

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the ‘Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year of Citizens (2013)’**

COM(2011) 489 final — 2011/0217 (COD)

(2012/C 181/24)

Rapporteur: **Mr GOBIŇŠ**

On 21 September 2011 the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 21(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on the

*Proposal for a Decision of the Parliament and of the Council on the European Year of Citizens (2013)*

COM(2011) 489 final — 2011/0217 (COD).

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 29 February 2012.

At its 479th plenary session, held on 28 and 29 March 2012 (meeting of 28 March), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 137 votes to 3 with 11 abstentions.

*‘Civil society is one of the ways in which our human nature can be exercised in its entirety.’*

Václav Havel

## 1. Conclusion and proposals

1.1 The European Commission has designated 2013 as the *European Year of Citizens* <sup>(1)</sup>. The European Economic and Social Committee stresses that citizens play a central role in securing Europe's future and integration, and it supports many of the ideas set out in the proposal. With its partners, the EESC has already undertaken important preparatory work in order to help ensure the success of the European Year, and it will continue to do so in a targeted manner.

1.2 However, the EESC regrets that the current Commission proposal contains some gaps. In this proposal, the Commission has not met civil society organisations' request to devote this Year to active citizenship, nor responded to the European Parliament's invitation to place special emphasis on the new rights citizens have acquired through the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. In suggesting some specific additions and amendments, the EESC is encouraging a proposal which will better reflect citizens' needs and make the Year a real success.

1.3 The major future challenges facing Europe and its people require the setting of priorities for this European Year. The low level of confidence that people have in the European Union, their scepticism about their power to influence EU decisions, apathy and the lack of involvement in the decision-making process are fundamentally detrimental to the spirit of the EU and impair the quality of decisions and the Union's long-term development.

1.4 The main aim of this European Year must be active, participatory citizenship. The Year should encourage informed,

active and inclusive citizen participation in the European integration process and in political and social life. The EESC advocates specifying the legal basis for the European Year and naming it the *European Year of active and participatory citizenship*.

1.5 The Committee points out that the concept of active and participatory citizenship includes consolidation of the fundamental values of democracy and of the EU, discussion of respect for citizens' political, economic and social rights and their obligations, and strengthening the feeling of belonging to the EU. The European Year should focus on the diversity of society's needs and the fight against discrimination and inequalities, giving special attention inter alia to women and people with disabilities.

1.6 The administrative bodies of the various institutions at both European and national level should delay no further in working towards achieving these objectives. The process should be conducted in the framework of a close dialogue with civil society organisations at every stage and every level (local, national, European) of the decision-making process.

1.7 In this context, mobility is an objective which deserves to be supported notwithstanding its indirect nature.

1.8 The level of funding allocated to the European Year and involvement in it needs to be re-examined. The level of funding should be appropriate, fixed and in proportion to the importance of the goal, bearing in mind that a democratic shortfall could prove extremely costly. The reduced budget

<sup>(1)</sup> COM(2011) 489 final – 2011/0217 (COD).

(down from some EUR 17 million for 2010 to around EUR 1 million for 2013) will not allow major issues to be addressed.

1.9 In order to pursue good practice and provide maximum access and coordination for these actions, Liaison Group members representing European civil society organisations and networks, together with other partners and with the support of the EESC, have created an alliance for implementing the thematic year. This alliance is ready to take on a major role in taking the year forward and framing additional recommendations. The Committee undertakes to establish and carry out a broad participatory, transparent and innovative programme that can show society and the EU institutions the advantages to be gained from involving the broader public, while in some respects acting as a pilot project for other initiatives.

## 2. Background to the opinion

2.1 2013 will mark the 20th anniversary of the introduction of the concept of 'citizenship of the European Union' under the Treaty of Maastricht. The Lisbon Treaty (Article 10(3) and Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union) enshrined several new rights for civil society, with particular emphasis on the obligation for all EU institutions to promote democratic participation in the decision-making process on the part of both individuals and organised civil society<sup>(2)</sup>. Unfortunately, society currently has little perception of these rights.

2.2 The Commission partially responded to the European Parliament's request by proposing to make 2013 the *European Year of Citizens*. However, its proposals focus on specific legal aspects which only cover a small part of the concept of citizenship. EU citizenship is one of the strongest instruments for forging a common identity. Under the terms of Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the Union is founded on the principles of democracy, freedom, the rule of law, equality and respect for human rights<sup>(3)</sup>. These are particularly important for strengthening the democratic process, citizens' awareness and the feeling of belonging to the EU, especially in these times of crisis and potential change. Unfortunately, they are not given sufficient attention in the Commission proposal.

