

# "YMCA EUROPE - HEADING FOR A NEW CENTURY"

## EUROPEAN SECRETARY'S REPORT 1995/96

to the

EAY GENERAL ASSEMBLY, MAY 1996

(by Dölf Weder)

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### I FIVE FUNDAMENTAL TRENDS AFFECTING THE YMCA AT THE TURN OF THIS CENTURY

Dear Friends

"YMCA Europe - Heading for a new Century".

We can only head for a new century when first - and always again - carefully analyzing the ever changing world that surrounds, affects and influences us.

My first question therefore: What are some of the fundamental Trends affecting the YMCA at the turn of this millennium?

#### **Trend No. 1: Globalisation**

Today's problems, challenges and opportunities always have a global dimension. Every community, country or even continent is greatly and increasingly influenced by global trends and developments. The world has become a global village.

Reasons for this are new means of transport and communication, resulting in a global economy and worldwide interrelations in almost any field.

Some examples:

- Unemployment, social problem number one in Europe.

Unemployment is directly linked with the all-European as well as with the global economical development and the world-wide situation of labour.

- Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers - directly linked with the all-European and the global political and living circumstances.

- Destruction of Environment and Exploitation of Natural Resources - consequence of global industrialisation. Cannot effectively be addressed without all-European and global cooperation.

· Mass-Media and levelling out of local cultures - direct effect of globalising mass-media and other multi-national corporations for example in the field of food.

· Drugs and AIDS: - global phenomena which can only be effectively addressed in global cooperation. etc. etc.

If the YMCAs are not aware of such global dimensions of the phenomena experienced at local level, they remain naive and become play-balls of global forces. We then in the best case are fire-brigades, who with a lot of good will try to fight against fires which others make when fighting for their personal interests.

*Questions to the YMCA:*

*Are the European YMCAs aware of these global processes and do they act with a reflected view on them?*

*Do they try to influence them?*

## **Trend No. 2: Growing Primacy of Economy over Social Policy**

The end of the cold war opened and liberalised the markets worldwide. The global economy and the global finance markets are more and more setting the direction, the priorities and the pace of world development.

Initially dominated by Western - mostly multi-national - companies and capital, today strong forces from Asia and some countries in the Middle East have joined the game.

The global players did not all start from the same level nor do they work on the basis of the same rules regarding social standards, environmental standards, human-rights standards and democratic standards.

Most of our European economies find themselves in hard competition, and got under extreme economical pressure over the last years. - Not to speak of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe who had to re-start from a much lower level.

On top of this come the effects of decades of European deficit-spending and exploding budgets for social programmes. Deep cuts in national budgets could and can no longer be avoided. Slim and efficient government operations are general demand.

Economical necessities and global competition are more and more dictating the way to go. Economy is getting primacy over Social Policy, - if not over Politics in general.

While the theory is that everybody will benefit of global economical growth at the end, negative effects can be seen in almost any country round the globe.

Change is necessary - but at what price?

In Europe, we observe a growing gap between rich and poor, we notice increasing marginalisation and social exclusion of the weak and of minorities, and we observe a growing disintegration and fragmentation of European societies.

The limitation and even drastic reduction of social budgets are also heavily affecting the YMCA. Some of our YMCAs already landed in deep financial crisis because of this trend.

Another effect is an increasing commercialisation and professionalisation of the youth sector especially in Western Europe.

The youth represents a market with a high financial potential. Industries like those working with sports and fitness, music, language courses and holidays - all traditional working fields of the YMCA - are fighting for their share of the cake.

And especially those YMCAs who work with volunteer leaders and who operate in urban areas find it more and more difficult to compete with the professional and focused approach of such commercial enterprises. Is the consequence for the YMCA to become a professionalised organisation, too, and use volunteers in boards and committees only?

Also fund-raising is being professionalised and commercialized. Long-term links with faithful donors are being replaced by more spectacular one-off actions and media-activities. International campaigning organisations like Greenpeace come in with aggressive new fund-raising and marketing methods. They often use commercial fund-raisers who now also take out their part of the money available for the non-profit sector.

