Study on Youth Policies in the Black Sea Region

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Content

Executive Summary

The importance of the Black Sea Region is growing in recent decades. According to the opinion of many researchers in international affairs, the Black Sea can be considered as a bridge between different 'worlds', where major transport, economic, energy, territorial and power interests of many countries meet. Those interconnections of interests include not only littoral countries (Turkey, Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Georgia) and those in adjacent areas (Moldova, Azerbaijan and Armenia) but also major world powers.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, there were several attempts to institutionalize the cooperation around the Black Sea, which have achieved different levels of success. Nevertheless, in many aspects, the cooperation remains in an embryonic state and the very idea of such cooperation is sometimes put under question. Considering that the Black Sea region is extremely heterogeneous politically, economically, culturally and in terms of the shapes and sizes of its countries, some authors express skepticism towards possibilities of regional cooperation. From a socio-economic perspective the region is not very stable and homogeneous and economic cooperation remains low among the countries in the region. In this sense it is the non-governmental sector that has capacity to intensify the cooperation with neighbors regardless of the political agenda of national governments. Thus, one of the most effective ways to foster future regional cooperation in general

is to enforce the cooperation in the sphere of youth in the Black Sea region and to provide more support to youth civil society organizations to realize their potential as drivers for future regional cooperation. The participation of young people in social and political life is essential for a democratic society. That is why most of the BSR states are attempting to elaborate and improve coherent and comprehensive youth policies addressing the social, cultural and educational needs of young people and the regional cooperation should become an important component of these policies.

Regional cooperation in any field (including that of youth policy) is a process that requires stakeholders to mutually adjust their behavior through the coordination of policy. That is why the current research has focused on examining the prospects for cooperation in the field of youth policy in the Black Sea Region. The main aim of this research was to create a complex picture of youth policy in the Black Sea region and to find out what the main challenges and opportunities in the development of youth policy in the countries of the Black Sea Region are and to identify possibilities for the development of regional partnerships in the field. In the research both quantitative and qualitative methods are used, including desk research and online survey, which were supplemented by field visits to several countries of the region during the period May-August 2012. Despite the challenges of the research, the main aims were achieved and the results are presented in the report at hand.

The first chapter of the report provides a general introduction, explaining the methodology and the scientific approach. The second chapter examines the Black Sea Region in general and provides the theoretical background of regional cooperation, which brings the perspectives of regional youth cooperation to understanding. The main reason and motivation behind such cooperation is the idea that regional cooperation can achieve additional benefits which the independent actions of states cannot provide.

The following chapter of the report aimed to analyze the youth policy in the countries of the region according to the essential components and principles of youth policy. Thus, the questions are answered, whether the youth policy of the BSR states have a clearly defined target group, a transparent and compatible National youth strategy and clearly defined authority in charge of youth. The reviewed components also include: existing National Youth Councils and umbrella organizations in the countries of BSR, the civil society in general, the issues of youth information, budget for youth, legislative framework, non-formal education, European and international dimension of youth policy.

The report continues with the analysis of the topics, which according to the perception of young people from the region are the most important regarding the youth policy and the situation of youth in BSR. The touched issues include education and employment, youth mobility, youth participation, healthy lifestyle, existing and potential conflicts, environment, youth housing, issues of family and gender. In this part the information provided in different reports and documents is compared and supplemented by the answers of the respondents to the online questionnaire.

Considering the regional cooperation in the youth field, the most important challenges mentioned by respondents in the online survey are: the lack of sufficient funding, non-active participation, limited and unequal access to information and possibilities, youth unemployment, political issues and the barriers to mobility. Among the most important challenges are also the big number of countries and their diversity, the presence of conflicts and contradicting interests. Moreover, there exists a predominant low level of trust in institutions, insufficient civic commitment, low trust in civil society and youth organizations within society and a high level of corruption. On the other hand, however, (and this is the main assumption of the current research) those are exactly the problems that actually define regions and regionalism. Deeper regional cooperation often appears as a response for the challenges, when the common policies are developed to address perceived common problems. In this way the states of the region can cooperatively achieve the results, which

are impossible to achieve individually. Thus, all the challenges turn to become opportunities for the cooperation. In this context, the non-governmental sector and particularly the youth is capable to contribute to increase the internal social cohesion, to consolidate the trust between all partners and to intensify the cooperation with neighbors circumventing the contradicting interests of states of the region.

The survey has detected that the vast majority of the respondents can see and recognize potential benefits and opportunities for their organizations, their countries and for the youth of the region in general in the emergence of cooperation in the youth field between BSR countries. Thus, the report continues with analyzing the main domains of the youth cooperation in the region, be it existing or potential, and the framework for such cooperation. In this context also the main actors, stakeholders and donors, playing a role in this cooperation are reviewed, among which the European Institutions appear to be the most important. The main perspectives of the future regional partnership are defined to be the share of best practices and initiatives to provide for the transfer of experience and expertise in youth policy over the region. Also, the necessity to base the youth strategies on the real needs of young people and to perceive the youth as a resource and not as a problem are highlighted. Thus, in the final parts of the report the potential directions for cooperation in the region and relevant topics for partnership projects (as they are seen by young people) are provided.

To conclude, the report provides recommendations for development cooperation and partnerships on the regional level basing on the results of the survey. Those recommendations emphasize the necessity to establish the evidence-based youth policy and elaborate common regional strategy, to introduce a system of monitoring and evaluation of youth projects, to improve the management of youth budget and coordination of funding on regional level. Furthermore, there is a need for more oriented actions on building up information systems for young people, to contribute for recognition and appraisal of the role of non-formal education, to focus on improvement of the situation of youth employment and youth participation in the region. Particular attention is paid towards sustainability of the cooperations and thus to the necessity of maintaining the ownership of youth over existing initiatives. The youth in the Black Sea Region needs to create its own attitude towards the situation concerning youth policy, and indeed to see the clear benefits of being involved in the regional partnerships and cooperation. Only in this case, the youth of the Black Sea Region can exercise responsibility, actively participate in the process of regional youth cooperation and actively contribute to it.

1. Introduction

1.1. **Aims and Objectives of the Survey**

In this report is aimed to shed more light on the situation of youth policy in nine countries of the wider Black Sea Region and to provide for the transfer of experience and expertise in youth policy as well as for development of regional partnerships. The main aim of this study is to analyze the current situation of the youth in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. We will try to find out what the main challenges and opportunities are in the development of cooperation of youth in the countries of the Black Sea Region (further also called BSR). This should help to facilitate the elaboration of the youth policies and strategies in the region and help to understand which actions and initiatives should be supported in future. Thus, this investigation will focus on the following research question: What are the main challenges and opportunities in the development of youth policy in the countries of the Black Sea Region and what are the trends and possibilities in development of regional partnerships in the field.

Considering the above context, the general aims and objectives of the survey were to:

- create a complex picture of youth policy in the Black Sea region
- conduct an analysis of existing youth specific policies in nine countries of the region
- describe the situation of young people in the nine countries of the Black Sea Region with a view to better understanding their needs
- assess the extent to which the governmental youth policy in each country of the region is providing complementary responses to such needs
- define existing programs contributing to the development of youth policy in each country in particular and to the development of regional cooperation in general
- compare the information provided by different local stakeholders with institutional and academic materials
- identify common problems and opportunities for the development of cooperation among the countries of the region
- provide a basis of information on which the stakeholders and actors in the area of youth policy development may be consulted on possible approaches to the improvement of regional cooperation in the youth field
- find out possible solutions and make recommendations for development of regional partnerships

1.2. Methodology

In this research both, quantitative and qualitative methods are used. For the collection of relevant data, two main research methods were applied: desk research of relevant sources and the online survey. Along with this, the research has also benefited enormously from field visits to several countries of the region.

The desk research relied entirely on secondary material gathered from a variety of sources, in particular: reports of governmental, intergovernmental and nongovernmental agencies dealing with youth issues and youth policy development; youth related legislation and regulations regarding components of a youth policy; evaluation and activity reports prepared by public authorities and international organizations; official statistics; academic resources; activity reports and surveys conducted with civil society organizations, NGOs and youth organizations.

The online survey was conducted between May and July 2012. It was performed with the help of an online questionnaire[1], which was distributed through the partner organizations in all nine

[1] References to online survey in the following report are marked by 'Q' and the number of question. For example, 'Q.1.' means first question of the online questionnaire. The full list of questions is provided in the Annex to the report

countries of the Black Sea Region. The objective of the online survey was to get the opinion of a bright spectrum of youth policy actors and stakeholders in all the countries of the region, active on national and local level. The respondents included representatives of governmental authorities responsible for youth, non-governmental organizations, youth researchers, youth workers, representatives of youth NGOs and international agencies implementing programmes related to youth. Data processing was accomplished using the 'Google Forms/Documents' software. The results were interpreted based on scientific literature and compared with other relevant surveys conducted in the Black Sea Region countries.

The additional source of information for this survey was provided by the field visits of the author of report at hand to several countries of the BSR region in the period May-July 2012. During those visits interviews and consultation discussions were held with the relevant stakeholders in the youth policy including the representatives of youth NGOs, international organizations and EU agencies, representatives of ministries, responsible for youth and youth researches. In the final text of the report were included comments and corrections received from several partner organizations during the national revise of the draft report.

1.3. Respondents

The majority of completed online questionnaires came from Bulgaria followed by Moldova and Romania. Such countries as Azerbaijan and Ukraine were less represented in the online survey. However, the answers are not divided according to country of origin of the respondents but are considered as the general opinion of the youth of the BSR.

The vast majority of respondents (71%) belong to the age group between 20 and 30 years.

Q.2. Which age group do you belong to?

>20	-	**7%**
20-25	-	**40%**
25-30	-	**31%**
30-35	-	**11%**
35>	-	**11%**
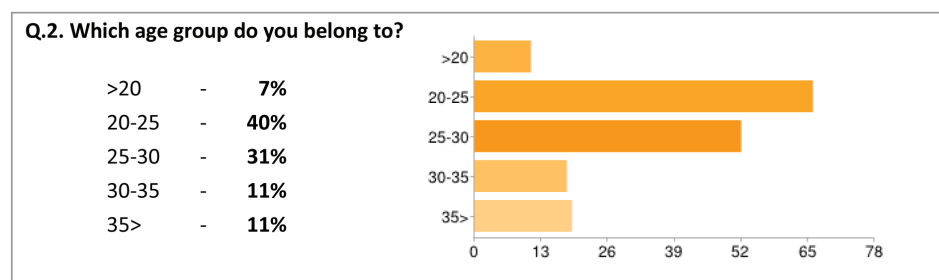
Almost half of all respondents (48%) have identified themselves as members of NGOs. Only 8% stated that they are not associated with any organization or group. The organizations, whose members have completed the questionnaire are active either on national (31%) or on European/ International level (30%) (Q.4). Among the respondents there is also a number of persons who are head or board members of NGOs (32%) and youth workers or trainers (25%). This means, that the vast majority of respondents are directly involved in youth work and youth policy. Among the respondents there were also a lot of students (34%).

It is important to mention that the respondents were approached directly by the partner organizations of the National youth Council of Moldova (CNTM) in all the countries of the BSR. This means that the overwhelming majority of answers were provided by the respondents involved in youth work in this field. The vast majority of respondents (74%) stated that they have a very broad or good personal experience and the level of involvement in the youth work (Q.6). They therefore have a competency to evaluate the youth policy in their region. Among the respondents there are the representatives of almost all categories which are directly or indirectly related to the youth policy and youth work in the BSR countries. This allows assuming that the answers provided in the online survey are reliable and represent the real opinion of the youth stakeholders from the BSR region.

Q.3. Which of the following best describes you and your occupation?
(People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%)

Category	Percentage
Public servant working in youth field	1%
Representative of State or local...	5%
Entrepreneur/ Self-employed/ / Employee	13%
Freelancer	4%
Youth researcher	7%
Youth worker / Trainer	25%
Volunteer	23%
Head or board member of NGO	32%
Member of NGO	48%
Member of an informal group of young people	9%
Member of a political party/political youth movement	7%
Private sector information and advice organization	2%
Student	34%
Young person	39%
Other	4%

1.4. Structure of the Report

The starting point for this study was the analysis of country reports summarizing observable trends in relation to young people's life situations and social policy coverage of young people in each country. Nevertheless, this study is mainly based on synthetic rather than country-by-country approaches to the presentation of the relevant information concerning young people and their treatment in policy.

The report contains the most important findings of the survey and summarizes only the most striking results. Particular emphasis is given to the perspectives of cooperation in the field of youth policy in the Black Sea Region, to the opportunities and challenges of such cooperation, socioeconomic issues, youth participation, youth welfare and healthy lifestyle, access to information, conflicts, non-formal education and others. The report is divided in several subchapters reflecting the most relevant and important issues and ends with a set of concluding remarks and recommendations regarding the perspectives of youth cooperation. Those recommendations in the last chapter serve as conclusions to the issues described in previous parts of the report.

1.5. Challenges in Research and Approach to the Report

One of the most important challenges in the research was the complex nature of the Black Sea Region. Local conditions, national and regional traditions, historical and political situation and a variety of actors play a role in determining the situation in each country. The national realities behind the reports were quite different[2], that is why it was not an easy task to draw parallels and define relevant similarities and differences. The data collection was also limited by a rare availability of relevant data about young people and their life situations (which very often is only available in local languages). For this survey mostly documents which were available in English and Russian languages were studied. Due to this fact probably some important information reflecting the local realities is limited or not up-to-date.

The youth policy is a cross-sectoral issue that requires action within several departments, ministries and agencies. There are many important policy areas that have a strong impact on each other, even though they seem to belong to different sectors. For example, the level and quality of education (one major policy sector) has a direct impact on employability of young people (a

2 For example, Russian Federation with its population of 142,517,670 and Moldova with a population of only 3,656,843 (CIA – The World Factbook est. July 2012)

different sector), and may also affect young people's awareness of health-related issues (a third sector). Those three sectors should therefore be coordinated [15, p.16]. Thus, in the youth policy are involved many actors and organizations with different approaches, so the challenge of desk survey consisted in the differences in the formats of the existing reports. The reviewing process was complicated by some structural differences in the documents processed. Statistical information and policy analyses are rarely directly comparable. Different topics were addressed in different depth, so the comparison process was not always an easy task to be realized.

Concerning the online survey the main challenge was to achieve a high number of respondents from each country. The problem consisted in the different will to participate of the respondents in each country. This led to an uneven distribution of respondents among the nine countries of the region.

Due to the absence of fully comparable data and up-to-date sources, the quantitative and qualitative data presented and their interpretation may in some cases not be complete or fully representative of specific national situations. Some statistical figures, when presented side by side allow making definitive conclusions. Others (for example budget allocated for youth projects in the huge Russian Federation and in the relatively small Armenia) could not be compared directly and are provided in the report in order to show the general situation. That is why it is important to highlight that the main aim of the survey is not to point out bad developments or the problems regarding youth in each particular country but to analyze the regional context in general and to define the perspectives for improvement of regional cooperation in particular. If the problem or challenge is shown on the example of one country it does not necessarily mean that this case is specific only for that country and should not be considered as relevant only for mentioned country. The same applies for examples of successes. The idea behind is to make the problem visible for all partners of the BSR countries and provide for better solutions as well as for the transfer of experience and expertise in youth policy, share of good practices and development of regional partnerships.

2. The Black Sea Region (BSR)

2.1. The General Overview of the Region

In the book "The Black Sea. A History" [20] the Black Sea Region is described as the meeting point of the Balkans, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Indeed, a number of researchers in international affairs concede that the Black Sea is a kind of springboard between the two worlds, where meet major transport, energy, area, territorial and power interests not only for the countries of the region, but also of the United States of America and the European Union [23, p.21]. That is why the cooperation in the sphere of security and stability in this region becomes one of the key issues in world politics.

When it comes to the Black Sea region as geographic entity, the question is which countries belong to it, and what criteria should be considered in determining the membership to the region: geographical, social, economic or political. Generally, from the geographical perspective, the Black sea basin includes 12 states, with its square area equal to 19,1 mln. km and population about 322,9 mln. people [17, p.5]. In this paper we will focus on nine countries of the region including both littoral (Turkey, Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Georgia) and those in adjacent areas (Moldova, Azerbaijan and Armenia). However, Black Sea regional identity is difficult to precisely define. The region's difficult geographical position spurred debates over the idea of regionalization around it [28]. On one hand, the relationships between states are fragile and sometimes conflict-prone, as the states of the region have experienced ethnic conflict, economic collapse, and interstate rivalry. On the other hand, the states surrounding the Black Sea have a common past, and their common heritage and common interests run deep [20].

2.2. Prerequisites for Cooperation

The concept of a Wider Black Sea region became relevant in early 1990s, since the first wave of regionalist activity (focused on asserting the area's post-Cold War international standing). Later the countries of the region have created a lot of initiatives directly (BSEC, BLACKSEAFOR) or indirectly (GUAM, the Danube Cooperation Process) dealing with problems of the Black Sea region. But none of these have reached a high level of integration and did not receive a lot of trust between its members [17]. According to some scholars [28] they are all used by the local countries more as foreign policy tools to declare their political allegiance to one or another big power (the EU, US or Russia).

In the early 1990s, the creation of Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation was the first to institutionalize cooperation around the Black Sea. BSEC is considered to be the most comprehensive and broad platform for cooperation [17, p.18]. Nevertheless, the socio-economic component of this project was clearly weaker than the individual interests of member states, bearing in mind also their different foreign policy allegiances. Even though the BSEC cooperation has not fully answered the expectations that existed, it nevertheless provides an important instrument for cooperation in the region [7, p.15]. The detailed description of the full inventory of regional cooperation schemes in the Black Sea Region is provided in the Policy report 'Reinvigorating Black Sea Cooperation: A Policy Discussion' by Panagiota Manoli [23].

Following the argument of Charles King [20] who calls the region "more of a bridge than a boundary, linking religious communities, linguistic groups, empires, and later, nations and states" we will focus on perspectives of policy cooperation (namely in the field of the youth policy) among the countries of the region. But first we will try to analyze the factors which influence the cooperation in the region in general.

2.3. Challenges for Cooperation

First of all let us consider the most important challenges influencing the region. According to Panagiota Manoli [23] in order to develop a feasible regional policy with appropriate tools of implementation, stakeholders must take into consideration both exogenous (e.g. the end of the Cold War, EU and NATO enlargement and globalization) and endogenous (historical legacies, the regional 'security complex', economic complementarities and cultural elements) factors.

As the other comparative study on BSR [28] states, "the regional dynamics characterized by 'frozen conflicts', soft security issues such as organized crime and drug trafficking, weak states, and slow economic development combined with the competition among the big powers for energy resources impede the creation of a unitary and cohesive region around the Black Sea" [28, p.56]. Another important factor is security. Recognizing the fact that the states of the Region face both traditional security threats and new challenges with ever more complex characteristics, the existing collaboration mechanisms in frames of the UNO, OSCE, NATO, and EU should be widened and deepened [17, p.41]. Historically, all but one (except Turkey) regional states were former soviet republics or satellites. Later several states were united under the auspices of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The European Union (EU), in its turn, brings to the region its own segmentation between four categories of states: the full member states (Bulgaria and Romania), the accession candidate state (Turkey), the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) partner states (Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), and finally Russia, as a 'strategic partner' [13, p.2].

The same argument, that the concept of political Black Sea region is not really clear, is shared by Panagiota Manoli who insists that the Black Sea is neither a "natural" nor an "objective" region. Characterized by cultural, historical and geographical heterogeneity, the region's boundaries have shifted continuously, as Black Sea regionalism may be described as an expression of multifaceted networks [23, p.9]. She argues that the countries of the Black Sea Region indeed belong to various different regions (Southeast Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Mediterranean). The wider Black Sea region is also structurally heterogeneous, as illustrated by the diverse links each country has with the EU and other international organizations exercising significant impact on domestic and foreign economic policies (e. g., World Trade Organization) [23, p.9].

