



Thinking Lab on Social Cohesion

Policy Brief

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Over the course of the last two years, the Berlin-based think tank Das Progressive Zentrum organised, in cooperation with numerous partner organisations, the trans-European civil society project 'DIALOGUE ON EUROPE'. Within this framework, experts and practitioners from across Europe gathered in four so-called 'Thinking Labs' to deliver fresh ideas and to independently elaborate concrete policy recommendations on four European key areas: Migration & Integration, Populism, Social Cohesion, and Sustainable Growth. The overall project has been supported by the German Federal Foreign Office.

Introduction

Who we are, our Aspirations and our main Topics

Social cohesion is one of the core objectives of the European Union, mentioned explicitly in Article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty. Naturally, social cohesion can refer to the cohesion between EU member states, or to social cohesion within European societies. Especially since the onset of the economic and financial crisis in 2008, social cohesion in Europe has come under pressure due to austerity and other political measures, including reduced spending on welfare and social policy.

“Social cohesion is an indispensable prerequisite for the continued existence of the European Union.”

Social cohesion is an indispensable prerequisite for the continued existence of the European Union. Therefore our Thinking Lab on Social Cohesion, in the framework of the pan-European civil society project DIALOGUE ON EUROPE has been engaged with one of the current main sources of discontent within the European Union: the increase in social inequality and its consequences, both on national cohesion and intra-European solidarity. The

Thinking Lab draws on the Council of Europe's (2005) definition of social cohesion, understanding it to be "society's ability to secure the long-term well-being of all its members, including equitable access to available resources, respect for human dignity with due regard for diversity, personal and collective autonomy and responsible participation".

Our Thinking Lab has aspired to identify both critical current developments and appropriate solutions to the crisis. The Lab looked into policy arrangements at the national level and incorporated international interdependencies.

Throughout the 18-month elaboration process, participants were engaged as a team of 14 young professionals from France, Portugal, Latvia, Germany, Italy and Greece, working in civil society, academia, diplomacy, the EU institutions, and the private sector. What distinguishes our group from others is its transnational composition, diversity of professional and volunteering backgrounds, as well as the direct practical experience participants have with the effects of a lack of social cohesion on certain parts of the population. This holds particularly for vulnerable groups such as migrants, asylum seekers, (young) unemployed or members of ethnic minorities.

Based on the group's practical, on-the-ground experience in six different countries, **four key areas** were agreed upon for the work of the Thinking Lab, and addressed by dedicated sub-groups:

1. Training, Skills and Opportunities: The high youth unemployment rate in many Southern EU member states poses an imminent danger to social cohesion, both in the countries concerned and across the EU. Despite excellent qualifications and education, many young people do not find adequate employment. Therefore, this sub-group elaborated two policy recommendations to enhance vocational education and the communication between stakeholders at the local level.

2. Labour Market Reform Policies: The second sub-group dealt with the question of how to decrease the alarming levels of youth unemployment in

Southern European countries. This group focused on possible improvements in the labour market and on boosting employment, especially in terms of intergenerational fairness, experience exchange and the promotion of entrepreneurship.

3. Cultural and Civic Engagement: Since social cohesion is much more than just economic factors, fostering an active local community is key to creating a sustainable sense of belonging. This sub-group focused on how the EU could promote cultural and civic engagement in disadvantaged communities and thus contribute to more exchange and mutual understanding among citizens all over the EU.

4. Minority Communities: When considering crucial factors that determine the degree of social cohesion, the inclusion and participation of various minority communities is a central element that needs to be taken into account. Unfortunately, in this respect a lot of progress still needs to be made in the EU. Persistent patterns of inequality concerning foreigners, immigrants and minority groups, especially on the European labour market, remain. This sub-group proposed measures for affirmative action to promote diversity at work and ways in which to raise awareness about the situation of minorities.

1. Training, Skills and Opportunities

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Policy Context and Problem Analysis: The Mismatch between what is taught in School and what is required for the Labour Market

The inadequacy of the education system of many EU countries has been highlighted by several international institutions – such as the European Commission, UNESCO and the World Bank – as one of the causes behind the high levels of youth unemployment in the ‘old continent’. There is a worrying lack of correspondence between what is being taught in schools and what is actually demanded by the labour market; a mismatch of skills that has been further reinforced by the economic crisis.

“There is a worrying lack of correspondence between what is taught in schools and what is actually demanded by the labour market.”

In 2012, and despite the difficult economic situation, there were around two million unfulfilled job vacancies in the European Union due to a lack of workers with the required competences in the local labour markets. Other data from the European Skills and Jobs (ESJ) survey, carried out by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in 2014 in all EU28 member states, revealed that some 29% of European employees were either over- or under-qualified, with the former increasing during the economic crisis as more people took on jobs below their qualification or skill level. According to Cedefop’s report

“Skills, qualifications and jobs in the EU: The making of a perfect match?” (2015), the overall incidence of skills mismatch in the European Union in 2014 was as high as 44%.

A possible cause for the inadequacy of the skills provided by European secondary and higher education institutions may be linked to the lack of practical experience of European students. With academic curricula strongly focused on theoretical skills, they are not offered sufficient opportunities for internships, traineeships or apprenticeships. In 2011, the *Bruges Communiqué*, issued by Cedefop, recognised vocational training as a motor for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth that provides young people with the adequate practical skills to succeed in the job market – as well as with opportunities to pursue higher-level qualifications.

