



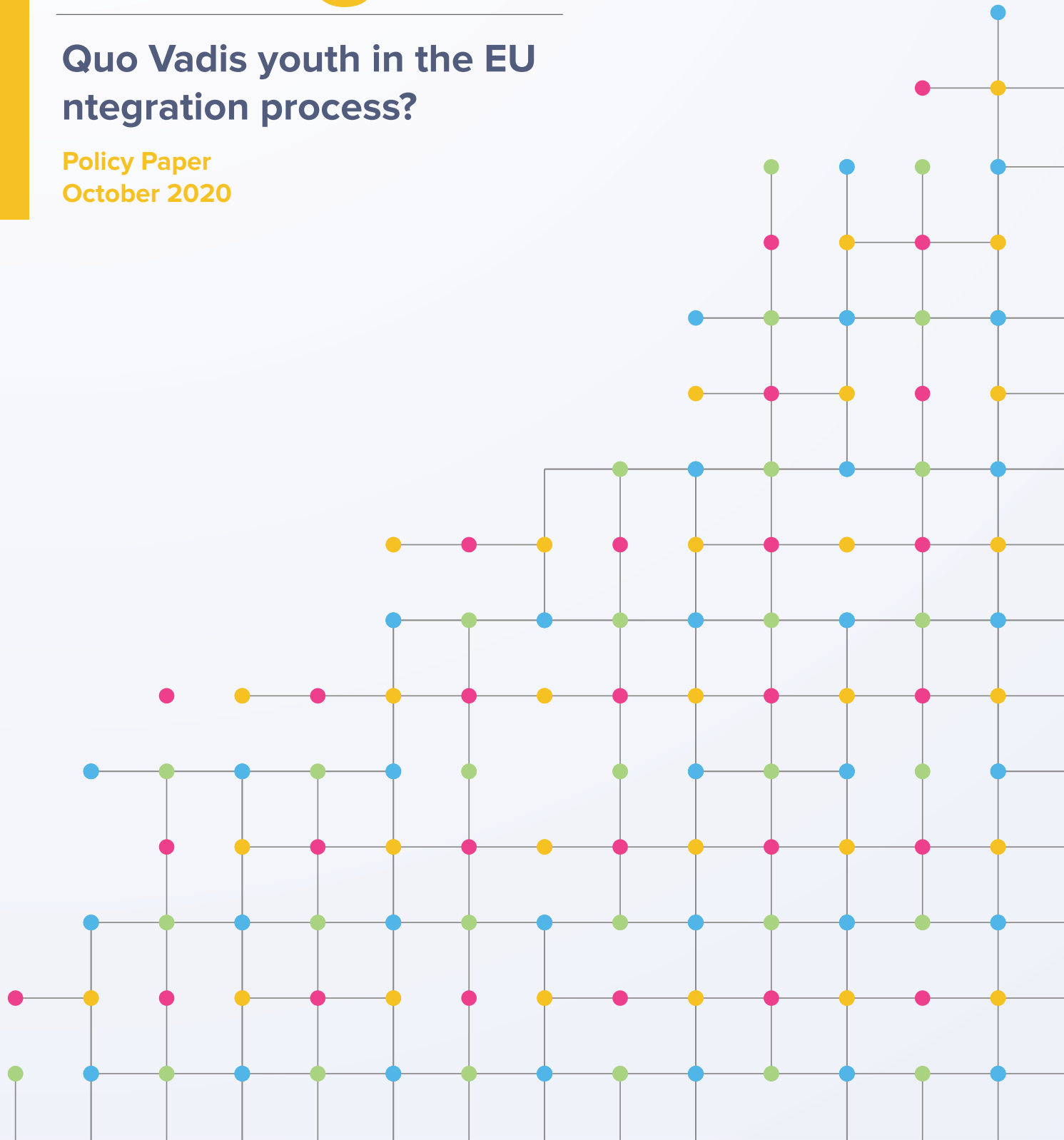
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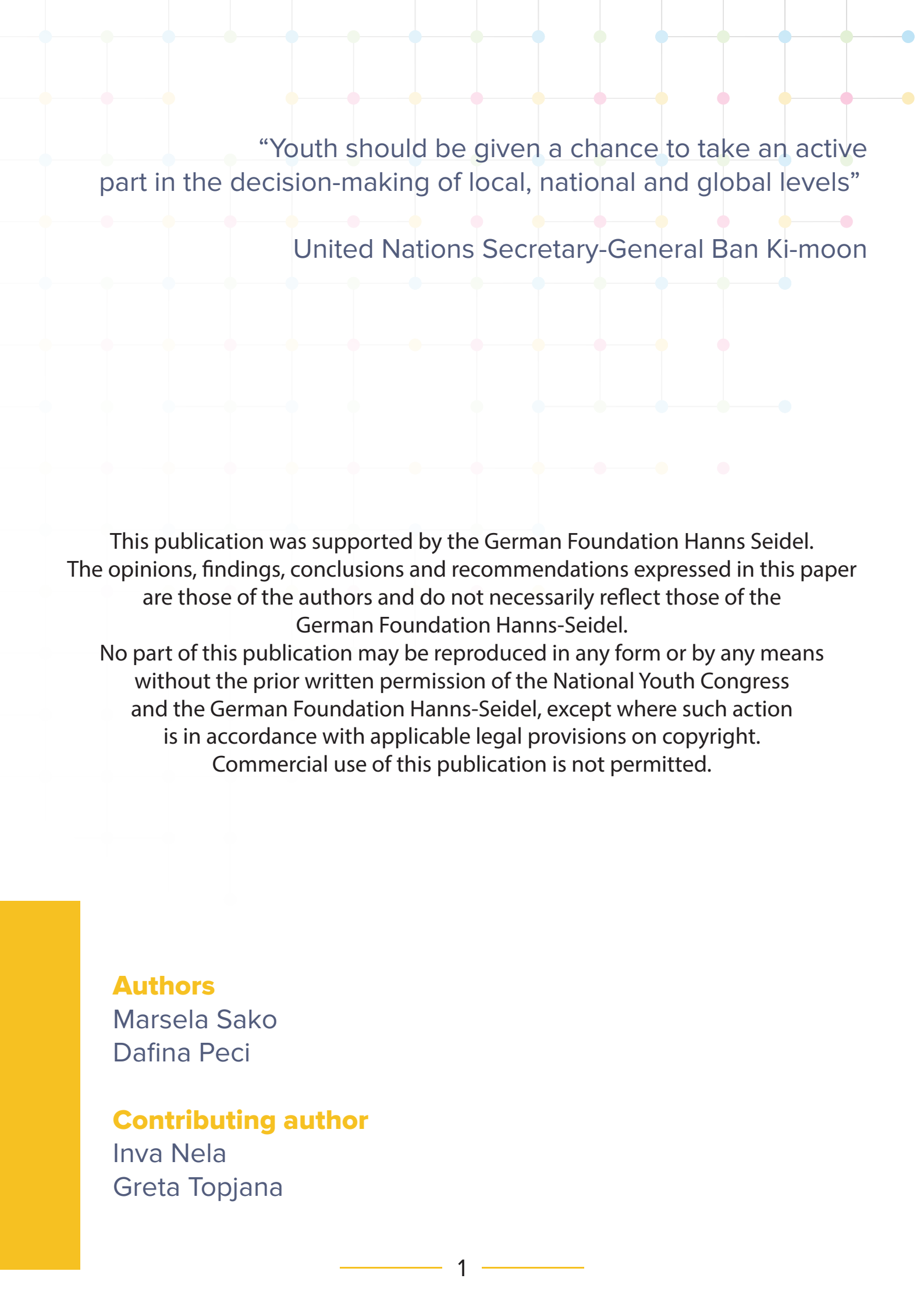


