AND THE SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD YOUTH

The European Union (EU) began to pay particular attention to young people in the Euro-Mediterranean region in the mid-1990s, and placed the youth dimension on its political agenda, taking into account the increasing demographic weight of young people and the important role they play in economic, social and cultural development and in the political change in their respective territories.

The Barcelona Declaration (1995) recognised the importance of youth and laid the foundations for different cooperation frameworks seeking to promote mobility, the employability of young people and the development of youth associations. Today, young people appear as a major issue in most of the strategic documents that specify the orientations of European policies towards its partner countries (the 2011 European Neighbourhood Policy, the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the European Union's Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy, the Report on the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the European Consensus on Development...).

However, while youth is considered an essential actor in socio-economic development and stabilisation in the region, it is not a real political strategy in itself. However, the European Union has developed a strategy for youth in Europe (Communication "Mobilising, connecting and empowering young people: a new European Union youth strategy", "Council conclusions

¹ We regret that visas were denied to the participants coming from Syria and Libya who were therefore absent in the workshop.

on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe").

In the first half of the 2000s, the EU started to set up and/or financially support several cooperation programmes targeting only young people. The transversal axes that are recurrent in these programmes are: vocational training, employment, culture, mobility and the fight against violence. These include the EuroMed Youth Programme, the Youth Partnership between the EU and the Council of Europe, the Anna Lindh Foundation's youth initiatives and the NET-MED Youth Programme. Other programmes on mobility, employment and training as well as the fight against violence targeting a wider (not exclusively young) public have been set up and continue to exist today: the Governance of EU projects for employability in the Mediterranean (GEMM), the Dialogue Fellows programme set up by the Civil Society Facility, MedCulture.

First observation: The lack of an ambitious global strategy for youth

Despite the fact that many EU policy documents identify the importance of the role of youth and the problems they face as a priority, there is, as of yet, no overall policy specifically aimed at young people. European policies promote a stability-sustainability-economic development approach, of which youth is a vital component. Nevertheless, Neighbourhood youth policies remain vague and the operational approach is fragmented. Thus, the means implemented to address these problems are not commensurate with the issues. Moreover, young people are very little involved in the discussions revolving around the formulation of the strategic orientations that concern them, when they exist, but are also little involved in the consultations on global political frameworks that fully concern them.

Second observation: A “programme-orientated” approach that does not allow inclusiveness

Programmes targeting young people of the Southern Neighbourhood can be an opportunity to develop new skills and establish both formal and informal networks between young people and/or institutions. However, it seems that these programmes target only a small proportion of young people and particularly the categories that are more likely to have access to some opportunities. The latter are generally young urban people coming from economically and socially advantaged backgrounds with a high education level. These programmes therefore find it difficult to include *all the young people* that may be affected by EU global policies. These programmes are also very costly. Given the difficult access to funds for youth organisations, the redistribution of funds allocated to these programmes must be considered in order to enable these organisations to conduct activities and subsist independently of the existence of these programmes. In addition, developed according to EU priorities, the latter neither consider the diversity/representativeness of the CSOs that are active in the region, nor the country's context and the real expectations of young people.

If these programmes are useful, they cannot replace real substantive policies for young people in the region.

Third observation: The model proposed by these programmes seems inappropriate to the specificities of young people and the methods of action of youth organisations in the Southern Neighbourhood

Young people tend to abandon traditional devices/structures of civil and political commitment, but they have not failed to invest new forms of activism and expression. This rejection of traditional forms of engagement is due to the current context in which young people evolve: the growing importance of art and culture as a means of advocacy, the organisation of activities promoting youth mobility, modern technologies allowing the creation of new tools for activism etc. Young people must be able to be represented, their own modalities of engagement considered, and to participate effectively in debates. Their presence should not be symbolic. The establishment of concrete spaces of dialogue between young people, the inclusion of the youth dimension in all debates, the financial support of their actions and capacity building for young people especially in terms of advocacy enable this participation.

General recommendations

The UE should:

1. Assess the impact of current European policies towards the Southern Neighbourhood (association agreements, programmes, etc.) on youth.
2. Involve young people, in their diversity, in the construction of a real EU strategy targeting youth.
3. Integrate social movements (mostly composed of young people) and informal collectives in the dialogue between civil society and the institutions and develop tools to support new forms of mobilisation.
4. Encourage the implementation of alternative means of funding for CSOs.
5. Support the strengthening of advocacy capacity of youth and youth organisations.

