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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

Follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth. Proposed common objectives for the participation and information of young people, in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	3
1.1.	Proposals to follow up the White Paper on Youth.....	3
1.2.	Proposals which reflect the will to work together.....	3
1.3.	Proposals to complement other political measures	4
2.	Common objectives to enhance the participation of young people	5
2.1.	Greater participation by young people in the life of the community in which they live	6
2.2.	Greater participation by young people in the mechanisms of representative democracy	6
2.3.	Learning to participate	7
3.	Common objectives to improve information for young people	7
3.1.	Improving young people's access to information services	8
3.2.	Provision of quality information	9
3.3.	Enhancing young people's participation in the shaping and dissemination of information.....	9
4.	Implementing and monitoring mechanisms	10

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Proposals to follow up the White Paper on Youth

These proposals for common objectives follow on from the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth¹, approved by the Commission on 21 November 2001, and the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 setting a new framework for cooperation in the youth field².

In this Resolution, the Council calls for an open method of coordination to be applied, initially, to two priorities, the participation and information of young people. The Council gives the Commission a mandate to draw up draft common objectives on the basis of a report on the situation in all the Member States. The present Communication proposes common objectives to the Council, in accordance with this mandate.

The Member States' decision to apply the open method of coordination in the field of youth policy to these two priorities is an indication of their desire to enhance cooperation on policy implementation and monitoring in these two areas. Their view is that it must be applied "with a flexible approach in a manner suited to the youth field, with due regard for the competencies of the Member States and the principle of subsidiarity".³

In accordance with its mandate, the Commission drew up a detailed questionnaire for each of these two priorities, in consultation with the Member States. These questionnaires were sent to the Member States and also to the candidate countries, as the Council Resolution provides for candidate countries to be "associated with the framework of European cooperation in the youth field".

The questionnaires are based on a common approach and have the same general structure; they start with basic information on the situation and legislation in each country and go on to ask about general trends in current national policy and examples of good practice. Finally, Member States are asked to specify their expectations at European level.

In view of the commitment made to consult young people, the consultation methods adopted nationally also have to be specified.

The Commission, for its part, consulted the European Youth Forum before making its proposals.

1.2. Proposals which reflect the will to work together

The ways in which the questions were handled and the answers given varied from one country to another, depending on national youth policy and the ways in which young people were involved. The data, arguments, proposals and examples of good

¹ COM (2001) 681 final.

² OJ C 168, 13.07.2002.

³ Council Resolution of 27.06.2002.

practice constituted a wealth of interesting material for the Commission services to use in their analytical report.⁴

The proposed common objectives are a result of analysing the answers from the countries consulted. In its Resolution of 27.06.2002, the Council invites the Commission “to draw up [...] a questionnaire for each priority, including key issues, [...] to prepare, on the basis on the answers of the Member States, a synthesis report for each priority [...] and to present to the Council drafts for common objectives [...]”. These objectives are based on the Member States' answers to questions about their own situation and their expectations at European level. They are the result of the common approach developed by all the countries consulted and reflect the consensus resulting from analysis of the answers. An overall objective, divided into three sub-objectives, is proposed for each of the thematic priorities.

As in the case of the open method of coordination in the field of education, the measures which are proposed to achieve these objectives are indicated.

1.3. Proposals to complement other political measures

Europe of knowledge

The development of political cooperation in the youth field, a key element of which is the setting of objectives, will help to implement the strategic objective of the European Councils of Lisbon and Barcelona to make Europe “the world’s most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy”.

Lifelong learning is an important part of this strategy, which is designed to improve knowledge and professional qualifications and also to enhance the awareness and civic and social commitment of citizens.

In this context, non-formal and informal education is fundamental, not only to improved competitiveness but also to social integration, personal development and active citizenship.⁵

Youth policies contribute greatly to the non-formal education of young people. These policies - and young people themselves - give priority to two areas, participation and information.

The common objectives proposed are also inspired by experience of the YOUTH programme and will be taken into account when the new generation of programmes on education, training and youth are being prepared.

⁴ Analytical report of the responses of the Member States to the Commission questionnaires on participation and information of young people — working document for the Commission services (SEC(2003) 465).

⁵ Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning, OJ C 163, 09.07.2002.

Citizenship and governance

Information is a prerequisite for the participation so eagerly sought by young people.

Enabling young people to play a fuller part and providing them with more information will contribute to the broader objective of active citizenship and will help to "bring citizens, and primarily the young, closer to the European design and the European institutions".⁶

The "openness" and "participation" objectives of the White Paper on Governance also include youth participation and information. According to the White Paper on Youth, "youth is an area in which ... these principles should apply":

- openness: providing information and active communication for young people, in their language, so that they understand the workings of Europe and of the policies which concern them;
- participation: ensuring young people are consulted and more involved in the decisions which concern them and, in general, in the life of their communities.

