

Macedonian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

SEE Youth Gathering, Ohrid, 10-11 September 2010

“Promoting effective youth participation in democratic and decision-making processes in South East Europe”

Ohrid Process Declaration: Youth & Decision-Making: Towards Greater Inclusion and Ownership

We, the government representatives of SEE countries responsible for youth issues, national representatives to the European Steering Committee for Youth, as well as representatives from National Youth Councils or national umbrella NGOs, gathered in Ohrid on 10-11 September 2010 to further the process and boost the efforts for greater inclusion and participation of youth in decision-making process of the SEE countries

Inspired by the overall consideration of youth as a vital actor for healthy democratic society and based on the Council of Europe's policy to empower youth to take more active involvement in policy and decision-making processes;

Drawing from and building on Recommendation 128(2003) on the revised European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe which calls for a “permanent representative structure such as a youth council, a youth parliament or a youth forum to be set up” at local and/or regional levels;

Considering Recommendation Rec (2006) 1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the role of national youth councils in youth policy development and Recommendation Rec (2006)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on citizenship and participation of young people in public life;

Taking into account Parliamentary Assembly's Recommendation 1844 of 2008, which calls, *inter alia*, the establishment of “participatory structures for youth involvement at all levels”;

Emphasizing the Council of Europe's youth policy priorities stipulated within the 2008 Kyiv Declaration, especially those associated to active citizenship, participation and social inclusion of young people;

Bearing in mind the Project No. 1 of Council of Europe's Programme of the Youth Sector (2010-2012) which refers to youth participation and democratic citizenship as Council of Europe core values;

Building on the results of the three regional seminars on youth policy development in South East Europe, organised by the partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe in the field of youth in co-operation with the SALTO Resource Centre SEE and the Governments of Serbia and Slovenia;

Are convinced that sincere and consistent inclusion of SEE youth in decision making and policy development processes of their respective countries would produce a qualitative multifaceted effect in building a better society. Granting youth ownership in policy development would allow them to have their voice heard; and thus tailor local, national, regional and European decision-making agendas. Being in position to share the decision-making arena with other relevant stakeholders represents an excellent venture in designing policies which reflect the interests of young people and address issues of broader social concern.

Are equally convinced that young people, as citizens in the towns and regions where they live, have an important role to play in the development of a democratic society and in promoting fundamental democratic principles at local level and thus *urge* local and regional authorities to implement the principles and guidelines laid down in the above mentioned revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.

Express our commitment to the concept of active and democratic citizenship and reaffirm our readiness to collectively work for increased youth participation in the socio-political and democratic processes in SEE countries at national, regional and local levels.

Reaffirm our commitment to the development of independent and pluralistic NGOs and to the development of youth work;

Support the establishment of National Youth Councils in all SEE countries, as a structural form for direct youth participation in decision making processes and in youth policy formulation and implementation, by using the co-management experience of the Council of Europe in an appropriate way, and a multi-stakeholder forum for debates related to youth policies, intended to convert this vision into reality and navigate our joint commitment.

Devote ourselves to strong regional partnerships, aware that regional challenges require regional solutions,

Take note of the idea of gradual foundation of Youth Council for SEE,

Welcome the launching of the Ohrid process which promotes principles that stimulate youth participation at local, national and regional levels.

Encourage authorities, at all levels, from SEE countries to find ways and solutions for greater youth participation in political life, emphasizing the gender perspective and intercultural dialogue and human rights education.

Commit ourselves to take into account this Declaration when tailoring our youth policies in the future.