2.4. Theoretical Aspects of Regional Cooperation

Thus, we can see that regionalization is a complex phenomenon with many types and forms in a continuous transformation and adaptation with many factors influencing it. We will start the investigation by setting the theoretical grounds of the regionalization process. In the theory of International relations in general the issue of regionalism is characterized by ongoing debates between rationalists and constructivists [28]. In case of Black Sea Region, according to Emerson [13] there are quite a number of types of regionalism open for consideration. The possible scenarios are listed in the following box:

Different possible species of Black Sea regionalism (Source: [13, p.2])

Technical regionalism:	objective criteria assign specific public policy functions to the territorial level that best encompasses their costs and benefits
Good neighborliness regionalism:	where neighboring political jurisdictions organize congenial activities together with a view to building good relations and friendship
Security regionalism:	facing common threats such as illegal migration, the trafficking of drugs and people, terrorism, and strategic security generally
Eclectic regionalism:	experimenting with many conceivable types of regional cooperation, without a clear strategic view, or evident criteria for selection
Dysfunctional regionalism:	vain attempts to construct regional cooperation, frustrated by serious political divergences or inefficiencies between the participants
Institutional regionalism:	focus on the administrative and organizational structures devised to promote regional cooperation
Transformative regionalism:	regional cooperation as a means of working towards the 'Europeanisation' of the region
Compensatory regionalism:	a major bloc, in practice the EU, seeks to compensate outsiders immediately beyond its frontiers for the disadvantages of exclusion
Geo-political regionalism:	relating to the objectives of leading powers to secure a sphere of influence

Hereafter several explanations of different kinds of regionalism basing on CEPS Working Document [13] will be provided. For example cooperation in cases of environmental pollution and fisheries when the individual state will not have a proper incentive to optimize policy or, the individual state cannot manage the problem alone without accepting a totally unreasonable burden of the costs can be regarded as issues of technical regionalism. The good neighborliness regionalism appears when on the regional level there are organized depoliticized activities for which there may be little or no technical need, but which can contribute to a spirit of mutual confidence and create bonds of friendship (for example, joint youth and sporting activities, twinning or groupings of local or regional officials for semi-social gatherings). Security regionalism becomes necessary due to common security threats of a cross-border nature, such as illegal migration and trafficking of drugs and people, and movements of terrorists, may also be viewed up to a point as needing regional cooperation technically. The example of institutional regionalism in the BSR was provided by The Black Sea Economic Cooperation organization (BSEC) which has created a comprehensive institutional structure [13]. Having taken into consideration that the Black Sea region is extremely heterogeneous politically, economically, culturally and in terms of the shapes and sizes of its countries, some authors express skepticism towards possibilities of regional cooperation by asking the question whether the Black Sea could provide an example dysfunctional regionalism [13, p.2].

Thus, we can see that a variety of quite different regionalisms is possible. As youth policy is a cross-sectoral phenomenon it touches almost all important issues including for example migration, culture and healthcare as well as education, employment, family and sports. That is why regional cooperation in the field of youth is always connected to different levels of regionalism.

2.5. Conclusion

Concluding it is possible to argue that generally the problem of institutional cooperation in the Black Sea Region can be explained by such factors as: historical, cultural, economic fragmentation of the region; domination of the great powers interests, which prefer bilateral relations to sub-regional initiatives; the lack of trust and political commitment among leaders; insufficient involvement of private sector and civil society in regional integration; duplication of organizations and initiatives in the region and the lack of coordination between those organizations; lack of financial and institutional resources; and the presence of "frozen" conflicts in the region.

As the experience of regional cooperation in the last decades has shown, such cooperation varies among issues and over time. From a socio-economic perspective the region is not very stable and homogeneous and economic cooperation remains low among the countries in the region. In this concern it is the nongovernmental sector that is capable to contribute to increasing the internal social cohesion and to intensify the cooperation with neighbors regardless of the political agenda of national governments. Regional cooperation in any field (including that of youth policy) is a process that requires stakeholders to mutually adjust their behavior through the coordination of policy. The main reason and motivation for such cooperation is the idea that regional cooperation can achieve additional benefits which the independent actions of states cannot achieve individually.

On this point we can come to the first conclusion, that one of the most effective ways to foster future regional cooperation in general is to enforce the cooperation in the sphere of youth policy in the Black Sea region and to provide more support to youth civil society organizations to realize their potential as drivers for future regional cooperation. The participation of young people in social and political life is essential for a democratic society. That is why most of the BSR states are attempting to elaborate and improve coherent and comprehensive youth policies addressing the social, cultural and educational needs of young people and the regional cooperation should become an important component of these policies [26]. While examining the prospects for youth cooperation in the Black Sea region, it is useful to study and analyze the situation of youth in the countries of the region.

3. Youth Policies in BSR

According to Youth Policy Manual "a national youth policy is a government's commitment and practice towards ensuring good living conditions and opportunities for the young population of a country. It can be more or less targeted, weaker or stronger, narrow or wide-ranging. A youth policy is not necessarily articulated in a specific strategy document (although this is certainly preferable!), but can be a set of established policy practices or rooted in a number of different documents, which together determine how a government deals with issues that address young people" [15, p.11].

One of the central scholars in the international youth policy review process of the Council of Europe, Howard Williamson, has argued that there are five most important components to youth policy ("the five Cs"): Coverage, Capacity, Competence, Co-operation (also including co-ordination and coherence) and Cost (for details please see [15, p.11]).

The general principle for all approaches to youth policy remains "perceiving of young people as a resource, not a problem". The Youth Policy Manual [15] outlines several important components of an effective, modern and European oriented national youth policy. Those are among the others a clearly defined government authority on youth; a clearly defined target group; a concrete and transparent strategy; a knowledge-based policy; promotion of youth participation; separate budget; inter-ministerial cooperation in the field of youth policy and others. The European Youth Forum also provides '11 Indicators of a (National) Youth Policy' [21] which should be seen as essential elements of a youth policy. They coincide with the afore mentioned principles but additionally underline the importance of non-formal education and youth training policy, and youth information policy.

To describe the general situation on youth policy in the BSR we will further analyze the youth policy in the countries of the region according to the mentioned components and principles.

3.1. Target Group of Youth Policy

According to previously quoted Youth Policy Manual [15, p.12] there is no universally correct answer as to which age category "young people" are defined in Europe because this concept is more socially constructed rather than biologically determined[3]. This is also true for the Black Sea Region where the definition of youth and the role attributed to young people in the society varies from country to country and also has been changing in each particular country of the region with the political and social developments in the country. In the countries reviewed the youth is defined by various types of legislation and other political documents. In general it is covering range of ages from 14 to 35 years old. The definition of the age for 'youth' is defined differently in some researches and documents.

For example in Turkey the data on youth provided by the Turkish Statistical Institute refer to people between the ages 15-29. Here the young population constitutes almost 30% of the population of the country [4]. However, when approaches of young people to various aspects of life (employment, identity, citizenship, migration etc.) were analyzed, it was also confirmed that demographically and socially there was not only one type of youth in Turkey, but many different groups existed [4].

In Georgia it is not defined according to concrete age range, but according to the "National Policy of Youth of Georgia" (2010) where the term "youth" includes the age from childhood to adulthood [29, p.9]. In Ukraine the age limit for young people is up to 35 years, but it is argued [29, p.59] to be decorative, having background in paternalistic approach and social care in order to give formal opportunities for benefits by solving social problems. In Romania 'the youth' is the population ranging between 13 and 30 years old which represents 27,6% of the total population of

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3 The European Commission White Paper on Youth defines the youth as young people between 15 and 25, which is accepted in the youth policies of many European countries. What is important, however, is that the policy operates with clearly defined lower and upper age limits, even if this may mean different age limits for different targeted policy measures.
4 Turkish Statistical Institute- www.tuik.gov.tr

the country [43, p.1]. In Azerbaijan The number of youth 14-29 years of age represents 31,4 % from the total population [45, p.7]. Moldova and Armenia have the same age ranges for youth which is 16-30. In Moldova it was defined by the "Youth Law" and in Armenia according to the "State Youth Policy Concept Paper". However, it is interesting to note that in Moldova the official state statistics define young population differently - as persons aging 15-29 [29, p.9]. In Russia the share of young people at the age of 14-30 at the beginning of 2008 came to 38.048.949 million people [40, p.3].

Thus, we can conclude that in general for BSR, the biggest number of young people lives in Russia, Turkey and Ukraine once Moldova and Armenia have a rather small and approximately similar amount of the youth (accordingly 925.500 and 905.200). The percentage of youth in overall population is the largest in Azerbaijan (about 31%) Ukraine, Turkey and Georgia and approximately equal in Moldova 27,5%, Russia 26.8% and Armenia 27.9% [29].

3.2. A Clearly Defined Government Authority on Youth

According to the World Bank Report 2007, generally youth issues are not dealt with by an entire ministry of its own. They are, in most countries dealt with by a department within a ministry that also has responsibilities for other issues, such as education, sports, culture, or social affairs [37]. For the BSR countries a huge variety of the forms and names of the structures involved in the youth policy and youth work is characteristic (further described in 3.6.). Also, a tendency of changing and reforming public structures responsible for youth affairs could be observed. All of the BSR countries have state structures responsible for youth affairs. In general, those are "Ministries of Youth and something else" (e.g. tourism, sport, education, etc.) [29, p.23]. Among the other common features could be mentioned: the presence of appropriate structures in the legislative bodies of the countries (for example the Parliamentary Commission on youth issues), the geographical coverage of structures responsible for youth (namely, the unequal balance between the capital cities and the regions, where the activity of youth structures is weaker) [29]. Besides the general types of the youth structures in the countries reviewed, there are also some specific public structures dealing with some concrete issues. For example, "State Social Service for Family, Children and Youth" in Ukraine, "National Youth Resource Centre" In Moldova, "Armenian Youth Fund", "Children and Youth Development Fund" In Georgia [29]. As it was already mentioned, the level of involvement of such organizations and periods of vigorous activity are varying through time. Being important and active for a while some organizations due to different reasons could minimize their activity in the next years (as is for example the case with "National Youth Resource Centre" in Moldova)

3.3. National Youth Councils and Umbrella Organizations

In all but one countries of the BSR there are youth councils or similar organizations which are involving a great number of other smaller organizations. Generally the role of National Youth Councils (NYCs) or similar umbrella organizations is to represent the interests of youth. They serve as the strongest representative bodies of youth voice at national level, being the main nongovernmental dialogue partner in relations with public institutions in the field of youth policy development. NYCs also represent the country's youth in the international youth work sector. In some of the countries there are even more than one umbrella organizations with different views on youth policy and youth work (e.g. in Ukraine) [29, p.22].

In Turkey the National Youth Council still does not exist. Even though the need to establish a NYC to bring all the youth organizations under one structure and to influence youth policies at governmental level started to be voiced in the 1990s, but the existing legal framework and lack of sufficient infrastructure made such an establishment impossible until present [2,p.32].

It is also important to note, that even though the coverage of most of the NYCs is quite big, in most of the countries a lot of strong youth organizations are reported not to be involved in the umbrellas and are operating outside these schemes [29, p.22]. Most of the umbrellas in BSR countries are also very active in European youth work and are members of European Youth Forum, as for example the National Youth Council of Moldova.

The extension of activities also to remote regions became recently important for the NGOs of Azerbaijan. Alongside with branches of the big central organizations, here has started the process of establishing and functioning of local organizations. There are three biggest youth platforms which are very active in youth issues in Azerbaijan ("IRELI" Youth Public Union, Azerbaijan Students' Youth Organizations Union and National Assembly of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (NAYORA) [45, p.19].

3.4. Civil Society in the BSR

Basing on the existing reports (e.g. [29] and [3]), it is possible to provide an overview of the civil society of the Black Sea Region in general. In all the BSR countries there are specific political contexts, yet most of them have been going through similar transition experiences. One important problem, which is common for the NGOs from all the BSR countries, is sustainability and particularly financial sustainability. The NGOs from the region are highly dependent of funding from international donors. Not only in EECA countries but also in Romania and Bulgaria (where the European structural funds had the potential to create a positive impact on the NGO sector, opening new opportunities for innovation and development) the problem with sustainability remains very important and local resources cannot be mobilized sufficiently. The situation is aggravated in recent years by the global economic crises. For example in Romania the financial resources of 2/3 of the NGOs are low or very low, which limits their action capacity [3, p.10]. Nevertheless, there are still many strong organizations which have had positive results even without the Government's support. At the same time, in several countries of the BSR the Government attempts to exercise more control over the NGOs' financial resources or to ban the operations of some international foundations and agencies which provide funding for CSOs. For example the recent case in September 2012 when the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was asked to cease operations in Russia. Official Moscow had been worried about USAID's work in Russian regions ,including the North Caucasus, so USAID was accused in attempts to influence political processes, including elections of various types, and institutions of civil society though the distribution of grants[5].

The limitations of NGOs activity by the government present the other important problem for several countries of the region. For example it is reported that in Azerbaijan there are persistent pressures and abuses on the freedom expression. In some regions of the country NGOs face restrictions particularly during the election periods. Or in Georgia there were reported efforts to question the legitimacy of the outcomes of the NGO sector activities, by calling them biased and politicized, and through this, to undermine the level of trust exercised by the international community and donors towards the non-governmental institutions, as well as to weaken the level of their stability and effectiveness [3]. This tendency towards labeling CSOs as being associated to political parties is reported in several countries. CSOs in Armenia still face pressure and intimidation which are caused by attempts of public control over civil society. Nevertheless, civil society in BSR proved that it is sometimes able to react immediately in order not to allow legislation to set limits for democracy and the activity of civil society [3, p.10].

Even though Turkey does not have a post-soviet experience, but Turkish civil society continues to pass through a significant era of transformation since the last decade. Civil society in Turkey is reported to be still in its nascent stages where the level of participation remains rather low.

Notwithstanding of challenges, the public trust in NGOs in general is slowly increasing, however the proportion of public participation of citizens in the activities of NGOs remains low. In spite of those existing problems and challenges there are observable some positive changes and trends. For example, in the Republic of Moldova the National Participation Council is a new consultative body created at the initiative of the Government with the main goal to create a strategic inter-sector partnership and to identify the main strategic priorities for working together the civil society. Civil society is recently being more involved in the process of reconciliation and the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict. In Russia (despite criticism) are reported positive developments regarding the freedom of the press and other freedoms: for example, during the election period civil society has been actively involved in monitoring process. There are many social projects initiated by NGOs. The civil society is now stronger and is more ready to face challenges. Also in Moldova, Armenia, Georgia the NGOs sometimes demonstrate important skills in building coalitions and in working on legislation initiatives. NGOs in Azerbaijan get the possibility to make suggestions and recommendations directly to the Parliament and they have proved there is capacity to influence the legislative process [41]. In Ukraine NGO advocacy efforts brought some significant results: cooperation between civil society and public authorities has improved and there are more opportunities for successful NGO advocacy initiatives [3, p.8-10]. The further analyses of the activity of civil society will be provided in the following chapters while reviewing the youth participation.

3.5. Budget for Youth

A national youth policy needs to have a separate budget which may consist of allocations within different governmental bodies and should be well coordinated [15, p.16]. As it was stated before, the budgetary sources for financing the youth activities in all the countries remain quite limited. Analyzing the country reports it is possible to define the common problems concerning the funding of youth activities. Among the main problems all the countries report the lack of transparency in the mechanisms of distribution and usage of the resources in varying degrees; a general lack of clearly defined priorities in financing of youth activities and a lack of transparent co-managements schemes providing the NGOs' participation in decision making process in this sphere (Romania and Bulgaria seem to have less problems in this concern as they tend to adopt more EU standards). Among the other problems are mentioned a lack of monitoring and assessment mechanisms for effectiveness of the resources provided and lack of coordination of international donor support and their direction according to the evidence-based strategic spheres. Some countries report the presence of some sort of "elites" which easily receive funds and "outsiders" which do not have chances to benefit from these public resources. This is partly confirmed by the respondents of the online questionnaire (Q.27). Concerning this problem the Ukrainian report mentions also political limitations on support to youth activities and "politicization" of the expenditures from state budgets on youth affairs, when such resources are used not for the "youth policy" but for the "youth politics" [4]. The majority of country reports state that the funds allocated for youth activities by state and other organizations could be sufficient, but they are distributed not correctly and mismanaged. For example in some countries such as Armenia and Georgia there is a tendency to spend a huge part of the resources on organizing costly events (mostly youth gatherings and camps, such as "Falcon" in Armenia and "Patrioti" in Georgia) [29, p.48] instead of funding several smaller projects which could have more real effect and value. For example, there could be organized such huge youth event in cooperation with other BSR states not for the national but for regional level, bringing together many young people from the BSR.

Considering the principle of perceiving the young people as a resource and not as a problem it is important to mention that there is "the constant need to move the focus away from a problem-

oriented approach towards seeing young people as a resource that can contribute actively to the society. Eastern European and Southeastern European countries have a particular challenge in this regard, as their historical-political heritage is one of strong governmental control of the youth population and a rather problem-oriented approach to youth policy" [15, p.15].

3.6. Legislation

Concerning the normative bases for the youth policy in all nine BSR countries, the situation is quite diverse (there exist both, the counties which have almost no developed laws on youth and there are countries with almost full packages of legislative acts on youth). In particular Bulgaria and Romania during the process of accession to the EU have brought the legislation on youth in conformity with the EU demands. It is possible to argue, that the common tendency for all EECA countries is the recent attempt to change the legislative base on youth, which was previously mostly based on the documents and laws adopted in middle 1990s.

As could be illustrated in the case of Moldova, the general aim of change in the legislation on youth is "making youth policy efficient and more attractive to youth for involving them in elaboration and implementation and creating a youth-friendly services and environment". The new normative bases for the youth policy also intend to include such important issues as Non-Formal Education and Volunteering. For example, the National Law on Volunteering was adopted in Moldova in 2010 [5].

Youth Policy Manual [15] mentions the interesting fact that non-governmental youth activists in most of the countries of EECA and in Southeast Europe are often strong advocates for adopting a youth law in their countries. "If there is a law on youth," the argument goes, "the government will have to give priority to youth policy" [15, p.55]. However, there are countries in Europe (e.g. Norway and Slovakia) with a long-standing youth policy which do not have a specific youth law. Thus, some scholars[6] argue that youth legislation is not always an essential element of a state youth policy. This should be considered while elaborating common youth strategy for BSR. It is important to focus not just on Youth Law as core legislation but also provide the efficient operation of hierarchy of institutions which work on youth field and support cooperation between those institutions (e.g. co-management principles, collaboration agreements between youth councils and Ministry, etc.). However the structure of actors is different in different BSR countries and the degree of involvement of organizations as well as the efficiency of attempts to apply co-management system is varying in different BSR countries. Such diversity of actors could be observed on the example of the Republic of Moldova. There 'The Parliament Committee for culture, education, research, youth, sport and mass media' is the top legislative body promoting and defending in the Parliament the youth legislative initiatives (Laws, Strategies). Then The Ministry for Youth and Sport has the legal power to elaborate, implement, monitor and evaluate state youth policy. Along with this there are a number of structures working in youth field, they are: The Collegium of the Ministry for Youth and Sports (a decisional body at the level of a ministry which includes top-level officials and representatives of youth umbrella organizations as CNTM); Regional Departments for Education, Youth and Sport; Advisory Council of Youth; Centers for Information and Consultancy for youth; The National Youth Resource Centre and the Network of Local Youth Centers; The Social Reintegration Centers for Youth, and finally Youth Councils, Student organizations, Youth Parliament [52] represent actors that should have an active role in promoting youth rights, interests, and participate in the process of formation legislation on youth.