Policy Recommendations: Strengthening vocational Education and Training Systems and fostering Communication between Stakeholders at the local Level

1. STRENGTHENING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS

For the very reasons mentioned above, our Thinking Lab’s recommendation is first of all to strengthen vocational education and training systems in European countries in two different ways:

a) Providing work-based opportunities integrated into the education system

Bearing in mind that the integration of vocational education or work-based learning opportunities within the education and training system is a fundamental aspect for their success, it is recommended that, by the end of secondary school, all students should have completed a relevant internship for 6 months. This period of professional experience outside the school environment would make up for a total of 800 hours and should be done either part-time during the school period or full-time during school holidays.

b) Promoting partnerships with stakeholders in designing these opportunities

In order to ensure that through these internships students will be provided with the skills and competences that are going to facilitate their transition from school into the labour market, partnerships with vocational education stakeholders shall be encouraged. Schools should work closely with other actors in the local community so as to better understand the real needs of the labour market and of 'real life' businesses. An advisory committee, comprising representatives from schools, employment services, trade unions, local businesses and parents, should be created at the municipal level to help design school curricula in such a way that the problem of skills mismatch is comprehensively addressed. If this collaboration does not take place, students risk being taught competences that are, to a certain extent, irrelevant for the labour market or might end up in professional situations that do not enable the further development of skills.

Such a scheme should initially be implemented as a pilot project in the member states most affected by high youth unemployment rates, especially in the south of the EU. The possibility to then expand the scheme and these measures to further EU countries in the event of positive results should nonetheless be kept in mind. The European Commission, in close cooperation with Cedefop, should be responsible for the supervision of the project, which includes ensuring and assuring the responsibilities, rights and obligations of those involved through a clear, previously defined regulatory framework.

2. FOSTERING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STUDENTS, GRADUATES AND BUSINESSES WITH AN INTERACTIVE EVENT FORMAT KNOWN AS 'BRIDGES 4G'

Besides the lack of practical relevance and the subsequent need for vocational education and training systems in Europe, there is also a lack of communication between relevant stakeholders which contributes to the existing difficulties of young people entering the labour market. It is a shortfall which, additionally, hinders young people pursuing other meaningful and valuable

forms of engagement, including becoming more active in civil society overall. The Thinking Lab has, therefore, come up with an event proposal – Bridges 4G – which could serve as a bridge to overcome this shortfall and as a means to, literally, bridge this gap.

The event format is designed to promote intergenerational dialogue and to provide – all over Europe but adapted to a local level – both the appropriate time and space for a high-quality skills-and-experience exchange. It is intended to be self-funded by the organising team, which can be either a public administration or a private organisation such as a company or business association – and happily in partnership with others.

The main objective of a Bridges 4G event for the organising team is threefold:

- To gain more visibility at the local level;
- To link up with with new, young talent;
- To get fresh ideas on specific problems (from the challenge)

The event would last 2-3 days and would be based on three main pillars:

1. Success stories and best practices storytelling:

Local actors (experienced professionals, entrepreneurs, public officials) share their stories, based on their accumulated experience, by delivering lectures, workshops or using any means they consider meaningful.

2. Overcoming challenges: The organising team of the event designs a competition in order to collect pioneering ideas to solve a specific issue or problem related to the umbrella theme of the event, and offers prizes for the top proposals and solutions.

3. Jobs fair: Local businesses and representatives of the public sector present themselves and highlight available job vacancies in order to bring together potential employers and employees in an informal environment.

Depending on the context the event can be adjusted to the needs of the organising team and the particular issue(s) the organisers are seeking to address. Nonetheless, the three pillars should always constitute the core elements of the whole event.

The event is, in principle, open to everyone – but the target groups are mainly the following two:

- a) all kinds of secondary school and university students, recent graduates and unemployed young people;
- b) active professionals of any sector, including public officials and entrepreneurs.

The EU should lend its support to the events, first and foremost through resources for basic logistical support. Additionally, it should be possible for the organisers to qualify for and thus use relevant EU funding (e.g. European Social Fund, Youth in Action etc.) which targets the issues Bridges 4G events seek to address: youth unemployment, skills development, long-term employability, entrepreneurship etc. Last but not least, participation in such events should serve as a communications channel between the different actors within a local community, indirectly contributing to very tangible social cohesion at the local level.

2. Labour Market and Social Policy Reform

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Policy Context and Problem Analysis: Alarming Levels of Youth Unemployment and the Necessity for a ‘Two Handed Approach’

In today’s continental Europe, young people are struggling to find employment, especially across all Southern EU member states. The economic situation in Southern European countries, with a view to both increasing national debt and stagnating GDP, is reflected in the respective labour markets. Youth unemployment has reached alarming levels there, and remains high in others too: the average youth (covering 15 to 24 year olds) unemployment rate in the EU is 23%, but in the Southern European macro region, that rate has been as high as 30% or even over 50% in Greece and Spain. These numbers are not considered as dramatic in contrast to other countries (such as the US and UK), but careful consideration also needs to be given to the so-called ‘NEETs’ (*Not in Education, Employment or Training*). In Portugal, Italy and Spain, up to 25% of the young generation that has completed higher education is currently without a job, and has not enrolled in any university course or further training, either.