Open Dialogue:

Quo Vadis youth in the EU
integration process?

Policy Paper
October 2020





“Youth should be given a chance to take an active part in the decision-making of local, national and global levels”

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

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Introduction

The new EU Youth Dialogue, proposed by the European Commission in the Communication on the next EU Youth Strategy for the time period of 2019-2027, should be built on the achievements of the Structured Dialogue with young people. Undoubtedly, the Structured Dialogue has not achieved its full potential even in the European level, and further improvements in the new EU Youth Dialogue are vital to the impact and quality outcomes of the process. That's why this discussion and reform come at the right time, giving an opportunity to critically reflect and advance this youth participation mechanism for the next generation.

Nevertheless, the youth involvement in Negotiation Scheme/Plan needs to be introduced and implemented properly in Albania which means the establishment of well-functioning working structures on national level - national working groups - that are of key importance for the new EU Youth Dialogue to be a success. These structures are essential, because they bring together wide variety of actors in the youth sector, including governments, youth organizations, youth work organizations, National Agencies for Erasmus+ (hereafter "National Agencies") and more, that have the know-how and channels to reach out to and work with diverse groups of young people on the ground.

The answer on how to reach out to young people on the periphery of participation or from marginalized backgrounds can be found locally. By engaging as many local actors that do day-to-day work with diverse young people - youth workers, youth organizations, schools, youth services and so on. The principle is to bring these actors together, have enough resources to support them in their work, and to reach out to young people systematically and pro-actively with the aim of promoting EU values and spirit I the core of the society and from the core of the society.

What is the youth perception upon EU Integration and the Albanian momentum right now? Is it the proper momentum now to speak up? How can young people be official driving force in the Negotiation process? Where to begin? How should it be done?

This Policy Study aims to address the Youth involvement in deciding the overall priority of the future cycle of the structured dialogue and EU Integration, especially the chapters 19 and 26.

Methodology

The main objective of this policy paper is to cCreating the proper environment to open up the discussion on the joint decision-making of young people and policymakers regarding EU Integration and specifically the process of opening and closing the negotiation chapters.

