



AEGEE Toolkit

Policy and Advocacy



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1. Introduction to Policy and Advocacy

Being the biggest interdisciplinary student organisation in Europe comes with certain duties and responsibilities. Towards the European and International institutions we are one of the most relevant student stakeholders, and therefore we must ensure that our messages, statements and policy resolutions are always based on a fresh, young student perspective. To achieve this, we need a structured way of doing policy work internally, and contributing to policy externally.

The objective of this toolkit is to clarify the basic elements of our strategy:

- what are the internal processes leading to the formulation of policy recommendations and the involvement of different actors and different levels
- what should be the policy strategy of AEGEE externally, namely towards whom and with which perspective and expectations

In this toolkit we will define the relevant actors inside AEGEE when making policy, who are all the external stakeholders, and what are the channels and platforms which our network uses when dealing with policy making. By knowing these elements, we can increase the impact of our organisation in this field.

2. Who are the internal actors inside AEGEE in the field of advocacy and policy?

Agora (General Assembly):

The Agora is the highest body in AEGEE. The Member Organisations (Antennae) gather and make decisions on the future of the association. All official position papers and other official documents have to be ratified by the Agora.

EBM (European Board's Meeting):

The European Board's Meeting is the biggest thematic conference in AEGEE and takes place in the first trimester every year. It has a hybrid nature that combines a statutory event of AEGEE-Europe (where we work on Strategic Planning) and a thematic conference. In this second thematic part, usually there is space for participants to draft recommendations and resolutions on the topic of the conference that will work as a recommendation for the Comité Directeur of AEGEE-Europe and other policy actors in AEGEE to help them do their advocacy work in Brussels, once they are ratified by the following Spring Agora.

Therefore, the EBM serves as an opportunity for our members to learn how the negotiation processes of drafting policy recommendations work, and they can get introduced to the advocacy work of AEGEE-Europe.

Comité Directeur (CD):

The Board of Directors of AEGEE ensures the running of the organisation as well as provides the political vision for one year. The CD is democratically elected by the Agora, and receives the mandate to speak on behalf of the Network externally. The members of the CD are the **main actors in charge of all the external representation, external relations, external communication and policy and advocacy of the Network.**

The CD speaks on behalf of the network:

- They can launch external campaigns.
- They write opinions and reactions to the latest European news
- They do policy and advocacy through AEGEE-Europe's membership in bigger platforms such as the European Youth Forum or EUCIS-LLL.
- They hold meetings with decision makers to advocate and influence the final outcomes, responding to the needs and opinions of the students.

But they also have to:

- respect the Statement of Principles and any other document ratified by the Agora.
- share and discuss with the members any opinion, reaction or article presented on behalf of AEGEE (for the sake of transparency and also for nurturing discussion).
- ask the opinion of relevant internal bodies before publication of the reactions, when time allows.

The Comité Directeur can delegate their right to speak on behalf of AEGEE to other actors, such as the Policy Officers, in order to have a deeper work in specific areas, and also as a tool to empower more people in the field of Advocacy and Policy.

The Comité Directeur uses different channels to report its work on advocacy and policy to the members of AEGEE-Europe: mailing lists such as ANNOUNCE-L, the AEGEE-Europe Newsletter, our blog in Euractiv "Key to Europe", the Key to Europe annual report, our Social Media channels, and the News section of www.aegEE.org,

Policy Officers (POs): Policy Officers are selected by the Comité Directeur and ratified by the Agora. This position requires certain expertise on a concrete field, preferably connected with the Strategic Plan of the association. They are given the responsibility to gather the opinion of the network in one topic of their field of work, and then translate this opinion into a document which the AEGEE Network can use externally (the Position Paper). The Policy Officers have the right to represent AEGEE externally whenever there are conferences or processes on their topic, always in agreement with the Comité Directeur. They are also in charge of redirecting to the Network the information that can be relevant to allow them to contribute to the consultations, in collaboration with the relevant internal bodies.

Policy Officers report about the work on advocacy and policy as well as representation together with the CD and using the same channels.