“Tackling youth unemployment is vital for ensuring the sustainable economic and social future of Europe.”

Tackling such very high youth unemployment is vital for ensuring the sustainable economic and social future of Europe. By now, policy makers and academic scholars agree that the promotion of full employment requires a ‘two-handed approach’: on the one hand, governments need to improve aggregate supply of labour by introducing large-scale training and re-qualification programmes

through active labour market policies (ALMP). On the other hand, EU governments should take coordinated actions to stimulate aggregate demand. The following sub-chapter contains concrete policy recommendations which focus on the latter, as the labour market in Europe is undermined by a weak aggregate demand.

Policy Recommendations:

Establishing transgenerational Working Tandems, a ‘European Business Empowerment Scheme’, and promoting inter-generational Equity in Decision-Making

In light of the current situation of labour markets in (first and foremost Southern) Europe, a sensible increase in public investment to tackle weak aggregate demand is needed. Such a Keynesian-style stimulus can be expected to boost government-driven job creation to employ (low-skilled) young Europeans and to reduce youth unemployment. Acknowledging that there is, however, no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, three concrete policy measures are proposed to this end: intergenerational working tandems, a European Business Empowerment Scheme (EBES), and a ‘Special Ombudsman for Intergenerational Equity’.

1. WORKING TANDEMS: MATCHING THE EXPERIENCE OF OLDER EMPLOYEES WITH THE ZEST FOR ACTION OF YOUNG JOB STARTERS

This scheme facilitates the transition of young Europeans into employment, and envisions the matching of a senior employee close to retirement (63+ years old) with a 18-26 year old new entrant into the labour market. During a transition phase of up to two years (depending on the job), the tandem partners work together, enabling the young person to gradually learn from the more senior.

The company continues to pay the senior employee’s salary, and 25 percent of the new worker’s. The European Commission (EC), at the same time, funds the rest of the junior employee’s pay. It is a win-win situation – companies manage to pass on valuable expertise internally without extra costs, young people gain meaningful employment and experience, and national authorities see youth unemployment decrease, while tax incomes and social cohesion increase.

Both participants and companies apply for a pool of applicants. Companies must prove ‘good behaviour’ towards their employees in the past. The scheme is handled by national employment agencies who work to match the jobs and to manage funding. The scheme would be primarily implemented nationally by member states’ governments (who receive 50% of the funding from the EC), but also complemented by a pan-European element of the scheme by which youngsters can apply to take part in any other EU country (also financed by the EC). Regular reviews and random controls would be carried out by EU authorities to ensure quality and prevent fraud.

We suggest a trial period of three years which would help further refine the scheme, with an initial focus on regions with particularly high youth unemployment.

The key **criteria for participants** to be accepted on the programme would be:

- some sort of recognised qualification in the relevant field;
- one year or less of professional experience (including internships);
- the salary of the older participant should not be higher than the median salary in the company.

The key **criteria for companies** to be accepted into the programme:

- five or more employees;
- public or private entity;
- obligation to hire the participant for at least two years after the programme ends.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE: AN EXPERIENCED SPANISH OFFICE MANAGER NEAR RETIREMENT IS MATCHED WITH A RECENT BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION GRADUATE

Laura is an office manager with more than three decades of experience. She joined the Madrid-based chemicals producer Xylophone Industries (XI) in 2005. Since then she was able to gather valuable in-depth knowledge of the specific processes and administrative tasks related to her position. Being 61 years old, Laura recently started

to think about retiring, some time in the foreseeable future. Alex is a freshly graduated college student from a Madrid University with a major in Business Administration. He has been struggling to find a job for quite some time and, ultimately, decides to consult a case manager at his local employment agency. There Alex learns about a new EU programme called 'Work Tandems'.

The case manager consults a country-wide database with information on all companies that are participating in the programme – among them Xylophone Industries. Alex learns that XI is looking for a tandem partner for Laura, one of XI's office managers. After successfully completing a job interview, Alex signs the employment contract for a full-time position as an office manager with XI. Over the next two years, Laura and Alex work closely together. Alex has the opportunity to gradually learn from Laura and to gain significant on-the-job-experience. Laura meanwhile can pass on her experience which she accumulated during her long time at XI. Overall the company is able to preserve expertise within the company.

2. EUROPEAN BUSINESS EMPOWERMENT SCHEME (EBES)

Europe has always been – and remains to this day – a hub for great ideas. Yet small and medium enterprises (SMEs) all too often lack the practical tools to scale-up and become businesses that employ thousands of people. Encouraging this ambition will help put companies across Europe on-track to thrive. The European Business Empowerment Scheme (EBES) is an SME-orientated growth package and a plan with several measures which will collectively foster entrepreneurship in the EU, ensuring job creation. It consists of three key elements: business administration consulting, advice for funding opportunities, and administrative and legal support.

a. Business Consulting: Skills

Managers of SMEs in Europe notably lack tailored guidance to enable them to scale-up their companies. Business consulting services would help to address this. Initiators of projects selected for the EBES scheme would receive intensive courses in business administration basics and other key competences for successful company management. Teams of

expert consultants would then be formed in each EU member state via EBES agencies, with the financial support of the European Commission, lending support to these organisations an enabling them to implement the proposed projects.

b. Funding Consulting: Money

EBES teams would also assist in explaining funding opportunities available for SMEs in each member state and from the EU in an easily understandable, outcome-oriented way. In addition, SMEs would be able to receive help with writing funding proposals, receiving personalised feedback on their applications before submission to ensure higher success rates.

c. Administrative and Legal Support: Practicalities

In addition to business skills and advice on funding opportunities, administrative and legal support would also be provided to selected SMEs. The objective of this measure is not only to help SMEs successfully launch or expand their business in their country of residence, but also to navigate administrative requirements in other EU countries so that they can take full advantage of the single market and can operate across various EU member states.