In this framework, the methodology selected for the study of young people's perceptions regarding to their involmment in decision-making processes is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

The study paper is based on:

1

Desk - research and document analysis:
European Union policy documents, articles
and report analysis.

2

Online Survey: study of the perception of the
young people at the national level focusing
on the identifying of the factors that may
affect in increasing of their involvement in
decision-making.

European approach to inclusive youth policies in decision-making processes

The strategic involvement of young people in the integration process is considered increasingly, a priority policy by the EU institutions in order to build a European perspective for countries aspiring to join the EU and to build a European citizenship for the countries that are already part of the union. It is worth noting that in parallel with European initiatives, the initiation of the Berlin Process for the Western Balkans also emphasizes the importance of cooperating with young people in accelerating the integration process, especially in relation to important decision-making issues that directly affect young people.

The importance of youth participation in public life is underlined as a fundamental human right, since in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The growing role and importance of youth participation in a country's democratic processes has received special attention in the European Union from both the European Commission and the Council of Europe. Thus, in the preamble of one of the most well-known documents related to the European Union policies for youth participation, "Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life", it is underlined that:

"..... The active participation of young people in decisions and actions at the local and regional level is essential if we want to build a more democratic, inclusive and prosperous society. Active participation and citizenship has to do with the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and when necessary to be supported to participate, to influence in the decisions and to be involved in actions and activities in order to contribute to building of a better society." (Council of Europe, 2015).

The youth policy, in the approach of youth sector of the Council of Europe, combines a multidimensional concern in order to ensure the well-being of young people, to provide relevant learning opportunities, to increase the probability of their successful integration into society and transition to autonomy, and to participate in decision-making and civil society. (Council of Europe, 2008)

1 - The Revised European Charter on Youth Participation in Local and Regional Life³¹ was adopted in 2003 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe, one of the pillars of the Council of Europe. It was adopted as a recommendation by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in 2006.³² unanimous decision of all member states, which gives it a strong leverage as a document that all member states must respect. (Denstad F. Y. (2009).

When it comes to youth participation, the concepts that are encountered most often in the European Union political documents are co-management, the structure dialogue and, most recently, the youth dialogue. Essentially all three of these, the most frequently used concepts aim to emphasize the importance of involving young people and listening to their voice in decision-making processes on issues that influence their lives.

It is worth noting that the Council of Europe decided that through the co-management system, to link in a unique decision-making structure, the representatives of government and the non-governmental partners. The unique co-management system in the sector, where the government representatives and the young people have equal votes, is the evidence of the meaningful experience in youth participation, as the main mission of the Council of Europe, in which youth policy information is carried out in two ways: as an approach based on the human rights to youth intervention and by consolidating and expanding work on youth participation and democratic citizenship (Council of Europe, 2008). Williams & Heinen & Meyers (2012) define co-management as "a system used in the Council of Europe's Youth Sector, where young people and government representatives sit around the same table to make decisions based on the youth reality." Co-management" is often described in Council of Europe policy documents as "an unique and valuable mechanism for cooperation between governments and youth organizations," (Council of Europe).

Whereas, the European Commission chose the Structured Dialogue as a tool of cooperation between the decision-making structures and the young people in order to enable young people access to policy-making. The concept of structure dialogue was further supported by Resolution of 26 October 2006 (2), which states that: the structure dialogue and its outcome should be taken into account in policy-making at the relevant levels. Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the field of youth (2010-2018) (3) recognized the potential of young people as a basis for society and underlined the importance of the right of young people'supporting to participate in development of policies that affect them through a structured, ongoing dialogue with youth and youth organizations. (European Union, 2011).

2 - Parw at Finnish Youth Research Network (2014): Youth Participation Good Practices : in Different Forms of Regional and Local Democracy.

The European Union Strategy for Youth (2010-2018) emphasizes that: the participation of young people in representative democracy and civil society at all levels and in society at large should be supported. "

The structure dialogue means that governments and administrations, including the EU institutions, discuss selected topics with young people in order to obtain useful policy-making results.

In this context, a structure dialogue with young people takes the form of EU Youth Conferences organized by each EU presidency with specific focusing priorities under several key themes. The member states implement the structure dialogue with young people, usually in the form of national consultations. The structure dialogue with young people is included as a funding topic in Erasmus + 2014-2020 (previously was included in the program "Youth in Action" 2007-2013, (Huang, Lihong 2014).

The European Union Youth Dialogue, proposed by the European Commission in the Communication on the EU Youth Strategy for the period 2019-2027, emphasizes in particular "The dialogue with the young people as a central tool for youth participation in the EU and other European countries, as appropriate, the main elements of which include direct dialogue between decision-makers, young people and their representatives, consulting young people on relevant topics to them and ongoing partnerships in governing the process at local, national and European levels. Related to the implementation of EUYD and in a line with the European Union Youth Strategy (EUYS), the European Youth Goals should "serve as an inspiration and provide guidance to the EU, its Member States and their stakeholders and relevant authorities", (European Union, 2019). This initiative is seen as a continuation of the previous dialogue process with the sole purpose of involving as many young people and youth organizations as possible, in order to implement the European Union Youth Strategy.