Pool of Representatives (PoR):

The Pool of Representatives is a group of experienced AEGEE members selected by the Comité Directeur and ratified by the Agora. The purpose of the PoR is to support the representation of the association, including at the political level. Due to the high workload of the CD and the POs, and the geographical widespread of the opportunities available, in many occasions it is not possible/feasible to attend important conferences or events. **The members of PoR are sent to different events to deliver the official message approved by the AGORA or agreed with the Comité Directeur.**

Pool of Representatives must report and work directly with the CD and notify about their representations through the official communication channels.

Liaison Officers (LOs):

Liaison Officers are selected by the Comité Directeur and ratified by the Agora. LOs are in charge or creating a link between AEGEE and their respective institutions like United Nations, OSCE, OECD and World Bank. They must count on knowledge of how the institution works to facilitate AEGEE's involvement in its processes. They must also present to AEGEE members all the opportunities which these institutions provide to students and young people. After agreement with Comité Directeur, LOs can also represent the associations in different meetings of the institution they work with.

Working Groups (WGs):

The Working Groups in AEGEE are internal thematic structures inside AEGEE. The representatives of these WGs are democratically elected among the members of the WG. They are a forum for discussion among members interested and/or experienced in the topic. Ideally these discussions should develop reactions and positions which later on can be used for policy and advocacy on different levels. Their role in Policy is mostly consultative, as usually WGs do not directly formulate any kind of recommendation or opinion. What they can do however, is bring for discussion topics which are being hot in Europe and then urge either CD, or Policy Officers to develop a position based on their internal debates.

AEGEE-Europe Projects:

Projects are initiatives developed by AEGEE members tackling different problems or obstacles which we currently face in society. Through different activities and actions they have impact on other young people and can also have impact on policy levels. **As a result of their work, projects can develop policy recommendations or sets of guidelines to certain institutions on how to overcome those problems.** They do represent the association externally, but only occasionally.

If they follow the procedures and guidelines of AEGEE-Europe, stated below, to draft a document, Projects can, in cooperation with the Comité Directeur, draft a Position paper to be presented at AGORA.

Member Organisations (Antennae):

The antennae are the core of the AEGEE Network. They are the Member Organisations and they are the ones who have the ultimate decision power at the Agora. Antennae vote and approve the official positions, statements, policy recommendations and documents for the whole Network. They can also have **independent advocacy actions** on the local level, but must comply with the common policy statements once approved by the Agora. This way, once approved by the Agora, our Network can move and act as one united force having a real advocacy and pressure impact on different institutions and stakeholders.

Individual members:

Individual Members can contribute to Policy and Advocacy Process through the consultation of the Network of the Policy Officers and other bodies, and their input and initiative to a specific topic is always appreciated. The Antennae should consult their members before making an official decision or statement e.g. at Agora or any other occasion.

3. What are the platforms and umbrella organisations which AEGEE works with?

3.1 European Youth Forum (YFJ)



The European Youth Forum (YFJ) is the platform of youth organisations in Europe. Representing 99 youth organisations, both National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations, we believe youth organisations are the tool through which we empower, encourage, involve, represent, reach out and support young people. The Youth Forum brings together tens of millions of young people from all over Europe, organised in order to represent their common interests.

The Youth Forum works to empower young people to participate actively in society to improve their own lives by representing and advocating their needs and interest and those of their organisations. In the current uncertain political and social context that affects young people, they can be powerful catalysts for positive change and contributors of innovative solutions to Europe's problems.

To overcome the challenges faced by young people, the European Youth Forum has three main goals:

- Greater youth participation
- Stronger youth organisations
- Increased youth autonomy and inclusion

The Structures of the European Youth Forum include:

- Board of the YFJ (2 year long mandate)
- Expert Working Groups
- Expert Ad Hoc Task Forces
- Pool of Trainers (PoT)

<http://www.youthforum.org/>

3.2 European Movement International (EMI)



European Movement International

The European Movement is an international organisation open to all political, economic, social and cultural trends in civil society. Its objective is to "contribute to the establishment of a united, federal Europe founded on the principles of peace, democracy, liberty, solidarity, and respect for

basic human rights. It seeks to provide a structure to encourage and facilitate the active participation of citizens and civil society organisations in the development of a united Europe". Its 42 National Councils and 32 associated Member Organisations work towards bringing together representatives from European associations, political parties, enterprises, trade unions and individual lobbyists.

