

“A VIEW OF A POINT AND A POINT OF VIEW”

Secretary General’s Report

YMCA Europe’s General Assembly. Tallinn, Estonia. May 15th 2015

I. Introduction

My greetings to all of you present here.

One more time, I have the privilege of standing humbly in front of you to report about our work at YE since our last GA.

I report to you on behalf of our Executive Committee and Staff Team.

I know how diverse this group is. Many of you are volunteers representing national or local YMCAs. Others are members of staff in different levels of responsibility. Almost half of you are below the age of 30 which – according to the generally accepted age range of youth – makes us officially consider you as young people.

I am also aware of the fact that those of us who gather here today are just a small representation of many others that are now in hundreds of local YMCAs implementing our mission. Most of them do not even know that we meet here in Tallinn this weekend. Maybe many of them have never heard about YMCA Europe and our purpose, but they are implementing the YMCA mission. As I report to you I also keep all those colleagues in my thoughts as they, together with all of you, are the reason why we exist as an Area Organization.

We gather here not as members of a kind of a multinational company with branches across Europe. Our success is based on the fact that the authority comes from the local associations and from the local to the national movements. Then, the national movements own and empower our regional structure. We have a responsibility to provide responses to you, our members. We organize ourselves to facilitate and support the growth and development of each of the movements in Europe. Believe me that this goal is deeply rooted in our Executive Committee and Staff Team.

In my job within YMCA Europe over the past four years, I have had the privilege of visiting 32 different NM in Europe, more than 60 local YMCAs. Knowing your realities, I realize that your agenda in the local and national level differs from our YE agenda. I often challenge our colleagues to think beyond the local and national realities and you challenge us at YE to be relevant to you. In this dialogue between the different levels, it always scares me that we at YE can give an impression that we know best just because we are an “umbrella organization” and have an overall perspective. We have a view from a point. We just have a point of view.

In addition, in fact, our vision and guiding principles are clear and strongly relevant when we say that we dream of an European YMCA Movement,

- *Inspired by its Christian ecumenical mission*
- *Moved by an open and creative spirit and actively involving young people*
- *Playing an active role in today's global and local realities*
- *Uniting each other to realise the YMCA mission in the diversity of national contexts*
- *Which is challenging and relevant for young people, both a sign of God's Reign and Love on earth.*

I have always been fascinated by the positive energy and fellowship that we experience at the GA's. Fellowship in diversity. We take for granted the fact that we are able to gather – like today here - more than 120 persons from 31 different countries representing our diversity. And we are brave enough to say that we want to have feedback about how we implemented our Strategy and that we want to achieve a consensus about the pillars for our next plan!

As our President Ed Eggink said yesterday, this GA focuses on those two goals : evaluation of the past four years and setting the scenario for the next four. So, I invite you to look back for a while and to look ahead into the future.

“A group of children were lined up in the cafeteria of a Christian elementary school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. The teacher made a note, and posted on the apple tray, “Take only one. God is watching.” Moving further along the lunch line, at the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. One child whispered to another, “Take all you want. God is watching the apples.”

Just like this story, my report will be divided in two parts :

“A view of a point” and...

“A point of view”

II. A view of a point

The point I invite you to concentrate now is a specific period in our YMCA Europe history. The period between June 2011 and May 2015. Four years, since we approved our present Strategic Plan.

If we review our 3 strategic priorities in the last 4 General Assemblies (including this one in Tallinn) we have reported about developments in :

- *Mission Awareness, Advocacy, Representation*
- *Relevant Programmes*
- *Sustainability*

The concrete implementation of those priorities took place through the following actions during the past 4 years :

- 41 events, seminars and trainings on youth participation, youth policy, Christian orientation, peace work, sports, scouting, Ten Sing.
- 3.570 participants directly involved in those events ... 82% were young people
- ...plus a major European and global festival in Prague with more than 4.500 participants 70% were young people
- 19 governance meetings (GA's and ExCom), setting policy, defining strategy directions... taking decisions
- 21 staff and technical meetings (YE Staff and NGS) to implement and evaluate strategy, strengthen working platforms and generate programmes
- 22 Movement Strengthening actions (European conferences on MS, Field and Partner Groups and YERT visits) focusing on specific National Movements with an emphasis on the 3 strategic priorities (Mission Awareness, Relevant Programmes, Sustainability)
- 110 staff and volunteers involved on those MS initiatives acting on behalf of YMCA Europe
- YE Staff and ExCom members visited a total of 42 National Movements (including member and co-operating movements), taking part at events, meeting with national leadership, providing inputs