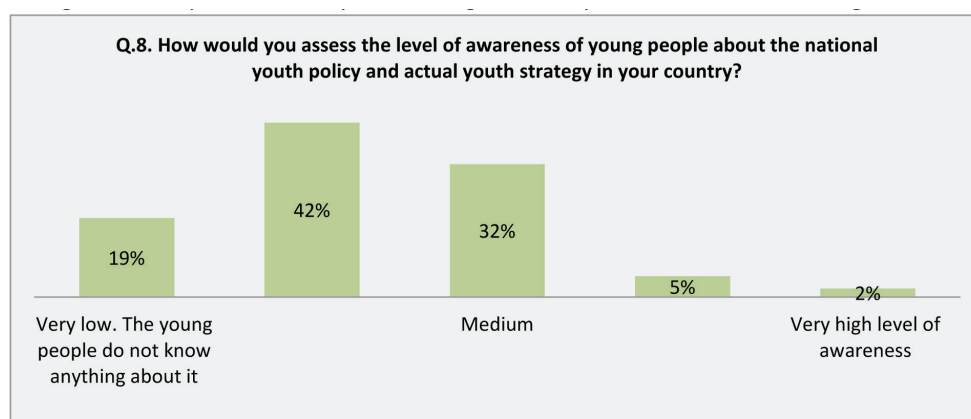6   Williamson, Howard (2008), p. 19. In [15, p.55]

3.7. Clearly Defined and Transparent National Youth Strategy

Concerning the national youth strategy it is important to mention that to a certain extent all the countries in the region have a long-term or middle term national youth strategy. Those strategies have different timeframes in different countries of BSR covering different time periods.
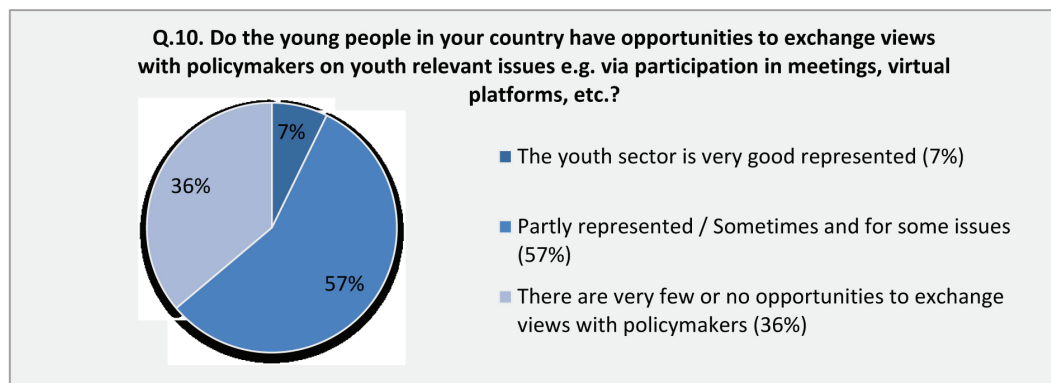
For example in Azerbaijan they are based on five year cycles: the previous one was adopted for the period 2005-2009 followed by the current 2009-1013 [45, p.23]. Romania, as a EU Member State, has adopted the European Youth Strategy ''Investing and Empowering'' 2010 – 2018. In Bulgaria the actions are coordinated by National Youth Strategy 2010-2020 [42, p.8-9] or in Turkey there exist The Ninth Development Programme (2007-2013) and the Medium Term Programme (2009-2011) which include the strategy with regard to youth policy. Ukraine has the State Social Programme "Youth of Ukraine 2009-2015" [29, p.31]. Moldova has adopted the "National Youth Strategy for 2009 – 2015". The Strategy of the State Youth Policy in the Russian Federation is adopted for the period 2006-2016 [40]. Such strategies of the government in some countries of BSR are also supplemented by other documents as for example in Azerbaijan 'The decree about state program on Azerbaijani youth for 2011-2015' [45, p.23].

The main problem concerning the youth strategy in the BSR region apparently is the implementation. Several experts consulted during the survey claim that even though the strategies are adopted, in reality they remain only "on paper" and are not implemented. Moreover they are not based on research and do not reflect the real needs of young people. For example, Romania was the first country to launch its National Youth Action Plan in 2001. Nevertheless, it is argued that its implementation is not taking place at the moment and the budget for this has not been allocated. This example could actually call into questions the existence on current stage of the real and operative National Youth Strategy in each BSR country.

Moreover, such diversity in timeframes and the length of periods covered by the strategies in different countries of the BSR could lead to a situation when the youth policies in the BSR countries do not coincide in the important benchmarks and also that inside the country the strategies duplicate themselves in different documents. This could make the youth strategy less clear and complicate the synchronization of youth policies among the countries of the region. Such potential threats are also partly confirmed by the results of the online survey. The majority of the respondents (Q.8) argue that the level of awareness of young people about the national youth policy and actual youth strategies in the country as "low". Moreover, answering the question (Q.12) about the initiatives of the government in the youth field many respondents have stated that they are not aware about any initiatives in the youth field. This allows concluding that the situation of the awareness on youth strategy and youth policy in the BSR is lacking consistency and that the youth strategies in many cases are not clear enough.

Q.8. How would you assess the level of awareness of young people about the national youth policy and actual youth strategy in your country?

19% 42% 32% 5% 2%

Very low. The young people do not know anything about it   Medium   Very high level of awareness

The opportunity of young people to exchange the views with policymakers on youth relevant issues is also assessed as not sufficient. Only 7% of the respondents stated, that the youth sector is very well represented in their countries.

Q.10. Do the young people in your country have opportunities to exchange views with policymakers on youth relevant issues e.g. via participation in meetings, virtual platforms, etc.?

- ■ The youth sector is very good represented (7%)
- ■ Partly represented / Sometimes and for some issues (57%)
- ■ There are very few or no opportunities to exchange views with policymakers (36%)

7%
36%
57%

Talking about a knowledge-based policy it is important to mention, that the youth policy must not be based on the perceived needs of young people, but on real-life needs that can be documented through research. According to the results of the online survey, we can argue that the needs of young people in BSR are not really considered in the governmental policy.

Q.9. Are the real needs of young people known to the government of your country and reflected in its policy?

- ■ Yes (28%)
- ■ Partly (39%)
- ■ No, the real needs of youth are not reflected in the governmental policy (33%)

33%
28%
39%
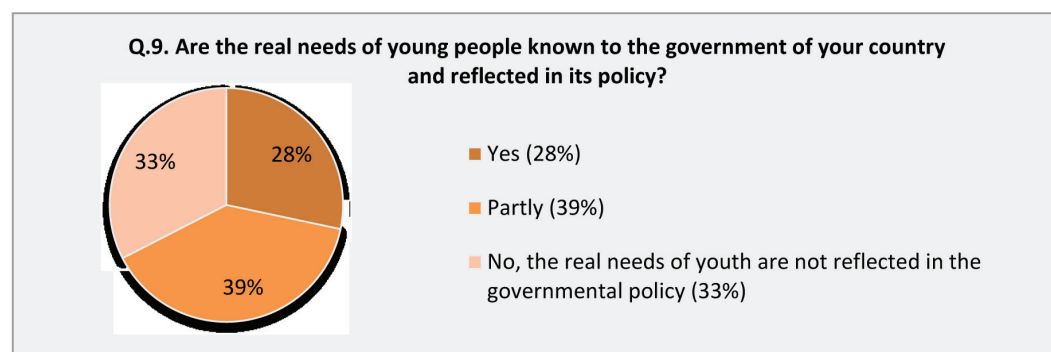
In most countries of the region (except Bulgaria and Romania) the youth research sector is often neither politically defined, nor recognized and there is no common understanding even about the term of "youth research" [29]. The other problem concerning youth research is the limited number of topics covered by the research.

For example, as it is argued in 'Youth in Russia' review: today, research regarding youth in Russia is "mostly focused on studying those who are either at the lowest or at the highest steps of the society's social scale. At the same time, the majority of average young people are as if dropped out from the field of vision. This is proven by the nearly total absence of studies regarding so-called 'marginal groups'. Young people from rural areas, HIV-positive youth, young handicapped people, youth considered as foreigners are very rarely represented in the studies" [38, p.5]. In a report on Azerbaijan it is also stated that there is no comprehensive research on youth [45]. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the last comprehensive report on youth was stated in 2007 by Ministry of Youth and Sport. After this date there is no any updated information or alternative reports on youth in Azerbaijan. The Ministry of Youth and Sport's and some international organizations' surveys touch only few topics such as youth reproductive health, the level of awareness on HIV/AIDS among youth, youth participation, etc. [45].

Even though the sphere of youth research is quite underdeveloped in the most BSR countries, in all the countries the need of youth research is recognized by stakeholders. This is also confirmed

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by the answers to the questions Q.7 and Q.12 of the online survey. There "The initiatives to provide sufficient support to promote cross-disciplinary research relating to young people, their real needs and socio-economic environment" are highlighted as important by some respondents. In some countries there are also steps taken to improve the situation in this field.

The Moldovan government has adopted a series of legislative acts and strategic documents aimed at improving the youth research (e.g. the state policy in research-development, the state policy for innovation and technological transfer, the approval of Strategic Priorities of research-development for 2004-2010, and the Strategy for development of the national system of protection and use of intellectual property objects until 2010) [52, p.30]. Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs in Georgia has taken the responsibility for a follow-up to the National Youth Report by conducting a periodical research on youth development. There were allocated appropriate budgetary means by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of Armenia for updating the national youth report [29, p.29].

3.8. Youth Information

Another characteristic of the youth policy of the recent years is the higher attention to the issue of youth information. Lauritzen [31] claims that "a youth information strategy should ensure transparency of government policy towards young people. Such a strategy should also inform young people about different opportunities that exist for them. Different initiatives can be elements of a youth information strategy … and ensure open communication channels with networks of all major stakeholders for youth policy".

According to the online survey, the young people in the BSR countries evaluate the quality of information on the possibilities of participation/ funding/ education/ youth projects they get as medium/satisfactory (Q.26).

Q. 26. How would you evaluate the quality of information the young people get in your country on the possibilities of participation/ funding/ education/ youth projects either in their country of residence or abroad?
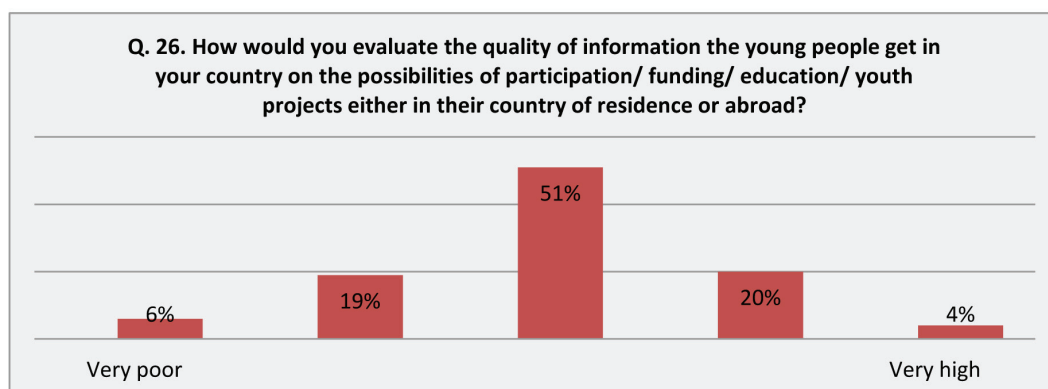
Nevertheless, 74 % of all respondents whether partly or totally agree to the statement that the access for opportunities provided for the youth in your country is available only for a limited number of people and is subject to corruption, nepotism, political segregation or other kind of unequal approach (Q.27). Moreover, 22% of respondents (Q.7) name "information and access to information" among the areas where the youth in BSR countries is facing most problems and challenges. This allows making the conclusion, that the improvement of youth information is one of the important issues in the future development of youth policy and youth cooperation in the region.

The online survey has shown, that among the sources from which the youth learns about the possibilities of youth education, mobility, education the leading role is taken by "media and

internet" (82%) (Q.24). The same is confirmed by Q.28 where the overwhelming majority of young people (76%) state that the potential of internet and other modern media in the development of youth activities is "important" or "very important".

Q.24. From which of the following sources does the youth in your country learn about the possibilities of youth participation, mobility, education etc?
(People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%)

Source	Percentage
Youth organizations/ youth clubs	56%
NGOs and International Organizations	75%
Political parties	5%
Public bodies at the local, regional, national level	16%
Family, friends	31%
School, university	40%
Media, internet	82%
Other	1%

For example, according to the YADA Survey (2008) in Turkey the young people use extensively the internet, often to socialize in a virtual environment. Almost half of the young people have a domestic internet access and the second most common place is the internet cafes. The usage of the internet increases correlating to the education levels of young people [2, p.16]. In Turkey, young people do not read much: only 36.1% read newspapers daily, 27.4% read book. Watching TV is the favorite leisure activity (81%) [14, p.10]. Information of young people is a priority at the European level. It is increasingly seen as key for ensuring their access to social and civic opportunities and the frequency of internet use among the young people is constantly growing[7].

In this context the experience of Armenia where the state structures are trying several types of media to provide this aspect of the National Youth Policy is very interesting. The last scheme is the initiative of an online portal of youth information. One of its integral components is the "Online Grant System" (www.cragrer.am) and the bilingual "Online News Portal" (www.youth.am). Another two components will be a social networking platform with learning opportunities and a section on the resources and information on National Youth Policy and programmes for young people [29, p.51]. The Network of Regional Youth Centers with its libraries and computer halls is another tool for the youth information dissemination. But here it is necessary to note that the youth information system is not yet reachable for majority of the youth, as the internet coverage in Armenia is not very wide [29, p.51]. Moreover, the 'Online Grant System' is claimed not to be functioning properly from time to time.

Being asked to provide the name of the internet platform or website which the youth of the country uses to learn about the youth relevant issues, opportunities, projects and initiatives (Q.25.) the respondents have provided lots of different sources. The whole list of mentioned internet resources could be found in the Annex to this report. From the answers provided to Q.25. is possible to draw some conclusions. Each country has several reliable internet resources for youth information; however there appears to be no common platform for youth information in BSR with selected and relevant information provided in one language available for youth from all BSR countries. Many respondents have stated that they use internal channels of the organizations for distribution of information (such as newsletters, Yahoo and Google groups etc.). This means that the information on youth relevant issues on regional dimension is not always easy to find. Among

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7 For more details please see EU Youth Report 2009 - Information: the key to participation? ec.europa.eu/youth/documents/publications/eu-youth-report_en.pdf

the most often mentioned sources were the search engines such as Google, and the portals such as Eurodesk and "www.salto-youth.net". This should be also considered while elaborating the future youth information strategy.

The other important issue concerning the youth information (which will be also mentioned again later in the context of youth mobility) remains the language. For many young people in the BSR countries the absence of appropriate information in their language could cause the problem in access to possibilities. In this context an example of good efforts for breaking the language barriers are the activities of the Council of Europe. For example, the human rights education manual COMPASS is available online in all the state languages of the countries of BSR (at present except Ukrainian, but it is in progress)[8].

3.9. Non-formal Education

The respondents to the online questionnaire have often mentioned the importance of non-formal education and the existing country reports also state the growing role of it amongst civil society and governmental programmes. However, the political frameworks promoting and developing this sector are developed only in several countries of BSR, mostly in Bulgaria, Romania, Armenia and Moldova. In the other countries of the region there is a need in Non-Formal Education strategy which will provide for a normative framework and standards for developing non-formal education services at national level according to the good practices and existing international experience.

In the Republic of Moldova such strategy is being developed. In Armenia there exists the "State Concept on Non-Formal Education" (adopted in 2006) defining this type of education, presenting its principal characteristics as well as defining the priorities of this sphere [29, p.35]. Moreover, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs have started and process of training youth workers in this sphere and according to the Work Plan of the Youth Policy (2009-12) each year till 2012 (and maybe further) 50 youth workers will pass the "Training for Trainers" LTTC and appropriate methodological training materials and manuals are developed [29, p.51].

In Turkey the Non-formal education as a method of learning is relatively new and mostly used by civil society and youth organizations. In some cases it is also used by the private sector to train their staff. Concerning the voluntary work it is interesting to mention that the necessity of voluntary work in Turkey became for the first time visible with the massive earthquake of 1999, where many NGOs and volunteers were mobilized. Since that time and especially since the Participation of Turkey in the EU Youth and Education programmes, the numbers of young people who work as volunteers in national and international projects is constantly increasing. Even though a high number of volunteers are engaged in youth work, there is not a formally defined profession of youth workers in Turkey [2, p.25-27].

The Ukraine, according to country review [4], has no recognition for non-formal education, youth work, long-term learning and volunteering. The European standards of youth policy are only partly introduced in legislation and the programmes and are rather declarative.

According to the online survey, the majority of respondents argue that the young people in the region are generally not satisfied with the youth policy and the governmental support to the nongovernmental youth sector. More than a half (59 %) of respondents stated that the young people are mostly unsatisfied.

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8 For more details please see: http://eycb.coe.int/compass/other.html

11. In your opinion, are the young people in your country satisfied with the youth policy of your government and the governmental support to the non-governmental youth sector?
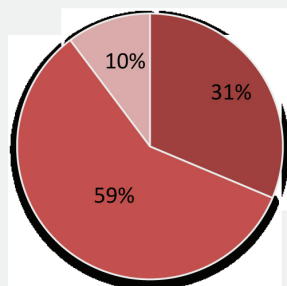
- Partly satisfied (31%)
- Young people are mostly unsatisfied (59%)
- Young people are satisfied with the governmental support and youth policy (10%)

For the improvement of the situation of youth in the country the respondents have stated the following actions of the government as very important: Political and financial support to youth organizations, as well as local and national youth councils; Initiatives to harmonize the educational systems of the country with the existing labor market and providing young people competitive education and training schemes which are likely to increase their professional opportunities and the Initiatives to facilitate active participation of young people in decisions which concern them, and encourage them to commit themselves in their community life

Q.12. Which of the activities and initiatives taken by your government (existing or previous) are the most important and provide for improvement of the situation of youth in your country? (People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%)	
Political and financial support to youth organizations, as well as local and national youth councils	**42%**
Initiatives to promote cross-border mobility of youth workers and young people in youth organizations by establishing state mobility programs, reducing administrative and financial obstacles and visa restrictions	**27%**
Initiatives to provide sufficient support to promote cross-disciplinary research relating to young people, their real needs and socio-economic environment	**21%**
Initiatives to harmonize the educational systems of the country with the existing labor market and providing young people competitive education and training schemes which are likely to increase their professional opportunities	**37%**
Initiatives to facilitate active participation of young people in decisions which concern them, and encourage them to commit themselves in their community life	**34%**
Other	**23%**

However, it is important to mention, that several respondents have answered, that they are not aware of any initiatives of their government in this field (because there is no transparency or because the information is not accessible). Some respondents have even argued that neither of the initiatives mentioned in the questionnaire exist in their countries. This brings us again to the conclusion that the general level of awareness of young people with the governmental youth strategy as well as the level of satisfaction with the national youth policy in the countries of the BSR is relatively low.

3.10. European and International Dimension of Youth Policy

According to Panagiota Manoli [23, p.15] the EU's economic gravitational pull has been a major force shaping regional dynamics in the Black Sea area mainly because the EU provides the most cooperation funds for joint projects and programmes. The majority of stakeholders also stated that the European Union through its different programmes and initiatives remains one of the main actors fostering directly and indirectly the cooperation between the countries of the Black Sea Region. Thus, there is the necessity to provide the short overview of the EU activity in the region.

All the countries reviewed state international and European cooperation as one of their most important priorities, even though there are some differences regarding the interest towards European Integration. While some countries as Georgia and Moldova are clearly stating their inspirations to fulfill the requirements and to deepen their countries' European Integration process, the other countries are considering the European cooperation frameworks as excellent development and partnership mechanisms [29].

From the nine countries of the region two (Bulgaria and Romania) are the full members of the EU and Turkey is negotiating the accession. This means also that only Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey have National Agencies for the implementation of Youth in Action Programme[9] of the European Commission. Accordingly, the national youth strategies of Bulgaria and Romania are to some extent (or should be) elaborated in conformity with the EU youth strategies and policies. The European dimension of youth policy in the rest of the countries of the BSR is determined by co-operation with the Council of Europe, the European Commission and the European Youth Forum. Moldova and Ukraine were included for the first time in the EU's policy in 2003 as the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) was launched. In 2004 the framework was extended to include also the South Caucasus countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. However, the ENP did not engage with the whole Black Sea region and lacked the membership incentive. This has changed in 2007 with the launch of the Black Sea Synergy[10] - a new regional Cooperation Initiative (BSS) addressing the region as a whole and not each country separately. In 2009 was launched the Eastern Partnership[11] (EaP), a new EU's foreign policy instrument targeting only the post-Soviet republics from the Black Sea Region. This new initiative connects the Black Sea with the Baltic Sea in an attempt to stabilize the neighborhood through economic development and democratization [28, p.53]. Obviously all those developments are influencing the cooperation in the field of youth policy in the region thus, more details on the cooperation with the European Union will be provided in the fifth chapter of this report. The next chapter, in its turn, will continue with the other issues, which are important for the regional cooperation in the field of youth.