Structures include:

- Board of the EMI
- Working Groups
- Task Forces
- Newsflash
- Federal Committees

<http://www.europeanmovement.eu/>

3.3 European Civic Forum (ECF)



The European Civic Forum (ECF) is a transnational network that brings together over 100 associations and NGOs across 27 countries in Europe and is actively working to promote civic and popular ownership of Europe. Facing this growing civic disaffection across Europe, it is more critical than ever to foster citizens' engagement for a collective project and the emergence of a European public space where the role and influence of civil society are fully recognized through the setting up of a genuine European civil dialogue.

Structures include:

- Board
- European Year Alliances

<http://www.civic-forum.eu/>

3.4 European Civil Society Platform for Lifelong learning (EUCIS-LLL)



EUCIS-LLL

The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) gathers 33 European networks working in education and training. Together, these organisations cover all sectors of education and training including networks for secondary and higher education, vocational education and training, adult education and popular education; networks for students, school heads, parents, HRD professionals, teachers and trainers.

Structures include:

- Board of EUCIS-LLL (2 /3 year mandates)

<http://www.eucis-lll.eu/>

3.5 Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe (AC):



The AC is made up of 30 representatives from youth NGOs and networks who provide opinions and input on all youth sector activities. The AC also ensures that young people are involved in other activities of the Council of Europe. Its Bureau is made up of 5 members. The new members of the Advisory Council for 2014-2015 were nominated by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 16 October 2013.

Structures include:

- Elected member of the AC
- Elected member of the Bureau of the AC
- Elected member of the Programme Committee of the AC

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/coe_youth/advisory%20council/Advisory_Council_on_Youth.asp

3.6 National Youth Councils (NYCs):

National Youth Council is a representative body made up of youth organizations and young people in a particular state or nation such as National Youth Council of Ireland,. Many were formed after the second world war to attend the World Festival of Youth and later the World Assembly of Youth.

Many National Youth Council receive funding from the government in which they operate and are affiliated to a regional federation:

Structures include:

- Board of NYCs
- Expert Working Groups
- Campaign and lobby actions
- Representative of NYC in EU and global events
- Policy documents of the NYCs

3.7 Regional and Local Youth Councils (RYCs and LYCs):

Youth councils are a form of youth voice engaged in community decision-making. Youth councils exist on local, state, provincial, regional, national, and international levels among governments, non governmental organizations (NGO), schools, and other entities.

Structures include:

- Board
- Programmes
- Working Groups or Task Forces
- Campaigns and lobby actions

4. What are national, regional and local youth councils?

Youth councils are a form of youth voice engaged in community decision-making. Youth councils exist on local, state, provincial, regional, national, and international levels

among governments, non-governmental organizations (NGO), schools, and other entities.

The history of youth councils extends back to the early 20th century, when communists and Nazis formed youth-led decision-making bodies for the purpose of propaganisation and recruitment. Youth councils have seen a resurgence in Europe under the advisement of the European Youth Forum. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is also widely credited with promoting youth councils.

Youth councils have many purposes. Many are consultative bodies for more representative political bodies at all levels of government. The extent to which they have been established at all levels varies. How they are composed varies, with some youth councils being elected by young people in the community, while others are handpicked by political officials or elected by youth NGOs. The European Youth Forum only recognises youth councils that are independent, democratically elected and youth-led.

5. The Structured Dialogue on Youth

The Structured Dialogue is the result of the *A New Impetus for European Youth* (White paper, 2001) and a sequence of the European Youth Pact (2005). Those documents emphasize the importance to consult young people on policy fields that affect them directly.

In 2005, a European Union Council Resolution invited the European Commission and the Member States to develop a Structured Dialogue with young people and youth organisations, experts on youth issues and public decision makers.

The biggest boost for its implementation happened with the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) adopted in 2009 through the Council Resolution that recognize young people as key actors in society that should be considered as an important resource. Therefore it is there mentioned the importance to defend their right to be involved and participate on the elaboration of policies that affect them through a permanent structure dialogue between decision makers, young people and youth organizations.

Thus, the European Cooperation in the Youth field was established:

General Aims:

- Create more equity opportunities for young people on Education and on the labour market:
- Promote active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity among young people.