4 -The European Union Youth Strategy was adopted by the Council through the Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the field of youth (2010-2018). This followed the release of the Commission Communication "An EU Strategy for Youth - Investment and Empowerment", COM (2009) 200 final, 27 April 200.

Dimensions of policies and the situation of young people in the Albanian context

According to all indicators, Albania is one of the few countries in the European continent with a young population, in which youth constitutes 24% of the total population according to the data of the Institute of Statistics for 2018.

Despite this indicator, it is worth noting that the involvement of young people in decision-making processes at both central and local levels remains low. Considering the fact that society is heading towards aging and when young people will be in the minority, then this will also be reflected in the insignificance it will have in a society, where laws and decision-making will depend on the majority. Thus, according to data for the period 2014-2018 it is noticed that from 25% of the population who were young in 2014, until 2018, this figure dropped to 24%, a decrease of 1%, which is one of the indicators of aging further population.

In this sense, keeping young people away from decision-making processes reflects nothing but a fragile level of democracy. In the Albanian reality in order to improve the situation of the highest possible involvement of young people, concrete legal policies have been undertaken by governments over the years where we can single out the adoption of important documents such as: National Youth Strategy (2003,) and which was improved by adapting to the new socio-political conditions of the country with the National Youth Strategy (2007-2013). The data show that youth policies seem to have influenced a slight increase in youth participation in decision-making processes from 10% in 2007 to 25% in 2012. Despite these data, Prime Minister Rama underlined that, until 2013, young people were only numbers without any real weight in governing the country, "never a priority of politics and decision-making", while in the Council document of Europe (2012) for Youth Policy in Albania the situation was paraphrased as, "unfavorable position for young people".

Under these conditions, the new government, emerged from the 2013 elections paid special attention to young people and their policies. The idea to develop the National Action Plan for Youth, is presented as a necessity in the conditions when the National Youth Strategy (2007-2013) was no longer in force, but also to have it in coherence with the economic and socio-cultural orientations and objectives of the new government.

4 - Data taken from the National Strategy for Development and Integration p. 95.

5 - National Youth Action Plan (2015 - 2020).

Thus, in May 2015 the Albanian government approved the National Action Plan for Youth (2015 - 2020) which had as its primary goal the development and coordination of cross-sectoral youth policies in education, employment, health, culture and strengthening youth participation in social life and decision-making processes. The National Action Plan for Youth represents a very important document related to youth policies grouped according to 6 strategic axes, where obviously the first strategy refers to the promotion of youth and their participation in democratic processes and political decision-making. In his message for the approval of this document, Prime Minister Rama emphasized that: "For a society, it is meaningless to try to solve the problems faced by the youth without the participation of the youth and without seriously investing in the youth."

Also in June 2014, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania approved the establishment of the National Youth Service, an institution that, placed under the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, was responsible for the implementation of youth policies. Certainly, one of the most promising success stories for the countries of the Western Balkans in the context of the Berlin process has been the story of the establishment of the Regional Office for Youth Cooperation (RYCO) in 2016. Opportunities for young people to travel, improve their skills to meet people around the world through funded programs provided by the Erasmus Plus project of the European Union and other institutions or donors, such as the Council of Europe Youth Department, SALTO, FES and USAID, (The Balkan Forum 2020).

Another important initiative is the adoption of the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2014-2020, which represents the vision of how will Albania approach the membership in the European Union, through the policies and actions of the government.

It is worth emphasizing that, despite the coherence of the Albanian governments to adopt initiatives and strategies in line with the orientations of the European Union, in reality the situation of young people does not turn out to be significantly positive change.

6 - Country data show that the impact of European Youth Policy has been particularly strong in countries that have drafted youth policies from scratch, often as part of a process of socio-political transformation (Insights into Youth Policy Governance, 2018).

According to the report Youth Political Participation in Albania (2018) it results that by the end of 2017, neither the government nor the municipalities had created any structure or had created any investment fund for the implementation of the National Action Plan for Youth. According to these data, there is a lack of supportive policies for the effective participation of young people in policy-making and decision-making.

As a country aiming for membership in the European Union, Albania in this period is facing a situation when there is still no legal definition for young people until 2019 when the Law on Youth was adopted.