<sup>(2)</sup> TEU Article (10(3) stipulates: 'Every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union. Decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen.' Moreover, Article 11 TEU stipulates:

1. The institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action.
2. The institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.
3. The European Commission shall carry out broad consultations with parties concerned in order to ensure that the Union's actions are coherent and transparent.'

<sup>(3)</sup> TEU OJ C 83, 30.3.2010.

2.3 According to a recent Eurobarometer survey, just 43 % of people questioned stated that they knew what it meant to be a European citizen and 32 % considered they were well or very well informed of their rights as an EU citizen<sup>(4)</sup>. In 2009, only 43 % of citizens of voting age took part in the elections to the European Parliament<sup>(5)</sup>; this is a much lower turnout than for national elections (around 67 %)<sup>(6)</sup>. Barely 30 % of citizens think that they can personally influence the EU process and this figure is falling<sup>(7)</sup>. The 2009 Eurobarometer survey shows that the participants' main priority for ensuring greater respect for citizens' rights was improving dialogue with the European Union's institutions (37 %)<sup>(8)</sup>. In opinions adopted in 1992 and 1993; which remain surprisingly relevant today, the EESC already drew attention to such issues as the need to involve the public, problems of legitimacy, civic education, keeping the public informed, their confidence in their own resources, and reducing the democratic deficit<sup>(9)</sup>.

2.4 The shortcomings in European regulations, the failure to comply with them and the much-criticised lack of enthusiasm on the part of EU institutions for engaging in real dialogue are also major challenges for the European Union. For example, a specific study carried out by Eurobarometer in 2011 showed that less than a third of EU citizens were wholly or partially satisfied with the EU administration's effectiveness, willingness to provide services and transparency. Others expressed their dissatisfaction, particularly as regards the lack of transparency, or else had no opinion on the issue<sup>(10)</sup>.

2.5 These figures illustrate the gulf between the EU's citizens and its administrative bodies, and the low level of involvement in their functioning<sup>(11)</sup>. Indeed, they raise doubts among some as to the legitimacy of their decisions overall, or even about the major influence which the European Commission is exerting on countries affected by the crisis. In any event, the consequences are a less effective, less united and weaker European Union. That is why the 2013 European thematic year should be used to put these questions on the agenda and, with the involvement of society, to significantly improve the situation and discuss the future development of citizenship.

<sup>(4)</sup> Flash Eurobarometer 294, published in October 2010.

<sup>(5)</sup> COM(2010) 605 final.

<sup>(6)</sup> Eurostat, Voter turnout in national and EU parliamentary elections.

<sup>(7)</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 75, published in August 2011.

<sup>(8)</sup> See Standard Eurobarometer 72, Autumn 2009, Public Opinion in the European Union, Vol. 2. Similarly, in 2011 the priorities that those questioned revealed to be the most important (from a list already drawn up) were: the right to move and reside freely in the EU (48 %), good administration by EU institutions (33 %), the right to submit complaints to the European Ombudsman (32 %), access to documents of the EU institutions (21 %), voting in European elections when living in another Member State (21 %), the right to petition the European Parliament (20 %) and the right to propose legislation via a citizens' initiative (19 %). See *Special Eurobarometer / Wave 75.1, published in April 2011*.

<sup>(9)</sup> EESC opinion on *More democracy for Europe and its institutions; better information for citizens and socio-economic operators; role of the European Parliament's Ombudsman*, OJ C 352, 30.12.1993, p. 63.

<sup>(10)</sup> Special Eurobarometer / Wave 75.1, published in April 2011.

<sup>(11)</sup> OJ C 318, 23.12.2006, p. 163.

### 3. General comments

*The main idea behind the European Year and its title*

3.1 The EESC supports the idea of linking the 2013 European Year to the subject of citizenship. It believes that this Year should focus on how EU policies match up with the values, interests and needs of its citizens. Its aim should therefore be the **informed participation** of all EU citizens at all levels and at every stage of the decision-making process, all aspects of **active citizenship**, as well as **European awareness and a feeling of belonging to Europe**, and peace, freedom, the rule of law, equality, solidarity and respect for human rights.