To support this initiative, a media campaign would be launched together with an online platform and a hotline in all EU languages, providing information and advice to entrepreneurs.

The key **criteria** for a project to be accepted in the EBES programme would be:

- companies of 3-49 employees;
- a substantial 'growth story', providing a convincing vision of why the project is necessary and how it will succeed;
- providing paid, meaningful internships for young people.

3. INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE IN DECISION-MAKING

The countries of the Northern Hemisphere are faced with growing inequalities in terms of income, gender, identity and generational cohorts. A special focus on the living conditions and the prospects of the millennial generations demonstrates an unfair distribution of resources and opportunities in comparison to their parents and grandparents.

“To promote social cohesion, decision-makers should take into account a fair distribution of resources and opportunities between the old and the young.”

In order to promote economic equality and social cohesion, decision makers and legislators should take into account a fair distribution of resources and opportunities between the old and the young, the current and the future generations. In seeking intergenerational equity a compromise between politicians, legislators, social stakeholders, the market and civil society is required. The establishment of special governmental and consultative institutions concerned with issues of intergenerational equity, which work with all public decision-making entities, is therefore proposed.

The governmental institution would be a ‘General Secretariat for Intergenerational Equity’. This Secretariat would work under the authority of the national labour and/or employment ministry with a mandate to apply horizontal policies that affect both generations (e.g. pension system reform, social protection, skills acquisition or labour market inclusion).

The consultative institution would be a ‘Special Ombudsman for Intergenerational Equity’ or a ‘Special Parliamentary Committee’ (e.g. on employment and social affairs). This institution would first and foremost be in charge of supervising the implementation of fundamental good governance principles concerning, in particular, the effects of a proposed decision or law on the younger generation. It would publish an impact assessment to be distributed to all politicians dealing with

the proposed measure and the decision. This assessment would go together with a proposal of corrective measures and policy recommendations related to, for instance, the labour market, pension system reform, healthcare or poverty reduction. Stories and testimonials of intergenerational discrimination could also be included in the Ombudsman’s Annual Report in order to raise awareness and help mainstream the issue in the political discourse.

A major advantage of the proposal put forward is its relatively low costs and the fact that it is easy to implement, both at the EU level (in the context of the European Commission’s 4th Social Pillar and the pan-European effort to alleviate precariousness and poverty) and, of course, at the national level. Further, it would empower youngsters – and even the voiceless (infants and children) – to ensure that their interests and perspective are always heard regarding decisions that will affect them. It would also prompt political debate among parties, policy makers and other decision-making stakeholders. Even though there is no guarantee that the institution would, ultimately, persuade politicians, it would at least give greater prominence to addressing existing inequalities among social and age groups.

3. Cultural and Civic Engagement

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Policy Context and Problem Analysis: Lack of civic Engagement despite various local Opportunities

In order to address the current lack of civic engagement in many EU countries, local societies must be empowered to facilitate participation and involvement in various decision making processes. This is necessary in order to highlight the European dimension of citizenship and so as to promote inclusive policies. The activation of civil society engagement can and should take place at different levels.

One best practice example has been promoted by the Greek NGO Diazoma, which connected local societies, businesses and associations with state actors in order to revive Ancient Greek theatre sites. The value added has been the interconnection of the various ancient theatres, brought together under the ‘Cultural Paths’ title. This programme was prototyped in Greece and then emulated by the EU in the context of community-led development.

It is, however, clear that not all communities have the knowledge to develop and implement such projects. Neither do they have the know-how to connect their projects with other local projects at the national and European levels. Communities and municipalities can therefore use existing tools to provide ‘training for trainers’. It is not a secret that knowledge and know-how on how to use existing funding opportunities can empower local communities. A positive example of local civil empowerment in this form has been provided by the Portuguese Municipality of Amadora, which created a training programme to train people from NGOs and civil society associations in project management,

application writing for funding, and also in planning, developing and implementing a project, its budget and the necessary marketing of the activities.

Another issue for local communities – especially in countries facing financial problems, local communities in remote areas, rural areas, or even small urban regions – is how to activate or maintain civic engagement. Some are even having problems maintaining small cultural events that take part annually because the local authorities have no funds. As a consequence there is an apparent lack of know-how and a lack of funding. Unfortunately, both coincide with scant participation, increased disengagement and a distorted understanding of the EU and the notion of what it means to or how to interconnect locally, nationally and transnationally with other European partners.

“Disadvantaged communities not only show lower rates of cultural and civic engagement, but also a lower level of political participation.”

Disadvantaged communities not only show lower rates of cultural and civic engagement, they also show a lower level of political participation, electoral participation¹, as well as stronger disapproval of national and European politics. However, most disadvantaged communities do have associations, traditions and rituals they follow and attend to. The character can be cultural – e.g. an annual local music festival – religious-cultural – e.g. a festival for the local saint – or civic – e.g. an annual celebration of the local association. It would be wrong to claim that disadvantaged communities have no engagement. But it would equally be wrong to believe that they are not often struggling to keep annual festivities running, let alone to grow them into local, regional or even national and European events. The same holds for their projects. The ability to grow a project or to interconnect it with other local and European events is a challenge, but, importantly, may serve to boost engagement.