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

Young people are a key resource for the present and represent more than 65% of the Southern Neighbourhood's population. Yet, they are the population category that is most affected by unemployment. The economic and social problems that young people face must be placed at the heart of EU policies towards the Southern Neighbourhood. The EU's response to the employment situation essentially takes the form of a **bilateral aid**, negotiated between the EU and each State of the Southern Neighbourhood. In addition, there are two specific programmes led by the **DG Education and Culture (EAC)**: **Erasmus +** (support for university reform and mobility of students and lecturers); **Informal Education** (support to young people through short-term exchanges and volunteering activities). However, these programmes do not address the root causes of the problems.²

² See "Summary of the main recommendation of the Brussels Civil Forum, 10-12 July 2017", p. 28.

The first challenges to be met are those of **job creation in the formal sector and the promotion of decent work and social protection**. EU policies can have a negative impact on young graduates (labour market flexibility) and struggle to influence the quality of work. These challenges are exacerbated by the gap between labour laws and those that govern the private sector and the lack of the workers' knowledge of their rights (this education can be provided by unions). Young people are particularly discriminated in the labour market. Some categories of young people are doubly affected (women, people with disabilities, rural people). This largely explains the prevalence of employment in the informal economy among young people, which has serious consequences in terms of social rights (many have no employment contract, do not contribute to social security etc.). Young people are therefore particularly vulnerable to unfair practices, which are sometimes unacceptable in the labour market.

Work **opportunities in the sectors of activity for which young people of the Southern Neighbourhood have skills** must be promoted. EU policies on trade and investment in Southern Neighbourhood countries have a direct impact on the labour market, especially in the framework of the Comprehensive and Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) and bilateral trade agreements with countries of the region. These policies do not take account of the fact that they are built on the support of sectors that have no added value to develop the economy of the country in a fair way, they do not promote the employment of youth, especially graduates. Moreover, young people little invest in the setting up of new businesses that could enable them to develop their own employment. The low level of youth entrepreneurship is partly due to a generally unfavourable environment (bureaucracy often makes it difficult to start a business), lack of public services for young entrepreneurs, lack of self-esteem and skills in this field.

Lastly, the transition for school to work is difficult for young people. Although education systems are relatively well developed in the region, there is often a mismatch between the basic skills required in the labour market and the qualifications of young graduates. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is little developed in some regions, poorly adapted to the needs and often discredited by youth. Finally, **the skills and know-how that can be acquired in the context of voluntary and community work** are also little valued.

Recommendations

The UE should:

1. Focus on trade and investment policies that create work opportunities in the secondary and tertiary sectors and adapted to different training accessible to young people in the Southern Neighbourhood.
2. Support youth entrepreneurship by contributing to creating an enabling environment (funding, training, etc.).
3. Improve and develop access and provision of technical and professional training.
4. Support the development of new approaches/programmes enabling professional education systems to acquire professional skills.

5. Support the inclusion of vulnerable groups (women, people with disabilities, refugees) in the Southern Mediterranean labour markets through appropriate devices drawn from the experiences of the EU countries in cooperation with the governments southern shore countries.

While proposing regional solutions for growth, work and local collaboration on employment must be intensified taking account of the specific situation in each partner country and therefore respond to the need to adapt to local situations.

MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

EU policies on migration and mobility targeting young people focus on specific categories of people (students, workers, researchers). They support forms of mobility that meets the needs of the EU or target categories of young people who already have relatively privileged access to mobility. Despite the interest of existing programmes to facilitate North-South exchanges such as the European Voluntary Service, Erasmus+ and other programmes, the vast majority of young people in the Neighbourhood are faced with insurmountable administrative barriers and find themselves under house arrest.

Young people from the southern Mediterranean shore experience inequality in terms of mobility, which particularly crystallises around the visa issue with certainly, a strong inequality north/south but also south/south. Some categories of the population suffer from discrimination based on social criteria and geographical origin. Young people of Libyan, Syrian and Palestinian nationality are on the frontline and often struggle to move. Security policies oblige mobility candidates to prove their solvency and the stability of their situation (money placed on a bank account, employment contract, student status, family etc.) when applying for a visa in order to demonstrate their intention to return to their country of origin at the end of their stay.