While already well established YMCAs face growing difficulties to finance themselves, YMCAs in European developing situations will be even more affected by a further fading-away of financial support from donor movements.

As a result, also in many YMCAs, economy may get primacy over the YMCA Mission.

*Questions to the YMCA:*

*Do the European YMCAs just intend to adjust themselves to the changing economical and socio-political environment or do they intend to get actively involved in shaping the future?*

*And where do the European YMCAs position themselves in a professionalising and commercializing world of growing economical competition and shrinking financial resources for the social sector?*

### **Trend No. 3: Survival of the Fittest and Marginalisation of the Weak**

I shall never forget my encounter with an 18 year old unemployed in YMCA Camp Lakeside. He attended a course for unemployed youth. The young lad told me: "Look Dölf, life is nothing but a fight for survival. And only the fittest will survive. I want to survive, that's why I'm here".

Life nothing but a fight for survival.

I found a lot of this attitude also in Asian countries, where a good number of young people are ambitiously fighting for their part of the goodies in the world. They are convinced - and they experience it: Only the strong ones will have a good life. And they know that they come from a part of the world which was not privileged over the last century.

Life nothing but a fight for survival, and money the measure for everything. Such realities of market economy for me are 19th century jungle capitalism. It is the old rule of the jungle: Survival of the fittest and elimination of the weak. Accompanied by destruction of environment, oppression of people and exploitation of the weak.

In Europe, such trend of moving away from a more social market economy is subtle and rather hidden. But even in so called rich countries, the proportion of the population who is able to cope with the pressures of modern competition is decreasing.

And even in a country like Switzerland, the difference between high income and low income has almost doubled over the last fifteen years; and around 5-10% of the population today live in what is called "new poverty".

That in a city like London, even in the bitter colds of last December and January young people live and sleep in the streets must be a most alarming signal, too.

And the topic "Unemployment" will keep us deeply concerned also in the next century.

Is this the future European 3-class society: On one side growing wealth for an always smaller number of fit and clever - but often only lucky and unscrupulous - persons. On the other side a middle class which is economically falling back and fighting for keeping up their acquired life style. Plus in the corner a growing Under-Class of the weak and disadvantaged, living in marginalisation and new poverty?

And what with all the poor in the rest of the world?

*Questions to the YMCA:*

*Where is our place?*

*Who then are the addressees of future YMCA activities?*

*And who will make up the core-group and will financially carry this YMCA?*

#### **Trend No. 4: Loss of Security and Feelings of Being Cared for**

When life becomes a fight for survival, and little is guaranteed for the future, then loss of security and loss of feelings of being cared for are the result.

Paradoxically, such a loss of security and emotional warmth has economical consequences, too.

At present, several European countries are in danger of falling back into recession. One of the reasons being that expenses for private consume are not high enough. Part of this is due to salaries which in real terms decreased over the past years. But because of general feelings of insecurity people also prefer to bring their available moneys to the bank instead of spending them. The dog bites its own tail; the preachers of unlimited free markets destroy their own basis.

A successful and sustainable economy is only possible if people trust in this economy and can have trust in their own future.

But even more serious than the economical are the psychological and sociological effects. In an atmosphere of permanent competition, general insecurity and a lack of long-term perspectives for the future, traditional values and social structures break down. Societies disintegrate and become fragmented.

The old Romans described this situation with: "Homo homini lupo". Man becomes a wolf for his fellow-man.

We today observe in several Western and Eastern European countries this kind of growing social disintegration and fragmentation.

Such societies open up for cheap recipes of nationalists, racists, fundamentalists and religious sectarians.

No life without trust.

*Question to the YMCA:*

*In such an environment, how can the European YMCAs be places where young people find trust in their future and where they feel cared for?*

*And how can the European YMCAs work for societies that are trustworthy?*

## **Trend No. 5: Growing Number of Spiritually Homeless**

In the process of secularisation and growing pluralism, the Christian churches have to a significant extent lost their former influence in society.