2. COMMON OBJECTIVES TO ENHANCE THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

We all know that, in a rapidly evolving social context, where the long-term trend is towards ageing European populations and young people becoming increasingly removed from traditional forms of political life, the active citizenship of young people is in jeopardy.

The concept of active citizenship for young people implies full and complete participation in society, commitment and an ability to practise that citizenship.

The way in which young people participate in society evolves with changes in the state of representative and participatory democracy and the ways in which it is practised.

If young people are to be active and responsible citizens, on a par with the rest of society, it is essential to recognise and support the various ways in which they do participate within their own environment, to enhance their relations with the mechanisms of representative democracy and to help them take advantage of the available opportunities for participation.

The Commission proposes, as an **overall objective** for participation, that ***measures to encourage young people to be active citizens should be instituted and supported and that their effective participation in democratic life should be reinforced***. To achieve this overall objective, the following three sub-objectives are proposed:

- greater participation by young people in the life of the community in which they live;

⁶ Laeken Declaration, 14-15.12.2001.

- greater participation by young people in the mechanisms of representative democracy;
- learning to participate.

2.1. Greater participation by young people in the life of the community in which they live

Citizenship develops, in the first instance, through a young person's experiences in the immediate environment - family, school, leisure time and work. The local voluntary sector and NGOs also have a major role to play. It is important to ensure that young people, regardless of their social, economic or cultural situation, their habits and the places they frequent, have an opportunity to play a greater part in the life of their community.

The following lines of action are proposed:

- promote the involvement of young people in participatory structures (NGOs, associations, voluntary organisations, etc.) and support youth NGOs, while respecting their independence and their autonomy;
- recognise young people as citizens and independent people by supporting activities, measures and projects which involve young people directly in finding solutions to local problems;
- be more aware of, publicise and support the work done for young people by parents, social workers and other relay persons;
- identify more carefully the obstacles which prevent specific groups from participating and foster measures and mechanisms which will encourage all young people to take part in the life of a citizen, bearing gender issues in mind.

2.2. Greater participation by young people in the mechanisms of representative democracy

Representative democracy is one of the cornerstones of our societies. A lot depends on young people taking an active part. Society must, therefore, provide a better response to the aspirations and needs of young people if it wants them to accept the traditional mechanisms of democracy. This cannot be done without a change in attitude and behaviour. For young people to hold sway in places of decision-making and political influence, dialogue, above all, is essential. The political authorities must make sure that young people are more involved in the mechanisms of representative democracy.

The following lines of action are proposed:

- intensify and develop regular and structured dialogue between political bodies and young people and their representative structures (national and regional youth councils, European Youth Forum);
- ensure that this dialogue also includes young people who are not in structured organisations, and that these organisations take their needs into account;

- support mechanisms to develop all types of dialogue, in order to bring young people closer to political decision-making;
- improve the links between the various levels of representation and dialogue at both local and European level;
- ensure that young people carry more weight and have a greater presence in electoral processes: encourage young people to register as electors; encourage them to go along and vote; open the political parties to young people; make sure there are more young people in elected bodies;
- identify more carefully and study the obstacles to the participation of young people in the mechanisms of representative democracy and foster measures and mechanisms which will encourage all young people to take part, bearing gender issues in mind.

2.3. Learning to participate

All young people should be able to develop their potential, find their identity and develop their ability to play an active part in society. Education plays a decisive part in this process because the ability to participate is learnt, particularly at school, which is one of the first places where young people socialise outside the family. Experiences in the field of non-formal education also make a major contribution to personal development and active citizenship. The conditions for learning to participate must be created.

The following lines of action are proposed:

- develop and intensify training in participation within the formal education systems (in line with the objectives approved for the open coordination method applied to education);
- support the development of action in the field of non-formal and informal education to enable young people to play an active role;
- develop interaction between formal, non-formal and informal education;
- foster experiences of participation developed in the places where young people live, whether this is within the family or at school, university, other educational institutions or work;
- promote awareness of the benefits to all of the participation of committed young people and combat prejudices against young people which prevent them from playing an effective part;
- analyse more carefully the phenomena which lead to the exclusion of certain groups and encourage approaches focused on prevention.

3. COMMON OBJECTIVES TO IMPROVE INFORMATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Information tailored to the needs of young people enables them to participate in public life and develop an active sense of citizenship. This is a necessary condition

for participation, albeit an insufficient one. Such information is also aimed at those who come into contact with young people, such as parents, teachers, youth workers, young leaders, youth information officers, librarians etc.

