



EVENT REPORT

OCT Youth Event

4 – 9 October 2021

Brussels - Strasbourg

1. CONTEXT

The action has been organised as part of OCTA's 2021 Work Programme, as part of the co-financing of the European Commission, which included this event as part of the objective to reinforce the visibility and knowledge among the youth about the EU-OCT partnership.

The event aimed at inviting 13 youth representatives from the 13 OCTs to a study visit in Brussels. The organisation of this event was approved by the Executive Committee of OCTA in July 2021 for the week of the 4-9 October. These dates were selected to align the OCT Youth Event with the European Youth Event 2021, which took place on the 8-9 in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, and gathered young Europeans to discuss the future of Europe.

The youth representatives of each OCT were selected by the OCTs, who then communicated to the Secretariat their selected candidates. Due to the fact that 5 OCTs did not submit candidates by the deadline (17 September 2021), the other OCTs were invited to send their second candidate. In the end, 12 young persons from 8 OCTs were invited, as per the following the list of participants:

1. Aruba: Marilis Becker
2. Bonaire: Jordy Tromp
3. Curaçao: Veronica Pichardo / Yanina Urbaez Urbaez
4. French Polynesia: Kahalanie Haapa
5. Greenland: Asta Helms / Sophia Bailey
6. New Caledonia: Aurélie Vollerin / Tahny Tchung
7. Sint Maarten: Matthew Halley / Jean Oneli Blaise
8. Wallis & Futuna: Finau Vakalepu

The agenda as well as the logistical aspects of the event were coordinated by the OCTA Secretariat, with the collaboration of the members of OCTA, the European Commission, the Permanent Representations of France, Netherlands and the Mission of Greenland to the EU, and the European Parliament.

2. COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The OCT Youth Event represented a unique opportunity to increase OCTA's visibility on social media among the youth and general users of social media platforms. OCTA has seen an steady growth of their social media follow during 2020 and 2021 thanks to an ongoing strategy of maintaining a consistent activity on social media platforms. The increase of the presence of social media during this event is one of the key indicators that measures the success of this event, as social media is presented as the main tool to reach younger audiences.

For instance, this week OCTA took the opportunity to kickstart Instagram, which was rarely used by the Association, it had only 28 followers and now counts with 106 followers (19 October 2021).

The social media following status of OCTA is the following, as of 19 October 2021:

	December 2019	December 2020	19/10/2021
LinkedIn	124	229	540
Twitter	200	280	454
Facebook	Did not exist	140	160
Instagram	Did not exist	28	106

In addition to the activity on social media, which can be found in the Annex, OCTA asked a set of questions to the OCT Youth representatives, which have now been gathered in a series of videos that compile the opinions and views of the group. These videos are published in our website and can be found on OCTA's youtube channel. Other questions were asked and responded in written, shared with the EC (INTPA).

(1) "How can the EU engage with the youth from the OCTs?"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCWOM-BZ35o>

(2) "Why is the OCT Youth Event important?"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfAVXNFNsUI>

(3) "Why is it important to promote the culture of the OCTs?" <https://youtu.be/fsXmr82bYZs>

The 3rd video was made in the context of the launch of the Archipel.eu cultural pilot project on 13 October 2021, which was played during the event to bring the youth voices from the OCTs to the event.

3. ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT

Monday 4 October

Welcome by OCTA

The OCT youth group were welcomed at the OCTA office by Mr Pablo Lopez-Herrerias, Coordinator of the Secretariat, who explained the work of OCTA and how it is structured. Following this introduction, Ms Chloé Calvignac, representative of the OCTA Chair, welcomed the Youth representatives on behalf of the members, explaining the relevance of their presence in Brussels and Strasbourg during this week.



European Commission visit



The visit of the OCT Youth to the European Commission was arranged in coordination with the DG International Partnerships, Unit B3 – Relations with All Overseas Countries and Territories and with the Commission's Visitors Centre. The group was the first physical guests to Commission buildings since March 2020. They were welcomed by Ms Nicole Peil from the Visitors Centre at the Berlaymont building. The group was offered lunch before an afternoon full of presentations/exchanges.