3.2 The EESC proposes that the year be entitled the **European Year of active and participatory citizenship** <sup>(12)</sup>.

3.3 The current proposal for a decision <sup>(13)</sup> places too much importance on the free movement of individuals and the rights they should enjoy in a cross-border context. The **proportion of citizens willing to move is still low** and; in some countries, particularly Romania and Bulgaria, moving is made very difficult, even if these countries meet the Schengen criteria. Furthermore, 2006 had already been declared the European Year of Workers' Mobility.

3.4 The current Commission proposal reduces EU citizenship to a handful of legal elements, when it should cover a much wider range of aspects. **Citizenship also encompasses other dimensions: political, civic, economic, social** <sup>(14)</sup> **and cultural**.

*Legal aspects of the European Year*

3.5 The EESC backs the proposal set out in the document under consideration to improve **dialogue and the exchange of information** between the institutions and citizens of the EU, but believes that a central role should be accorded to **participatory democracy** and active citizenship. The new rights and obligations in this area included in the Lisbon Treaty <sup>(15)</sup>, which the European Parliament is proposing be highlighted in 2013 <sup>(16)</sup>, need to be implemented in full. An open and transparent dialogue between citizens and administrative bodies at all levels should be guaranteed without delay.

3.6 The EESC also calls for the proposal for a decision to include clear and precise references to all the provisions relating to democracy and participation alluded to in the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), in particular **Article 11 TEU** and **Article 15 TFEU**, but also the preamble and Articles 1, 3(2), 6 and 10 TEU <sup>(17)</sup>.

<sup>(12)</sup> Countries which traditionally conceive citizenship as active citizenship could use the short title.

<sup>(13)</sup> COM(2011) 489 final – 2011/0217 (COD).

<sup>(14)</sup> OJ C 376, 22.12.2011, p. 74.

<sup>(15)</sup> OJ C 354, 28.12.2010, p. 59

<sup>(16)</sup> European Parliament resolution of 15 December 2010 (2009/2161 (INI)).

<sup>(17)</sup> OJ C 83, 30.3.2010.

*The second paragraph of Article 1 of the Treaty on European Union states that 'This Treaty marks a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen.'* <sup>(18)</sup>

3.7 The **legal basis of the thematic year should be extended** so that the abovementioned objectives can be achieved reflecting all aspects of citizenship and guaranteeing its practical implementation across all spheres of policy action.

3.8 The EESC emphasises that **each Member State** also bears its share of responsibility as regards society's participation in the EU decision-making process, as shown, for example, by the use of the term 'responsibility for integration' in a decision of the German Constitutional Court <sup>(19)</sup>.

3.9 The EESC would stress the principle of **citizens' equality** enshrined in Article 9 TEU <sup>(20)</sup>. In the context of the 2013 European Year, it therefore calls for attention to be paid to groups of citizens suffering discrimination. Specific measures should be taken to guarantee that all citizens have the same opportunities for exercising their right to participate, their economic and social rights and for exercising their other rights, regardless of their origin and citizenship, age, particular needs, state of health, wealth, religious beliefs, family situation or other characteristics of the same nature. Total equality must be ensured between men and women <sup>(21)</sup>. Special attention should be devoted to **combating radical or antidemocratic ideologies and activities**.

3.10 The Committee also highlights the **external dimension** of active citizenship. In the conduct of the Year, it would be appropriate to cooperate with the EU's neighbouring countries. The Committee calls on the EU at all times to respect its fundamental principles and values in its external relations <sup>(22)</sup>, to ensure greater involvement by civil society in framing its external policy and to begin preparations for the 2015 European Year which the Committee has suggested devoting to development cooperation.

*The free movement of people*

3.11 The EESC upholds the free movement of people as one of several indirect priorities <sup>(23)</sup>, as does the Commission which, in its proposal, states its determination to **remove the existing**

<sup>(18)</sup> OJ C 83, 30.3.2010.

<sup>(19)</sup> BverfG (German Federal Constitutional Court), 2 BvE 2/08, 30.6.2009.

<sup>(20)</sup> OJ C 83, 30.3.2010.

<sup>(21)</sup> See particularly the REX/307 file, rapporteur Ms Sharma, and Flash Eurobarometer 294, published in October 2010. The groups that least understand the meaning of European citizenship include women and manual workers.

<sup>(22)</sup> OJ C 376 22.12.2011, p. 74.

