

Report on the Youth Policy Dialogue with Glenn Micallef, European Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport

‘All in: Promoting Inclusiveness through Sport and Culture’

Date: 28 January 2025

Location: Technopolis - Athens, Greece

Introduction

Commissioner Glenn Micallef hosted his first Youth Policy Dialogue, which focused on fostering access to culture and cultural heritage for young people and the role of sport as a vehicle for inclusion, solidarity and social cohesion. The topic of the Youth Policy Dialogue was well-aligned with the Commissioner's portfolio, ongoing work on related policy files (including the Culture Compass), and the broader intentions of the European Commission to involve youth in decision-making. It is also a topic of high relevance that resonates with young people. The location was chosen by Commissioner Micallef's Cabinet due to the symbolism Athens represents for democracy, sport and culture. The event was part of the Commissioner's two-day visit to Athens and was moderated by Myrto Vamvakoudi, from DG EAC, European Commission.

The Dialogue brought together 28 young people from diverse backgrounds - youth workers, Erasmus+ project beneficiaries and coordinators, young activists, NGO representatives and members of national youth councils, EU Olympic Ambassadors, as well as active members of sport networks, special Olympics and Paralympics athletes and the winner of the EUmies Awards Young Talent 2023. The group was well-balanced in terms of gender, geographical origin, and included participants with disabilities.

Summary of the Online Preparatory Meetings

Three online preparatory meetings were held on 16-17 January 2025. They sought to connect organisers with participants, to clarify any remaining questions and to exchange on the background note which had been sent to everyone in advance. Participants shared their expectations of the event, as well as their intended interventions regarding the topic.

Summary of the Youth Policy Dialogue (In-Person Meeting)

The moderator facilitated ice-breaker activities and a round of introductions of all participants.

The discussion was opened by Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen, Director-General, DG EAC, European Commission, who underlined that arts and sport have a real power to foster positive change by overcoming barriers and bringing people together irrespective of differences. She made references to the [Erasmus+](#) and [Creative Europe](#) Programmes mentioning EU initiatives such as [#BeInclusive EU Sport Awards](#), [Culture Moves Europe](#) and [European Capitals of Culture](#) as instruments promoting inclusion and equal access of young Europeans to culture and sport.

In his introductory remarks, Commissioner Micallef expressed his gratitude to young people for their motivation to participate and underlined the transformative power of engaging with youth in discussions. Commissioner Micallef assured that the new Commission is set on strengthening the role of young Europeans in shaping the future of the EU. He also highlighted that sport and culture are part of the fabric of our European way of life and stressed their importance as instruments for achieving equality and inclusion by addressing both accomplishments and shortcomings. He also pointed out that the main objective of the Youth Policy Dialogue was to listen to the participants' insights and ideas.

Following the opening of the Dialogue, participants were divided into three groups for discussions dedicated to the following sub-themes: (1) **Making sport and culture careers a reality for youth**; (2) Fostering **access to culture and cultural heritage for young people**; (3) **Sport and inclusion**. The discussions in these groups were facilitated by DG EAC staff. Commissioner Micallef, accompanied by Director-General Ahrenkilde Hansen and the moderator of the Dialogue had the opportunity to exchange with all participants in the groups. The open and inclusive setting allowed everybody to express an opinion. Groups appointed *rapporteurs* who summarised the main outcomes and relayed the identified challenges, opportunities and recommendations.

The Commissioner listened attentively to the young people's comments and created a dynamic and insightful discussion. Overall, the group dynamics was constructive and provided a meaningful exchange. The atmosphere, being 'safe and inclusive', contributed to a smooth running of the Dialogue. As main takeaways from the event, Commissioner Micallef referred to 3 keywords – '**empowerment**', '**opportunity**' and '**space**' for young people. He committed to working throughout his mandate on the issues that were raised. Participants shared that they were leaving the event more knowledgeable of the issues discussed and expressed hope that their input will be taken into account.

Following the Youth Policy Dialogue, there was a lunch and an artistic presentation by the children's **team** coached by the Greek **Olympic Champion of Rhythmic Gymnastics**.