8 Domains of Action:

- Education and Training
- Employment and Entrepreneurship
- Social and Well-Being
- Participation

- Volunteering
- Social Inclusion
- Youth and the World & Creativity and Innovation

For more information you can have a look on the European Commission document on the concept of the SD: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/documents/doc776_en.pdf

5.1 What is the Structure Dialogue?

The Structured Dialogue is a process enabling discussions between young people and policy makers about different themes, to make sure the opinions of young people are taken into account in defining the EU's youth policies.

The Structured dialogue is a means of mutual communication between young people and decision-makers in order to implement the priorities of European youth policy cooperation and to make young people's voice heard in the European policy-shaping process.

It is a consultative process, implemented by the European Commission, in order to increase cooperation with the civil society, and to get first-hand input coming from, in our case, young people.

It is called "Structured Dialogue" because it happens in a very concrete frame which has been set by the European Commission together with the European Youth Forum.

5.2 How does it work?

The Structured Dialogue is linked with the cycles of the European Presidencies. Every 6 month, the presidency changes.

One Cycle of Structured Dialogue covers 3 cycles of European Presidencies of the European Union, which means in total 18 months and during 6 months of each Presidency.

Each trio of Presidencies chooses a global priority and the Member State assuming the Presidency focus in a subject related with the defined priority.

The Trio of EU Presidencies:

1st Cycle "Youth Employment"

Spain was hosting the EU Presidency with the Subject "Youth Social Inclusion through Employment"

Belgium was hosting the EU Presidency with the Subject "Youth Work

Hungary was hosting the EU Presidency with the Subject "Youth Participation Documents

2nd Cycle: Youth Participation in Democratic Life in Europe

Poland was hosting the EU Presidency with the Subject "Mobility of and cooperation between young people from the EU and EU neighbouring countries"

Denmark was hosting the EU Presidency with the Subject "Participation: creativity and innovation"

Cyprus was hosting the EU Presidency with the Subject "Youth Participation and social inclusion, with an emphasis on the young people with migrant background"

3rd Cycle: Social Inclusion of Young People Across Europe

Ireland was hosting the EU Presidency with focus on Quality of the Youth Work

Lithuania was hosting the EU Presidency with the Subject "Want to get involved?"

Greece was hosting the EU Presidency with focus on Youth Entrepreneurship

5.3 How does it work through different levels?

On National level

Each Member State has a National Working Group with representatives from:

- State (Youth Sector)
- National Youth Councils
- Youth organizations and local/regional youth councils
- Youth Workers
- Researchers on youth field

The role of this group is conduct consultation events with young people and decision makers, collecting the outcomes to include in a national report to send to the European Steering Committee of the Structured Dialogue..

On European level

For each phase the European Steering Committee for the SD constituted by:

- European Commission
- Trio of EU Presidencies
- European Youth Forum

Elaborates a document that reflects the outcomes of the reports sent by the National Working Groups, to present on the European Youth Conference.

The European Youth Conference

The European Youth Conference takes place every 6 month, in the Member State that is hosting the EU Presidency.

During the European Youth Conference, delegates from National Working Groups and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations are present, and discuss again the results of the online consultation, to finalise the recommendations which are going to be presented to the Council of Youth Ministers.

This is the European space that young people and decision makers have the opportunity to discuss and work together to present a common joint message to the EU.

5.4 Why getting involved in the Structured Dialogue?

Youth organisations like AEGEE have a vital role to play in the Structured Dialogue, as they speak on behalf of a great number of young people.

Structured dialogue aims at addressing all young people, including those with fewer opportunities or not formally organised. Hence, youth organisations are invited to try to reach out beyond their members and to involve an even larger diversity of young people.

AEGEE defends youth participation in the democratic processes, and we believe that it is important that young people share their needs with decision-makers.

Getting involved in the Structured Dialogue is a way for us to make our voice heard, but also to contribute by giving concrete recommendation and concrete input to the Council of ministers.

Young people often complain that there is no space for them to make suggestions to decision-makers, or to influence the decisions which are being taken.

The Structured Dialogue gives a 'structured' space for this, on topics which have been preliminarily chosen, but still, which definitely matter for young people.