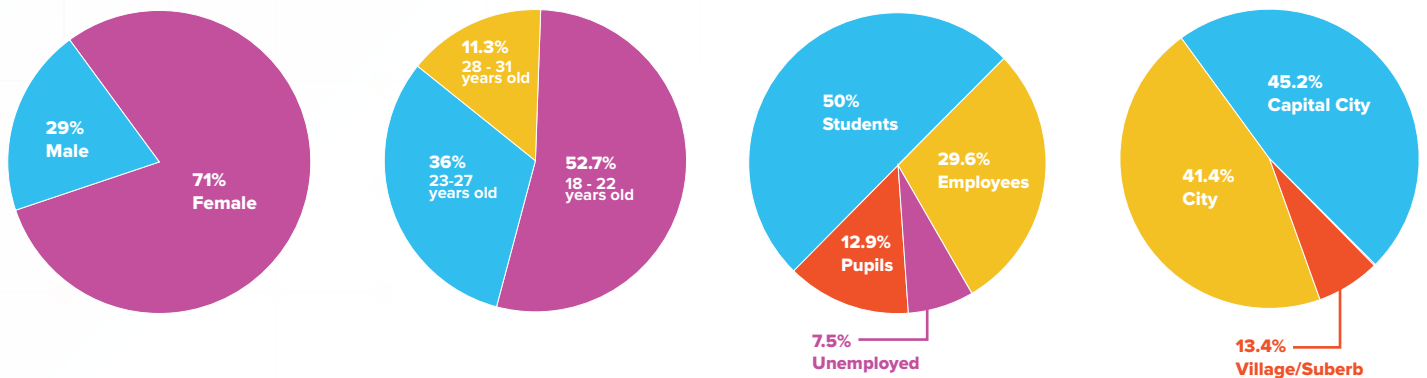
Although it was considered a delayed legal initiative, its adoption marked another positive development in terms of integration of young people in society and decision-making processes. The Law on Youth emphasis specially the empowerment of young people by creating the conditions and opportunities for their participation in decision-making processes, through the creation of mechanisms responsible for the protection and promotion of their rights at central or local level.

It is important not only to consult with young people but above all to consider and influence their attitudes in decision-making processes related to issues that affect their lives. Albania in the context of involvement in government discussion and decision-making processes turns out to be the country with the most passive political population in the region, where approximately (57%) of the population has never been involved in any discussion related to government decision-making, referring to Balkan Barometer 2019 data.

The participation of young people at central levels, unlike their participation at the local level, is generally represented and not directly involved. In this sense, the main role in youth representation and participation is played by non-governmental youth organizations.

Online Survey

To measure the perceptions of young people regarding their involvement in decision-making processes and their involvement during the integration process of Albania, we have undertaken a survey involving 186 young people, who have the following characteristics:



Topic 1. The participation and activation of young people in decision making
The results of the survey show that 41.4% of respondents were only partially involved in decision-making processes, while the other 35.5% had never been part of any such process. Only 23.1% of young people answered that they have been involved in these processes.

- The youth participation in the community

The data show that young people are more engaged in the structures of:

1. Youth organizations: 33.9%
2. Activities from different projects: 25.3%
3. Voluntary work: 18.8%
4. Political organizations (Fresh, FRPD etc.): 16.1%
5. Consultations with decision makers at local and central level: 5.9%

- The reasons that push young people to participate in the above forms of organizations

Survey data show that the main reasons that motivate young people the most are:

1. Desire to bring a new spirit of change: 48.4%
2. Acquisition of knowledge and skills: 18.8%
3. Personal fulfillment: 11.8%
4. Socialization: 8.6%

- The perception of the impact on society / community

From the respondents results that the vast majority 68.3%, think that they have a little impact on the society or community where they live.

16.7% others think they have no influence at all, while only 15.1% think they really have an influence.

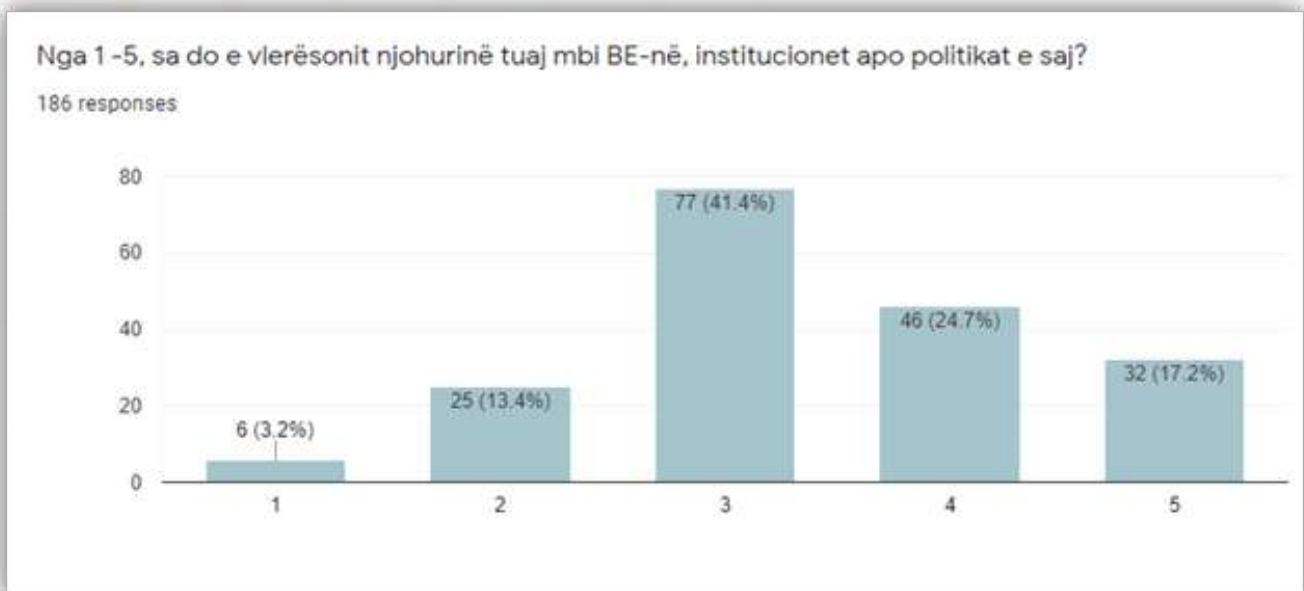
- The barriers that inhibit active participation

