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Elements provided by the Secretariat

1. *[Address. Thanks for the confidence in my ability to address the real, burning issues of youth policy in the 21st century]*
2. Allow me to start my reflections on "The Future of the Council of Europe Youth Policy: AGENDA 2020" by emphasizing two obvious facts:
 - In the European political architecture, the Council of Europe has a key responsibility for promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and for creating a Europe without dividing lines.
 - However, the Council of Europe can only exercise this responsibility if these values are shared — shared not only by governments, parliaments and the judiciary, but also by civil society and all others who together form our societies. To be effective and practical, human rights, democracy and the rule of law must permeate our political culture at international, national and local level. This is why standards need not only be set, but also implemented and monitored. Youth policy is no exception to this rule.
3. The European youth policy of the future can build on the outstanding achievements of the past. Many of these are described in detail in the "Background Document", prepared for this conference. We should perhaps specifically mention the following:
 - The two European Youth Centres, in Strasbourg and Budapest, which are the undisputed focal points of youth training in Europe today and the meeting points of committed young people and their organisations
 - The European Youth Foundation, a vital support of youth action
 - The principle of co-management and co-decision between governments and non-governmental youth organisations, successfully practised in the two youth centres and the Foundation, a unique approach to involve young people in matters that concern them
 - The two European Youth Campaigns "All different - all equal" for diversity, human rights and participation and against racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and intolerance
 - The "European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life", in its revised form adopted in 2003, as well as the numerous recommendations of the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, relating to youth matters

- The many innovative working methods made available to youth work everywhere, resulting from decades of practical experience
- The many publications resulting from youth training and research, which serve as benchmarks for the development of new approaches to youth policy
- The results of many ground-breaking symposia — for instance the symposium held in 2004 on "Europe, Youth and Globalization" — which often served as reference points for policy-making and research at national level.

3. Diversity and dialogue, dignity and democratic citizenship, social cohesion, human rights, participation — these have been the overriding topics of European youth policy in recent decades. Allow me to quote a recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which speaks of *"the growing importance of the role of youth in an ever more rapidly changing world, and the crucial importance of permanent dialogue with youth and of the effective participation of young people in political, economic and social life"*. You will be surprised to hear that this recommendation was adopted in 1970.¹ It sounds so relevant still today — almost forty years or several generations of youth workers later.

4. But is it true that nothing has changed? Certainly not. Looking more closely at the situation of young people today, one finds new constellations, new divisions, new challenges. Before going into details, let me make the case for a sustained effort to promote youth research. As a scholar of comparative education policy, as an academician not only of the Russian Academy of Education but also — among other functions — as a foreign member of the Academy of Education Sciences of Ukraine, I would forcefully argue that only through studying the social, economic and political realities, the cultural and historical traditions of dealing with specific problems of youth policy that exist in each of our countries can we advance our thinking. Research must be expanded both at the level of the Council of Europe, but also at national level. Even in Russia with its vast scientific and educational potential there are still not enough studies on youth-related issues in the field of comparative social and political science.

5. The youth policy reviews conducted under the authority of the Council of Europe in a number of countries are of course interesting in this context, precisely because they follow a comparative perspective and are based on common indicators. The Council of Europe also calls together youth researchers and publishes their results, most recently a thought-provoking reader on the "Politics of Diversity".² It seems to me, however, that even more needs to be done in a more integrated and multidisciplinary way.

6. Allow me to make one last comment before I look in detail at some of the key issues that will occupy us later in this conference and the panel discussions. It is important, on the one hand, to use the "Agenda 2020" to list what you regard as the most burning youth-related problems. I would argue, however, that it is of equal importance to have a clear view of what you regard as the precise goals of youth policy action — in other words, what we want to achieve by 2020. This is more than

¹ Recommendation 592 (1970) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, adopted on 21 January 1970

² Titley G., Lentin A. eds. 2008. *The politics of diversity in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing

increasingly difficult to obtain a decent place on the labour market, to gain independence from the parent family or from state support systems. This creates new challenges for our youth policy: ensuring civic commitment under the economic pressure of globalisation, and supporting those who are at risk of becoming the victims of globalisation.