<sup>(23)</sup> OJ C 228, 22.9.2009, p. 14.

**obstacles identified**<sup>(24)</sup> to enable all EU citizens, without discrimination, to freely exercise their rights. At the same time, it calls for attention to be focused on **concrete and practical actions** that will bring about long-term positive effects. These initiatives could involve creating or extending promotional programmes or instruments, drafting and implementing new regulations or more strictly monitoring and prosecuting violations of EU legislation.

3.12 In the context of the 2013 European Year, it would also be worthwhile to pay particular attention to citizens' right to receive **assistance** from the **diplomatic and consular missions** of other Member States when they are in a third country.

3.13 The EESC notes that the mobility of individuals should also be considered in the context of **demographic** trends, and that its beneficial effects **on employability and competitiveness** should be recognised. It encourages developing, implementing and complying with European legislation in many areas such as consumer rights, the movement of goods, services and capital, healthcare, education, the right to vote and freely stand for elections to the European Parliament when in another EU Member State, knowledge of languages, intercultural and social skills, together with other social and economic rights and guarantees. Mobility of individuals thus also means allowing citizens to benefit from the advantages of the single market and helping to achieve the growth targets of the Europe 2020 strategy.

#### *Organisational aspects of the European Year*

3.14 The organisational arrangements for the 2013 European Year must comply with the objectives and values it advocates. The EESC considers that its planning and implementation **process** should be as **open** as possible, and should involve all interested players at all levels and all stages: the Committee of the Regions, the EESC itself, representatives of civil society organisations (CSO) including the social partners, and representatives of national and local administrative bodies, among others.

3.15 The EESC stresses the particular attention which should be devoted to cooperation with **schools and higher education institutions** and their activities. Each Member State should be mindful of its role and should establish teaching programmes for them which could be eligible for Commission support.

3.16 A **practical methodology** should be devised for consultations with civil society, and a compendium or manual of good practice drawn up.

3.17 Extensive use should be made of the opportunities offered by **modern technologies**, particularly the social networks and other media whose content is defined by their users' contributions. A consultative page should be created in the internet sites of all the EU institutions.

3.18 The Committee also calls for guarantees for transparent, **effective coordination** of the 2013 European Year at all levels and between all stakeholders involved, particularly by making full use of the potential of the steering committees by setting up effective mechanisms for exchanging experience at national level.

3.19 On the basis of positive past experience during previous European Years, the Committee has expressed its support for the creation by European organisations and networks belonging to the EESC Liaison Group, and other partner organisations, of a broad, open **coalition** of civil society organisations **to help organise this thematic year**, and has expressed its readiness to cooperate with that coalition. For its part, the EESC intends to set up a coordination group to follow the progress of the Year and to contribute to making it a success. To that end, close cooperation should also be established between the civil society coalition and the EESC coordination group. The EESC feels that, with its partners at EU and Member State levels, it can make a substantial contribution in this respect by identifying participants from civil society, involving and motivating them. They will then become jointly responsible for taking the thematic year forward. There is thus the opportunity to share the EESC's unique expertise on establishing grassroots consensus and cooperation.

3.20 The Committee calls for specific measures to be drawn up and implemented to ensure a **link between the different thematic years and to ensure that the outcome of the events is enduring**. From the content point of view, the Committee advocates linking the European Years 2010 to 2013<sup>(25)</sup> and the subsequent years, particularly 2014 which it has proposed be devoted to family-related themes.

3.21 It is necessary not only to carry out information campaigns but also to undertake practical and concrete actions drawn up by decision-makers working together with society. The actions recommended in Article 3 of the proposal should be weighed up and amended in line with the recommendations set out in this opinion, with the primary aim of fully implementing Articles 10 and 11 of the Treaty on European Union.

#### **4. Specific comments**

##### *Society's involvement and the legitimacy of decisions*

4.1 The Committee deems that, in its current format, the proposal will not encourage a feeling of belonging to the EU. It does not create the necessary foundations for achieving tangible results in the context of the 2013 European Year to close the gap between society and decision-makers in terms of citizen participation, or significantly increase the EU institutions' legitimacy. In the context of the thematic year, the Committee recommends **creating a new promotional programme, establishing mechanisms, and drafting and adopting legal acts** in this area.

<sup>(24)</sup> COM(2010) 603 final.

<sup>(25)</sup> OJ C 224, 30.8.2008, p. 106; OJ C 128, 18.5.2010, p. 149; OJ C 51, 17.2.2011, p. 55.