It turns out that young people perceive as the main obstacles:

1. The lack of trust in state structures: 25.8%
2. The lack of information: 20.4%
3. The lack of legal framework guaranteeing this participation: 19.9%
4. The lack of confidence that they can make a difference in society: 17.7%
5. The lack of free time: 12.9%

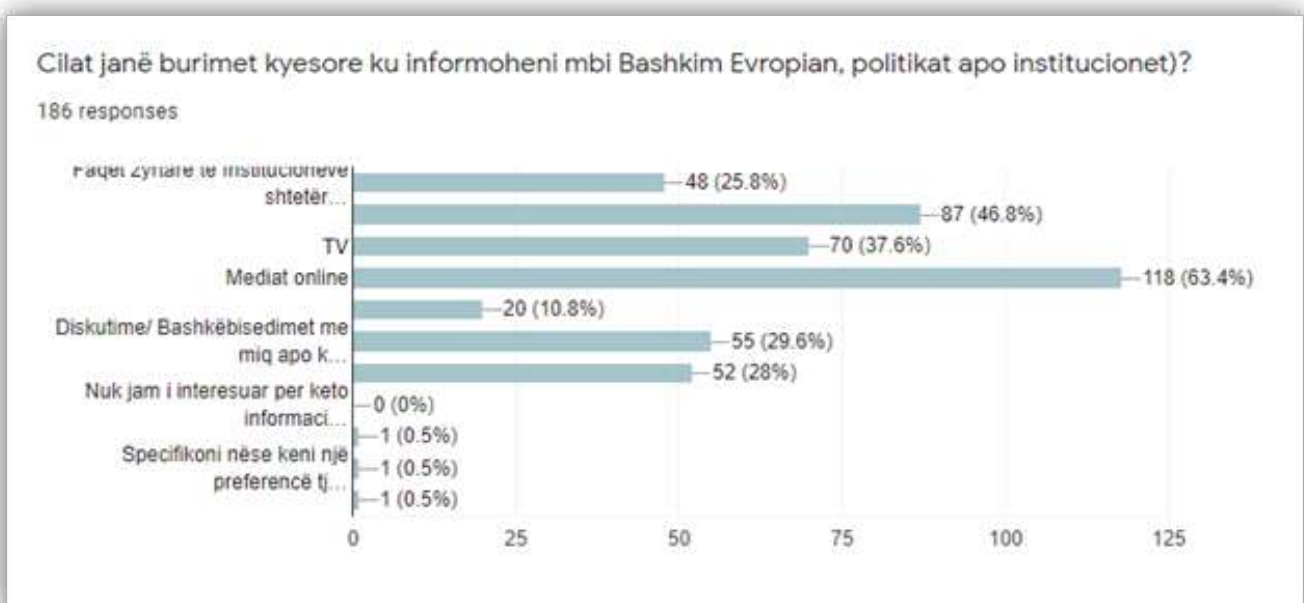
Topic 2. Youth Perception of European Integration and Country Progress in the EU Accession Process

- Knowledge about the EU and its institutions



The given answers show that 41.4% of the surveyed young people have an average information about the EU institutions and the policies pursued by each of these institutions.

- The main sources of information about the EU and its policies



- The topics of interest about the EU

1. The policies for youth: 71.5%
2. The economic policies: 48.9%
3. The education policies: 40.9%
4. The expansion process: 28%
5. The foreign policy: 27.4%
6. Cultural policies: 21%

As it is evidenced by the given answers, young people show a very high interest in policies related to youth, seeing it closely related to economic and education policies that occupy even the topics of most interest to respondents.

- Albania's integration into the EU

The perception of young people about the period that Albania will still need to meet the criteria to be a member of the EU turns out to be as follows:

1. It will take more than 10 years: 34.9%
2. Within the next 10 years: 33.9%
3. Within the next 5 years: 17.2%
4. Will never be part of the EU: 9.1%

As can be seen from the answers, most of them feel pessimistic when it comes to the perspective of Albania's integration into the EU, considering it a very long way to a full rights membership.