1. Pacheco, J. S. and Plutzer, E. (2008), Political Participation and Cumulative Disadvantage: The Impact of Economic and Social Hardship on Young Citizens. *Journal of Social Issues*, 64: 571–593. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.00578.x

What these communities lack is, notably, funding and knowledge. These are two sides of the same coin. By way of a solution, this Thinking Lab's proposal seeks to foster know-how transfer, as was achieved through local civil empowerment in the municipality of Amadora (see above).

Supporting communities in developing their strengths through targeted seminars, through personal communication and by avoiding non-local language will help ensure that the barriers to the realisation of projects can be lifted, and the organisation, its activities, and the levels of engagement can grow. Bringing the EU to a local disadvantaged community would be positive for the image of the EU and for its perception amongst the local public. Connecting communities will be beyond the expectations of the stakeholder and therefore additionally beneficiary to the image of the EU among a wider part of the population

Policy Recommendation: EU comes to you! (EUcomes2U) – Raising cultural and civic Engagement in disadvantaged Communities

INTRODUCTION

In order to foster civic engagement at the local level – but with a certain European perspective – a proactive approach towards communities is proposed. The idea is to have a regional (depending on country and geography) pro-active taskforce, consisting of a small team of mediators, that work in the field and are provided with decision-making abilities, small funding resources, training knowledge and consultation competences. This taskforce would be able to contact local actors and authorities, to visit them and to realise synergies for the implementation of local projects with the community.

A genuine innovation would be the taskforce enabling local communities to network with each other on similar projects and, further, to connect them in a European network with other European local communities and their respective projects. The aim would therefore be the creation of a EuroLocal network of similar projects which can get to know each other, visit and learn from each other's best and worst practices. This idea fosters a local 'we' and raises it to the European 'we'-dimension.

This approach would also actively address issues of inclusion, and the involvement of disadvantaged communities and groups. Thus it activates participation and connects diverse demographics on multiple levels.

The value added is that, literally “the EU comes to you”. In this way the EU can present itself to those citizens that do not (yet) know it.

“Cultural and civic engagement are paramount to develop local societies.”

AIM OF THIS POLICY PROPOSAL

The aim of this proposal is to activate and maintain civic and cultural engagement at the local level, and then to connect it across Europe. Specifically, cultural and civic engagement are paramount for the development of local societies. This has proven especially difficult in rural areas, in areas of low income and in remote places that feel not only forgotten by the EU but by the national or even regional authorities. In this proposal these areas are referred to as ‘disadvantaged communities’, and sets out to develop a short but concrete plan on how to activate and maintain cultural and civic engagement in disadvantaged communities with low investment. It is beyond the scope of this proposal to include recommendations for already advantaged communities such as for city projects that are already successful.

The target audience of this proposal are local actors, local decision-makers, associations, and key civil and cultural actors in disadvantaged communities.

LOCAL FESTIVITIES AND EVENTS: A SMALL, WARM FIRE FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

As already mentioned above, one pressing issue that can be observed in structurally weak regions is that of events and festivities with a local character which take place annually. These events are difficult to maintain because the organisers lack funding, people, or both. Sometimes they lack only a few Euros for the realisation of the event. Therefore establishing a small fund for these events is a central aim of this proposal. 50%

of the costs should be covered by the local organisers, 50% by EU funds with a maximum of 1 500€ per event. Naturally the EU logo would be visible at the event, in communications and in any possible publications connected to the event so that it is clear that the EU supports this activity.

To further promote the European spirit of *EUcomes2U* it could connect similar events which take place all over Europe. An example for this would be the so-called Saint George Events which mostly take place in Italy, Greece and Portugal. Concretely, in the framework of *EUcomes2U*, the 5 villages celebrating Saint George would be encouraged to invite each other, exchange and learn. Another positive example is the European Festival of Folk Music and Dance which takes place every summer in Val di Chiana in Italy. The main purpose is to connect different cultures and various traditions, thus enabling dialogue between people from all over Europe and beyond. In such a framework of tolerance and hospitality, music and dance are heralds of common emotions and beliefs and can, therefore, contribute to strengthening a common European sense of belonging.

OPERATIONALISATION AND USE CASES

In order to realise *EUcomes2U*, a team of specialised, communicative and flexible individuals is needed. The size of the team depends on the size of the country and the number of disadvantaged communities. For instance in Greece, a team of five people should be enough to cover at least 50 projects/visits in 50 disadvantaged communities and/or festivities. They would make up a EuropeanSupportTeam (EST).

Flexibility and transparency, as well as independence from national authorities and from the EU institutions, are key for the proper functioning of this project. The work of the EST is best described with the two illustrative examples:

A first possibility is that the EST itself makes the first contact with disadvantaged communities. The team looks at the regions of, say, Greece, and sees that the region of West Macedonia has a youth unemployment rate of 72%, and then locates one especially disadvantaged community – the Village of Lechovo. The EST

contacts the authorities of the community and thus establishes that in Lechovo there is an active cultural association. They arrange a meeting and evaluate the situation of the community and the association. Following that the EST offers a two-day ‘training for trainers’ or for key individuals of the association. This training gives the members of the local cultural association the opportunity to meet with other similar associations from other EU member states. To secure the sustainability of the training, the EST and the association keep contact via telephone and e-mail. As soon as there are several projects and connections throughout the country, a database can be created with associations in different Greek regions. Eventually, these can meet up in the framework of a conference, ideally every one or two years, to exchange their experiences and best practices.