4.2 The Committee particularly emphasises that the Commission should produce practical proposals, including white papers on the **full implementation of Articles 10 and 11 TEU**. The introduction of the citizens' initiative (Article 11(4) TEU) and the other mechanisms put in place to date are not enough to ensure society's full participation. A discussion should be launched right away on possible ways of supplementing these tools <sup>(26)</sup>.

4.3 Action is also needed to **supplement the existing mechanisms** for dialogue and participation, **adopt good practices** <sup>(27)</sup> and improve cooperation between the EU institutions and also between the European level and the national bodies working on questions relating to the Union, including governments, the national parliaments and civil society, to mention just these few stakeholders. The aim should be to make decision-making as open and transparent as possible.

4.4 Independently of this action, the Committee calls on the Member States to improve the mechanisms for society to become involved at **national, regional and local level** by including the general public in the ongoing dialogue and by drawing up specific performance indicators for the goals to be pursued.

4.5 Discussion of ideas must also be encouraged at European level. Steps should be taken to ensure that each citizen is able to grasp the import of the subjects being discussed and understand at what point and in what way they can take part in the decision-making process. It is also necessary to strengthen and encourage <sup>(28)</sup> the **European media area**, in terms of installation, education <sup>(29)</sup> and culture.

4.6 The EESC stresses its role as a bridge between the institutions and civil society <sup>(30)</sup>. In preparing to launch the 2013 European Year, **the Committee is determined to embark on and implement a broad, participatory, transparent and innovative programme** that will show society and the EU institutions the advantages to be gained from involving the broader public, while in some respects acting as a pilot project for other initiatives.

#### *Previous opinions and assessment of the thematic year*

4.7 In **earlier opinions**, the EESC has steadfastly upheld the values and objectives highlighted here, notably as regards informed involvement of the public, civic education, and the protection and development of the rights of all citizens <sup>(31)</sup>.

4.8 The Committee recommends including in the action plan those mobility-related initiatives it has put forward in **earlier opinions** and backing them up using other means. The aim would be to encourage, in particular, actions relating to young

people, improving accessibility, or education and specialised training, improving access to life-long learning, launching **initiatives to remove obstacles** created by education systems, a lack of linguistic skills, healthcare questions, social security, access to housing or other difficulties <sup>(32)</sup>. The Committee urges that thought also be given to less pleasant possible aspects of mobility, such as separation from one's family or the risk of losing one's culture, or the socio-economic impact on the region of origin of the people concerned.

4.9 The Committee supports the suggestion that each Member State should draw up a manual on the rights granted to citizens of other Union countries residing in their territory, and that they should be obliged to provide them with other easily accessible sources of information <sup>(33)</sup>. All the points made in the EESC opinion on active citizenship are also worthy of support <sup>(34)</sup>.

4.10 The Committee supports the idea of a **follow-up report on EU citizenship** and the proposal to draft an action plan on the methods for removing obstacles that still prevent citizens from exercising their rights. In this respect, it suggests that citizen participation be designated the top priority. It believes that such an initiative would also make citizens more aware of and more inclined to take part in the elections to the European Parliament which will be held in spring 2014 and thereafter.

4.11 The Committee draws attention to the **lack of consistency between policies** drawn up by the European Commission. On the one hand, there is a desire to emphasise mobility, whilst at the same time there are plans for major changes to the Youth in Action programme during the next budgetary period which could lead to a diametrically opposite effect and undermine young people's sense of belonging to the European Union and their feeling of being citizens and Europeans.

4.12 The Committee agrees that the results of the 2013 European Year should be subject to an **in-depth assessment** and that the opinions expressed by individuals during the year should be collected and examined. It will be useful to take these conclusions into account when framing subsequent European policies affecting the issue of citizenship. For its part, the Committee will consider drafting an **opinion** that would include practical indicators and guidelines for continuing with this project.

#### *The institutional framework*

4.13 The Committee advocates looking into the possibility of setting up a specific **intergroup at the European Parliament** for encouraging interinstitutional cooperation, including cooperation with the EESC, for planning and taking forward the thematic year.

<sup>(26)</sup> OJ C 376, 22.12.2011, p. 74.

<sup>(27)</sup> See also the INGO Conference, CONF/PLE(2009)CODEI, 2009

<sup>(28)</sup> OJ C 318, 23.12.2006, p. 163.

