
Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

Let me start by thanking Ambassador Mariangela Zappia, Franco Vaccari, President of Rondine and all students present here today for the organisation of this important event.

For the past 20 years, “Rondine Cittadella della Pace” has been training young people from countries in armed conflict or post conflict situation to become peace leaders in their own community. The launch of the “Leaders for Peace” campaign last year, aimed at replicating the Rondine method worldwide, is an important step towards increasing the participation of young people in peace initiatives. I look forward to hearing from Rondine staff and students about their lessons learnt and recommendations.

Worldwide, 1.8 billion young people want to make their voices heard. The vast majority of them are living in low-income countries, and many of them are affected by conflict. Recognising and empowering young people's aspirations is the promise of the youth, peace and security agenda.

The EU has a longstanding commitment for youth empowerment and for partnerships with young people. We fully share Rondine's view that education is essential in this respect. One of our most iconic programmes, the student exchange programme Erasmus, has for the past 30 years opened up opportunities for millions of young people from Europe and beyond. Our new Commission President, Ursula Van der Leyen, who took up duty last Sunday, has announced her intention to triple the Erasmus+ budget, which has a strong international dimension.

We are also fully involved in the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda. Last year, we organised the first ever Youth, Peace and Security international conference in Brussels. We are listening to young people on how to consolidate our policies on Youth, Peace and Security. And we have been working with partner countries, multilateral institutions, and with young people and their organisations to jointly translate policy to practice, to implement the Youth, Peace and Security agenda on the ground.

We have created extended networks with young people from Europe, Africa, the Middle-East, Asia and elsewhere. These networks – such as the EU-Africa Youth Hub or the Young Med Voices - provide open channels of communication to discuss global issues, to connect young people and leaders from the EU and from our partner countries.

We have taken important steps to move this forward, notably through bringing the voice of young people in high-level dialogues – including at the UN - because their ideas and passion are essential to help governments do a better job in
fulfilling their needs and for us to hear from them about what works and what doesn't.

But to make our partnership work, we need more than listening. We need innovative thinking, and new ways of connecting and learning from each other. Crucially, we need young people to tell us not only about their problems, but to present us with solutions. One aspect of how we innovate together with young people is the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, a ground-breaking project enabling youth in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean to engage in meaningful intercultural experiences online, as part of their formal or non-formal education. The Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange creates a safe online community to encourage and promote intercultural dialogue, employability and citizenship, and to strengthen the youth dimension of the EU neighbourhood policy.

Crucial to the accomplishment of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda is to make a difference for young people, and for other generations, on the ground. Presently, the EU is conducting close to 30 crisis prevention and response actions on four continents to strengthen youth resilience and to promote youth peacebuilding.

2020 will be an important year for youth at the UN and beyond. First because a new SG report will be presented on Youth, Peace and Security and we expect the Security Council to take new action in this regard. Also because we will be celebrating the anniversaries of several key UN documents: the 5th year anniversary of the Agenda 2030, the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and the 75th anniversary of the UN and its Charter. You can count on us to make sure that young people are fully associated in these important projects.

Thank you.

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