- Knowledge of the Negotiation opening process

The majority of respondents (52.7%) state that they have a very little information about this process, 38.2% turn out to be very informed and only 9.1% have no knowledge about the process.

- Perceptions on youth involvement in the process of the opening of Negotiations

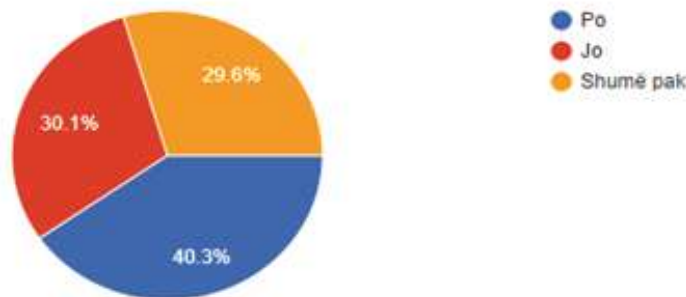
1. Youth is superficially involved but not substantially: 47.8%
2. Youth is ignored in decision-making processes: 28%
3. Youth is totally excluded: 18.8%
4. Youth is involved: 5.4%

Most respondents answer that their involvement in the process leaves much to be desired.

- Knowledge about Chapter 19 and Chapter 26

A keni njohuri mbi Kapitullin 19 (Politikat Sociale dhe Punësimi) dhe Kapitullin 26 (Edukimi dhe Kultura)? (Kapitulli 19 synon rritjen e punësimit, përmirësimin e kushteve të punës dhe të jetesës, krijimin e mekanizmave të mbrojtjes sociale me standardet e duhura, zhvillimin e burimeve njerëzore në mënyrë që të sigurojë punësim të qëndrueshëm, luftimin e varfërisë dhe përjashtimit social dhe ofrimin e mundësive të barabarta për meshkujt dhe femrat. Nëpërmjet kapitullit 26, BE-ja synon të promovojë bashkëpunimin brenda kornizës së politikave të përbashkëta si rritja e cilësisë së arsimit, garantimi i arsimit, punësimi, dialogu kulturor, ruajtja e pasurisë kulturore, trashëgimia e përbashkët kulturore, ruajtjen dhe promovimin e diversitetit kulturor.)

186 responses



Most of them turn out to have information about Chapters 19 and 26 at 40.3%.

- Further information on these processes

It results that there is a great desire from the respondents to get more knowledge about these above processes.

1. Very interested: 54.3%
2. Interested: 35.5%
3. Slightly interested: 8.6%
4. Not at all interested: 1.6%

What is evidenced by the received answers turns out to be a great desire by young people to increase their influence in decision-making processes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Albania's EU integration process undoubtedly carries many challenges, but one of the most important challenges for the time and political context is considered to be the involvement of as many young people as possible in dialogue and decision-making.

Their involvement in these processes should be more than just a political will to close the chapters but also an indicator of policy pursuit to prevent their marginalization from the decision-making processes for them.

The European Union sees its future in the youth, as reflected in the approved initiatives and documents, just as the Albanian youth sees the EU as the light at the end of the tunnel. This makes the influence and the link that exists between these actors, who sees the EU as the future of their country, insoluble. In this sense the desire and willingness of young people to be part of the processes will need to be reflected in policy opening including the voices of young people and their representative structures in all decision-making steps for them.

In this sense, participation is widely considered an essential principle, if not the most important, principle of the democracies of our time, just as European institutions and structures have consistently emphasized the importance of youth participation in promoting active youth citizenship, in order to increase their integration and inclusion and to strengthen their contribution to the development of democracy.

Recommendations

Youth is among the strongest allies of the SEE6 path to EU membership. However, unfortunately up to date Youth has not been involved in the enlargement process. Taking this into account, and also the experience of other Western Balkan countries and based on the observation of the mechanisms that were established by respective institutions with regard to Youth involvement in the European integration process, the authors provides the following recommendations:

1. In the frame of the European integration process, the Albanian state institutions should:

- Expand the Platform of Partnership for EU Integratuib (PPEI) involvement mechanisms by engaging specific actors, such as the Youth. In light of the adoption of Law 75/2019 “On Youth”, the structures established in accordance with this law, such as the National Youth Council, the Local Youth Council, youth organisations, organisations for young people and the National Representative Youth Organisations (to be established) should be involved in the process;
- Enhance transparency of the required procedures, and future steps of the government in the integration process;
- Enhance transparency of adopted documents, and also share them on the institutions’ official websites.