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9 http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/youth/
10 http://ec.europa. eu/world/enp/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf
11 http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/index_en.htm

4. Problems and Issues for Cooperation

Being asked to indicate areas in the BSR countries where the youth is facing most problems and challenges, the respondents to the online questionnaire have highlighted several important issues. In this chapter we will continue with the analysis of the topics, which according to the perception of the youth from the region are the most important regarding the youth policy and the situation on youth in BSR. The conclusions and recommendations concerning these issues will be provided in the last chapter of the report.

Q.7. What are the areas where the youth in your country is facing most problems and challenges?
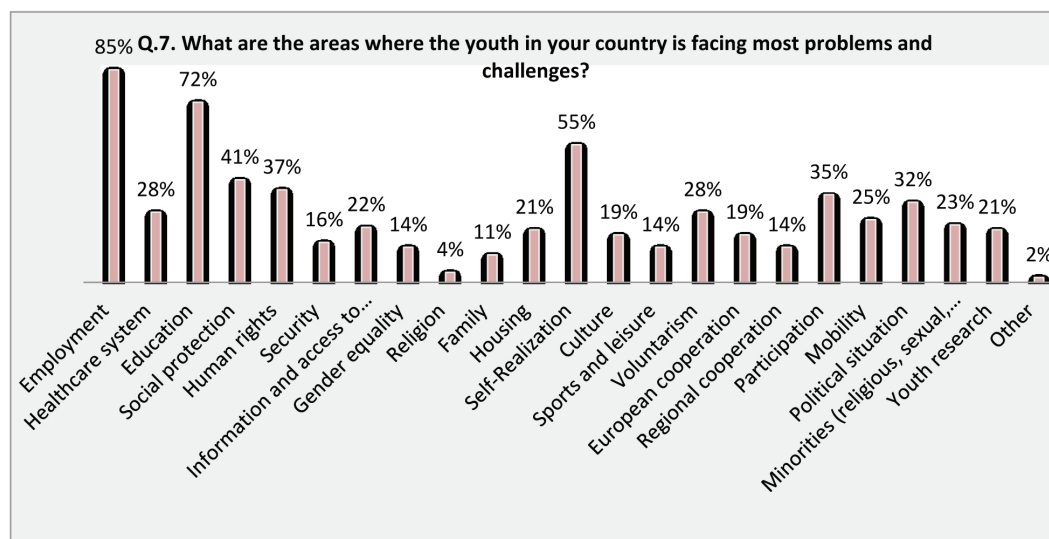
4.1. Education and Employment

Employment (with 85%) and Education (72%) are indicated by the respondents as the most important problems related to youth in BSR (whereas several answers could be provided by respondents to Q.7). That is why these two topics will be presented together. Indeed, according to 'Global Employment Trends 2012' [19] 75 million young people around the world are unemployed, and on the global level youth are particularly high hit by the economic crisis. Globally, young people are nearly three times as likely as adults to be unemployed [19, p.33]. The countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) and CIS experienced some of the most serious economic shocks during the global economic crisis, but also managed an exceptionally strong recovery [19, p.52]. The youth unemployment rate in the region remained high at 17.7 per cent in 2011. Such high levels of unemployment among young women and men in particular are likely to have adverse impacts, which might lead to lower levels of human capital, reduced wage rates and a weakened labor force participation in the years to come [19].

Basing on the existing reports and the opinion of experts it is possible to draw the following commonalities in the sphere of education and employment in BSR region. Despite the high number of public and private universities in all the countries of BSR, there is no defined standard of quality of education. The latest World Youth Report [34] states that one of the most critical periods in the life cycle of young people worldwide is the transition from schools and training institutions into the labor market. Such problems could be observed in the BSR countries. According to reviewed country reports the common problem is that when students obtain a university diploma, this is no guarantee for an   appropriate job in the labor markets. Young people are very often required to develop further skills and obtain the first work experience to be employed. It is also argued that the absence of corresponding information is characteristic for the labor market of many BSR countries.

Some young people of the region benefit also from the participation in the short-term employment programs like 'Work and Travel' in the EU and USA which on one hand allows them to get first work and international experience, to earn money and finance their own education and housing. On the other hand, it can negatively affect the quality of education (as they remain students only formally) and undermines the internal labor market. High rates of unemployment in the countries of the region and unfavorable working conditions as well as insufficiency of social security benefits in the private sector are among other challenges faced by young people. Those factors also cause the migration of young people in the other countries in search for better job. One of the destination countries in this concern is Russia. That is why it is important to mention that due to the difficulties of the labor market in Russia (where youth unemployment is high, reaching peaks of almost 80% in some regions of the North Caucasus) [11], many young people are ready to work without a contract. This phenomenon puts the youth, especially migrants and women, at risk of exploitation [18]. The similar problems apply for the other countries of the region.

Arrows represent migration streams: Thick, 3000,000 persons; thin, 40,000 persons.
Source: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTECA/Resources/257896-1167856389505/migration-pop-slide1.htm

In this concern, the ILO Report [19] provides the experiences of the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Turkey which exemplifies the gap between the GDP growth and employment that occurred in the Central and South-Eastern Europe and CIS region. The report states that each of these economies registered GDP growth, but at the same time, a sharp drop in employment since 2009 with the economy unable to create jobs and with year-on-year growth rates remaining negative through 2011 [19, p.52].

The other phenomenon (also mentioned in the World Youth Report 2011 [34]) which in case of BSR is characteristic particularly for Azerbaijan and Turkey is the employment of young women. As the country report states, among graduates of educational institutions there are many girls. However, the employers prefer boys, thus, girls face an unemployment problem much more often [45, p.9]. However, such situation is perceived in the country not as a problem but as a fact caused by the national mentality, when women, especially in rural areas, prefer to stay at home. The UNDP report [36] states that also in Turkey the percentage of the long-term unemployed is higher among young women. The mentioned gender gaps are also characteristic not only for employment rates but for the sphere of education. For example in Turkey, the rate of illiteracy among young women is higher. Even though school enrolment rates for girls have increased, there are gender gaps in primary and in secondary education, which shows that opportunities for girls to get an education are lower than for boys [36, p.15].

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Another important observation which also shows how the labor market is interconnected with the general values of youth is provided in Russia's country report. The report insists that for many young Russians the values have changed and the level of economic success is estimated according the money they earn: "being successful means making money". On the one hand, this stimulates ambition: many young Russians say they are ready to work hard and are willing to open their own business, but on the other hand, this creates a society in which being rich is almost the only way to gain social recognition and the only criteria to measure success [11, p.45]. The similar problem could be observed in other BSR states.

The major problems concerning education are the recognition of diplomas and certificates abroad, visa restrictions (also because young people are considered as potential migrants), different school standards (11 classes school education in Ukraine, 12 in Moldova etc.), abundance of exams to access relatively better quality of education as indicated in Turkey country report [2, p.17]. The other issue which often pops up as a subject of discussion in several BSR countries is a paid service in high school education. The Ukraine country report claims that such decisions in youth matters are being made without transparent consultations and without considering the opinion of youth. But there are the examples which symbolize the ability of young people to mobilize and defend their interests. For example in Ukraine in 2010 youth and students NGOs have organized all-Ukrainian protests demanding the Ministry to resign from the decision of providing paid service in high school education [29, p.58].

It is also important to consider the link between youth employment and non-formal education (NFE). Here again could be traced the cross-sectoral essence of youth policy, given the comprehensive issue of lifelong learning, which comprises formal education, non-formal learning and vocational skills. As it is argued in the Youth Policy Manual [15], involvement in youth organizations or working as a volunteer tutor or youth leader in a youth club provides a young person with valuable life skills that cannot be taught through the formal education system.

Considering the provided information, it is understandable why in many countries of the region the ongoing reform of the educational system takes place. For example Moldova is successfully involved the Bologna process, and in the other countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey) the education system is adjusted closer to European standards. In Georgia, the state has a concrete policy towards the reform in schools, where the plan of activities until 2015 is distinctly defined [1, p.5]. Considering the aforementioned problems, the promotion of youth employment and entrepreneurship becomes the priority of the youth policy in the countries of the region. For example Armenia's "Youth Policy Strategy for the years of 2008-2012" includes also the involvement of the Network of Regional Youth Centers in the remote regions, which suffer from youth unemployment much more than the capital [29, p.51]. One of the important issues related to the education and employment in the region remains the issue of mobility inside the country and within the region.

4.2. Youth Mobility

For the majority of the countries of the BSR the limited mobility of youth remains characteristic. The main reasons for this are the absence of infrastructure, high transportation costs and visa restrictions. In general, there are no or few state mobility programs for young people and any kind of travel discounts in the majority of the countries. The hostel system, hitchhiking traditions, active leisure is developing very slowly and used mostly by foreigners in big tourists cities. Such programs as EURO<26 or similar exist but are generally stalled at a rudimentary phase and mostly in the big cities. The situation is better in Bulgaria and Romania. Also in Georgia, Moldova and in some other regions (e.g. in Ukraine after EURO 2012) the network of youth hostels is slowly being developed. There are also few mobility opportunities within the educational system [29]. There are recent attempts to improve student mobility (e.g. students in Ukraine have transport discounts that are only valid during the academic year, the Armenian government provides free-of-charge university

buses for students residing in areas near the capital of the country [29, p.15]). A similar situation is described in Azerbaijan's country report which shows that the majority of youth live in more urbanized regions rather than rural areas, and the number of students who prefer to stay in big cities after graduation is increasing [45].

Regarding educational mobility basing on the existing statistics[12] it is possible to argue that the flow of the students between the region and the other EU countries as well as the flow of students between the countries of BSR region is slightly increasing. For example, for students from the Republic of Moldova one of the top destination countries remains Romania, for the students from Azerbaijan it is Turkey. The students from all EECA countries still choose Russian Federation as one of the top destination countries. There are also bilateral flows of students between Georgia and Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine and etc. There exist a number of EU and regional programs which allow the students from the region to participate in student mobility. Those are (in varying degrees of applicability for different BSR countries): Tempus, Erasmus-Mundus, Jean Monnet, e-Twinning, CoE-Pestalozzi programme, CEEPUS, ACES, DAAD, etc. There are also a lot of examples of interuniversity agreements and memorandums. One good example of cooperation in sphere of education are such regional joint programmes as the first 'Regional Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratization', offered by four leading universities from the region[13].

One of the main problems with mobility remains the visa restrictions and closed borders (e.g. Armenia), which hinders traveling by land transport, whereas traveling by air remains quite expensive. It is important to mention that in some countries of the region many young people obtain also the citizenship of other countries (e.g. in Moldova many have second citizenship of Romania, Bulgaria or Russia) which on one side simplifies mobility and also gives the eligibility to participate directly in the EU youth programs intended for EU member states.

According to surveys [29] quite a large number of young people from the region are willing to migrate from their countries or to leave their country for a defined period of time (1-3 years) mainly in search for better employment opportunities. Concerning the workforce mobility and tourism, the examples of Russia and Turkey are illustrative. The visa-free regime (from 2011) between these two states has attracted more Turkish construction firms (and workers) to the Russian market and vice versa. Tourism in the BSR is developing mostly among the countries which benefit from visa-free regime with each other. For example the number of Russian tourists on the Turkish side of Black Sea coast is growing each year. Unfortunately, as a negative consequence some stereotypes of behavior of tourists in the other countries are reported to appear (for more details see [17, p.15-16]).

The other issue, which could possibly represent a challenge to mobility, is language. Each of the nine countries of the BSR has a different state language, which accordingly differs vastly from the languages of the neighboring countries. An exception is represented by Moldova and Romania (the same state language) and partly by Turkey and Azerbaijan (where the languages are rather similar). For the majority of EECA countries, Russian serves as the language of international communication, but the level of command of Russian language among the young population of those countries is decreasing, sometimes being replaced by English. The general literacy of foreign languages is low, presenting the barrier in cross-border communication. For example in Turkey, nearly 55% of the young people do not know any foreign languages well enough to hold a conversation and only 2% visited another country, mostly for holidays [14]. This explains why language difficulties and travel costs are mentioned as the most frequent reasons of restricted youth mobility [2, p.15].

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12 Based on the presentations from the "Eastern Dimension of Mobility Conference", Warsaw, 6-7 July 2011 http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/docs/2011_july_eastern_dimension_mobility_en.pdf
13 http://www.regionalmaster.net

4.3. Youth Participation

The sustainability and relevance of all future developments in the region depend very much on citizens' participation, as it is a cornerstone of civil society development. The reports and research on civil society in the region state that citizens' participation level remains low and the ties between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and citizens are considered rather weak, for historical, cultural, socio-economic and political reasons [3, p.12-14].

Basing on the outcomes of Conference of the Black Sea NGO Forum in 2010 [3], it is possible to argue, that for the BSR region in general, the following commonalities concerning participation could be defined: the low level of civic participation is both a major weakness and obstacle for civil society development and democratic consolidation; participation remains rather diverse and is performed mostly in informal ways; the civil society structure in some countries is marked by elite domination and low levels of social capital [3, p.13]. In this context the involvement of youth in the active life of the society represents one of the main opportunities for improvement.

For the better understanding of situation it is crucial to remember that the youth of the region is represented by the first generation born after the Soviet era, which could explain the particularities in development of youth movements. The majority of BSR countries were former Soviet republics, where the youth movement was based on one huge national youth organization (such as Komsomol) that was considered a milestone in the political carrier and kind of entrance to the ruling elites. The former members of Komsomol provided also a pool for the formation of the first political elites in the newly independent states in the 1990s, because they represented a network of highly active, politically engaged and educated young people. After the break down of the Soviet Union, big organizations were demolished and the role played by such movements was not substituted. Respectively, the organization of youth was almost neglected during one decade. The similar but slightly different situation was characteristic for Romania and Bulgaria as former soviet satellites. At present, due to a long tradition of centralized political systems and decision-processes basing on the allocation of resources in the region, a culture of dependency on the State and passivity from the citizens was generated. This also explains the low level of trust towards NGOs and in the youth as a competent part of society.

The mentioned causes could be observed not only on the examples of some former Socialistic Republics but also on the example of Turkey where after the 1980 military coup, for a long time political participation of young people and their political activities were controlled by various means such as disciplinary regulations at the universities and family measures trying to keep children away from politics [2, p.18]. These resulted in a sharp decrease for young people's engagement in political and social organizations. Since the 2000s many young people in Turkey are getting involved in NGO work, but such activities can still be met with suspicion both by the central or local authorities and the families [36, p.14].

The country reports from the BSR region also name among the reasons of low youth participation the fact that, young people are so busy with their own prosperity that they forget about being socially active; they often want to be involved, but do not know in which way to do it. The youth has frequently limited sources of income, and as the participation in the social sector is in general not profitable, they prefer to go into more profitable spheres of economy.

For example in Georgia, most of youth has no or low level of access to educational recourses, information about different formal or non-formal educational means is not disseminated; the situation is most alarming for youth living in the rural regions [1, p.47]. Also young people in Turkey, according to recent surveys, do not seem interested in politics and their political participation is low. A survey concluded that only 3% of youth are members of any political, social or cultural associations [2, p.15]. However, young people perceive civil society and youth work very positively. To the extent

that young people do not trust politics and their families to solve their problems, they seem to direct their hopes towards civil society and voluntarism [2, p.40]. Concerning participation in Ukraine, a remarkable statement is provided in the country report: The only ways to participation in policy processes for youth are "direct actions" (steer demos, strikes and pickets, street performances, public appeals) preferred by active youth NGOs, since the dialogue is complicated or not possible. Young people interested in participation in policy development would rather join youth wings of political parties than "non-political" NGOs, because the other opportunities to influence even on "youth" policy are limited [29, p.59].

The other important issue which is mentioned in Ukraine's report is the access to opportunities by youth. Such opportunities are often commercialized and accessible only for limited number of young people [4]. Despite of an increasing interest to information, the youth in Ukraine is still isolated and young people need to make big efforts to find access to non-commercial opportunities for studying, learning and participating in social or cultural life [29, p.60]. The same applies for the majority of countries of the region. The respondents to the online questionnaire (Q.27) have stated that often in their countries the youth does not have equal access to opportunities. In such situations, political parties, movements or churches can successfully fill this gap by offering well developed structures on regional and local levels. According to the reports, the manipulation of youth by different forces to a certain extent is still relevant case in the BSR. Thus, while evaluating the level of youth participation, it is important to bear in mind that the involvement of youth in the decision-making should not be closed down to the level of "Manipulation", "Decoration" or "Tokenism", described by Roger Hart in his "ladder of youth participation" model[14].

Ladder of Youth Voice

8. Youth/Adult Equity
7. Completely Youth-Driven
6. Youth/Adult Equality
5. Youth Consulted
4. Youth Informed
3. Tokenism
2. Decoration
1. Manipulation

Adapted by Adam Fletcher (2011) from work by Roger Hart, et al. (1994)

On the other hand, to allow young people more participation in political life the age limit for participation in elections (16 years) could be further discussed in the countries of BSR. This was recently a huge topic in Germany[15], where the election age in Bremen was lowered to 16 years, while on the federal level it was still 18. It could be seen that younger voters generally support more progressive parties and politics. This represents another topic for potential discussions in frames of BSR youth policy cooperation.

Nevertheless, the situation of youth participation in the BSR countries is improving. Among the examples of best practice the establishment of co-management structures could be named, which comprise representatives of non-governmental organizations, the government and student unions and should work on youth policy and legislation issues (e.g. Advisory council at the ministry of youth and sport and Scientific-consultative Council on youth at the Parliament of Georgia) [1, p.39]. The other example is the reorganization of the Council of Youth Affairs by the Prime minister of Armenia in 2010, aimed at raising the level of participation of youth leaders in decision making processes as well as providing a higher transparency in budgetary expenditures. The renewed Council also developed a new funding scheme for grants to YNGOs from the state budget means, and in 2010 the already mentioned Online Grant System was introduced to the YNGO sector which was supposed to provide a much higher transparency and publicity level than the previous grants system [29, p.51].

According to Youth Policy Manual [15], if the young people and youth organizations do not have any ownership of the national youth strategy at all, they may even undermine any prospect of positive development. The best way to insure this ownership is to involve the youth in the process of development of national youth strategy on each stage right from the planning stage. Thus,

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14 More detailed description could be found on http://www.freechild.org/ladder.htm
15 http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/05/20/us-germany-voting-teens-idUSTRE74J3C820110520

concluding, we argue that it is very important to increase youth participation in the BSR countries, because it will provide for implementation of youth strategy and will develop among youth both, a sense of responsibility as well as an interest to contribute to the society.

4.4. Healthy Lifestyle and Sports

Basing on the outcomes of the Symposium on Well-being of Young People in Eastern Europe and Caucasus 2012 [46], it is possible to describe the situation in this field in the BSR. One of the most important challenges concerning a healthy lifestyle is the wide-spread lack of understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle among young people and their families. In particular, the negative effects of the lack of physical activity, unhealthy diet and substance abuse are underestimated or not realized at all. There are sometimes difficulties with the definition of what exactly a healthy lifestyle is. In some cases such definition depends on ideology in a particular context, rather than scientific evidence [46].

According to the reports, the problems with alcohol and drug abuse are more emergent for some countries of the region (Russia) then for others (Armenia, Georgia). However, those problems remain of current interest for all countries of the region. A Lack of awareness on health issues as well as living standards and life style in general of young people result in increasing numbers of HIV/AIDS cases (most emerging remains the situation in Ukraine) [29].

Among the other challenges are the lack of cooperation and coordination between different government bodies and non-government organizations working in the health sector, as well as deficiencies in the means used to communicate with young people and impede a health information flow. While basic medical care and service is guaranteed by the state, the compulsory health insurance has not been introduced in the majority of the states of the region. Also the lack of awareness of the business sector on its social responsibilities due to contrasting business sector and public health interests is considered a challenge. The unstable economy in general and the weak linkages across sectors that can ensure success in health promotion are also a present challenge in the BSR countries. Another important issue is the stigma of young people with mental health problems, which are still often marginalized. Youth workers need to be aware that when dealing with problems of young people, they should also consider mental health issues, as a possible source of their behavioural difficulties.