A second possibility is that a disadvantaged community contacts the EST. For instance a local association organises a festival every year but this time does not have sufficient financial means. The EST evaluates the situation, focusing on how much money is needed in total, how much money the association wants from the team and if the festival is actually a real event that happens annually. If the evaluation is positive, support can be granted, depending on four conditions. First, the local association needs to provide a small amount of money itself, while the EST will support fundraising activities or hold fundraising seminars (maximum of 1 000€). Second, the EU needs to be prominently represented at the event to show that it is supported by the EU. Third, the EST can offer a seminar. And finally, the local association supports the creation of a database of similar festivals to help create networks. As soon as these conditions are considered fulfilled, the EST maintains contact with the organisers of the event and visits it if possible. After the event, they also maintain contact, helping to establish a broader network with other event organisers across the country and Europe, facilitated by a regularly updated database.

Working on this basis the EU and its EST can have a broader physical presence, and are connected to positive events in a disadvantaged community. Simultaneously, associations and key players learn how to access European funding and can open their doors to new people.

“It is the right moment to demonstrate that an inclusive, supportive European society is possible.”

EXPECTED RESULTS

These proposed activities would allow the EST to dispense with overly bureaucratic restrictions and to make the EU accessible to disadvantaged communities. Europe can actively go to its citizens; in this demanding period, passivity and waiting would be counterproductive. The EU cannot expect disadvantaged communities to come knocking at their door. It is the right moment – even if it seems late – to demonstrate that an inclusive, supportive European society is possible. Giving hope when it is lost and providing inclusion where it is needed is a feasible answer to the challenges the EU faces in terms of populism, nationalism and detachment from society.

Disadvantaged communities deserve every possible effort to push them out of their current malaise. A first step is to identify who these disadvantaged communities are, focusing on why they are denied access to the tools needed for self-sufficiency. Each disadvantaged community is probably facing multiple and multifaceted barriers, meaning that solutions need to vary from group to group and be tailored to the local situation. Hence this proposal for a flexible team which can adjust to the individual needs of communities.

4. Minority Communities

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Policy Context and Problem Analysis: Persistent Patterns of Inequality for Minority Groups

In Europe, Portugal, France and Italy are the most unequal countries in terms of OECD household incomes. In addition to income inequality, inequality of opportunity also exists, and can often be due to different types of discrimination, including based on gender, ethnic group or religion. Widespread inequalities lead to the exclusion of minorities – despite the fact that ethnic, cultural and religious diversity is a central feature of the European Union.

“Widespread inequalities lead to the exclusion of minorities.”

Over time migration has been a major source of diversity in Europe: the foreign-born population of the EU has been estimated at over 40 million, or 8.8% of the total population of 495 million people. Of these, two-thirds were born outside the European Union. National and linguistic minorities or ‘historic minorities’ are another important source of ethnic and cultural diversity.

Yet there exist persistent patterns of inequality between the situation of foreigners, immigrants and minority groups on the European labour market, and that of the overall majority population.

Policy Recommendations: Affirmative Action for Diversity at Work and raising Awareness for Minorities’ specific Needs

Taking into consideration the factors outlined above, the Thinking Lab’s sub-group on minority communities proposes two measures for European minorities to

become integrated members of European society and to realise their full potential: affirmative action for diversity at work, and an informative campaign to raise awareness on access to health care and the labour market for minority communities.

1. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FOR DIVERSITY AT WORK

The solution proposed is to be implemented by governmental agencies, thus enabling the use of statistics on populations from third countries (i.e. without EU citizenship) to set a quota for (ethnic) minorities in the workplace. This quota should be calculated and defined by the agencies, depending on the salaries or wages of ethnic minorities in the specific region. It would encourage companies to hire people from different backgrounds. For reaching this quota a company would be entitled to tax benefits as high as one fifth of the national tax levels.

The ethnic minority groups at the heart of this proposal are people with non-EU citizenship but with a special status, including refugees, immigrants or asylum seekers residing in an EU country. The national government would empower regional governmental agencies and provide them the statistics on ethnic minorities for each region. These regional governmental agencies would then analyse the statistics and set up regional quotas for increasing hiring from these minority groups. Employers could also receive a 'diversity certificate' as soon as their company reached the quota, and would entitle them to tax breaks. The certification would have to be reviewed every year. This initiative should be supported by the European Commission, and be funded by local governments.

2. INFORMATION CAMPAIGN TO RAISE AWARENESS ON ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND THE LABOUR MARKET FOR MINORITY COMMUNITIES

The solution proposed here is an information campaign (including, for instance, television advertisements and in-person information sessions) at the European level to help raise awareness, and to promote access to health care services and the labour market for minority communities. The aim is to help them better integrate into European society.

Trained mediators with different language skills would be recruited at community centres to proactively reach out to the specific communities, informing them about access to healthcare and the labour market as well.