2. For a meaningful engagement in the European integration process, the Youth should:

- Enhance its sectoral expertise and role, being extensively engaged in the discussion roundtables as part of the PPEI;
- Raise their voice for involvement in all processes provided so by law, and in case of noninvolvement, to undertake all the required actions against state institutions;
- Self-organise in different expert groups and be prepared to provide opinion when required and on any area requested;
- Increase the degree of cooperation among all youth organizations at any level, avoiding any prospect for disruption due to state influence;
- Improve communication and information dissemination among all Youth actors. , The involved actors should come from the entire country, and not solely from the main cities, like Tirana, Durrës and Vlora.
- Develop and enhance platforms and other means for regional cooperation and cooperation with EU frontrunners countries in the region to benefit from their experience in this process.

3. The EU-supported state institutions should provide concrete support to initiatives creating opportunities for Youth involvement in the enlargement process and relevant reforms. A few recommendations are:

- Systemic identification and engagement of Young people and / or Youth organizations working in areas of the 33 membership chapters, to encourage and support expertise provision on the future process awaiting for Albania;
- Including youth in the already-established institutions for civil society involvement, like the Agency for Civil Society Protection and the National Council for Civil Society, to raise the awareness of different Youth actors to take part in the activities organised as part of PPEI.

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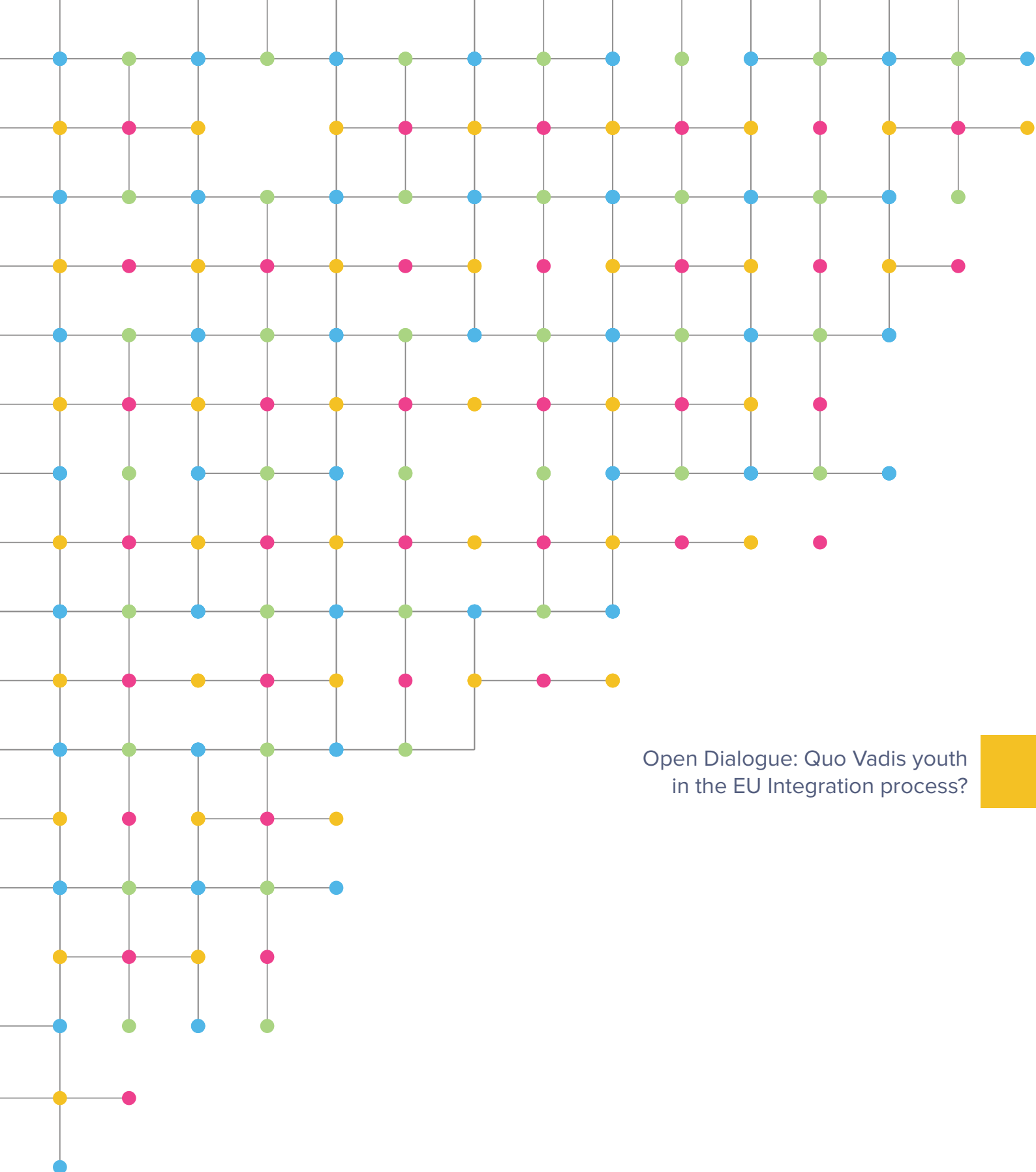
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