As the experience shows, while dealing with the health and well-being of young people at a policy level, it is important to pursue anti-discrimination and access to social rights aspects. Peer-based methods, including peer education may be considered an important element, especially when linked with intensive work at a grassroots level to educate young people about responsibilities and outcomes of their lifestyle (including raising the awareness of youth leaders on the importance of the topic). It is considered that young people's opportunities to participate in sports and otherwise have a rich and quality free time (for example through participating in youth NGOs) could have an impact on the number of young people who turn to illegal drugs or alcohol, or who may even become offenders [15, p.16].

4.4.1. Sports

Concerning Sports (as part of the healthy lifestyle topic) we can identify that the general problem is that during the years of the crisis that followed the collapse of the USSR, the entire sports sector lost government support and funding for several years. Over the 1990s, sport has been of little concern, especially in EECA countries, and existing infrastructures were neglected. This led to a severe degradation of infrastructure of the system of organized sport for the youth [12, p.41]. The statement could be true for the majority of BSR countries that the youth is almost not at all interested in sports and the knowledge on health, healthy lifestyles and healthcare system

are very low.

For example, as Armenian country report claims: sports facilities and in general leisure time facilities are extremely underdeveloped especially in rural areas, which is another cause of young people's internal migration to urban areas and especially the capital [29, p.51]. According to statistical data, every third young Azerbaijani says that their spare time is mostly spent on computers, Internet, and computer games [45, p.13]. In Turkey, according to the YADA Survey (2008), many young people aged 16-24 do not exercise sports regularly and are not interested in developing their hobbies, which means that they are not engaged in activities to develop their physical and mental capacities [2, p.16].

That is why it is important that the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, awareness rising on health and popularization of sports is reflected in the youth policy of the countries of the BSR. As it is, for example, in Armenia in the "Youth Policy Strategy for the years of 2008-2012" [29] or in Azerbaijan where as a result of prioritizing healthy lifestyle in youth policy, creation of favorable conditions for sport activities and wide promotion of a healthy lifestyle, criminal rate connected with drug consume of young people has decreased in the last years [45, p.10-13].

On one hand the perceived social power of sport in contribution to intercultural understanding and its benefit to interethnic relations has been expressed by many policy makers, scholars and organizations including the European Commission[16] and the United Nations[17]. They argue that sport could be a tool for building trust, mutual understanding and a rising level of tolerance. Other scholars are more skeptical of the positive role of sport arguing that it could provide more challenges than solutions [12, p.9-43]. Issues of cultural conflict and interethnic tolerance have moved to the centre of political and public debate especially the case in divided, post conflict societies that have recently suffered from civil war and armed conflicts. One of the cultural practices considered most promising both for enhancing interethnic contact and social cohesion and as a tool for peace and reconciliation initiatives is considered to be recreational sport [12, p.9]. In recent years there have been many examples of peacemaking and social cohesion initiatives, especially in football, for example in South Caucasus. Interesting examples of how sport can serve as mediating tool and can help to strengthen social cohesion in communities that have been shattered by conflict and war are provided in the Handbook "Sport in Post-Conflict Societies" [12].

4.5. Conflicts and Challenges Related to Social and Political Issues

Continuing the topic raised in the above chapter this part of the report will further focus on conflicts. All the countries of the BSR region are influenced by important geopolitical processes. It is crucial to understand them while analyzing the perspectives of regional youth cooperation. Any conflict on the territory of the neighbor state can become the reason of serious distresses in the whole region. Black Sea Region is obviously fraught with "frozen conflicts": Chechnya, Abkhazia, Adjaria and South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transdniesteria, Crimea, Kurdistan and other regions and disputed territories, influence in a varying degree the socioeconomic and political stability of the region. The interstate relations in the area are also instable, especially between Russia-Georgia, Armenia-Azerbaijan, and Turkey-Armenia as well as between Romania-Ukraine, Ukraine-Russia, Russia-Moldova. Such situation is jeopardizing the process of building trust and deeper cooperation among the local states in general and in the youth field in particular (as for example the Russian-Georgian war has delayed or even canceled many youth projects and initiatives in 2008) [28, p.53]. Moreover, from the geostrategic perspective there exists a continuous contest between different centers of power for the dominance in the region. Today, in spite of some contradictions in their foreign policy, both Russia and Turkey position themselves as legitimate Black Sea countries. As regional powers they both attempt to play the key role in the whole territory of BSR and especially in Caucasus. For example, Turkey (whose armed forces are the second biggest in NATO after the

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16 http://ec.europa.eu/sport/what-we-do/doc35_en.htm
17 (Annan, 2005) in [12, p.9] and (Krouwel et al., 2006) in [12, p.43].

US army) feels traditionally hypersensitive to the actions made by the other powerful players such as Russia or the US in struggling for the dominance over the region [17, p.10]. Turkey continues to promote its interests in South Caucasus, strengthening its influence in Abkhazia, Adygea and Karachay-Circassia and continues to give the active support (including military) to Azerbaijan concerning the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In its turn, Russia is pursuing the similar policy towards Armenia, still regarding it as the main ally in the region [17, p.10] and also pursuing to exercise its influence on the other countries of BSR ("the near abroad") perceiving it as the traditional sphere of its influence [6].

Despite all existing contradictions the respondents on the online questionnaire (Q.14) do not indicate regional conflicts as one of the main problems for regional cooperation, stating that there are more opportunities in the field of conflict transformation work in the region. However, there are some issues, related to the conflicts, which may cause potential problems in cooperation. Those issues have to be considered in building regional youth cooperation.

One of those potential challenges is the political and social polarization within some countries. For example, according to Country Report [4] in Ukraine there are strong regional differences in approaches to deal with youth issues in political attractive spheres as language, religion, patriotic education, leisure, and volunteering. It is also popular to cultivate regional patriotism, which is contradictive to the national ideas and raise a lot of interregional conflicts, non-acceptances and mistrust among the youth in different regions [29, p.61]. The other example is Russia, where according to survey [11, p.44] the North Caucasus Region is suffering heavily from the consequences of the political instability in the region in the aftermath of the Chechen wars. Youth unemployment, frustration and boredom are factors that may contribute to an increase in the potential for radicalism in the North Caucasus. Young people in this region are particularly concerned about the lack of suitable work opportunities, youth unemployment and the lack of leisure structures while in the rest of Russia, social issues (alcoholism and drug-consumption) come first. Although, central authorities have taken back sufficient control over regions to face potential situations of conflict, but the North Caucasus is the only region where political and social tensions are still immediate [11, p.44]. This is particularly important in terms of direct geographical proximity of North Caucasus to the Black Sea Region.

The other important challenge is the rise of intolerance and nationalism in some areas of the BSR region. For example Dafflon [11] mentions a high level of intolerance towards (illegal) immigrants and members of national minorities in Russia. In provinces characterized by a high unemployment rate and failing leisure structures, young people are easy recruitment targets for nationalist movements. In some cases they have little confidence in the future of the country, have no trust in public authorities and tend to be disillusioned about the evolution of the Russian society (acceptance of violence as a normal state of affairs; the widening gap between the rich and the poor; the high level of corruption) which in turn, leads to frustration and radicalism among youth [11, p.44].Those young Russians who feel the most disoriented are more likely to approve of radical groupings and to back violent measures to deal with marginalized social groups. They are thus easier targets for leaders of radical political or social movements [11, p.45].

As long as there is no stability and tools for implementing and evaluating efficiency of youth policy, the situation of the youth will depend on the political situation in the country, namely on the result of elections and the personality of politicians responsible for youth matters. According to Youth Policy Manual [15, p.57], especially the countries that have recently been undergoing transition may experience a less stable political system, where governments have no interest in pursuing action plans or strategies, which were developed by the previous government. This presents a potential threat for the youth cooperation and implementation of youth strategies in the Black Sea Segion. In this context one of the negative tendencies in the countries of the region is the increasing "politicization" of the youth policy sphere.

For example in Armenia the youth policy structures were traditionally a politics-free zone[29, p.51]. This was giving a possibility to secure the National Youth Policy from the effects of numerous political changes that were happening in the Republic. But last couple of years due to increasing political confrontations between different political parties, there is a tendency to give a political marking to youth policy as well. More and more issues relating to the National Youth Policy are discussed in political couloirs before reaching the youth sector, which is negatively affecting the trust of YNGOs towards the National Youth Policy [29, p.51].The same situation is described for Ukraine [29, p.60] where the organized youth is already got used to take part of political parties or to be incorporated into the party systems. There is also a tradition to build situations of "conflicts of interests" especially in financial matters, when civil servants, politicians and NGO leaders represent the same structures in processes of public consultation or division of resources. Therefore, it is necessary to take it in consideration in the future that youth leaders are politically biased [29, p.60].

As the above contextualization shows, youth work in conflict areas became an urgent issue. Obviously, such work is a big challenge and it raises a lot of important questions: How to encourage young people and create a safe atmosphere for non-formal learning in such places like towns and villages of so-called disputed territories? How to make young people able to overcome clashes and intolerance in migrant societies? What kind of activities should we undertake to let young people from different sides of conflict interact? What are the basic principles of non-formal learning in such contexts? One of the successful attempts to deal with those questions is Educational Report "Building Bridges in Conflict Areas" [16], which also could provide many practical answers applicable in the realities of Black Sea Region.

Among the examples of recent youth initiatives in this field, the following could be mentioned:
- "Sorry Campaign" Georgia (Human Rights Center, Georgia)
- Human Rights organisation presence in Abkhazia offering technical assistance
- Eastern Partnership Cultural Programme
- Summer school for Black Sea young leaders in Armenia on peace building and negotiations
- (ICHD, Armenia)
- November Managua conference on civil society and development cooperation (TRIALOG, Austria)
- Raising awareness and education for tolerance towards disabled individuals / Summer camp for youth (with and without disabilities)
- November launch of Black Sea Peacebuilding Network (BSPN) website
- December Kiev regional meeting of BSPN
- IT support platform for NGOs (TechSoup, Romania)
- Investing in negotiations skills of public authorities on both banks of Nistru/Dniestr river (Institute for Public Policies, Republic of Moldova)
- Engagement in the region and providing support and expertise on peacebuilding and conflict transformation (PATRIR, Romania and Crisis Management Initiative, Finland)

In the conditions of confronting interests, regional cooperation is essential for overcoming barriers and for generating solutions in support of locally based efforts for reconciliation and conflict resolution. Sharing the lessons learnt and good practices in crisis management and conflict prevention is very important. However, in many cases the society is not strong enough to generate viable solutions without support from the state and from international society.

4.6. Cooperation in Frames of Environmental Projects

Now let us look on the Black Sea Region from the ecological perspective. The Black Sea is unique among all seas on the planet. The Black Sea drainage basin covers almost third part of Europe. An important feature of the Black Sea is a uniquely high river discharge into an inland sea, which has as a consequence that marine life in the Black Sea is not diverse, nevertheless the new species are still discovered by scientists, and the growth rate of biomass is high[18].

The major environmental problems of the Black Sea region are related to global problems: climate change, energy, food, environmental contamination and, particularly water problems. The other specific topics are: unsustainable development of new coastal territories, their capture and high rates of building in coastal zone without regards to the existing legislation and the common sense. The problem of plastic waste has turned from a local problem to a global one [3, p.21]. Such topics could present a potential area for youth cooperation and joint actions and projects on regional level. In this sphere only cohesion of all BSR countries can guarantee effectiveness of implemented actions. Civil society should work together in fields such as sustainable energy, organic agriculture, public information, awareness raising and environmental education [3]. The following initiatives and projects could serve as examples of the first steps in regional cooperation in this field:

The International Black Sea Action Day - 31 October: comprises both national and regional activities designed to raise public awareness of the ongoing regional cooperation involved in protecting the Black Sea. The introduction of this day was preceded by signing and ratifying (1994) the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution (Bucharest Convention) by Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine

The Earth Day – 22 April: is celebrated in more than 175 countries every year. It is coordinated globally by Earth Day Network whose members include NGOs, quasi-governmental agencies, local governments, activists, and others (also the active organizations from the BSR countries).

The International Danube Day – 29 June: since 2004, through the joint effort of different organizations, the celebration of Danube Day throughout the Danube River Basin became an annual event, paying tribute the Danube and the rivers that flow into it.

Black Sea Regional Initiative for the wise use of coastal wetlands (BlackSeaWet) The initiative is intended to enhance cooperation, capacity development, civil society engagement and knowledge based approaches to conservation and sustainable management. The project is undertaking national consultations through national working groups in Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine[19].

4.7. Housing, Family, and Gender

The situation within the housing sector is of high significance for a society's social and economic development. In order to develop and implement feasible policy options, there is a need to openly recognize problems within the sector. In spite of several improvements, all the countries in the region are reported to experience a number of significant problems with housing. Basing on various reports of the UN Economic commission for Europe ([30],[31],[32],[33]) it is possible to distinguish the common problems in housing sector in BSR. Among the most common problems are the great challenges related to housing finance, a lack of access to reliable information and statistics on the housing sector, lack of adequate human resources both in terms of numbers and individual skills, the benefits of a free housing market are at present available only to the exceptionally wealthy,

18 http://blacksea-education.ru/e2.shtml
19 http://blacksearegion.wetlands.org/WHATWEDO/Allourprojects/tabid/425/mod/601/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/1911/Default.aspx

and there is no social housing safety net. It is obvious that all mentioned problems are especially relevant for the youth. Yet in the state policy of the previous decades the priority has been given to the other sectors. Probably the main problem facing the housing is a failure to recognize the scale and complexity of the issues.

Even though 'housing' was not mentioned in the online survey (Q.7) as the urging issue for youth, nevertheless in the last decade it is becoming one of the main issues for the state youth policy of the countries of the region. For example in Armenia in 2009 was launched the programme "Accessible housing for young families", which in conformity to "Youth Policy Strategy for the years of 2008-2012", was aimed to improve the social-economic situation of young people" [29, p.51]. The similar program was envisaged in the Republic of Moldova [5]. For a solution of the housing problems of the young families, the government of Azerbaijan has started realization of a state program on mortgage crediting [45, p.15].

There is also one problem, which is connected with housing for the youth. In Turkey, as in the majority of countries of the BSR, it is very common for single young people to live with their parents. This is also valid for young people who completed their education and start working, as well as for some married couples. The report states that young people cannot establish their own lives before marriage and spend most of their time together with their families [2, p.15]. Young people cannot afford to move out (72%) and they need financial help (32%) [14]. The financial problems being solved by parents often create young people's dependency on their families and the control of the family in young people's personal lives is very high [2, p.16]. Family in Turkey is a culturally valuable entity and provides support for a young person throughout life. However, it is also a factor that limits the freedom of young people as families often intervene with young people's own decisions, especially for young women. Not only pressure but also over-protection of family hinders young people to develop their personal independence, participation and self-confidence [36, p.7]. Thus, as it is shown particularly on the example of Turkey, the role of the family in a young peoples' life is very important. According to respondents, the same is true for many countries of the BSR regions and especially in rural areas.

An interesting fact from the Azerbaijan report shows that due to peculiarities of Azerbaijan mentality, marriage considers first of all solution of job placement problem, existence of stable source of income and provision with property. For the young generation, the first supreme goal is to be employed, to stabilize his or her financial demand and to find a solution in housing problems. The youth does not seek to wait for improvements of their socio-economic situation before getting married and tries to solve it while being at marriage [45, p.16].

The other issue which seems to be mostly relevant for Turkey and Azerbaijan is that the cultural and traditional role attributed to young women differs considerably from that of young men. Some socially conservative restrictive attitudes partly associated with some traditional characteristics especially hinder young women [36, p.22] and results in exclusion of women from equal participation in public and private life [36, p.44]. The inequality for young women also persists since girls often drop out or are withdrawn from school by their families for reasons such as getting married and taking on the traditional role of a wife and mother [36]. Early or forced marriage and 'honor killing' are two brutal examples of discrimination against young women [2].

The research report of SAD [11] shows that the prevailing traditional gender roles also still dominate the Russian society. Women are more likely to consider life as unstable and unjust, probably because most of them have fewer opportunities to pursue a career since society expects them first and foremost to be good wives and mothers. Furthermore, the risk of economic instability is especially high for women due to the high divorce rate in the country and the fact that single mothers constitute one of the groups most vulnerable to poverty [11, p.46].

Concerning housing and family there could be seen common tendencies among the young people in BSR countries. However in some countries, young women and young men go through different experiences, which shape their identities and patterns of participation in social life differently. Other reasons for different patterns of behavior among young people are socio-economic status, educational status, urban-rural differences and ethnic/religious backgrounds [2]. The main problems mentioned in this chapter are to a certain extend relevant for all the countries of the BSR.

5. Youth Cooperation in the Black sea Region

As an introduction, the following chart is provided, which shows that for 29 % of respondents of the online survey (Q.22) the cooperation with the BSR countries is the first priority and they consider it as essentially necessary for the development of the whole region. The vast majority of the respondents (65%) stated that the increase of cooperation in the youth field between BSR countries has some potential benefits and opportunities and only 6% claim it as not really necessary.

Q.22. Please assess what are the priorities in international cooperation in the youth field for your organization/country?

■ The cooperation with the BSR countries is the first priority for your organization/ youth from youth country and is essentially necessary for the development of the whole region (29%)

■ The increasing of cooperation in the youth field between BSR countries has some potential benefits and opportunities but it is not the first priority…

■ The cooperation within BSR is not important and not really necessary for the youth in your country (6%)
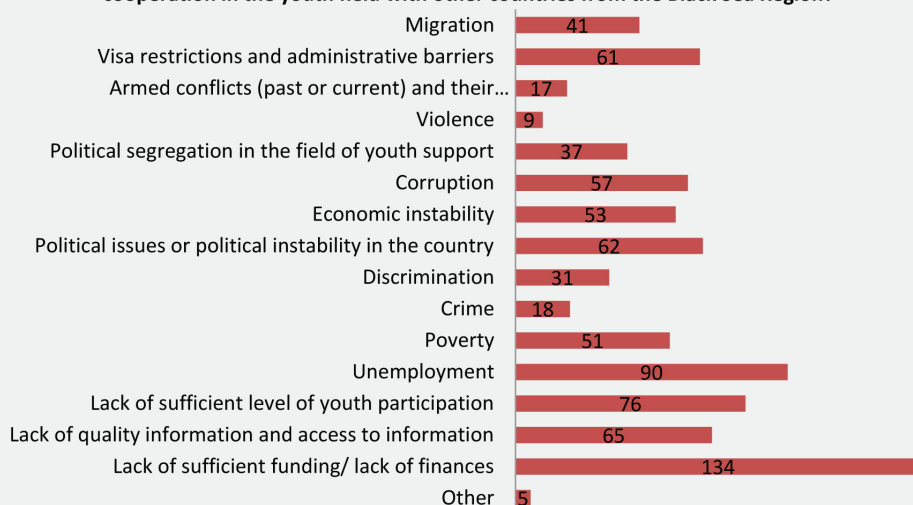
As it was shown in previous chapters, there are many challenges in the Black Sea Region. Among the most important are the big number of countries and their diversity, the presence of conflicts and contradicting interests. From a socio-economic perspective, the region is not very stable and homogeneous. Economic cooperation and exchange remain low among the countries in the region. Regarding the societal challenges, there is a predominant low trust in institutions and a high level of corruption. The civic commitment and the impact of the civil society are very low. All those factors are not facilitating the process of building trust and deeper cooperation among the countries.

On the other hand, however, the discussion of regions is based on the assumption that it is exactly the problems that actually define regions and regionalism. Deeper regional cooperation often appears as a response for the challenges, when the common policies are developed to address perceived common problems. It leads to a situation in which states can cooperatively achieve results which are impossible to achieve individually [23, p.6]. Thus, all the challenges turn to become opportunities for cooperation first of all because diversity is a prerequisite for exchange and for the creation of a space where the entire society can be active. In this context, the non-governmental sector and particularly the youth is capable to contribute to increasing the internal social cohesion, to consolidate trust between all partners and to intensify the cooperation with neighbors circumventing the contradicting the sometimes contradicting political interests of national governments.

5.1. Challenges

Taking into consideration the regional cooperation in the youth field, the most important challenges mentioned by respondents in the online survey are the lack of sufficient funding, not active participation, limited access of information, unemployment, corruption, political issues and visa restrictions.

Q.14. What are the most important challenges for young people and NGOs for the cooperation in the youth field with other countries from the Black Sea Region?