This information campaign would benefit, first and foremost, citizens from non-EU countries, such as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The activities would be mostly run by migrant and refugee NGOs, in cooperation with the national ministries of health, employment or labour, and with local municipalities.

Depending on the specific needs of the local minority communities, in terms of health services, the local NGOs can ask for the support from the EU and from local government to support an information campaign. The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness of the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers/undocumented people. In doing so the campaign would also help address the lack of information available about the issue by organising a far-reaching campaign that includes advertisements, in-person information sessions and best practice meetings.

Given the different health service systems which each EU member state has – including frequent changes in some countries – it is important to adapt the campaign to the particular country concerned. In the countries where these minorities have a right to local health service provision, the campaign should be directed to inform the minorities about this right. In those cases where this is not an automatic right, the campaign should be directed towards the organisations already providing help, support and information. The interactive part of the campaign would consist of meetings at local community centres, close to disadvantaged areas.

Wrap-up:

Social Cohesion as a Concern for the entire EU which goes way beyond economic Factors

When viewed together it is clear that the problem analyses and policy recommendations of the Thinking Lab on Social Cohesion give rise to three main elements which link all sub-groups:

“High youth unemployment rates risk to undermine the legitimacy of the European project and democracy as such.”

First of all, social cohesion is a matter of concern for the whole of Europe – and certainly not just an internal problem of one or several EU member states. Persistently high (youth) unemployment rates risk undermining the legitimacy of the European project, of the social market economy and democracy as such. If young people, who have spent considerable effort, resources and time to obtain a high-quality education do not find a job or only under precarious conditions, then they will, in the long-run, become prone to populist and anti-European sentiments. It is therefore high time to enhance education and vocational training, to boost employment and intergenerational justice, and, thus, to stabilise social cohesion within European societies and among EU member states.

“The EU can play a crucial role in supporting civic engagement, thus strengthening its legitimacy.”

Secondly, as has been shown, social cohesion goes well beyond mere economic factors. Creating a sense of belonging through common activities – such as organising regular events at the local level – is essential to help kit together societies locally and regionally. It should, therefore, be avoided that these kinds of activities fall victim to financial cuts or organisational limitations.

The EU can play a crucial and positive role in supporting cultural and civic engagement via its various cohesion funds and can thus open up new ways to strengthen its legitimacy by directly enhancing the lives of numerous people at the local level.

Thirdly, social cohesion can only be guaranteed in the future through better and more effective inclusion of migrants and minorities in our societies. This matters even more in the light of the large migration flows towards Europe which are unlikely to cease in the next years. The integration of minority groups into society, especially into the labour market is, therefore, key if the EU wants to avoid social conflict in the future which might pose a threat to the openness of European democracies.

DIALOGUE ON EUROPE

Rebuilding Trust and redefining Europe in tough Times

Project Presentation

WHAT IS THE APPROACH OF DIALOGUE ON EUROPE?

The European Union has been affected by a multi-dimensional crisis for almost a decade. Traditional solutions put forward through international summitry have proved ineffective. Therefore, the current challenges faced by the European project can only be confronted through the involvement of a **strong and connected civil society**.

WHY, WHEN AND BY WHOM HAS IT BEEN INITIATED AND IMPLEMENTED?

With this need for a stronger involvement of the civil society in mind, the Berlin-based think tank Das Progressive Zentrum, in cooperation with the German Federal Foreign Office and many other partners, initiated **DIALOGUE ON EUROPE** in late 2015, especially in light of the EU-internal upheavals linked to the euro crisis and the austerity policy.

WHO HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN THE DIALOGUE ON EUROPE PROCESS?

This trans-European project has brought together young, dedicated members of various civil society backgrounds from initially 6 countries (France, Germany, Greece, Italy Portugal and Spain; later Poland and



Michael Roth, German Minister of State for Europe, discussing with participants of the #EuropeanTownHall Meeting in Lisbon, March 2016



Frank-Walter Steinmeier, then German Minister for Foreign Affairs, speaking at the DIALOGUE ON EUROPE Opening Conference in Berlin, June 2016