12. Globalisation, however, also has a spatial effect. What I mean is: being young in France or Germany is not like being young in the Russian Federation, in Azerbaijan, Armenia or Albania. If we interpret the ongoing trends correctly, we will see in Europe a widening gap between high-income and low-income economies, but also between countries able to invest substantively in the young generation and countries which are not — which may not be the same thing. A European youth policy worthy of its name must be in a position to take this into account.

[Cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue]

13. The second challenge of a future-oriented youth policy is the growing cultural diversity that marks virtually all our societies. Addressing cultural diversity not with fear and rejection, but with sympathy through intercultural dialogue is indeed *“a key to Europe’s future”*, as the recently published “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue” of the Council of Europe put it.⁴

14. This has repercussions on the young generation. Young people are sometimes the first to experience diversity in daily life — at school, at the youth club, in sports, in music. They are also the best placed when it comes to learning the intercultural skills and attitudes that are necessary for ensuring *“that our diversity becomes a source of mutual enrichment”*, to quote once again the “Warsaw Declaration” of the Third Summit. The “White Paper” spells out the details of what we mean by intercultural competences, including those related to the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. Youth policy, and youth work as non-formal, self-managed education in particular, have an obvious responsibility here.

15. 2008 has been declared the “European Year of Intercultural Dialogue” by the European Union. The Council of Europe has contributed to this initiative, thus turning it partly into a pan-European affair. The purpose of the “Year of Intercultural Dialogue” is not to solve cross-cultural communication problems, but to identify viable solutions for the years ahead. In line with this objective, the proposed draft Declaration repeatedly and correctly underlines the necessity of education and the need for developing appropriate programmes and implementing their results.

16. Being an educator myself, I can only welcome this. But as a practitioner and as a professor of mathematics, I would — in the language of mathematics — say it like this: it is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition. Take as an example the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia, where I grew up from student to rector, to later become Minister. Each year, students from 130-140 countries, belonging to some 450 different ethnic communities, come to study at our university. Our experience tells us that the issues of cross-cultural communication can be solved only with an integrated programme of action. The solid experience of the Peoples’ Friendship University of

⁴ Council of Europe, 2008. *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue – “Living Together as Equals”*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. p.3

Russia shows: [Examples: in the field of social adaptation; problem-solving of foreign students “cultural shock”; experience of organizing cross-cultural communication, etc.]

17. After a speech I held in Strasbourg in March this year about the experience of the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia, it was decided to hold the final seminar on “Intercultural dialogue in the international student campus” at our University in March 2009. I invite you to come and study with us the long-term and multilateral experience of our University in addressing cross-cultural communication issues.

[Social inclusion and a discrimination-free society]

18. Globalisation and cultural diversity are interrelated, and both create comparable pressures on social cohesion. This is another underlying theme to be addressed by a future-oriented youth policy.

19. Emphasising the aim of strengthening social cohesion is in itself not a new theme for youth policy. The 7th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, in Budapest in 2005, already emphasised social cohesion and the inclusion of young people as a priority, with special emphasis on facilitating the access of young people to working life and social rights, and on youth work and policy responses to violence.⁵ Before that, six years ago, the final declaration of the 6th Conference in Thessaloniki in 2002 contained similar sections.⁶ Ten years ago, the Committee of Ministers set down as a priority “*the contribution [of youth policy] to social cohesion, especially by combating exclusion, and the prevention of phenomena specifically affecting young people*”.⁷

20. However, you will have noticed that the formulations used for this year’s conference go further and are much more specific than that. I am convinced that this is justified and necessary. After all, everywhere in Europe we now have a very clear perception of what is needed to achieve an effective social inclusion of young people — and of what the risks of a lack of cohesion are. We speak from experience when we create a link between social inclusion on the one hand, and education, non-formal learning, social and economic status, autonomy, decent living conditions, access to creative and leisure-time activities, intergenerational dialogue and solidarity on the other. Sadly enough, we seem to have become more and more aware of what is necessary in youth policy, without coming closer to our objectives yet.