Member States are primarily responsible for keeping young people informed – including on European issues. They nevertheless voice the need to enhance learning from each other through a structured exchange of experience and good practice, thereby strengthening the European dimension of youth information.

With regard to information, the Commission proposes a **global objective: *improving young people's access to quality information in order to enhance their participation in public life and their development as active and responsible citizens in an enlarged European Union.*** This global objective should be achieved through the implementation of the following three sub-objectives:

- improving young people's access to information services;
- provision of quality information;
- enhancing young people's participation in the shaping and dissemination of information.

3.1. Improving young people's access to information services

Many Member States have developed specific youth information services responsible for the shaping and dissemination of information and advice. Very often, however, these services are not adequately developed and there is a lack of coordination between the various actors and levels involved. Access to information services for young people, especially those who are disadvantaged, must be improved.

The following lines of approach should be taken:

- enhancing the development of structured, holistic, coherent and coordinated information supply services in the Member States which take into consideration the specific needs of young people, particularly by
 - effectively coordinating and linking the various services at the various national, regional and local levels;
 - establishing links with existing information services at European level in order to improve dissemination of European information at national, regional and local levels;
- providing information services on the spot which are free of charge, easily accessible and geared to the behaviour, environment and needs of young people;
- enabling particularly disadvantaged young people to have equal access to information, and avoiding any form of discrimination or exclusion for economic, social, cultural or geographical reasons;
- developing national and regional youth portals linked to the European Youth Portal and thus contributing to:

- the development of a network of interconnected youth information portals;
- the relaying of information on European issues to the national, regional and local levels.

3.2. Provision of quality information

The information products offered to young people are often of poor quality, do not always reach the target group in question, fail to make adequate use of new technologies and make only a limited contribution to enhancing young people's participation in society. In addition, staff working in the fields of youth information and counselling need to be trained. High quality is a prerequisite for providing young people with information efficiently.

The following lines of approach should be taken:

- developing a code of standards in the area of information provision and counselling services for young people, particularly by establishing common quality criteria and quality control mechanisms, and improving the education and training of those working in the field of youth information, particularly with regard to
 - the use of new technologies;
 - the acquisition of language skills; and
 - enhancing the European dimension of youth information;
- improving the link between information and counselling with the aim of encouraging a learning and capacity-building process among young people on how to obtain, select and evaluate information in order to become informed users of information;
- encouraging greater use of the “new media” such as the Internet, mobile phones, video, cinema etc. in youth information in order to reach as many young people as possible.

3.3. Enhancing young people's participation in the shaping and dissemination of information

In order to ensure that youth information is readily accessible, non-discriminatory and geared to young people's environment and needs, especially those who are disadvantaged, youth organisations and young people themselves have to be involved at all levels in the preparation and implementation of youth information strategies and participate in the shaping and dissemination of information.

The following lines of approach should be taken:

- involvement of youth organisations at European, national, regional and local levels in the development and implementation of youth information strategies;

- appropriate involvement of young people in the provision of youth information in order to
 - produce understandable and user-friendly youth information products adapted to the needs of young people; and
 - target youth information at specific groups of young people, especially those who are disadvantaged.
- encouraging greater involvement of young people in the dissemination of youth information (particularly in youth information centres, schools, clubs and the media) and in counselling their peers, especially those who have difficulties in gaining access to information and advice.

4. IMPLEMENTING AND MONITORING MECHANISMS

Implementing and monitoring the common objectives is part of the open coordination method, particularly the method set up in the Council Resolution on Youth.

Implementation and monitoring must be flexible and adapted to young people and must respect the competences of the Member States and principle of subsidiarity, in the same way as the setting of objectives, in line with the Council guidelines. The following principles and mechanisms are proposed:

The Member States must agree to achieve all the common objectives proposed for participation and information, which form a coherent and indivisible whole.

Each Member State must decide on the implementing and monitoring measures to be applied at national level, on the basis of its own situation in relation to the common objectives.

The principle of mutual information and regular exchanges between Member States on their approaches, progress achieved and good practice could be applied through regular meetings between the Directors-General for Youth, according to a timetable set in advance. Any preparatory work required could be done by working groups on the basis of the lines of action set out.

The principle of involving young people and their representative structures in this work at national and European level must be respected in an appropriate way by the relevant authorities.

It is proposed that the Member States should draw up national reports on the implementation of the two priorities, participation and information, in 2005. The Commission will then use these as a basis for drawing up a progress report for the Council. On the basis of the Commission's proposals, the Council will confirm, adapt or amend the common objectives for these two priorities.

These proposals for common objectives will be sent to the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.