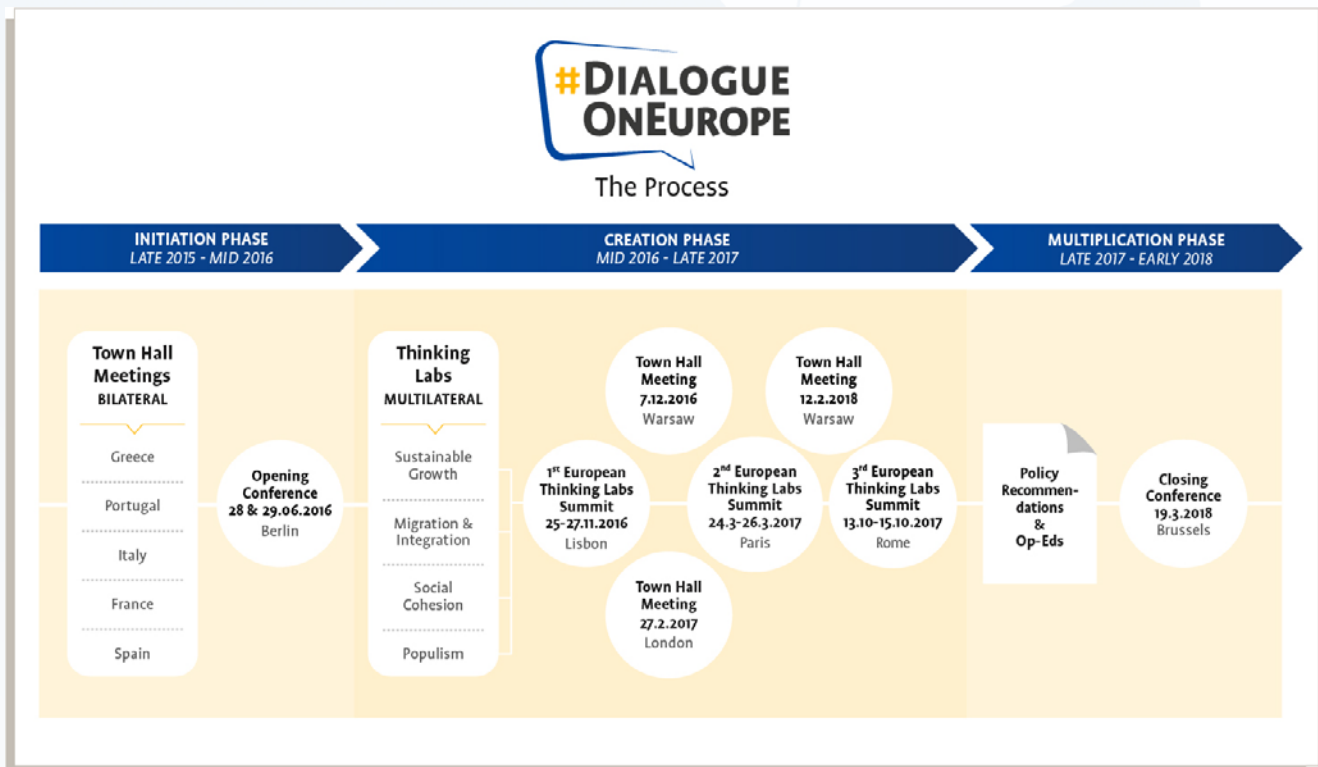
the UK) to analyse pressing EU-wide challenges and to elaborate concrete policy recommendations for the national and European level. In each country we worked together with one or more local partner organisations such as think tanks or foundations.

WHICH WERE THE MAIN TOPICS, HOW AND WITH WHICH OBJECTIVE WERE THEY DISCUSSED?

In the light of the most pressing current and upcoming challenges of the EU and its member states, DIALOGUE ON EUROPE had four main topics: Populism, Social Cohesion, Migration & Integration and Sustainable Growth. The goal was to use various perspectives from social society members all over Europe in order to **formulate concrete and feasible policy recommendations** which could serve as input for policy makers at the national and European levels.

WHAT WAS THE PROCESS OF DIALOGUE ON EUROPE?

DIALOGUE ON EUROPE unfolded in three phases. From December 2015 to June 2016 bilateral #EuropeanTownHall Meetings took place in five Southern European cities, mostly with the participation of the **German Minister of State for Europe, Michael Roth**. Hence, during this period civil society literally met politics. From June 2016 to October 2017 by contrast, civil society



Niels Annen, today Minister of State at the German Federal Foreign Office, replying to participants of the #EuropeanTownHall Meeting in Madrid, June 2016

representatives elaborated independently policy analyses and recommendations. 60 of the #EuropeanTownHall participants cooperated in four so-called ‘**Thinking Labs**’ (according to the four main topics) via digital collaboration means and personal meetings at four ‘**European Thinking Lab Summits**’. Since the last Summit in Rome in October 2017, the Thinking Labs have finalised their policy recommendations. These will be presented during the Closing Conference in Brussels.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT DIALOGUE ON EUROPE AND DAS PROGRESSIVE ZENTRUM?

For more information about events, interviews with renowned experts, opinion editorials, analyses, press coverage and the final policy recommendations, please visit the project website www.dialogue-on-europe.eu. If you want to know more about the activities of Das Progressive Zentrum and its international projects go to www.progressives-zentrum.org/?lang=en or follow us on **Twitter** (@DPZ_Berlin) and **Facebook**.

DIALOGUE ON EUROPE @work

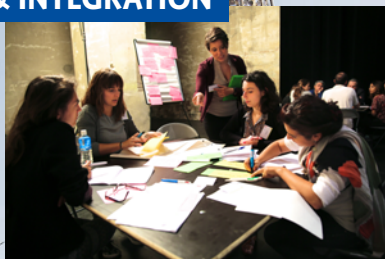
Some Impressions from
our #EuropeanTownHall
Meetings and Thinking
Lab Summits all over
Europe



POPULISM



MIGRATION & INTEGRATION



2nd European Thinking Lab Summit,
Paris (March 2017)



SUSTAINABLE GROWTH



SOCIAL COHESION



3rd European Thinking Lab Summit,
Rome (October 2017)

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Team and General Expression of Thanks

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ABOUT DAS PROGRESSIVE ZENTRUM

Das Progressive Zentrum, located in Berlin, is an independent and non-profit think tank. The aim of *Das Progressive Zentrum* is to foster new networks of progressive actors from different origins and work towards a general acceptance of innovative politics and aiming at economic and social progress. In this respect *Das Progressive Zentrum* gathers in its progressive debates mainly young thinkers and decisionmakers from Germany and Europe.



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