Mr Stephen Davies, from the Joint Research Centre, did a presentation on the topic *“The EU Commission as the executive of the European Union”*. A detailed introduction to how the EU institutions work and the role of the Commission.

At 15h, Jolita Butkeviciene, Director for Latin America and Caribbean, Relations with all Overseas Countries and Territories, from the DG International Cooperation and Development (DG INTPA), welcomed the group to the Commission on behalf of DG INTPA and the OCT Unit. She presented their work for the OCTs, and how they are organised. She also did a roundtable where she asked the youth to share their experiences and suggestions to engage decision-makers on youth issues.



Following this meeting, the group had the opportunity to meet Ms Jutta Urpilainen, European Commissioner for International Partnerships. Initially foreseen as a physical meeting, it was changed to a virtual meeting due to her having to be present in Strasbourg. They had a very productive exchange where she emphasized her commitment to the youth. During the meeting, she asked them the following questions:

Which actions do you recommend the EU to implement to improve young people’s lives in the OCTs? And more specifically, how can the EU contribute to young people being included in policy and decision-making in your countries and territories?

This led to a fruitful discussion on the topics of the importance of the youth participation, building one’s identity in the era of social media, Erasmus+, as well as the expectations for the OCT-EU.



Lastly, Ms Karin Zaunberger from the Directorate General Environment, presented the “*Strategy of biodiversity 2030*”, which is a comprehensive, ambitious and long-term plan to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems.

The visit to the European Commission ended after this presentation.

To commemorate the first day of the OCT Youth Event, OCTA arranged for a typical Belgian dinner for all the participants in the restaurant “Au Vieux Bruxelles”.

Tuesday 5 October

European Commission visit – 2nd part

The second part of the visit to the European Commission took place in the Conference Centre Albert Borschette. A presentation on “*Climate neutrality and the role of the renewable energies*” was delivered by Ms Yolanda Garcia Mesquita, Directorate General Energy, which led to an interesting discussion on the possibilities for renewable energies in the islands.

The visit to the European Commission ended after this presentation. The visit to the European Commission was really appreciated by the youth group, for whom it was an opportunity to understand the impact of the European Union on their islands and what are the available possibilities. Once more, particular thanks to Ms Sylvie Millot and her Unit for their significant support.



Feedback session – OCTA office

In the afternoon, the group returned to the OCTA office where they were presented with the visual project to gather their ideas and perceptions about the role of the youth in the OCT-EU partnership in the form of short videos. The questions proposed were:

- How can the EU engage with the youth from the OCTs?
- Why is the OCT Youth Event important?

In addition, and due to the Launch of the Archipel.eu cultural pilot project on the 13 October 2021, we asked the youth the following question:

- Why is it important to promote the culture of the OCTs?

These videos have been produced and can be found via the links on section 2 of this report. The last video, was prepared for the Archipel.eu Launch event and presented during the political launch, with the objective of bringing the voices of the youth from the OCTs to the cultural project.

Open discussion on the work of OCTA

Following the feedback session, the team of the OCTA Secretariat, Mr Pablo Lopez-Herrerias, Coordinator, Mr Andrei Moarcas, Environment and Energy Advisor and Ms Marta Fernández Fornieles, EU Programmes Advisor, did a dynamic session where they presented the daily work of the Association to support the islands, including the type activities organised for the OCTs via the European Commission's grant, such as this OCT Youth Event.

There was a lot of interest from the group on the work of OCTA as they acknowledge that it was their first contact with the Association, and this week was making them aware of the existing links between their islands and with the European Union.

Wednesday 6 October

Meetings at the Permanent Representations of France, the Netherlands and Greenland's Mission to the EU

The group of youth representatives was divided depending on their OCTs/Member State, and they were invited to meetings in their offices.

The meetings were very useful as they provided insight on how France and the Netherlands work with their linked OCTs. The youth were encouraged to ask questions and gain a deeper understanding on how the Member States defend OCT interests in EU settings.

Permanent Representation of France:



Permanent Representation of the Netherlands:



Mission of Greenland to the European Union:



Visit to the House of European History

In the afternoon, a visit was arranged to the House of European History, which is a great introduction on how the European Union came into existence. In addition, the group visited the temporary exhibition on “*Fake for Real, a History of Forgery and Falsification*”. The visit was really appreciated by the group who stayed until the museum closed.