In the second part of the day, there was a **wheelchair basketball match** in the presence of Sofia Zacharaki, Greek Minister of Social Cohesion and Family, Ioannis Vroutsis, Greek Alternate Minister of Education, Religious Affairs and Sport, George Mavrotas, Greek Secretary General of Sport, Nikos Pappas, Member of the European Parliament, and Haris Doukas, Mayor of Athens. Other guests included Lakis Lazopoulos, actor, Juancho Hernangomez, basketball player, Nikos Papangelis, Paralympian athlete, and Thodoris Iakovidis, Olympian athlete. Participants had the chance to play side-by-side with professional wheelchair basketball players. In parallel, there was an interactive collective painting on canvas organised by the graffiti/mural artist "Same84".

The programme was concluded by a guided tour in the Acropolis Museum in which Commissioner Micallef participated alongside the 28 young people.

Topic of Discussion

The general topic was divided into 3 subthemes. Those were:

- **Subtheme 1:** *Making sport and culture careers a reality for youth;*
- **Subtheme 2:** *Fostering access to culture and cultural heritage for young people;*
- **Subtheme 3:** *Sport and inclusion.*

Among the recurring concerns for young people were stark contrasts between urban and rural areas in the sport and culture offer and infrastructure, the systematic underfunding of creative and sport activities, the insufficient moral and financial support for career prospects in the fields concerned and the risk AI poses to creative industries. On repeated occasions young people pointed out that there is limited information of the instruments and opportunities the EU has put in place for the cultural and sport sectors. Another persistent problem, as young people reported, is the gender pay gap, the divide between more and less prestigious types of sport and the predominance of mainstream forms of artistic expression.

Education, training and adequate support tailored to the specific needs of people were also under the spotlight. It was acknowledged that establishing long-lasting synergies and channels of communication and cooperation between educational institutions, grassroots sport clubs, cultural institutions and NGOs within Member States and across the EU will have a decisive role in improving the standing of the sectors. Young people pointed out that non-formal education and volunteering are crucial for learning about inclusion in sport. They also highlighted that most people surrounding those with disabilities including sport staff and society at large are not equipped with the necessary tools, skills and knowledge to properly work with people with disabilities. They suggested that a tool for inclusion could be playing sport together (people with and without disabilities). They also mentioned the importance of the European Week of Sport as a campaign to promote inclusion in sport as well as the Erasmus+ programme. Lastly, it was emphasised that inclusion and equality should not be a sporadic campaign-driven effort, but rather a continuous, forward-looking process with tangible results.

The **main takeaways** from the Youth Policy Dialogue can be summarised as follows:

1/ There are big imbalances between urban and rural areas regarding the cultural and sport offer, career opportunities and infrastructure. There is a pressing need to make them equally accessible and professionally appealing both in central and peripheral areas.

2/ For the EU to create generations of Europeans genuinely interested in culture and sport, early education and promotion of positive habits and values remain an indispensable precondition.

- Young people should be made aware of the added social and personal value of practising sport and being involved in cultural life. Joining sport clubs and attending cultural events should be incentivised. The power of role models should be better leveraged.
- Schools tend to prioritise subjects not related to sport and culture which can prejudice the life choices of students. There should be more room for students to develop their artistic and sport talents at school.
- Graduation from school is a crucial moment when most young people sever bonds with culture and sport. Youth should be kept engaged in sport and culture through higher education, non-formal education and lifelong learning.
- It is important that students, adults and professionals (in sport and culture included) are trained to engage and include people with disabilities.
- Good mentorship is decisive for youth considering a career in sport and culture.
- Organising cultural events by young people should be simplified.

3/ To pursue a career in sport and culture and in general to be involved in these fields, young athletes and artists should receive more financial and moral incentives. A career in these fields is packed with insecurities. Among them are social pressure and low recognition, a gender pay gap, mental wellbeing issues and the challenge of striking a balance between professional and personal life.

Follow-up Activities

The event received publicity with a wide promotion across national Greek and EU-wide media, including television channels, radios, electronic and print media, social media, institutional press releases. There is a lot of constructive feedback which our services are looking forward to incorporating into work on ongoing and future policy files (including the Culture Compass). There are also intriguing new concepts and ideas which will facilitate internal expert discussions.

Lastly, this first Youth Policy Dialogue of Commissioner Micallef constituted an important learning experience for services involved. A satisfaction survey has been distributed to all participants, the feedback from which will be used for further improving the format.

Press coverage Youth Policy Dialogue

Glenn Micallef 28-01-2025

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