- Secretary General visited 33 National Movements (11 of them more than once) sharing YE strategic priorities and flagship programmes, learning about national-local realities
- 32 project applications were submitted by YE staff to public/private institutions. 26 were successfully approved, implemented and reported to donors
- 11 strategic partnerships with organizations were kept or developed with a focus on projects for youth and Movement Strengthening
- 3 YE General Assemblies focusing on each of the 3 signature programmes defined in the Strategy (Peace-Justice-Democracy, Healthy Living, Inclusive Christianity)
- 13 keynote speakers (from YMCA and external) focusing on YE signature programmes at last 4 GA's
- 2 Fundraising conferences with emphasis on resource mobilization strategies and best practices
- Balanced results (no deficits) in audited annual accounts 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014
- 81% of member movement movements paying annual contribution
- Operational costs reduced 18% in period 2011-2015
- 4 annual reports were published and distributed.
- Annual strategy implementation plans presented since 2012
- 26 surveys – evaluations on different events and programmes were designed, sent to participants and analyzed

In addition :

- Two National Movements became new full members of YE

- According to the regulations of our Constitution, 4 NM lost their membership at YE
- YE permanently represented at Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe since 2012
- YE permanently represented at the European Youth Forum
- Youth Policy Group formally created in 2012
- 44 participants from Europe at WAY's Change Agents Programme
- 4 change agents training events in Europe 2012-2014
- Over 20 European movements involved in WAY's One Million Voices
- Over 30 European movements involved in WAY's "World Challenge"

These are the highlights of the past period and we have made a special emphasis on reporting to you each of these years at the GA both from our Governance and our Executive responsibilities. We do it following our principles of transparency and accountability through :

- Our 2014 Annual Report (that is being now distributed by our staff and from today already available in our web page) and
- The Strategy Implementation Plan 2015 that you have also received this year before the GA.

Our Executive Committee and Staff Team encourage you to read both documents. In the first we tell you what we have done last year, the summary of our accounts and the auditor's report plus the key partners that made our journey possible.

The second document is a living expression of what we are doing this year. It is used by our staff and it focuses on the objectives, key activities and relevant outputs. And everything under the frame of the 12 aims in our Strategic Plan.

Also regarding reporting and feedback to the GA, I want to stress something that we often “take for granted” but that is already fully included at YMCA Europe’s DNA :

- Before the GA you have received a package of information that includes :
 - 56 pages of different reports (including management, finances, programme groups) with details about our past year
 - 27 reports from NM, with information about achievements, relevant data and their future plans. Thank you for sharing this information.
 - You can also read in our web (archives) about the contents and decisions of each of our ExCom meetings and, of course our GA’s.

This written information is completed with a number of interest groups and side meetings during this weekend with only one purpose : to make sure that all our annual information is clear to you and that no questions about our administration and programmatic field remain unsolved.

But let us not be self sufficient. We have developed over the years but we still have a long way to go. We cannot be conformists with our own working fellowship when we are strongly un-conformists with society. Let me briefly share with you 7 points that we shall visualize and that we must be able to improve. I recently shared them with a couple of our National Movements

1. Institutional strengthening as the basic strategy.

With a focus on our mission, values, model of governance, internal communication and actions, we shall work for a good administration and protection of our heritage. Let us do it through a continuous search for effective ways to strengthen our identity. At the end of our period as “administrators”, we must have a clear view of what has been accomplished. We must be able to see the improvements. If we see them from inside the organization, those outside will also be able to visualize them.

2. A social initiative committed with social transformation.

We are not alone in reaching the goals of social transformation. We could never do it alone. Networking, identifying needs in society, gaining recognition and credibility as we plan, develop and evaluate initiatives that improve the quality of life of members of our communities. The “public space” is not only a responsibility of Governments. We are closer to the community and we are co –responsible for its development.

3. Efficiency and social impact.

Giving a good testimonial of our work and commitment is excellent but it is not enough. We must guarantee that our service has an impact. The capacity to measure the impact using those evaluations for planning further strategies in a realistic and effective way, is crucial. Because of our YMCA structure, the impact in the local level, is almost always

guaranteed. But today's world needs a wider vision, a global perspective and if we want to be successful we must search for social relevance in a wider scale. We must prepare for this every day and this vision must also be an important part of all our programmes and initiatives.

4. Generating trust with coherence and transparency.

For many reasons, we compete with an increasing number of organizations. To the eyes of an average citizen that is not involved in a community service organization or a movement, it is not easy to distinguish us from the rest. Apart from a strong institutional reality and an effective work on the ground, we must have our "own seal". Transparency and coherence generates trust as we communicate our mission to the society and what we effectively do to put it in practice. The legitimacy of the governments is clear after the citizens elect them in a democratic way. The legitimacy of civil society organizations is when the results of their operations are presented to their boards and stockholders. Our legitimacy comes when our accounts are audited, when we measure our impact and communicate it in a sincere way, when we motivate and value each person or when we act with transparency.