Thursday 7 October

The group met at 6h30 at the Midi Station to take the train to Strasbourg. The Youth representatives travelled accompanied by Mr Pablo Lopez-Herrerias and Ms Marta Fernández Fornieles from the OCTA Secretariat. The arrival to Strasbourg was at 12h.

The participants from the Youth group from French OCTs were invited to a lunch with the MEP Mr Stéphane Bijoux, where they were able to exchange informally with the MEP and exchange about the challenges of the OCTs in the Pacific.



While the rest of group went to enjoy typical food from Strasbourg.



The day ended with a historical tour of the city, with a focus on the centre, the Cathedral and the neighbourhood “La Petite France”.

Friday, 8 October



Friday was the first official day of the European Youth Event 2021 (EYE). The group was invited via the MEP Ms Samira Rafaela, who had also invited a separate group of young people from the Netherlands and the Dutch Caribbean.

Once accredited, the OCT Youth representatives met with Ms Samira Rafaela where she presented her work in the European Parliament and the works she carries out to ensure the representation of the Dutch Caribbean. She also held a lengthy discussion with the group on the role of the youth in the European Parliament.





After the meeting with Ms Samira Rafaela, the group was encouraged to attend the sessions of their interest within those planned during the EYE 2021. They were able to attend sessions in the plenary, co-design sessions, as well as meeting other young Europeans from all over the continent, as well as the Outermost Regions.

Saturday, 9 October

The Saturday was the last day of the OCT Youth Event and it was fully dedicated to the participation in the EYE 2021. The OCT representatives were able to choose their preferred sessions and get involved in the workshops.

During the day we were able to meet and have lunch with the representative of Curaçao from the Youth Sounding Board of DG INTPA, Mr Gilberto Morishaw, who was also attending the EYE 2021, which led to very interesting discussions among the participants.



Sunday, 10 October

The departure of the OCT Representatives took place on Sunday. The feedback received from the group was extremely positive, which can be seen in the Social media annex, which includes their posts and reactions to the events of the OCT Youth Week.

4. MAIN RESULTS

This event was foreseen by OCTA as a pilot initiative to bring forward the younger generations of the OCTs. As stated in the introduction, it aimed at increasing their knowledge about the EU-OCT partnership, as well as the role of the Association in promoting common OCT interests.

Moreover, this OCT Youth Event is framed in the context of the intensified focus that the Union is placing in the youth, as seen by the creation in 2021 of the DG INTPA's Youth Sounding Board, a Youth Advisory Board to the Ms Jutta Urpilainen, European Commissioner for International Partnerships, as well as the Von der Leyen's Commission proposal to make 2022 the "European Year of Youth".

In absolute terms, it is clear that OCTA's I OCT Youth Event has been a success. Designed as a pilot initiative, in an uncertain context due to the ongoing pandemic, it is now one of the most impactful activities OCTA has carried out in recent years.

The main results can be summarized as follows:

Increased knowledge about the OCTs and the EU-OCT partnership:

For some participants, the fact that their islands are defined as "Overseas Countries and Territories" in the EU context was a foreign concept to them. In this regard, this event has contributed to building a solid knowledge base, this group of young persons from the OCTs now have a clear insight on how the EU-OCT partnership operates.

Improved awareness about the OCT cooperation and OCTA:

There were numerous opportunities during the week for the representatives to meet each other, learn more about each others territories, as well as exchange about common challenges and realities. Most of them were not aware that there were other islands with similar relations with other EU Member States. The study visit contributed to expanding the horizons of the participants by opening doors to future collaborations and exchanges.

Furthermore, the role of OCTA as a platform that unites the OCTs has been strengthened during this event. The OCT Youth representative are now aware of the role of the Association and how it supports the development of their islands.

Amplification of the youth voices of the OCTs towards the European Union institutions

The singularity of the OCT Youth, young Europeans living outside of the EU territory, territories that are connected to EU Member States, make them unique voices within the European Youth as they face unique challenges linked to their remoteness, financial and historical context.

It was remarkably well received by the OCT Youth representatives that the EU Commissioner and EU officials, as well as Members of the European Parliament, listened to their concerns and committed to creating new initiatives that involve the youth.