With all respect to the existing significant differences between countries and churches, I find it interesting that the overall-situation is not that different in Eastern, Western or Southern Europe.

The majority of today's people treat the believes and values of churches, religions and para-religious movements a bit like a supermarket. They look at the various values and options offered and then select and combine those elements which help them to define and express their own world view and world experience, - of course still strongly influenced by their religious up-bringing.

But this process means that the religious convictions have become much more person-related, individualistic and syncretistic. (With syncretism I mean a mixture of various beliefs.)

This development, and secularisation in general, is even more evident in countries and areas with multi-religious and urban populations.

We today live in societies with pluralistic and syncretistic sets of values and believes. The traditional churches do no longer necessarily represent the thinking and acting of the majority of people.

Or the other way round: The majority of people do no longer fully identify themselves with the sets of values and believes offered by the traditional churches.

However, religion is much more than only social action or cognitive elements like sets of values.

From psychology, we know that religion - in a very wide sense - is an indispensable dimension of human being.

The Christians - and by the way: most other religions, too - have always understood this much deeper character of religion. Christians do not stop at "believing" a number of dogmas or propagating a set of "Christian values" only. Christians do not only "believe that...", they "believe in" - Jesus Christ. It is essential for the Christian faith that it is constituted by a deep personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour - as my Lord and Saviour.

I call the expression of the entirety of all these religion-related elements "Spirituality".

And like every person needs a family and a home, everyone needs a spiritual family and home.

In Christianity, such faith and spirituality was always leading into a community of people, into discipleship in Jesus' time, into a church later on.

And here I see the problem of today's Trend No. 5, a growing number of people who are spiritually homeless.

The traditional churches do still exist, but a growing number of today's people do no longer experience them as their spiritual home, or at least at some special occasions only.

Over the last years, a considerable number of new Christian groups and all kind of new religious movements developed. Some of them are rather aggressive, some are very problematic. Most of them find their constituency.

But still a growing number people are or become spiritually homeless. They often are not even aware of their personal form of spirituality.

The needs of all these different people cannot be covered by one type of church activity or by one type of religious style only. Their world views and their spirituality vary widely. Pluralism can never be answered by one response only.

There are people who understand Christian spirituality as social action. There are other people who live their spirituality in bible study and prayer groups. There are people who feel nourished by church services and liturgical forms like Taizé. And there are others who prefer silence or intellectual reflection.

What we need is a new plurality of forms of Christian spirituality. And what we need are Christian spiritual homes for the many spiritually homeless.

*Question to the YMCA:*

*How does the YMCA respond to the growing number of spiritually homeless young people?*

*And: Do young people experience their YMCA as a spiritual home for them?*

### **EAY Strategic Plan 1997-2000**

Dear Friends

Here again the five fundamental Trends mentioned:

- 1 Globalisation
- 2 Growing Primacy of Economy over Social Policy
- 3 Survival of the Fittest and Marginalisation of the Weak
- 4 Loss of Security and Feelings of Being Cared for
- 5 Growing Number of Spiritually Homeless

You may tell me that I am drawing a rather dark picture. You are right.

In principle, I am an optimistic person. I am also convinced that a *social, ecological and democratic market economy* is the best economical system we presently know.

But I really think that a lot of the current trends work against the YMCA and against what the YMCA stands for. We do not have an easy task ahead of us.

However, a movement like the YMCA is as much needed in the next century as ever before - and maybe even more.

*It is and remains our Mission as YMCA to unite young people and extend the Kingdom of God in this world.*

Most of the work will continue to be done on local level. "Nothing is real until it is local."

But let us now have a look at what the European YMCA can contribute.

All of you are certainly aware that the present Strategic 5-Year Plan of the EAY is coming to its end. During this summer and autumn, the new EAY Executive Committee will design a new plan 1997-2002.

In late autumn, a Draft will be sent out to the National Movements and to all EAY Groups for their comments. The afterwards amended Plan will then be submitted to the EAY General Assembly 1997 for adoption.