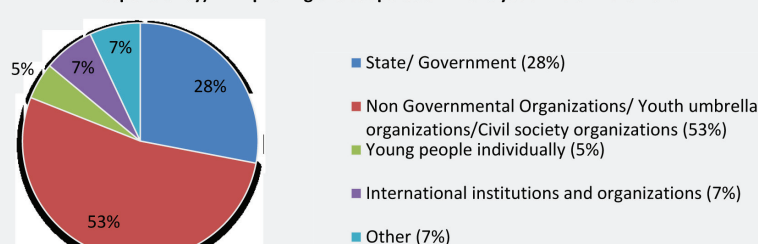| Challenge	Value
Migration	41
Visa restrictions and administrative barriers	61
Armed conflicts (past or current) and their…	17
Violence	9
Political segregation in the field of youth support	37
Corruption	57
Economic instability	53
Political issues or political instability in the country	62
Discrimination	31
Crime	18
Poverty	51
Unemployment	90
Lack of sufficient level of youth participation	76
Lack of quality information and access to information	65
Lack of sufficient funding/ lack of finances	134
Other	5

It is interesting to mention that the armed conflicts (past or current) and their consequences were mentioned as a challenge for cooperation only by 10% of respondents. As opposed to the other reports which put regional conflicts as one of the most important challenges for regional cooperation. The fact that regional conflicts do not present the major challenge for the youth cooperation in the region is also indirectly confirmed by the answers to the other question in the online survey. To the question Q .20 "Are there any areas in your country and/or in the Black Sea Region countries which you consider unsafe or unsuitable for performing youth activities and projects?" only few respondents mentioned conflict zones such as Transnistria, Osetia and Karabach as unsafe for youth projects (solitary answers includes also Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia, Eastern Turkey and Moldova but they are too uncommon). The majority of respondents answered however, that there are no areas which present danger for youth activities. On the contrary, such conflicts present opportunity for cooperation.

5.2. Actors in Cooperation

It is obvious, that many of the challenges, mentioned in the previous chapters of this report, could be influenced and changed by the state/governmental policies of the BSR countries. But only 28% of respondents named the government as the most important player in the BSR youth cooperation. More than half (53%) of all respondents of the online survey have stated that the leading role in the improving the cooperation in the youth field in BSR belongs to NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs).

Q.13. In your opinion, who should play the leading role (take the initiative and responsibility) in improving the cooperation in the youth field in the BSR?

- State/ Government (28%)
- Non Governmental Organizations/ Youth umbrella organizations/Civil society organizations (53%)
- Young people individually (5%)
- International institutions and organizations (7%)
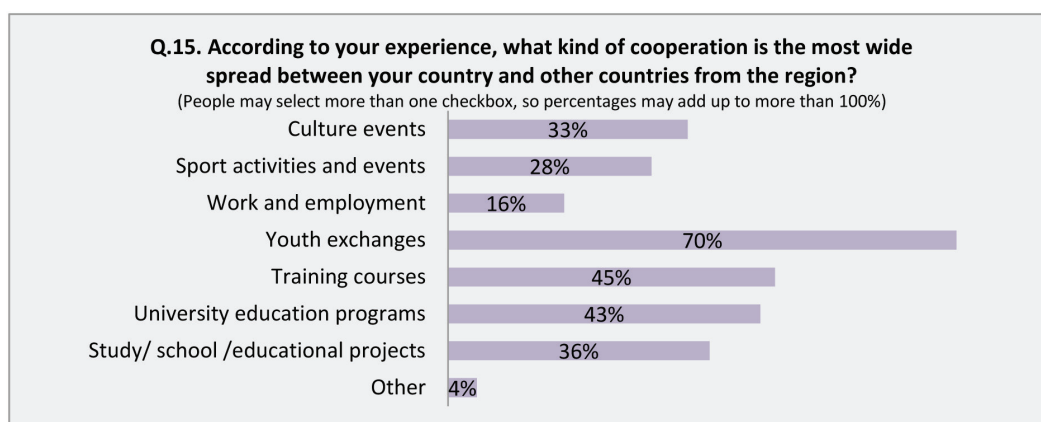- Other (7%)

Thus, there clearly exists a real need to enforce youth policies in the Black Sea region and to provide more support to youth civil society organizations as the way to foster future regional cooperation. Investing in youth should be seen as the most effective way of investing in peaceful, prosperous and democratic future for the Black Sea region [3, p.22].

Trying to define what structures are mostly involved as the partners for youth cooperation in the BSR region we have figured out that those are mostly youth NGOs (in responses are also mentioned National Youth councils) and to a lesser extent the governmental institutions (see Q17). Among the other partners for regional projects are also (rather seldom) mentioned National and Local Unions of students, Universities, Local Authorities, Cultural organizations (e.g. traditional dancers), political parties.
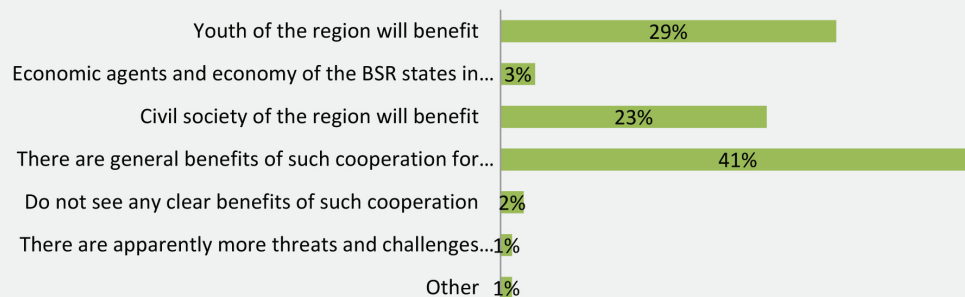
5.3. Main Domains of Youth Cooperation

The answers to the question Q. 15 and Q. 17 of the online questionnaire show, that the most wide spread youth cooperation in the BSR (under perception of respondents) is performed through youth exchanges (70%) and training courses for the youth. University education programs and school education projects, when taken together, also represent quite a big share of the cooperation projects. On the third place are culture and sport events. Work and employment projects evidently represent the smallest share of cooperation possibilities. In this regard it is important to pay attention to the question Q.23 where the "measures to provide enough assistance in entrepreneurship and employment including vocational education schemes, training, loans, etc ..." are highlighted by respondents as the most important for improvement of youth cooperation in the BSR. Thus the conclusion of the need for more of work, employment and entrepreneurship projects and initiatives in the BSR becomes evident.

Q.15. According to your experience, what kind of cooperation is the most wide spread between your country and other countries from the region?
(People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%)

Culture events	33%
Sport activities and events	28%
Work and employment	16%
Youth exchanges	70%
Training courses	45%
University education programs	43%
Study/ school /educational projects	36%
Other	4%

5.4. Potential Benefits and Threats of Cooperation

The youth see the clear benefits in the increase of the level of the youth cooperation in the BSR. The majority of respondents (41%) stated that in case such cooperation will increase it will bring general benefits for the whole region in different spheres and sectors. A big number of respondents also see benefits for the civil society of the region (23%) and for the youth of the region (29%).

Q.18. In case the youth cooperation between the BSR countries will increase who will mostly benefit from such cooperation?

Category	Percentage
Youth of the region will benefit	29%
Economic agents and economy of the BSR states in…	3%
Civil society of the region will benefit	23%
There are general benefits of such cooperation for…	41%
Do not see any clear benefits of such cooperation	2%
There are apparently more threats and challenges…	1%
Other	1%

Among the positive effects of youth cooperation in the BSR the respondents have frequently mentioned the possibility to exchange experience and good practices with the youth from the other countries of BSR. Below several responses from the online questionnaire are provided:

- *"The youth will have the chance to exchange opinions, problem solving and participation ideas with the other countries from the BSR. Furthermore, these courtiers are at a similar level of development, so that the communication will be simplified and will increase the level of problem solving. "*

- *"One positive benefit is the opportunity for sharing knowledge and experience which may result in the mutual projects. Such cooperation will give opportunity to connect with countries that it has not had cooperation with before"*

- *"increasing the number of common activities and youth exchanges"*

- *"Conscious Awareness in Youth Policies could be increased"*

- *"get the best practises and learn from each other, implement new youth politics and lows"*

- *"We believe that all of the strctures in the youth sector can benefit from more cooperation and comon work - from governments to NGOs and young people. We need more partnership projects to develop common understanding and better behavivor to each other."*

- *"more youth exchange possibilities, consequently more tolerant and educated young people"*

- *"More exchange ideas and information about BSR coutries."*

- *"promotion of best practices and youth participation at all levels"*

As one of the positive outcomes of youth cooperation is very often mentioned that international youth projects help to remove the stereotypes and to improve the intercultural understanding and in general increase the trust among the countries of the BSR countries.

- *"ethnical understanding will increase, youth will be more connected to their region and will discover attractive potentials in their own and the neighboring countries"*

- *"awareness raising and intercultural communication "*

- *"Intercultural Learning and breaking down the predijuces"*

- *"avoiding discrimination based on religion and culture"*

- *"As a positive outcome I consider the fact that young people from Armenia will have chance to meet with young people from other countries and as a result most of existing stereotypes (sometimes also aggression) will be broken."*

The young people also often mentioned the positive effect of cooperation on the education and employment.

- *"On the one hand, there will be improvement in the field of education, as the educational programmes for exchange of students will increase. Also, the better cooperation between the countries in the BSR will lead to better opportunities for the young people to work and travel in these countries, which will not only benefit the economy, but also the better understanding of the different cultures in the region".*

- *"Youth will be more likely to succed in their professional aims being supported by movements and projects offered by BSR countries"*

- *"Enhancing youth participation with inpact on democratisation of the societies involved*

- *The most important benefit is that we can help each other to make our countries and our future in better condition (education, employment, etc.)."*

- *"The young people from countries outside the EU will be trained to work according to the EU standards"*

- *"Young people will have the opportunity to exchange ideas and best practices will increase their knowledge about the culture of other countries in the region will cause youth entrepreneurship"*

In the responses big attention is also paid to the potential of personal development of young people.

- *"young people will personally develop and the region will have the chance to grow having the support of these enthusiastic youngsters"*

- *"Youth mobility in the region will increase"*

- *"exchange of experience, thus increasing the level of development of each other;"*

Other responses also mentioned the improvement of "lobbying of youth's interests", the positive changes in legislation and that the BSR will present "the alternative to EU cooperation".

Even though the benefits of such cooperation are clear, there are some challenges and threats which may appear. Those negative effects of the cooperation were provided in Q.19 ("If the level of cooperation in the youth field within BSR countries will increase, which potential benefits and threats for the youth of the region do you see?") The respondents were asked to provide at least one important positive and then one negative effect of such cooperation. All the challenges provided by the respondents in the online survey could be grouped into two broad categories - the existing challenges and the potential challenges which may appear if the cooperation will increase. Among the existing challenges, the youth from the BSR countries mention - the political problems in the countries and unstable political situation in some regions, lack of financial resources for the

development of youth initiatives, quite often mentioned barriers for mobility (including visa issues, expensive transportation and lack of infrastructure) etc.

The potential challenges mentioned by respondents to the online questionnaire could also be grouped in several categories:

- First category includes the challenges connected with potential migration of young people, and brain drain: "the more people are educated and inspired, the more they may want to leave their small cities and move to the big ones", "Some young people through the contacts in the EU countries aim only to receive the EU passport".

- Second category is connected with the lack of sustainability and fears that the governmental changes in the countries may cause the abolishment of existing strategies and cooperation agreements.

- Next category includes financial threads. Some respondents share the fear that with the increasing number of activities in the region the amount of expenditures necessary for youth projects will increase. This may lead to insufficient financial resources available for the region. "Not all the young people from the region who would want to participate in youth exchanges can afford to contribute to the travel expenses, so they will be disappointed that others had the opportunity to personally develop and they did not"

- As one of respondents has claimed: "the youth is not so diplomatic" and this may lead to the threat of aggravation of existing conflicts and contradictions between some of the BSR countries. This category can also include "lack of communication between the different culture, ethnic discrimination and historical issues (misunderstandings)" …" Threat - possible cultural conflicts… challenge will be different culture and different political situation and tolerance"… "Problems occur mostly in areas that are difficult to cope with (like religion, national believes and delusions, etc.)" here could be also included such answers as "Cultural differences" "low integration", "intercultural misunderstandings", "Prejudices" "Racism"," Lack of tolerance"

- Some respondents argue that there is the threat of 'politicization' of youth activities in sense that the youth issues could be used by politicians in the BSR countries for their own reasons. "Youth participation continues to be tokenistic and no real change occurs, further depressing the hopes and futures youth of our region"

- Sixth: "selective approach to the countries in the region" "more representation of certain countries and young people from those countries…" One of the respondents has mentioned as a thread that with increasing of cooperation within the region "influence of Russian ideas" in his country will also increase.

- Seventh category is connected with previously mentioned "corruption schemes among institutions" and unequal possibilities for young people within one country.

- Eighth: "Linguistic barriers" and all the challenges connected with the barriers in communication.

5.5. Legal and Institutional Framework for Youth Cooperation

At present, there is no formal multilateral agreement specifically dealing with youth cooperation in the Black Sea Region. However, there exist some important initiatives in the field. First of all, The Black Sea Convention on Cooperation in the Fields of Culture, Education, Science and Information (1993) possesses an important potential for encouraging the youth cooperation in the fields of culture and education, in such areas as students' exchanges, learning of the languages of the Black Sea countries, art contests and festivals, film festivals, cooperation on the opportunities of recognizing diplomas and degrees, and various youth exchange programmes [26].

The cooperation of the youth may also constitute a significant element of the emerging human dimension of the BSEC. In the process of its evolution, the BSEC is gradually expanding the scope of its activities to include issues pertaining to the human dimension of the regional cooperation process. In particular, in the Moscow Declaration adopted on 25 October 1996, the Heads of State or Government of the BSEC Participating States "agree that their economic organization will be enhanced by various measures in the sphere of human contacts" [26, p.4].

At the bilateral level, agreements aiming to promote youth cooperation have been concluded between some of the BSEC countries. For example, Turkey has signed sports cooperation protocols with Albania, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Moldova and Romania. In February 1997, the Draft Statute of the Black Sea Sports Games was signed by experts from Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine.

5.6. Civil society initiatives on regional cooperation.
Best Practices and Successful Projects.

The first initiatives in the field of youth cooperation are dated back in middle 1990s. The Black Sea University (Foundation) began its activities in Romania in 1993 with the aim to create a multinational intellectual environment of non-formal education and enhance scholars' and students' ability to solve common problems such as preserving the natural environment and cultural heritage of the region while also promoting regional economic development [26]. During the late 1990, a number of conferences, assemblies and other events were held in Georgia, Greece, Romania, Turkey with the aim to empower cooperation among BSR countries in the youth field. Among them are: the International Scientific Symposium "The Mediterranean and the Black Sea Coast" (1998), The Youth of the Black Sea countries in the Changing World, national-level seminar in Georgia "Non-governmental Organizations for Sustainable Development"(1997), the schoolchildren's Environmental Assembly (Trabzon, 1997), "Young Entrepreneurs, Spirit of Enterprise, Employment creation" (1997) and the others [26, p.7-10].

Among the further excellent examples of regional cooperation led by civil society organizations are to be mentioned:

The Eastern European Youth Cooperation (EEYC) with a joint idea to bring together the National Youth Councils from the Black Sea region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine) was established in 2005. Since then it has successfully run a number of common activities in the countries covered by its membership. The EEYC is the largest network of youth organization within the Black Sea region, allowing several hundreds of youth NGOs to benefit of different international activities and opportunities, and to influence youth policies in the region [3, p.22].

The Black Sea NGO Forum (launched in 2008) gathered over 100 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, other European Union member states and important

actors in the wider Black Sea Region. Youth non-governmental organizations, through the Black Sea NGO Forum, have been actively contributing to the sustainable development of the Black sea region and efforts to protect the environment of the Black Sea undertaken within the framework of the "Bucharest Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution" and the Black Sea Environmental Programme supported by the UN Global Environmental Facility [3, p.2].

YouthBank[20] is a unique mechanism focused on the idea of involving young people in community development and decision making process within their local community. The funding collected and distributed by young people involved in the YouthBanks initiatives supports projects designed and run by young people that address issues and concerns relevant to them and their community. At present, under various forms and stages of organization, YouthBanks exist in several countries in the Black Sea region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Romania and Russia). The experience from Armenia suggests that YouthBanks can generate positive evolutions at regional level: besides strengthening active citizenship, community work, philanthropy and personal development, this model can be applied for conflict transformation: future leaders working across border for peace and stability[3, p.23].

Being asked to name the projects or initiatives which have been outstandingly successful in terms of cooperation with countries of the Black Sea Region the respondents to the online questionnaire provided among others the following answers:
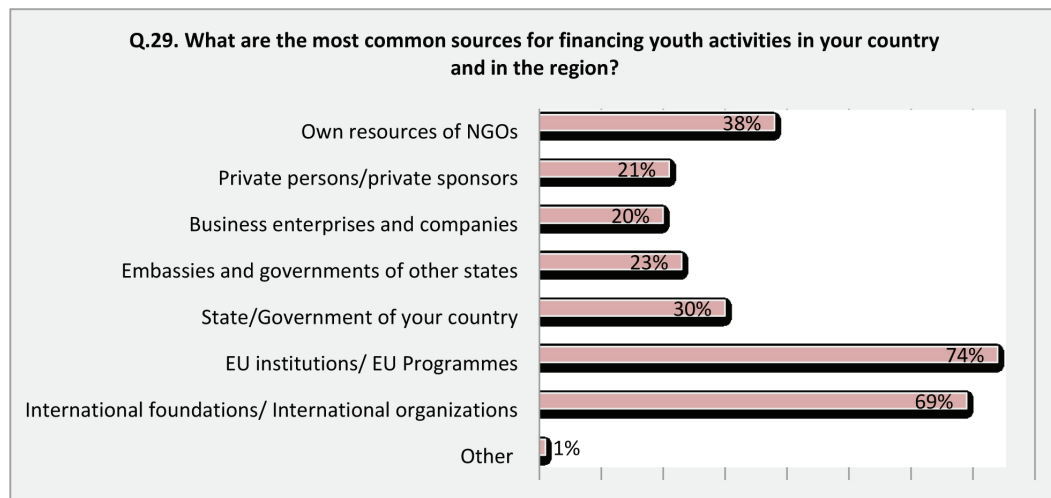
Black Sea Youth fellowship, Black Sea Sustainability Platform (BSSP), SALTO Laboratory on Youth participation in Macka "Lab 3 Active", Azerbaijan Youth observers in the president elections, Training course C.A.R.E. through Volunteering, Media Sapiens III "Creative Promotional Tools in Youth Work", "StereoDice" (dealing with the themes of social exclusion and racism) , Projects of President of Social Union of Legal Education of Sumgait Youth, Regional initiative in Black Sea Coastal wetlands, Cross-border project between Veliko Tarnovo university and the university of Craiova, Black Sea Summer University 2012, Faclia Center for Youth (exchange of good particles in the field of youth with Georgia, Moldova and Serbia), Projects of National Youth Forum of Bulgaria; " Small steps for intercultural dialogue" (2009); Canakale : "Innovation and creativity" (2010); Izmir : "Diversity as an union" (2010); Network meeting in Istanbul (2009);Black Sea NGO Forum;"Become a Legend" Project; IUSY seminars on BSR cooperation; No Child Left Behind (Georgia- Azerbaijan project); East Europe & Central Asia Union of PLWH; Joint Civic Education; EPF's Cross-border programs - Youth Bank, and Getting Involved!; The Eastern European Youth Cooperation ; "All Different – All Equal" company of the CoE and etc.

5.7. Funding

While the financial sources were mentioned in responses to several questions of the online survey as one of the most important issues for the youth cooperation, it is important to analyze the sources for financing youth activities in BSR countries and the main actors involved.

The respondents have indicated the EU Institutions and EU Programmes (74%) and International foundations/Organizations (69%) as the most common sources of financing the youth initiatives. It is important, that own resources of NGOs also were mentioned by a considerable share of respondents (38%) as the sources of financing of youth activities in BSR.

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20   http://www.youthbank.org

Q.29. What are the most common sources for financing youth activities in your country and in the region?