5.5 What is the impact of the Structure Dialogue?

The impact of this process to young people depends on the implementation of the political outcomes by the Member States through concrete measures and the involvement/commitment of youth representatives on attending and actively participating on the European discussion and on the national working group.

The SD has been getting some visible results on the political decision on the European Level. As an example of these results, for the period of 2012-2013 the European Commission provided more funds to increase the number of projects through Youth In Action Programme and the number of participants from the 6 neighbour countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Byelorussia, Georgia, Moldavia, Ukraine).

During the Denmark Presidency the discussion were focused on youth innovation and creativity and participation on the elections, therefore the conclusions of the Council (approved by the Youth Ministries of the 27 Member States) reflect most of the youth recommendations of the European Conference in Sorø (March 2011). The same happened in Nicosia on the last phase of this cycle, most of recommendations were taking into account on the conclusions of the Member States representatives.

The global results of the 18 months of SD on Youth Participation between young people and decision makers were taken into consideration on the Council Resolution at the end of the cycle.

The results included:

- Extend the Structure Dialogue to all young people
- Recognition of the youth work and youth organizations as a way to develop skills and competences for youth
- Supporting youth participation in decision processes at all levels

- Increase the support for all youth activities focused on intercultural dialogue and participation of young people in the EU and third countries

5.6 What AEGEE has been doing so far?

First of all, AEGEE has been present in all the EU Youth Conference from the different presidencies (Hungary, Poland, Denmark, Cyprus, Ireland, Lithuania). We systematically send the survey with the questions to the members, in order to get first-hand input.

In May 2013, The European Commission organised an evaluation process of the Structured Dialogue during the EU Youth Week 2013, during which AEGEE was present, giving its perspective as youth organisations, and bringing an international perspective, a different added value to the process and a stronger voice in the European Youth level together with the rest of the INGYOs.

AEGEE-Europe has been playing a leading role in the involvement and recognition of the INGYOs in the Structured Dialogue.

AEGEE-Europe has organised the first formal meeting of INGYOs gathering 12 youth organizations to draft a common position for the guiding questions of the Irish Presidency.

We also hosted the first international consultation in Zaragoza, bringing 22 INGYOs to develop common conclusions for the Lithuanian Presidency, creating a manual of best practices of why and how to involve INGYOs in the process, and we will draft concrete recommendations on the creation of a European Working Group. Check the website: <http://www.eurosd.org/sdweb/?lang=es>

5.7 How to get involved within AEGEE?

1. Participate in the online questionnaires and make your voice and opinions reach the decision makers.
2. Once participated in the questionnaire apply to represent AEGEE in the EU Youth Conferences around Europe.
3. Get in contact with your National Youth Councils and ask how to get involved in the Structured Dialogue and National Working Groups to represent your country in the EU Youth Conferences.
4. Get involved in the National Consultations organized by your National Youth Councils.
5. Spread the word and get all your friends and members of your antennae to also participate in the process.
6. Related Links:

http://europa.eu/youth/structured-dialogue_en

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-policies/structured-dialogue_en.htm

6. How does my local get involved in policy & advocacy?

These are the different ways in which your local can participate in policy and advocacy processes:

1. Filling in the surveys which CD, Policy Officers, Projects, Working Groups and Liaison Officers send to the Network.
2. Collecting the opinions of students and young people on your University or City level, and then approaching your University, City Council, Regional Government with concrete recommendations and proposals on behalf of the students, putting pressure on them to make them take decisions that benefit students and young people.
3. Contacting the CD/Policy Officers whenever something is happening in your region/country which deserves a policy resolutions or statement by AEGEE-Europe.
4. Organising Press Conferences at University where you invite the media and release a message for the public opinion.
5. Getting involved directly in the Structured Dialogue process either through AEGEE or through your local/regional/National Youth Council.
6. Attending AGORA and EBM, and actively participating in the drafting, editing and approval of policy documents.
7. Coordinating with locals of your same language, country or NetCom area to develop common messages towards different institutions and sending these messages to them to put pressure (example: Spanish speaking locals coordinating one common statement signed by all the locals and sent to the Government's complaining and calling for no more cuts in the ERASMUS grants).
8. Getting involved and making AEGEE part of your local or regional youth council. There are different requirements in different cities. Check your local authorities in order to find out how to contribute to local youth policy.