

IDEAS FOR A BETTER CYPRUS

THE YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

In the framework of the negotiations that are currently taking place in Cyprus with regards to the Cyprus Issue, the non-governmental organization Youth for Exchange and Understanding (YEU) Cyprus has developed the project “Better Cyprus Extended” in order to shape recommendations based on young people’s opinions in relation to the Cyprus Issue and how a better Cyprus can be achieved. The project “Better Cyprus Extended” is a continuation of the project “Better Cyprus”, implemented by YEU Cyprus in the past. The age of the participants through the whole project ranged from 16 – 30 years old.

The project used the methodology of Structured Dialogue, a means of mutual communication between young people and decision-makers, whose aim is to make the voice of young people heard in the policy-shaping process within the EU and beyond. It aims to increase cooperation with civil society and to get input from young people. The Structured Dialogue methodology gathers the opinion of grassroots, using a bottom-up approach and non-formal education methods and techniques. The main purpose of the Structured Dialogue methodology is to produce policy papers with a set of recommendations which can be adopted at a later stage by (official) stakeholders.

The main action of the project was a two-day conference, which took place between the 1st – 2nd of October 2016, at the Cyprus Community Media Center (CCMC) premises close to Ledra Palace, in the UN Buffer Zone in Nicosia. The conference gathered more than 30 young people from different ethnic and religious groups and communities living in Cyprus (Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots and Maronites).

During the conference, the outcomes of the first project entitled “Better Cyprus” (which gathered more than 50 young people) were presented and further discussed with the participants, aiming to gather a comprehensive opinion from young people as well as more concrete recommendations.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this policy paper is to advocate for incorporating the recommendations of young people from different groups and communities in Cyprus concerning the Cyprus Issue, taking into consideration the peace-building efforts that are currently taking place with the leaders of the two main communities of the island, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. It also seeks to provide practical suggestions for improvements which can be introduced to shape a peaceful future in Cyprus. Specifically, it will recommend actions to be taken on the following topics:

- Education and history teaching
- Media and political misinformation
- Economy
- Participation and Pro-activeness
- Perspectives of the people
- Feeling of being Cypriot
- Communication and cooperation

The recommendations were identified and built upon by the participants during both of the projects: “Better Cyprus” and “Better Cyprus Extended”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cyprus still has a long way to go in order to establish a framework through which all groups and minorities will be treated equally, but at the same time for all the communities to understand and to cooperate with each other peacefully.

Thus, Youth for Exchange and Understanding (YEU) Cyprus, through the Erasmus+ project “Better Cyprus Extended”, proposes the following recommendations:

EDUCATION AND HISTORY TEACHING

- The Ministry of Education to launch an obligatory lesson of “Human Rights, Peace and Justice” during the next academic year 2017-2018, so young people can learn to promote their rights and become good and active citizens.
- The Ministry of Education to re-launch objective history books written by objective local and foreign historians as soon as possible, in order to decrease the hatred and promote reconciliation and peace.
- The different NGOs to introduce more non-formal education trainings, seminars, workshops and trips in different areas of Cyprus with participants from different ethnic groups and minorities, in order people from Cyprus to get to know each other.

MEDIA AND POLITICAL MISINFORMATION

- The different NGOs established in Cyprus, to advocate for a new law regarding the media. This law suggestion should propose that all the media work only by subscription of their members. The subscription should be the same for every media; this way, every person or legal entity will only be able to pay a default fee according to the service provided. Ex. X Channel to ask for a default subscription fee of 15 euros per month in order to be available on your TV. The system should be controlled by the tax control (income and expenditure).

ECONOMY

- The Ministry of Trade to give more incentives to investors to invest in Cyprus. This can be done immediately by giving funding to Small and medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) for synergies and cooperation.
- The Ministry of Labour to suggest a law to ratify the Constitution and in particular the right of employment of people from both communities in the public sector. This will open more job positions and will boost the economy of Cyprus.

PARTICIPATION AND PRO-ACTIVENESS

- The Municipalities of Cyprus to be twinned with a town from the other side (e.x. The Municipality of Paphos to be twinned with the Municipality of Kerynia).

PERSPECTIVES OF THE PEOPLE

- The Ministry of Education to make changes in the school curriculum, as soon as possible, in order to teach social and political science, arts and literature at the same amount of hours as maths, bussiness etc., in order to help the students develop a critical approach and to be more open minded about gender issues, sexual identity and orientation, fanaticism, stereotypes and labels; and be more objective.
- The state, civil society and educational institutions to develop immediately a plan to use social media in order to promote awarness in peace-building and peace-keeping processes with the aim to achieve a peaceful enviorment to live in.

FEELING OF BEING CYPRIOT

- The Ministry of Education, the Municipalities and Universities to collaborate with NGOs to organize festivals and cultural events in order to promote awareness of the common culture and bring together the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot communities. These events can take place in the Buffer Zone where both communities can come together; or in other cities and new venues, at least once a year.

- The State to renovate and/or re-build the abandoned spaces of the Buffer Zone in order to bring all Cypriots together.

COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION

- The Ministry of Education to introduce synergies between Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot universities and other academic institutions. This could be implemented by organizing meetings, seminars and conferences between academics of the same field and by cooperation on common research projects.