Source	Percentage
Own resources of NGOs	38%
Private persons/private sponsors	21%
Business enterprises and companies	20%
Embassies and governments of other states	23%
State/Government of your country	30%
EU institutions/ EU Programmes	74%
International foundations/ International organizations	69%
Other	1%

When asked to specify the programs/foundations with which the respondents have the best and well established experience of cooperation (Q.30), the respondents have frequently mentioned The European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe, The Youth in Action Programme (YiA) of the EU (also specified sometimes as National Agencies of YiA programme of Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania and SALTO resource centre), the Open Society Institution and Soros Foundation

Among the other frequently named organizations/foundations were the following:

Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation , East Europe Foundation Moldova, The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sport (of several countries of BSR), Erasmus Program, NED, BST, USA Embassy, British Embassy, USAID, Norwegian government, Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, Balkan Trust for Democracy, DAAD, World Bank (WB)

To a smaller extend also the following names appeared in the answers of respondents:

Robert-Bosch-Foundation, POSDRU, TIA, LOTO, EON, Biodiversity Foundation, Caritas Swis, Anna Lindh Foundation, National Programmes for cross border cooperation, Jean Jaures Fondations, Alfred-Mozer-Stiftung, German embassy, Grundvich, CISV International, Kids across the Caucasus Program, Nitherland embassy , Theodor-Heuss-Collage, Community Foundation of Northern Ireland, Youth house of Tromso 'Tvibit', Ford Found, Church societies, Universities (e.g .Sofia University "St. Cyril and Methodious"), SILC, CIDA, GALE, YRMF, FLEX

5.7.1. Donors, Actors, Programmes

As it was stated before, the civil society of the region in general and particularly youth organizations remain highly dependent on foreign funding. Thus, in the following a short overview of the donor organizations active in the Black Sea Region will be provided. The common problem in the region, concerning the funding, which was often mentioned in this report, is the lack of strategy for regional cooperation among NGOs which might influence donors' allocation of resources. The Black Sea NGO Forum is partly performing the function of platform for such coordination. However, there are no political regional cooperation strategies which could generate more coordination among NGOs for consultation and advocacy purposes [3, p.25]. Moreover, according to the Black Sea NGO Forum Report [3] the future of existing donors in the region is uncertain due to the context of the economic crisis and of domestic political changes in EU member states. Nevertheless, there are organizations which play very important roles in the process of development of youth activities in the region.

A constant actor focusing uniquely on the support of regional cooperation remains the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation (BST). Operating as a public-private partnership over a 10-year period, BST promotes regional cooperation and good governance in the Wider Black Sea region; accountable, transparent, and open governments; strong, effective civic sectors; and independent and professional media [3, p.25].

In most of the countries, the role and contribution of UN structures (such as UNICEF and UNDP) were also noted as very valuable, especially in the fields of youth policy development and youth research. Cooperation with UNDP is mainly focused on strengthening good governance, accelerating human development, development of civil society and private sector, promotion of gender equality and improving access to information. Also UNICEF and other UN agencies provide support to specialized programmes addressing young people, at the same time promoting complex approach of development of policies, capacity development and quality services in the spheres of youth policy and youth work.

For example in Moldova, the lobby activity carried out by UNICEF has been one of the most important contributions to the provision of a national legislation according to the international standards and to the adoption of 'Youth Law'. UNICEF made a tremendous commitment to the creation and development of youth resource centers and youth local councils, as well implemented a lot of projects based on health care of young people.

The international organizations, through provision of international expertise have contributed to the setting up of normative framework in youth field. Development and approval of "Youth National Strategy" and "National Action Plan" in Moldova was carried out with the technical support of both UNICEF and World Bank. These organizations together with Council of Europe and European Commission also substantially contribute to capacity building of human resources and institutional development through their youth programmes [29, p.44]. WB in partnership with UNICEF supported a big project "Social and Economic Empowerment of Young people" for increasing the capacity of young people to launch and develop own businesses and improve the participation of young people in public life.

For example, in Turkey the World Bank has initiated two big youth policy related cooperation schemes: the involvement of Turkey in the "Youth Voices" Programme in 2004 (with two working groups on "youth policy development" and "youth and employment") and "Youth Social Development Programme" (YSDP) with the financial support of the Government of Japan. The main objective of the project was to contribute to social integration through the inclusion of disadvantaged young people in the social, economic and political life [2, p.36].

Concerning the projects in the field of conflict transformation OSCE is contributing to development of youth research projects and also institutional development of the infrastructures involved in local and national youth policy realization in some countries of the region as for example Moldova and Armenia [29]
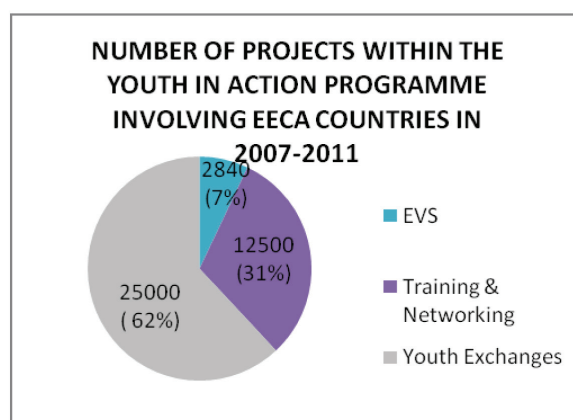
European Institutions
The results of the online survey and the country reports clearly indicate that the main role in the development of the youth policy and especially its international dimension in the BSR countries are played by European Institutions (mainly the Council of Europe and European Commission). The Council of Europe (CoE) and particularly the European Youth Foundation of CoE were mentioned in most of the reports for its contributions to the development of local and international youth work. The reviews of National Youth Policy realized in Cooperation with Council of Europe for the countries of the region serve as one of the most valuable tools for youth policy assessment and development and also as an important source of information for current report. Regarding the Youth in Action Programme of the European Commission the role of the SALTO EECA Resource

Center was also highlighted as one of the most effective structures supporting the involvement of YNGOs and youth in general into the Programmes of European Commission.

5.7.2. Youth in Action Programme

The majority of respondents to the online survey and consulted experts have highlighted that the Youth in Action Programme presents the most common framework and financial support for the cooperation between the countries of the region. Thus, it is important to provide a short overview of the activities in frames of European Community Youth in Action (YiA) Programme and its development in the region. Those data are available due to recent report of SALTO EECA Resource Center [25].

From the BSR countries Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey can participate in full at all "Actions" of YiA programme. Other countries of the region can benefit from two "Actions" of the Programme: Action 2 – "European Voluntary Service" and Action 3.1 – "Cooperation with the Neighbouring Partner Countries of the European Union". In this regard it is also important to mention that the development of the Programme in the six countries (EECA) of BSR region is supported by the Network of SALTO EECA Multipliers[21] which is aimed among others to increase YiA visibility and quality of realized projects. In years 2007-2011 there were over 2,250 of projects conducted within the Youth in Action Programme involving participation of EECA countries. The majority of these projects (almost 60%) were conducted within the European Voluntary Service. Concerning the number of participants in all YiA projects open for EECA region, the majority of them (63%) took part in Youth Exchange projects, and only 7% were EVS volunteers, as illustrated in the chart below.
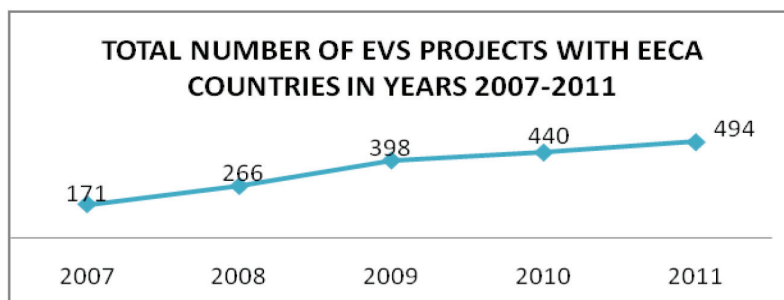

NUMBER OF PROJECTS WITHIN THE YOUTH IN ACTION PROGRAMME INVOLVING EECA COUNTRIES IN 2007-2011

- 2840 (7%) — EVS
- 12500 (31%) — Training & Networking
- 25000 (62%) — Youth Exchanges

Source: [25]

Action 2 - European Voluntary Service

Concerning the "European Voluntary Service" (EVS) the report [25] provides the following data. In years 2007-2011 to National Agencies of Youth in Action Programme came in 2,400 grant applications for Action 2 projects with participation of EECA countries. Around 1,770 (about 75% of all applications) of them obtained grants which amounted a total sum of 36,4 million €. Between 2007-2011 from Eastern Europe and Caucasus Countries almost 1400 volunteers were sent to Programme Countries within over 1,000 projects. Since 2007, the number of projects sent from EECA countries to Programme Countries is higher than number of projects sent in the opposite direction. Since 2007 the number of implemented EVS projects has been gradually growing and over the five years, the total number of implemented projects has nearly tripled. A dynamic increase is observed in the number of EVS projects with participation of the EECA Countries.

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21 http://www.salto-youth.net/rc/eeca/eecamultipliers/

TOTAL NUMBER OF EVS PROJECTS WITH EECA COUNTRIES IN YEARS 2007-2011

171   266   398   440   494

2007   2008   2009   2010   2011

Source: [25]

Concerning the countries of the BSR region (which have a National Agency of YiA Programme) it is possible to observe the following dynamics. Romania is one of the most active countries in EVS cooperation with the EECA region. During the period 2007-2011 Romania has hosted 128 EVS from the EECA region and has sent 78 volunteers to the region. Bulgaria is much less active, as it has sent 4 and hosted 23 volunteers from the EECA region and Turkey has sent 4 volunteers to EECA and hosted 18 [25,p.9]. With regards to the other countries of BSR, it is possible to observe that Russia had the biggest number of EVS projects and volunteers from EECA. Russian organisations took part in 483 projects with participation of over 700 volunteers. Ukraine follows on the second place after Russia. From the statistics it is also obvious that Armenia and Georgia are among the most active countries from the BSR concerning EVS projects. It is also possible to trace the bilateral cooperation between countries of BSR. For example we can see that Romania is the second most active country in cooperation with Azerbaijan within Action2[22].
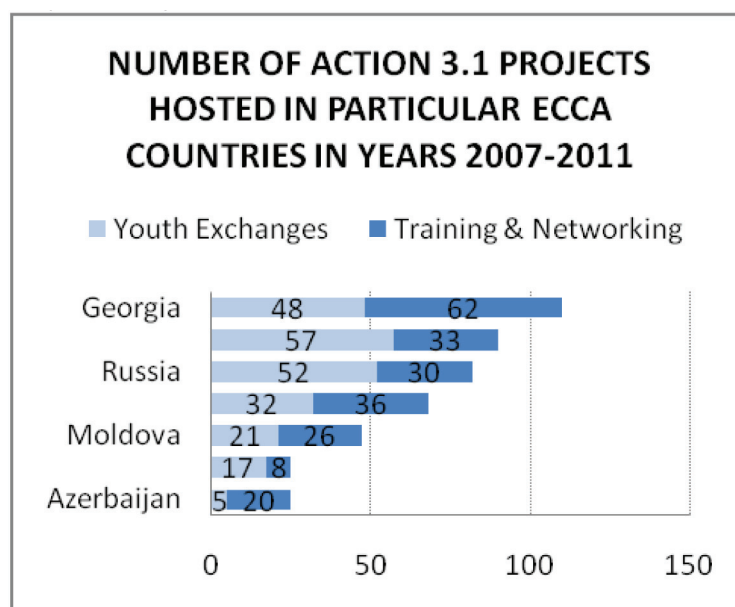
Action 3.1

In 2007-2011 around 1280 Training and Networking (T&N) and Youth Exchange (YE) projects obtained grants with total sum of about 17 millions EURO. That money was allocated by the different National Agencies. In the context of BSR it is important to see that in the last 5 years it was the Turkish national agency that has granted the second biggest number (from all programme countries) of Action 3.1 projects with participation of EECA partners: 72 Youth exchanges and 67 Training and Networking projects. Romanian National Agency is also active, being on the 5th place with (27 YE and 47 T&N Projects). Bulgarian NA is not so active in financing the projects from the region (only 13 in the last 5 years). It is important to mention here that being so active in financing Youth exchanges and Trainings, Turkey was almost invisible in the statistics in case of European Voluntary Service projects, which can also present the potential for future development.

When we look at the statistics on the number of all Action 3.1 projects in which particular EECA countries participated[23], we can see that the most active country is Ukraine that took part in over 600 projects. Georgia, with 500 projects, is on the second place. The third position belongs to Russia with almost 500 projects. It is important to mention, that from all Programme Countries Turkey has hosted the biggest number of Action 3.1 projects with at least one partner from EECA (133 projects), and Romania is on the fourth place with almost 80 projects.

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22 For more statistics on YiA in the region please see: Report on cooperation of Programme Countries with Eastern Europe and Caucasus Region within the Youth in Action Programme between 2007-2011 [25]
23 Action 3.1. projects usually involve more than one partner from EECA region

From all the non-programme countries small Georgia has hosted the biggest number of Action 3.1 projects (110 projects). Right behind Georgia there is Ukraine with 90 projects and Russia with more than 80 projects. The fewest number of projects from all the countries of the region (only 25) was hosted by Azerbaijan.

Source: [25]

This report shows that international youth cooperation within the Youth in Action Programme between Programme and EECA Countries had developed significantly since 2007. In general, from among EECA countries Russia and Ukraine are the leaders in cooperation with Programme Countries in Action 2 and Action 3. 1. This could be easily explained by their big demographic and financial potential. Nevertheless, if we compare the population number and the quantity of projects performed it turns out that small Georgia and Armenia are the most active countries in the region in YiA projects. From the BSR countries Azerbaijan participates in the fewest number of YiA projects.

5.7.3. Relevant topics for potential cooperation

Concerning the themes for the Youth in Action projects in the region the statistics shows that for the EVS Projects the most popular were "European awareness", "Anti-discrimination", "Art and culture" and "Disability". The most popular themes for T&N projects during the last years were almost the same. Similarly to Training & Networking, there were 20 thematic fields of Youth Exchange projects. And again, the most popular among them were "European awareness", "Art & culture" and "Anti-discrimination". In contrary to T&N projects, there was also a significant number of "Social inclusion" and "Strengthening of civil society" among the Youth Exchange projects in the region [25].

To continue with the themes for youth projects, next the answers to the Q.21 of the online survey will be listed. The respondents were asked to provide any topics for youth projects, cooperation activities and other initiatives which they consider most relevant or interesting for the youth of the Black Sea Region. Among the most frequent answers were the following:

"Capacity building activities, Field trips … Public Policy, PR advertising, experience and good practices exchange, cooperation within EECA region , human rights, work and employment, youth unemployment, education and training courses for acquiring of professional degree/specialization…"

"Initiatives to provide opportunities for volunteer work across the countries in the BSR. For example, there could be created projects which are oriented towards planting in specific regions"

"youth music/art festivals; sport tournaments; student camps; etc., sports and cultural exchange, nature conservation projects, Environment, cultural and leisure events, 'Be creative' seminars, education on the topics of energy supply and environment safe policy…"

"I would suggest to organize more internships between youth from different BSR countries"

"NGO development, project writing and management, discrimination, minorities rights, European integration & cooperation, health, sports, human rights, use of culture for building cooperation with BSCs, any kinds of creativity development and entrepreneurship…"

"I think that youth projects should focus more on the participation of young people, social inclusion and solving the problem of unemployment"

Considering the measures that should be undertaken by the government, civil society or other actors for the improvement of cooperation in the youth field in the Black Sea Region, the respondents (Q.23) have distinguished the necessity to provide enough assistance in entrepreneurship and employment including vocational education schemes, training, loans, etc for young people. According to respondents it is also important to establish (or to improve) a real monitoring and assessment systems for youth policy and to take initiatives aimed at the increasing of youth mobility and encouraging young people to participate in development cooperation activities either in their country of residence or abroad. The other recommendation will be provided hereafter. The next chapter will serve also as a conclusion for the issues mentioned in the previous part of the report.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Young people must be more actively involved in the Black Sea cooperation process. The cooperation of youth in the region may add a new dynamic dimension to the Black Sea cooperation process, including the removal of stereotypes, the promotion of direct personal contacts, exchanges and common projects and thus creating the space of mutual understanding, which respectively will contribute to peace and stability in the Black Sea Region. The non-governmental sector is capable to intensify the cooperation with neighbors regardless of the contradicting political and economic interests of states. Thus, one of the most effective ways to foster future regional cooperation in general is to enforce the cooperation in the sphere of youth in the Black Sea Region and to provide more support to youth civil society organizations to realize their potential as drivers for future regional cooperation. It is essential, that this process is performed in close interaction between all stakeholders including the state, international organizations and donors, international youth NGOs, civil society and private sector and should be maintained in cohesion of all countries of the region. Therefore, by elaborating the strategies and implementing the initiatives there should be considered political and social circumstances in their target regions, the actions should be taken to overcome any kind of discrimination and including all young people in the process of establishing bridges between various entities, stakeholders and interests.

Concerning the role of the states the report provides the following recommendations, which are based on the results of survey. To participate actively in the creation of youth policies in the BSR the young people of the region need an appropriate forum for this, to assure that their voices are heard and considered by the states. First of all, concerning the institutional level, the youth of the region has opportunities for participation both at national level and through international, European and regional youth platforms. Nevertheless, the governments of the BSR states should continue to put efforts in elaboration and implementation of comprehensive and consistent youth policies addressing the needs of the younger generation in the fields of education, employment, social security and culture. These policies should provide the necessary legal and operational framework for the activities of youth organizations as a prerequisite of young people's participation in institutional and political life. It is advisable to coordinate youth strategies between the states of the region and, to this end, exchange and harmonize relevant legislation, consolidating European and international cooperation in youth problems and related areas. However, when examining youth policy models from other countries the policymakers should ensure that they fully consider the importance of the cultural, historical, and social context within which they are working in each BSR country. The main aim of the government in this concern is to ensure that after policies are put in place, they are enforced and implemented.

The second important issue remains youth participation. The civil society in general and youth organizations in particular should take the role as a driving force in this process. As the results of the online survey have shown, the youth in the region is not much aware of the national youth strategy and relatively unsatisfied with the state youth policy. It is important that the youth of the region not only expresses its needs but also offers work and assistance, provides possible solutions, lobbies the government to prioritize youth policy, to include the youth NGOs in the legislative process, lobbies the international partners for more coherence in supporting projects and activities. At the same time, the young people's participation in social and political life will prepare them to become active citizens of their countries; will prepare them for the integration into democratic society, preventing their exclusion and marginalization. That is why along with regional cooperation more attention and resources should be dedicated to the promotion of local community development, civic participation and civic education at all levels.

As it was shown in the report, youth organizations in the region operate within context with a low level of public trust in civil society. It is vital to improve the level of trust to NGOs and recognition by society of youth activities, first of all on the national and then on regional level. In order to do so, youth NGOs must become more transparent and more reliable, should improve their communication and should become more professional in terms of communicating the aim of their work to the society. To increase public trust in civil society NGOs are advised to avoid direct opposition to the state but should identify those areas where they can influence and have a real impact, to focus on delivering plausible results and, based on that, gain support and trust from the public. The promotion of successful results not only on national but also on the level of the region (neighboring states) could be helpful in this regard.

The 'internal democracy' within the National Youth Councils as well as umbrella organizations and NGOs, especially in some countries of the BSR, is reported to be weak. This poses challenges for the access to opportunities for youth and hinders some initiatives on the regional level. To improve this, more attention should be paid by umbrella organizations towards self-regulation and higher standards should be mainstreamed in the work of youth organizations.

To provide sustainability of the youth strategy in the region, it is necessary to avoid the "politicization" of youth issues. It is necessary that youth workers and youth councils remain politically unbiased so that the implementation of a long term youth strategy will not depend on political changes in each particular country of the region. At the same time, to allow young people more participation in political life the age limit for participation in elections (16 years) could be further discussed in the countries of BSR. This represents another topic for potential discussions in frames of BSR youth policy cooperation.

Due to the cross-sectoral essence of youth policy it would probably be unrealistic to attribute the state youth policy to a concrete institution or a separate division within the ministry. However, it is advisable to set a concrete institution in each country (and to make its authority and responsibilities clear for other stakeholders) which will be in charge of implementation of youth strategy and cooperation. This will allow easier identification of concrete partners for cooperation on the level of ministry in each country of the region and establishing of long term agreements between the states of the region. Again, this will provide for keeping of ownership and higher responsibility of the ministries in charge of youth to support cooperation. Moreover, it will provide sustainability in case of changes within the ministries in the countries.