21. In this context it is important to reflect about human rights and democracy, major priorities of youth policy proposed in the draft Declaration of this conference and prerequisites for social inclusion without discrimination. The Declaration spells out a number of dimensions that are important to take into account when designing the youth policy of the future: equal opportunities but also the full enjoyment of human rights and human dignity; participation; effective gender equality; a higher awareness for the environment and the international community; and easier access to information and counselling. I think it is important to place these issues into a wider perspective, as was the case at the Youth Ministers’ Conference in 2002 which demanded that “*youth policies should be anchored in universal values of pluralist democracy and*

⁵ Document MJN-7(2005)4rev

⁶ Document MJN-6(2002)4rev 1

⁷ Resolution (98)6 of the Committee of Ministers on the youth policy of the Council of Europe, adopted on 16 April 1998.

human rights and pursue objectives such as justice, respect for identities, access to one's own culture, equal opportunities, including therein men and women, and social cohesion."⁸ In a way, human rights and democracy are not just a priority — they are a precondition for youth policy. Without them, all other priorities will lose their justification and viability.

22. Allow me to also raise the issue of the social responsibility of the business community. Youth employment is a crucial aspect of social cohesion. In many countries, young people have a far higher risk of being unemployed than the rest of the population. This calls for special efforts, if drastically negative effects on young people, their long-term life-chances, their "employability" and participation are to be avoided. I feel that we need an effective "triangle" of co-operation: between youth policy structures, institutions of vocational training and employers. The social problems of young people in a market economy cannot be solved only by public entities – there is a need for a greater social responsibility of the business community. It may not be a bad idea for youth policy to lobby for a stronger social responsibility of business across Europe and to develop constructive interaction mechanisms, in order to make progress at regional, national and local levels. At the same time it is necessary to develop tools to seize the opportunities that offer themselves because of the obvious interest of the business community itself to recruit qualified and innovative young professionals, particularly in view of an ageing population in many countries in Europe.

[The role of youth organisations]

23. This immediately links up with another theme, mentioned in various parts of the draft Declaration and one of the pillars of the youth policy of the Council of Europe: the important role of civil society, and of youth organisations in particular.

24. Citizenship education, participation, non-formal learning, peer education — all these approaches need a framework that the public authorities at national and local level cannot provide alone. This point is also forcefully made in the "White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue" and in other reference texts of the Council of Europe. Only through an adequate co-operation with civil society will we be able to harness the commitment and engagement that is needed to give our democracies the necessary stability and acceptance. The European political culture depends on a vibrant civil society. In the youth field this is perhaps even more important than in other areas.

25. It is through empowering youth organisations, by putting the necessary means at their disposal and providing their leaders, activists and volunteers with the relevant skills and methods, that youth policy can make a real difference. Permit me to mention here as examples the outstanding work of the National Youth Council of Russia and of the European Youth Forum. I am convinced that the implementation of certain standards in assessing the qualifications and skills not only in the field of management of youth policies, is a step forward.

[Mainstreaming and interaction with other policy areas]

26. When it comes to improving the life chances of young people, and involving them in society, youth policy is not the only stakeholder. A future-oriented youth policy

⁸ Document MJN-6(2002)4rev1, item 2.1

must be conducted in co-operation and interaction with many other policy areas, in a mainstreaming approach.

27. One aspect is the need for progressive interaction with the educational sphere. One must bear in mind that about two thirds of the age groups between 14 and 28 years are in formal education. As a former Minister of Education of the Russian Federation, I know that without the planned interaction of educational institutions and structures responsible for youth policy, from municipal to regional and pan-European levels, we will always see gaps in the service provision — or, conversely, inefficient duplication.

28. Youth policy has to do not only with abstract challenges, but all too often with manifest behavioural problems and delinquency. There is an adage that the police has to deal with those with whom educators and youth workers didn't work well. This, I think, points towards the important preventive function of youth work, which we also need to strengthen in order to prevent many negative phenomena in the youth field. There is clearly a need not only for integrated "mainstreamed" youth work programmes at national level, implemented by various ministries and departments, but also for a smooth interaction between educational structures and structures responsible for implementation of youth policies.

29. A word on youth policy and the sports movement. Another crucial element in the implementation of youth policy is the involvement of young people in sports activities, which contributes to the harmonious development of physical identity, and has an educational and preventive function [*Examples*]. In recent years, an important area of educating young people, enhancing their civic responsibility, is the participation in volunteering movements. [*Examples from the experience of the Olympic Games in China, preparing the Olympic Games in London and Sochi; the European Sports Charter*].