This General Assembly has an important role in this process. It follows two main goals:

1 To analyze and discuss some major trends influencing the European YMCAs at the turn of this century.

2 To identify the major working directions of the EAY for the next five years.

Also this, my report, wants to make a contribution to these two goals and intends to stimulate the discussion.

I have already dealt with five fundamental trends which in my opinion are affecting the YMCA. I now try to show five general directions I see for the work of the EAY and its partners in the coming years.

## **II. FIVE GENERAL DIRECTIONS FOR EAY WORK OVER THE TURN OF THIS CENTURY**

### **Direction No. 1: We need each other and have to create a new awareness for this fact.**

International work is still considered by many YMCAs a kind of cream on the cake, a luxury, something you can do once you have solved all your domestic problems.

In my opinion, our biggest failure over the past five years was that we all together did not achieve a sufficient mobilisation of our local YMCAs for international cooperation and European YMCA development.

Our IMC work is still very much located at national level and does not sufficiently reach down to the grassroots, And our European cooperation in general is still rather limited.

However, those National Movements in East, West and South who were able to involve their local basis experienced how stimulating, motivating and fruitful international cooperation can be.

On the agenda of our last EAY Executive Committee- and IMC Group-Meetings we had the names of 21 European countries. Which means that at the moment we have 21 or two thirds of the European YMCA movements who officially need and request EAY IMC support.

It is quite apparent: We need each other! - And we must in our movements create a new awareness for this fact. Not as cream on the cake, not as luxury, but as a matter of survival.

I go even one step further: In a globalising, competitive and for the YMCA difficult world as I described it in the first part of my report, we all need each other. We need the know-how of each other. We need the challenges from each other. We need the creativity and the innovative ideas of each other. We sometimes also need money from each other.

In my opinion, today single National YMCAs are simply no longer big enough to produce the necessary programme innovation alone which is needed to remain relevant, and which at the end of the day is even needed to survive. I already

now observe a whole number of YMCAs who are drying out in terms of programmes and in terms of leadership - because they are alone.

And if we want to influence the development of the European societies, or even the World development, then we definitely need each other. Together we can be strong. Alone we are weak.

The first Direction therefore: We need each other, and we have to create a new awareness for this fact.

## **Direction No. 2: We need additional, new and open Patterns of Cooperation and Communication**

At present, the EAY uses three main patterns of cooperation and communication.

1 The first pattern is the traditional line EAY - National Movements - Local YMCAs - and back.

This pattern is clearly structured, easy to handle and constitutionally indispensable.

The problem is that it has bottle-necks at various levels, long ways of communication, and only rarely reaches the local level.

In today's world, such slowly communicating systems are everywhere being complemented or even replaced by flexible networks.

In networks, every player can have a direct link with any other player. The key-elements lose their controlling bottle-neck character and become helpful feeding, monitoring and supporting units.

I am not suggesting to remove the National Movements and their special link with the EAY. But I am convinced that we have to change our thinking from a traditional hierarchic top-bottom concept to much more network-thinking. In this new thinking, the EAY and the National Movements become feeding, monitoring and supporting units.

2 The second pattern presently used by the EAY is the Field Group System.

In our Field Groups, a number of National Movements plus some EAY staff work together in multi-lateral cooperation and direct communication. The EAY, through its IMC Group, has mainly a coordinating and monitoring role. This innovative Field Group model - by the way a typical network model - proved its high value for developing situations over the last years. However, it now comes to its limits.

The EAY IMC Group is no longer able to monitor 10 Field Groups and 21 IMC countries.

The time has also come that several re-emerging movements, with now more or less stable national structures, do no longer need a Field Group and a Field Group Leader from abroad.

What they need is a Partner Group of partner movements, whereby initiative, responsibility and leadership can and should be given to the respective movement itself.

Through this, the EAY Field Group System could be reduced in size and could concentrate on movements where national structures have still to be developed or where specific situations need special attention.

3 Our third cooperation- and communication-pattern are EAY Groups composed of National Representatives, usually specialists in a certain field.