Because of the "commercialization" of many spheres of youth activities there is vivid interest among youth to non-commercial activities of NGOs and unorganized youth and opportunities for non-formal education and international youth exchanges. That is why the state youth policy should be focused on enhancing those opportunities. For instance, more attention should be paid not only for youth projects, but also to youth subcultures and informal groups which are bringing together unorganized youth. Those movements and subcultures (for example music festivals, sports events) could be also potential topics for cross-regional projects (even for informal initiatives), which could unite the youth from the different countries of the region with the same interests.

The general problem for all the countries of the BSR is the growing 'gap' between different groups of youth: differences between youth living in different regions of the country, administrative centers and peripheral areas, between urban and rural youth, rich and poor, differences between minorities, differences in social background, religion, etc. For example in Russian Northern Caucasus, or in East Turkey promoting cross-border activities and network building with partner countries, supporting the exchange of youth active in youth work and youth organizations are the main challenges. Rural youth or those living in peripheral areas have even less possibilities and few alternatives for self-realization and participation. That is why the establishment of the network of youth centers and youth information centers, developing programmes for youth, as well as training

of qualified youth workers in regions can solve the problem. Additionally, cooperation with different stakeholders already working with youth and education focused on critical thinking, participation, youth initiatives can help the young people create alternatives and reflect their needs.

The EVS program presents a good platform for the volunteer exchange among the countries of the region. As the report has shown, there already exists the exchange of volunteers between the Black Sea countries. It is advised to deepen the cooperation in this field using the existing platform, for instance by creating a network of organizations involving in the Black Sea region and organizing a regional volunteer service. This could both expand the exchange of youth in the region and enforce the recognition of voluntary service in the countries.

Youth Information and research on youth

The youth policy must not be based on the perceived needs of young people, but on real-life needs that can be documented through research. That is why the promotion of the youth research sector in BSR is very important. This should include the improvement of understanding of the youth research in general and youth related research market, the proactive collaboration between various communities interested in youth policy with the authorities responsible for youth on issues concerning the contents of research, putting higher standards for evidence-based youth policy. This sector should be given more priority in distributing the funds for youth by state and by donors.

Additionally, it could be essential to harmonize the criteria of the target group "youth" in the countries of the region. For example to reduce the age limit in all the countries to 30 years in order to simplify the work with statistics and to separate the youth policy from the social problems which appear in the category of older people. Indeed, more precise age limits could help young people to identify themselves better as "youth" and to be more aware of "youth policy". Along with that, it could be useful to use broader definition of youth and to elaborate youth policy according to needs of specific social groups which incorporate the youth.

The importance of youth information and equal access to information was highlighted several times in the report at hand. The actions in this field should ensure the access of the young to information regarding the rights and opportunities in all spheres of activity (education, healthcare, social protection, leisure time etc.). The role of the internet and new media is very important in this concern. Much more attention should be paid to different online communities, online youth forums, and groups as they provide the insight of up-to-date trends, needs of youth and youth culture, often consolidating the opinion of very active and dynamic part of the society. It is also advised to work more on the removal of language barriers in the region and to provide more information on web-sites (especially of umbrella organizations and ministries in charge of youth) not only in local languages but at least in English to facilitate the research and exchange of information between countries of the region. Notwithstanding, it should not be forgotten that there are areas in the BSR where the internet access and coverage is still very limited or very expensive (e.g. Armenia, some areas of Turkey, Georgia). So the provision of youth information should rely on supplementary measures as a national network of youth service centers, which in perspective could be expanded in regional network. Moreover, given the high number of different ethnic groups and minorities living in the countries of BSR , the youth policy should respect the right of minority groups of young people to be able to access relevant information in that language.

Financing youth initiatives

As it was stated in the survey, the most important problem concerning the youth budget is not the scarcity of financial resources but ineffective management of available resources, the lack of coordination between the actors and to some concern corruption on different levels of the system. The introduction of the integral system of monitoring and evaluation as well as the improvement of the management of financial resources within the countries and in the whole region are mentioned as the most important steps to bring real changes to the situation. It is also important to coordinate the youth budget between the countries and at least have the common and transparent policy concerning priorities for financing (for example to have as one of the priorities regional cooperation projects in BSR in the field of youth employment). The introduction of an electronic system of grants evaluation (best practice experience in Armenia) could provide for better transparency and a more effective management of existing resources.

Efforts should be taken, in spite of severe financial constraints, to provide for adequate financing of youth programmes from both public and private sources. However, by doing this, it is crucial to take the 'ownership' of youth strategy into consideration. It is important not to tie the themes of the cooperation projects only on the priorities of donor organizations and EU programmes, but to follow an own long term strategy which will envisage the intensification of regional cooperation. Thus, it is important to increase the downward accountability and not to focus the activities on responding only to donors needs but, in the first place, on the communities' needs. The main driving force behind the incentives for regional youth cooperation should be not the financial resources provided according to priorities of donor organizations but the own initiative of the youth of the region. The youth should desire such cooperation only in this case the ownership (which insures responsibility and sustainability) for the new regional projects and initiatives will be maintained.

Education, Employment, and Youth Mobility

The survey has confirmed that the issue of youth employment and education remains one of the most important in the BSR. It is obvious, that those issues are tightly interconnected with other socio-economic factors. Among the general recommendations provided by UN World Youth Report 2011 [34] are highlighted the following: it is necessary to improve the quality of education and to make it accessible to all young people (tailoring curricula more effectively to the labor market); vocational training and non-formal education should be more widely recognized by employers as valuable components of a rounded education; governments in partnership with the private sector should insure that institutions are supporting internships and vocational training. Moreover, governments and the private sector should ensure that information is widely available to all segments of the youth population and support those social groups which experience the most difficulties in accessing and completing education, such as young people living in extreme poverty and in rural locations, young women and youth with disabilities.

Those general recommendations are also relevant for BSR countries. As explained previously, it is crucial to consider higher vulnerability of women on the labor market in some countries (Azerbaijan, Turkey) while elaborating employment initiatives and to lead more gender sensitive policy in this field. It is also important to remember the restricted mobility of youth in the region and other regional socio-economic factors. For the BSR countries is specific a high number of young people working abroad. In this context, a could be necessary to include a special youth policy for reintegration for those citizens who return home from abroad and would work back home.

There already exists a basis for the regional youth cooperation in the field of education youth employment in the framework of the Black Sea Convention on Cooperation in the Fields of Culture,

Education, Science and Information. It is advised to increase activities aimed at recognizing diplomas and university degrees in the BSR countries, increase the number of study visits, seminars and workshops for young leaders and for officials dealing with youth issues, promote closer professional contacts among young people (for example entrepreneurs, students of the same faculty, young professionals, researchers).

Another opportunity is the creation of regional public-private partnership initiatives, which could increase the number of viable microenterprises owned by youth. This should be done in a tight cooperation between the state, civil society and business sector both inside the country and on the regional level. For instance, the leisure time activities and regional tourism for youth could represent a potential interest for business, as this sphere could bring profit and is not well developed yet. The government could stimulate the private sector to invest in such projects to offer support and consolidate the technical-material basis for organizing leisure time activities for youth and in this sphere could appear new enterprises owned by youth.

In all the countries of the BSR there exists a part of young people for whom higher education is not accessible for a number of different reasons. To meet the demands of those people and to involve them into the labor market, the vocational training system could play an important role. The countries of the region have a good experience of vocational training which used to be an important part of the education system in the last century but has been neglected in the recent decades. Thus, reforms in vocational training are very important for decreasing the present youth unemployment rate which is rather high.

It is also necessary to harmonize a normative framework and standards for developing non formal education (NFE) services at a national level in all the countries of BSR basing on the existing good practices and examples of the countries of the region (for example Moldova, Armenia where a non-formal education strategy was developed). It is important that such strategy not only exists on paper but also is effectively implemented. Even in Romania and Bulgaria where the possibilities of NFE are more visible and accessible for the youth (due to the full access to the EU programmes), there is still no system of recognizing the skills and competences gained through NFE. Additionally, some common standards for the training system in all the BSR countries have to be elaborated.

To improve the youth mobility in the region, it is advised to introduce a system of priorities and discounts for young people travelling within the country and in the BSR region. A good example could be the "Youth discount cards" or International Student Cards which are valid throughout many countries of the EU. To do this, the youth organizations and ministries in charge should collaborate closely with private sector to establish the network of affordable youth hostel network within the BSR, to promote active leisure and traveling among youth. Again, taking into consideration the economic reality of the region, by elaboration of youth policy initiatives should be prioritized the means of mobility available to young people with limited financial resources. Moreover, young people in this region are still challenged with obtaining visa even for participation in official youth events. Thus the measures for facilitation of visa regime for youth on regional level should be undertaken. The general aim of all measures in this concern should be to make the youth mobility not a privilege of small group of people but a common state of affairs.

Youth housing

Even though there are general commonalities in the housing problems facing BSR countries, the solutions for those problems are different in each countries of the region and should consider the countries' economic, administrative and geographic realities. That is why it is not possible to provide concrete recommendations applicable for each country of the region. However it is possible

to state that the first step in the improvement of situation concerning youth housing in all the countries is the recognition of the scale of the problem by the government and giving the priority to this problem. The free market alone will not be sufficient to deal with the country's housing problems. The state should take appropriate measures. The government has a significant role in adopting a coherent and transparent institutional framework; improving the general regulatory framework and standards, and ensuring their enforcement fairly and consistently; creating housing subsidy systems and facilitating private investment in housing; adopting and promoting social housing policies to cover all vulnerable groups. For example, the programme for housing for young specialists in rural areas appears to have potential in improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging specialists to return to their communities of origin. Thus, the government needs to define social groups that have priority for social housing assistance in order to address them directly. In this concern the government could be supported by the civil society. NGOs and youth organizations could play an important role in solving problems of public interest. Their strength and their importance for society consists in representing youth as social group as fairly as possible, lobbying the needs of youth, offering professional advice, expertise and help. Thereby, youth organizations could further work on recognition of housing problems and making the real needs of youth of the region heard and considered in governmental housing policies.

Healthy lifestyle and sports

At the moment the situation in this domain in the bigger part of the BSR is characterized by a lack of cooperation and coordination between different government bodies and non-government organizations working in the health sector, as well as deficiencies in the means used to communicate with young people. For a successful work, it is crucial to use a cross-sectoral approach and to strengthen communication and networking between youth NGOs, municipalities, government organizations and other institutions like media or the religious bodies. To gain more funding for healthy lifestyle promotion it could be useful to increase the advocacy in the field by state bodies and also to raise the awareness of the business sector on its social responsibilities (CSR).

It is important to remember, that to tackle healthy lifestyle problems, the youth strategy needs to be based on scientific approaches including examples of evidence-based good practices and strategies. The research is necessary first of all to find out how 'healthy lifestyle' is understood by young people. Only then it is possible to take measures to influence that young people recognize the role of health in their everyday behavior. As experience proves, peer education may be an important element, especially when linked with intensive work at grassroots level to educate young people (and also their parents and families) on responsibilities and outcomes of their lifestyle. This should also include raising the awareness of youth leaders on the importance of a healthy lifestyle.

Regional NGOs should get advice and become aware of potential of sport activities to take advantage of the available funding opportunities. As it was proven, sport could be used as a tool to enhance intercultural dialogue for preventing violence, ethnic and regional tensions. It should be helpful to conduct trans-regional sport events that can play a significant role in promoting mutual trust as well as exchanging best practices between various actors. Such events should gain more public interest (involving media and regional sport teams in promotion activities) and investment. Sport based cooperation projects should be part of a wider agenda of social and political change, for instance by engaging different organizations, NGOs and universities so that they can connect the micro level of the sport project with the macro level of broader sport policy and knowledge building.

As it was provided in the report, ecology and environmental cooperation projects, even though not directly connected with youth, also present a great framework for partnership activities in the

region. Environmental issues could blur out the geographic borders between states and present larger levels of perception of cooperation as the existing problems affect not the states but the whole region. There already exists a good record of cooperation in this field and this experience should be used in future strategies especially since those projects have a long term essence in planning and require continuation and cohesion of all states of the region to be effective.

Conflicts

Conflicts represent the other issue which could only be solved through regional cooperation and here the countries of the region have a great potential for partnership. This consists first of all in sharing best-practices and lessons learned. It is important to remember that especially in the issue of conflicts, donors and external actors can empower and build capacity to engage on conflict issues and peace building, but nevertheless, they cannot impose solutions. The countries of the BSR region are able to solve the conflicts smoldering in the region by using their own existing experience. In this concern, the heterogeneity of the countries of the region and the variety of conflicts existing can play a positive role. The survey has confirmed that the youth generally do not consider local conflicts as a barrier for regional cooperation, but vice versa, perceive it as opportunity. The youth cooperation initiatives can provide for finding common solutions, improving trust building, removal of existing stereotypes among youth of the region. The initiatives should additionally focus on building of ownership of the process of conflict transformation within society in each country and involving youth on all levels in the process. Should be used the existing experience of the countries and also considered the role plaid by several countries of the region as bridges between existing conflict entities (as for example many youth projects for Armenian and Azerbaijan and Turkish participants take place in Georgia).

One of the main issues with regard to perspectives of regional cooperation is the sustainability of efforts in this domain. Such sustainability is tightly connected with the concept of ownership. That is why many recommendations are to a certain extend related to the ownership of the youth strategy. The youth in the Black Sea Region need to create its own attitude towards the situation concerning the youth policy in the region. They need to recognize the necessity of regional cooperation and see its clear benefits. They need to contribute for youth policy development, concentrate deeply on identifying the real reasons for the situation they are in and propose solutions that would influence the way in which the state treats youth in the country. Only in this case the youth of the region can exercise responsibility and actively participate in and contribute to the process of regional youth cooperation.

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Annexes

Questionnaire 'Strengthening cooperation in the field of youth policy in the Black Sea Region'

(The online questionnaire included both, open questions and multiple-choice questions)

1.   Which country do you represent?

2.   Which age group do you belong to?

3.   Which of the following words best describes you and your occupation?

4.   Activity level of your organization (or a group you are mainly associated with).
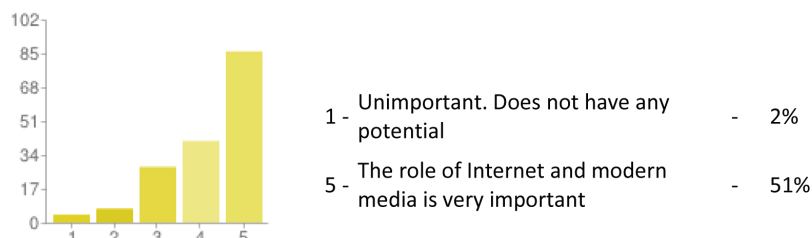
(If you don't find an answer that exactly fits, choose the one that comes closest)

5.   What is the name of your organization/association/group?

6.   How would you assess your personal experience and the level of involvement in youth work? (1 - Very little experience, 2 - Low, 3 - Medium, 4 - Good experience, 5 - Very broad experience)

7.   What are the areas where the youth in your country is facing most problems and challenges? (More than one answer is possible. Please use the last field ('Other') where you can specify your answer or indicate particular challenges, specific for your country, which were not mentioned in the previous answers).

8.   How would you assess the level of awareness of young people about the national youth policy and actual youth strategy in your country?

(1 - Very low level. "The young people do not know anything about it"/ 5 - Very high level of awareness)

9.   Are the real needs of young people known to the government of your country and reflected in its policy?

10.   Do the young people in your country have opportunities to exchange views with policymakers on youth relevant issues e.g. via participation in meetings, virtual platforms, etc.? (This means among others the existence of transparency and clear representation of youth sectors with all different approaches and viewpoints)

11.   In your opinion, are the young people in your country satisfied with the youth policy of your government and the governmental support to the non-governmental youth sector?

12.   Which of the activities and initiatives taken by your government (existing or previous) are the most important and provide for improvement of the situation of youth in your country?

13.   In your opinion, who should play the leading role (take the initiative and responsibility) in improving the cooperation in the youth field in the BSR?

14.   What are the most important challenges for young people and NGOs for the cooperation in the youth field with other countries from the Black Sea Region? (Here, you are encouraged to use the last field ('Other') where you can specify your answer or indicate particular challenges for young people and the work of youth NGOs, specific for your country, which were not mentioned in the previous answers).

15.   According to your experience, what kind of cooperation is the most wide spread between your country and other countries from the region?

16.   With which country from the Black Sea Region do you/ does your organization have the most positive experience of cooperation in the last 5 years (e.g. common projects, youth exchanges, study visits, university education programs, training sessions, work and employment programs, etc)? (More than one answer is possible, but please do not tick your own country)

17.   What kind of cooperation is this? Which structures are mostly involved (youth NGOs, Education institutions, Governmental institutions, etc.)? Please specify

18.   In case the youth cooperation between the BSR countries will increase: who will mostly benefit from such cooperation?

19.   If the level of cooperation in the youth field within BSR countries will increase, which potential benefits and threats for the youth of the region do you see?

20.   Are there any areas in your country and/or in the Black Sea Region countries, which you consider unsafe or unsuitable for performing youth activities and projects?

21.   Do you know of any projects or initiatives which have been outstandingly successful in terms of cooperation with countries of the Black Sea Region? If so, please provide the name of the initiative or provide an URL/ the link to the website where the details can be found. (In case none of the existing successful initiatives comes to mind at the moment, please tell us what topics for training/ youth projects/ cooperation activities do you consider to be most relevant, interesting for the youth of the Black Sea Region?)

22.   Please assess, which are the priorities in international cooperation in the youth field for your organization/country?

23.   What should be done in the first place by the government/ civil society or other actors for the improvement of cooperation in the youth field in the Black Sea Region?

24.   From which of the following sources does the youth in your country learn about the possibilities of youth participation, mobility, education etc?

25.   Please provide the name/URL of the internet platform or website which the youth of your country uses to learn about the youth relevant issues, opportunities, projects and initiatives?

26.   How would you evaluate the quality of information the young people get in your country on the possibilities of participation/ funding/ education/ youth projects either in their country of residence or abroad? (This means among others that information, advice and guidance provided to young people is comprehensive, impartial, quality and sufficient)

27.   Do you think that the access to opportunities provided for the youth in your country is available only for a limited number of people and is subject to corruption, nepotism, political segregation or other kind of unequal approach?

28.   How would you estimate the potential of the Internet and the other modern media in the development of youth activities in your country and in the BSR?

29.   What are the most common sources for financing youth activities in your country and in the region?

30.   Please specify with which programs/foundations/etc. you or your organization has the best and well established experience of cooperation? Please provide the name of foundation/ institution and/or the country

Answers, provided by the respondents of the online questionnaire:

Q. 28. How would you estimate the potential of Internet and the other modern media in the development of youth activities in your country and in the BSR?

1 - Unimportant. Does not have any potential   -   2%

5 - The role of Internet and modern media is very important   -   51%

Q.25. Please provide the name/URL of the internet platform or website which the youth of your country uses to learn about the youth relevant issues, opportunities, projects and initiatives?

www.aegee.org
www.aiesec.md
www.armacad.am
www.civic.md
www.cntm.md
www.cync.ge
www.dezvoltare.md
www.dir.bg
www.dnes.bg
www.edu.aris.ge
www.education.am
www.eritasard.am
www.education.am
www.eu.funds.bg
www.eu-edu.org
www.eastchance.com/index.asp
www.fadm.gov.ru
www.forum.pridnestrovie.com
www.gov.md
www.hrdc.bg
www.mediaforum.az
www.msy.gov.ge
www.ngobg.info

www.nmf.bg
www.ong.md
www.publika.md
www.resursetineret.ro
www.resurs.az
www.salto-youth.net
www.sulesy.org
www.social-diplomacy.org
www.tineri.md
www.tinact.ro
www.ua.gov.tr
www.unwe.acad.bg
www.webcafe.bg
www.yia.org.ua
www.youth.md
www.youthbg.info
www.youthinaction.info.md
www.youth-in-action.org
www.youth-in-action.ru
www.youthrussia.ru
www.yspdb.bg
www.youthnetworks.eu
www.youngleaders.ro