30. Another parameter that youth policy needs to take into account is the media environment in which young people grow up. In my view, media pursuing their profit objectives often play a negative role in the life of young people. One example would be media contents violating moral standards, leading to problems in sexual behaviour and violence. However, we must also talk about the sensitive inter-confessional relations, which can be disturbed by provocative publications in the media. I understand the complexity of addressing these issues in democratic societies, with broad freedom of expression as a human right. However, if such developments are harmful to society, particularly through their negative impact on young people, society should raise the issue of social responsibility of the media and develop appropriate mechanisms. At the level of the youth policy of the Council of Europe, I would argue that we must not shy away from dealing with this complex issue. There is a need for adequate approaches to develop collaboration between intellectuals, educationalists, youth leaders, youth politicians and media professionals. [*Examples of possible approaches*].

31. Finally, the link between modern information and communication technologies and the implementation of youth policies has often been described. In young people's lives, internet-based technologies such as virtual community networks, forums and chats play a greater role than even a few years ago. Obviously, in the time span covered by the "Agenda 2020" these opportunities — and their impact on young

people — will increase many times. Already now, experts try to identify what the digital world in 2020 will look like.

32. This is why we cannot wait until the question "What will happen to the Google generation?" is raised by others and take action only then. On the contrary, it is necessary to do our best to anticipate such new scenarios, by commissioning the necessary studies of emerging or possible trends, but also by preparing measures for a greater use of Internet resources in working with the young generation [*Some proposals*]. One of the results of globalization and internationalization is a significant confidence of youth in international websites. Young people show an active desire to establish and maintain online contacts and discussions with their peers from many countries around the world at no or little cost. In order to determine the strategic direction of youth policy in Europe, we need to establish constructive mechanisms for a wider use of all opportunities that internet technologies can provide.

[Concluding remarks]

33. Summarising all these issues — and taking into account the many more topics dealt with in the draft resolution — we should finally ask ourselves the question: "Why an "Agenda 2020"? Why not a vision for the next three years or so, until the next youth ministers' conference? Why not an "Agenda 2050"? There are probably many different answers to this question.

34. In the latest "World Youth Report" of the United Nations,⁹ the authors criticize the many obstacles to youth development that exist in all world regions. The Report then makes this observation: "*The progress of civilization is largely determined by the extent to which each individual is given the opportunity to contribute to the development and advancement of society. The world's 1.2 billion young people...are an essential part of this process. ...young people offer unique aptitudes and perspectives that must be assimilated into the broader development paradigm and translated into effective action on the ground.*" And it states, "*Unfortunately, negative perceptions of youth, the failure to help them develop to their full potential, the inability to recognize that investing in youth benefits national development, and the consequent unwillingness and incapacity of society to fully involve young people in a meaningful way have effectively deprived the world of a resource of inestimable value. Unless a sustained effort is made to ensure that that youth are given the opportunity to contribute to the well-being of their societies, the goal of achieving of a 'society for all' ...will never be achieved.*"¹⁰ End of quote.

35. Are these words that apply only to less developed countries, not to Europe and other developed market economies? I should not think so. The UN World Youth Report itself makes this clear by acknowledging, on the one hand, that our region has made "considerable progress" in terms of youth policy over recent years. "*As a result of these factors, young people in developed market economies are particularly well-positioned to access the opportunities brought about by globalization*", the Report states. On the other hand, however, the Report also observes, "*there are still major differentials in youth development opportunities within and between the developed*

⁹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2007. *World Youth Report 2007. Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Progress and Challenges*. New York: United Nations publication (also www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr07.htm)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. xv. xxxv

market economies. There remain large numbers of young people who are unable to access the benefits of national growth and development and participate fully in society.”¹¹

36. This alone, for me, is one of the main reasons why we need an “Agenda 2020”. We need a “sustained effort”, an effort which goes beyond the short-term planning horizon that all of us are used to. At the same time an effort that remains realistic and does not become utopian. A ten-year vision seems about right.

37. *[Thanks and good wishes for the panel discussions and the success of the conference]*

¹¹ Ibid., p.201