

Launching of the MA EYS Project

Innsbruck 23 October 2009

**Address by Ulrich Bunjes,
Head of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe**

Speaking notes

Dear Vice-Rector,
dear Lynne,
dear participants and guests,

this is a memorable moment. It is not every day that somebody like me, who works for an intergovernmental organisation and co-operates primarily with youth and civil society organisations, finds himself among so many distinguished academic teachers and experts.

Youth policy, youth work and youth research are all aspects of one common challenge: how to understand and facilitate the process of growing up in our society, of growing into adulthood and finding one's place in society, of mastering and promoting intergenerational change and innovation. These three dimensions are obviously interrelated – some say they form a “magic triangle”, but this sounds perhaps too much like Harry Potter. There is nothing magic about it. And yet, in the youth field it is relatively rare that we can experience a real interaction between policy, practice and research.

Today is one of those days. We commence a project that is at the forefront of co-operation among European universities, as the Vice-Rector so eloquently underlined. At the same time it is – seen from a youth-policy perspective – among the most advanced initiatives aimed at a better understanding of youth. At a better, a truly professional and integrated training of future youth researchers, youth politicians and youth work practitioners. Aimed at a better recognition of the academic and professional competencies they acquire during their academic career.

All three areas need this boost. Youth policy and youth work practice, both of which I know better, undoubtedly need more human and material resources, they need more inspiration and expertise, they need more recognition.

However, the need for European research data on youth is also urgent. This has been underlined in the policy document which the European ministers responsible for youth affairs adopted a year ago, the “Agenda 2020” which spells out the strategic directions that youth policy should take in the next ten years. The need to base this policy on hard data, on scientific evidence, is one of the key messages of the “Agenda 2020”. Alongside initiatives to bring together youth researchers at European level, the Council of Europe, together with the European Commission in the framework of our partnership in the youth field, has started creating the infrastructure for providing an open, web-based exchange of research data. I am talking about the “European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy” (EKCYP), to which some of you are contributing regularly.

Yesterday I arrived in Innsbruck coming from Brdo near Ljubljana in Slovenia, where a group of eminent researchers and politicians looked at youth unemployment in the South-east European region. Here, youth unemployment runs high – at 30, 40, in some countries just a few kilometers from here 50 or even 60%. And these are just the official figures. And these are figures which very

often disguise even more fundamental problems of massive discrimination and marginalisation, of human suffering and despair.

How can we ever tackle successfully such a colossal problem without the joint effort of all stakeholders - policy, civil society and the academic world? How can we ever pretend making a real difference in the life of young people, if we do not pool our resources? If we do not sit together and analyse collectively and at European level what needs to be done? If we do not learn from each other? If we do not apply the most advanced methods and concepts? If we do not recruit the best human resources that we can possibly get? If we do not properly recognise the achievements of those who work for and with young people? And yes, if we do not break down the barriers which all too often still exist between policy, practice and the academic world?

This, I think, is the real value of the MA EYS project. It is one element for the construction of a more coherent, a better integrated, a more professional, a more sustainable, a more European system of youth policy, youth work and youth research.

It is therefore a great honour and pleasure for me, on behalf of the Council of Europe, to formally launch this wonderful project which hopefully will help us all to move forward.

Many thanks for your attention, and good luck for your forthcoming discussions.