<sup>(29)</sup> OJ C 28, 3.2.2006, p. 29.

<sup>(30)</sup> OJ C 354, 28.12.2010, p. 59

<sup>(31)</sup> Reference should be made here inter alia to the other EESC opinions mentioned in the present document.

<sup>(32)</sup> OJ C 228, 22.9.2009, p. 14.

<sup>(33)</sup> European Citizenship – Cross-Border Mobility, Aggregate Report, Qualitative study – TNS Qual+, August 2010.

<sup>(34)</sup> OJ C 28, 3.2.2006, p. 29.

4.14 As part of the preparations for the 2013 European Year, the EESC recommends that **appropriate resources** be secured for the Commission departments responsible for questions relating to the strengthening and involvement of civil society and that their scope be broadened and their importance and coordination bolstered. It also calls for particular attention to be given to encouraging and coordinating voluntary work.

4.15 Because of their low profile and lack of impact, it would seem questionable to put special emphasis on sources of information such as 'Europe Direct', the 'Your Europe' portal or Solvit. The list could also include Europeana and Eures. In any case, the EU authorities can only have an indirect role as the focus should be mainly on organised civil society. At all events, **information should target the public** it is intended for by providing modern and innovative distribution channels, including recourse to social networks and other mechanisms.

#### Financial aspects

4.16 The Committee recommends granting the 2013 European Year **sufficient and appropriate funding**. The total of EUR 1 million currently earmarked is not enough to achieve goals of this scale. The 2011 European Year had a budget of around EUR 11 million<sup>(35)</sup>, if the preparations already carried out in 2010 are included, whilst the budget for the 2010 European Year totalled EUR 17 million<sup>(36)</sup>. Moreover, there are plans to allocate funding for the 2013 European Year from the Directorate-General for Communication's budget and programme headings. This would not be additional funding<sup>(37)</sup>. Furthermore, regrettably there is no funding provided in this amount for co-financing citizens' initiatives or civil society organisations<sup>(38)</sup>. The Committee considers that the average 0.2 eurocents scheduled per EU citizen is insufficient for carrying out the measures called for in the present opinion, even if major funding is not required for all the actions and

initiatives. Whatever happens, particular attention must be devoted to activities which are not receiving the requisite funding.

4.17 The Committee recommends deleting the provision whereby 'financing will generally take the form of **direct purchase** of goods and **services** under existing framework contracts'<sup>(39)</sup>, since this would basically generate huge expenditure on unsustainable campaigns devised by public relations companies which could even create negative results or not be very successful in many Member States because they use a standard format. As far as possible, funding should be granted to national and local civil society organisations, who should be the parties primarily responsible for the European Year. One way of achieving this would be to allocate funds via the Commission's representations in the Member States.

4.18 Account will need to be taken of the results of the 2013 European Year and the lessons to be learned from it by **providing financial instruments** such as the future *Europe for citizens* funding programme or others. At the same time, it is necessary to provide more information on the possibilities for financial help to encourage EU citizenship<sup>(40)</sup>, guarantee an adequate level of funding for these objectives, and renew the operating grants programmes for participation or structured dialogue on European issues at Member State or EU level. This action will also serve to extend earlier programmes intended to encourage the active participation of EU citizens and their feeling of belonging to the Union<sup>(41)</sup>. The voluntary sector should be enlisted to help with the co-financing of projects.

4.19 Lastly, the Committee recommends adopting an **innovative approach in the planning**, management and use of **financial resources** at EU and other levels, particularly regarding the participation of citizens in allocating the budget for the European Year.

Brussels, 28 March 2012.

The President  
of the European Economic and Social Committee  
Staffan NILSSON

<sup>(35)</sup> *European Year of Volunteering 2011*.

<sup>(36)</sup> OJ C 51, 17.2.2011, p. 55.

<sup>(37)</sup> COM(2011) 489 final – 2011/0217 (COD).

<sup>(38)</sup> Liaison Group, EESC, 'European Citizenship is more than Rights! Open letter to MEPs: Commission proposal to designate 2013 as *European Year of Citizens*'.

<sup>(39)</sup> COM(2011) 489 final – 2011/0217 (COD).

<sup>(40)</sup> COM(2010) 603 final.

<sup>(41)</sup> Report on progress towards effective EU Citizenship 2007-2010, COM(2010) 602 final, Brussels, 27 October 2010.