5. Networking locally and globally.

Proximity is essential when we seek for social transformation. Specially in times of crisis, being close to the needs of the community, is crucial. Working in partnership with other institutions without losing our own

identity is a must today when new challenges affect the civil society in the dramatic ways that we all know. But also today the solutions for the challenges that affect our communities need to be global. And therefore, we must give global answers to social exclusion issues. Complementing capacities and competences, exchanging methodologies and techniques that have been successful are factors that facilitate our networking with public and private organizations seeking for common goals.

6. Specialization Vs. diversity.

Globalization presents a holistic scenario in which the cultural, religious, linguistic, economic, environmental and social issues are somehow connected. Today is not easy to think or work over one of those aspects without thinking about the others. Even society itself is more and more diverse from a cultural, religious and social perspective.

In the past, the community service organizations and social movements would tend to specialize in a particular field. If really concerned with social transformation, it is now time to adapt our strategies, open our doors for new ways of cooperation and prepare ourselves for our work in a more complex environment. Our identity must be kept the same, as that is really our most important value and strength. Losing identity would be losing most of what we have achieved through the years with great effort and not being honest with our heritage.

7. New technologies as tools for social transformation.

Many aspects that I have shared before are possible to achieve through a good use of new technologies. It is almost like talking about the bases for an “alternative globalization”. Bringing in the tools that facilitate communication, sharing of knowledge, mobilization of initiatives and resources as we strengthening networking, can be seen as opportunities for a community service organization in contemporary times.

Together with our President, Executive Committee and Staff Team, I encourage you to reflect about these suggestions and to analyse them openly with your teams, boards... partner organizations. At our internal meetings we are often critical with our own platforms. We must continue being critical, in a constructive way, as an excellent way to continue moving forward in a sustainable way.

III. A point of view

Dear friends,

Collectively we face now an extraordinary opportunity : to design our next Strategic Plan. YMCA Europe Towards 2020. We have the chance of imagining the Europe we want and to set the pillars of the YMCA in Europe we want for the next 4 years.

I have reported about our achievements over the past 4 years with areas of work, programmes and concrete figures, but there is much more we are called to do within YMCA Europe and the YMCAs in Europe.

We have an advantage : we have an excellent “point of view”. We visualize Europe from an unique perspective, the perspective of our common guiding principles :

The “point of view” of our Christian identity as an ecumenical lay movement

The “point of view” of volunteers in every level of our movement in leadership roles as active members of civil society.

The “point of view” of young people, actively participating at every level not as beneficiaries only or as future leaders, but as today’s key leaders within our YMCAs.

The “point of view” from a perspective of justice, peace, solidarity and integration

The “point of view” of an international movement that wants its voice to be heard when tackling the key challenges that Europe faces today...

These are not just words or sentences that sound fine. It is the reality of our movement and what we experience in the different levels of our work. And because we share this points of view, we are ready to develop our VISION for the next four years. Our Governance structures and technical team agree that it is now time to fully :

- Emphasize our “point of view” on Movement Strengthening with a new approach more effective answers to the

challenges of NM (share a few highlights from the MS Conference held in Tallinn)

- Strengthen the presence and input of young people within all YE structures (a brief reference to the YES Seminar), guaranteeing that their “point of view” is listened, implemented and followed up with mutual responsibility
- To agree on a “point of view” when speaking about Christianity, in an inclusive way within the YMCA and to spread that “point of view” openly across Europe
- Bring our “point of view” to the heart of Europe by setting a YMCA Europe office in Brussels as a way to strengthen our voice and our member movements
- Guarantee that each of our programmes and initiatives are a living expression of our “point of view”. That’s the point!
- To make sure that our “point of view” about migrants, asylum seekers and refugees is linked with our YMCA mission and principles and leads to concrete and sustainable actions in our Southern shores and the suburbs of our big cities.
- To raise our “point of view” about ways to tackle radicalization of youth across Europe, providing opportunities and spaces for unemployed youth, minorities and socially excluded population

- To publish our “points of view” about contemporary issues based on our own YMCA “know how”. To invest in making those documents available both internally and externally among civil society, governmental and non governmental institutions.
- To help our staff members and volunteers to raise their profiles and “points of view” by providing educational resources through partnerships with university (Kassel as an example)
- To point out and make a better collective use of our network of youth hostels, hotels and camps, opening a new view of this outstanding resource that belongs to the YMCA but that is not interconnected across Europe.

VI. Closing

“Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about such things”

Philippians 4:8

Thank you.

Juan Simoes Iglesias

May 2015