We at present use such Groups mainly in the field of Programmes. Examples are the European Physical Education Group, EMRAS, the "Volunteers for Europe" Coordinators, etc.

The advantage of this third pattern is that such groups are composed of specialists who do not only report to their national headquarters, but who have also their direct links and mobilisation possibilities in their respective working field.

The disadvantage is that several of these groups proved to be not always very innovative. The selected national representatives are not necessarily the most progressive spirits in the respective field and often are no longer in direct contact with their grassroots.

All these patterns currently used by the EAY have two things in common:

1 Not everybody can participate or even only communicate. The European YMCA world is exclusive and works with a selected elite only.

2 The system is set up in a way that new, innovative and maybe critical ideas do almost never reach the international level if they are not brought up by a person who is already member of the system.

The result is that our international YMCA world is still a rather limited, closed and not very innovative world. And we also do not make good use of the creative potential of our young members, who normally have not yet reached key-positions.

If we take ourselves serious with the famous strategic call for "dynamic interaction" between all of us, then we need additional, new and open patterns of cooperation and communication.

They must be of an interactive network type, open for everybody to join in.

"Friends for Europe" is an attempt in this direction and urgently needs further development and more interactive components.

YMCA Internet presence and interactive Internet-Forums can be a second tool.

Facilitating local to local contacts and partnerships is a third element.

A fourth possibility is purposefully using events, workshops and leadership training for establishing informal networks among participants.

Further ideas have still to be developed.

**Direction No. 3: We need a new type of Relationship with our Non-European Partners.**

"I feel a new wind of cooperation blowing through the YMCA world." This is the sentence I used last year when greeting the General Assembly of the Asia Alliance. And I meant what I said.

I see in all YMCA-Areas on all continents a great new openness for a new form of cooperation, whereby we on the basis of our common Christian Mission together analyze today's realities and then try to respond to them.

But I feel the need for us European YMCAs to establish a new type of relationship with our Non-European partners.

It seems to me that we are still influenced by a post-colonial thinking: We know, we have, we exploit, and therefore we owe "the poor Third World" our help.

It is very typical that consequently our European relationships with YMCA movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America are mostly handled by our World Services.

To say it in a picture: It is like in a country where all Foreign Affairs are handled by the Ministry for Development and Disasters only.

Consequently, and whether we like it or not, our relationships with these movements are basically "helping" relations. Helping relations are always asymmetric relations: one partner mainly gives, the other mainly receives. Such relations remain on the level of projects.

But "a new wind of cooperation" is only possible among equal partners; on the basis of symmetric relationships.

It is interesting for me that my discussion partners in Asia do not want to hear from me what I can do for them. They want me to learn from them, and they want me to ask what they can contribute to fulfil the Mission of the European and of the World YMCA.

Our partners want to be taken serious. They want to share their world view and their vision of the YMCA with us. They want to be equal partners. - And they fully are!

The consequence is that the Europeans can no longer deal with them as project-partners and through World Services only.

It is the same respect we Europeans request from the US YMCA when we expect them to work with us as equal partners and not to treat us as recipients of US World Service Support only.

What is needed is that we as Europeans develop a new type of relationship with our Non-European partners. A relationship beyond projects.

I am convinced that the EAY has to play an important role in this.

Over the last years, the World Alliance has considerably strengthened the role of the Areas. We Areas now have much more responsibilities. And the World Alliance John R. Mott Fund gives us the necessary financial means to live up to these responsibilities.

The consequence is that now there must be a close cooperation between the World Alliance and the Areas as well as between the Areas themselves. "A new wind of cooperation" is vital, as is intensive interaction among all the partners.

The basis can only be an attitude of mutual respect and appreciation, based on our common Christian Mission.

#### **Direction No. 4: We need more and systematic Issue-Orientation**

Over the last five to seven years, the EAY was very operation oriented. Because of the dynamic development in Central and Eastern Europe, there was and still is an urgent need for action and operations.

However, what was suffering, was a certain systematic issue-orientation. A lot of today's burning issues are so far not systematically and not adequately addressed at EAY level.