If mobility is a right, it is also a significant lever for personal empowerment. Inequality in mobility has a serious impact on the confidence of young people in the ability of institutions to build just societies, and encourage many to risk of their lives using irregular migratory routes. Thousands of young people have lost their lives in recent years during their migratory journey.

Recommendations

The UE should:

1. Promote the right to equal mobility of persons and movement in the Euro-Mediterranean area by making visa procedures more flexible for all young people and by abolishing short stay visas.
2. Develop a migration policy and more inclusive programmes taking account of social disparities and geographical origin.
3. Break with the selective immigration policy to avoid brain drain.

SECURITY AND STRUGGLE AGAINST VIOLENCE

The participants of the “youth” workshop in Amman believe that EU policies on combating violence (reform of the security sector, of prevention and fight against violent extremism and of conflict prevention) are questionable. They are mainly targeted at youth and do not take account of the different forms of violence to which they are subject. **The parallel drawn between “youth and violence” and any discourse conveying the idea that young people are violent must be absolutely rejected.** This stigmatisation is all the more stressed through the “infantilisation of youth” whose role as a vector of change, of peace building and in promoting a culture of universal Human Rights, dialogue and citizenship and respect for others is underestimated. Attempts to delegitimise resistance and peaceful struggles by reducing the interest of youth in sports only in order to depoliticise them and exclude them from the political sphere, is a structural violence that only worsens the problem.

The approach to the phenomenon of radicalisation in European policies is dangerous. Radicalisation manifests itself as a phenomenon affecting only young people on the one hand and, on the other hand, policies do not take account of the complexity of the root causes behind the use of violence (for instance: the absence of Rule of Law; absence of sufficient public space devoted to the expression of youth, lack of access to decision-making and positions of power; absence of strategies and policies aimed at the real and effective empowerment of young people, outside the electoral propaganda; economic policies generating high employment rates, trivialising hate speech and normalising violence).

The perception of violence may differ according to the experience of people the local context and the specificities of societies. Violence can be directed towards people, citizens, minorities, activists, human rights defenders, etc. Everyone is called to differentiate between violence and the right to self-determination, self-defence and resistance to independence. The resistance of unarmed young Palestinians peacefully fighting for the liberation of their occupied nation cannot be described as violence. The arms industry leads to the expansion of war, blunders, violations of Human Rights and environmental destruction. The instrumentalization of migration crises by the northern shore countries to restrict the right to free movement must be avoided. **It is the political, social and cultural circumstances that define each type of violence that can be physical, moral and even symbolic/indirect.**

Recommendations

The UE should:

1. Promote its values and founding principles in the policies established and implement devices for the monitoring and assessment by civil society, for policies related to security and fight against violence.
2. Involve the youth of the Southern Neighbourhood in the formulation of EU-youth and EU-Southern Neighbourhood strategies in terms of security and fight against violence.
3. Support the new forms of expression of young people and their projects working for the promotion of peace and the prevention of violent extremism.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH³

SRH is defined as physical, mental and social well-being. It is not limited to the proper functioning of the genital and reproductive organs but also implies a free and well-informed consensual sexuality. It revolves around two levels: reproductive health (the choice or not to have children, contraceptive methods, family planning); risk reduction (prevention, screening test, STIs, HIV).

SHR is an issue that is particularly targeted at young people and seems to be little or not addressed between the EU and the CSOs of the Southern Neighbourhood. The average age of marriage in neighbouring countries is declining and the economic situation is unfavourable to young people, and unsafe sex practices are developing.

Awareness-raising is little developed in schools and universities. The realities of SHR are often denied as they are considered only for married couples.

In many Southern Neighbourhood countries, public authorities consider condoms only as a means of contraception (distributed in health centres by midwives) and not as a means of disease prevention.

The absence of global public policies on SHR has serious consequences for young people:

- At individual level: a number of unwanted pregnancies and therefore unsafe abortions with no figures available on the consequences (deaths, complications, etc.), lifelong treatment for pathologies that are not detected in time, STDs contracted outside the framework of marriage ...
- At social level: break-up of the family unit, abandoned children, isolation of people with HIV, large-scale transmission, public health costs.

Recommendations

The UE should:

1. Include the issue of SHR among priorities and provide financial support to the already engaged civil society and encourage new organisations to address this issue.
2. Put this issue on the table when negotiating bilateral agreement with Southern Neighbourhood countries with a particular emphasis on the challenge that this issue represents for young generations.

³ This theme was freely chosen by the participants of the workshop as being important for all young people.