We, for example, did not yet sufficiently deal with youth unemployment and marginalised youth in general, and the YMCA's involvement in this field. We never fully discussed the fast changing family structures and the consequences for YMCA work. Or we never systematically addressed global issues like the destruction of environment or the effects of globalisation.

In all these fields, our YMCAs are involved and could share with each other a lot of reflection, know-how and innovative ideas.

In many of these fields, partners from other continents and Areas could make stimulating and challenging contributions.

This could considerably strengthen our position as a leading and relevant youth organisation.

In my opinion, the EAY has in the next five years to become more and systematically issue-oriented, offering platforms for challenging reflection and for exchange of innovative related programme concepts, reaching up to social political involvement.

There is a further element to be considered in this context. So far the World Alliance and each of the Areas had their own agendas.

Each one was running its own workshops. Sometimes coordinated, sometimes listed in an overall plan, but almost never part of a well reflected, dynamic overall process.

The results, especially of World events, therefore remained rather limited. High quality, but little effect back home. We made poor use of being one, worldwide movement.

In future, the YMCA can simply no longer afford to do this. The World Alliance and the Areas have to sit together and create together one, worldwide, dynamic process.

This cannot be a top-down approach designed by the World Alliance. It has to be a joint venture whereby each partner brings in his real priorities and what he wants to contribute to the overall process.

We as European Alliance have to identify and contribute our priorities and the most burning issues that affect us.

To adequately do that, we need more occasions for careful reflection and a systematic issue-orientation.

**Direction No. 5: We need with highest priority the Continuation and further Deepening of the EAY Leadership and Movement Development work.**

With this 5th and last Direction, we come to the field in which the EAY had certainly its best successes over the past years: EAY Leadership and Movement Development.

We strongly supported the development of YMCAs in Central, Eastern and to a certain extent also Southern Europe. In Europe we are today considered one of the leading movements in the field of European Youth Work Development.

The first step was the establishing of the Field Group system.

The Saphir and the 5+2 Initiatives then allowed us to employ Field Staff and to develop the concept of "Begleitung".

In a next step, our friends from Germany and the USA - assisted by contributions from other movements -, enabled us to design the EAY Development Initiative and to start our Training the Trainers Curriculum.

And last year, the initiative of a local German group enabled us to employ additional Field Staff in Russia and the Czech Republic, as well as to start the EAY Development Service.

In my opinion, YMCA Movement Development and, linked to this, the further evolution of a comprehensive Leadership Development concept must be and remain the corner-stone and priority number one of the EAY also for the coming years.

Thanks to the new World Alliance Intermovement Support System (IMSS) and thanks to our old friends from Germany and the USA and other supporters, - and if we can keep the National Contributions to the EAY on the present annual 5% increase path -, we hope that also the financial resources will remain available to continue and further deepen this most important work of the EAY.

### **III CONCLUSION**

Dear Friends

- We need each other and have to create a new awareness for this fact.
- We need additional, new and open Patterns of Cooperation and Communication.
- We need a new type of Relationship with our Non-European Partners.
- We need more and systematic Issue-Orientation
- With need with highest priority the Continuation and further Deepening of the EAY Leadership and Movement Development work.

With these five general Directions for future EAY work, I come to the end of this year's European Secretary's Report. I hope I was able to a bit stimulate your discussions; they are most important for defining the directions of our future EAY work.

I would not like to close without warmly thanking all those many people who have also during the past year carried and accompanied our EAY work.

A special thank goes to the outgoing Executive Committee, especially to its President, Terry Ratcliffe, and to its Treasurer, Bob Copleton. The close cooperation with these outstanding YMCA persons was always a source of inspiration, and as staff we felt fully supported and wisely led by this excellent group.

But above all, I would like to thank our good Lord and Saviour, who was with all of us during the past year, and who has throughout all difficulties always so generously blessed the work of the European Alliance.

I am motivated and moved by the vision of a European YMCA movement which stands together in dynamic interaction and is involved in global cooperation - for the extension of the Kingdom of God among the young people of this World.

Thank you.