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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 voluntary activities among 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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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Follow up to the White Paper on Youth

#### General background

The present Communication follows on from the White Paper on youth<sup>1</sup>, approved by the Commission on 21 November 2001, and the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 setting a new framework for co-operation in the youth field.<sup>2</sup> In this Resolution, the Council called for the open method of co-ordination to be applied to four priorities i.e. participation by young people, information of young people, voluntary activities among young people and a greater understanding and knowledge of youth. Pursuant to this mandate, the Commission first proposed common objectives for participation by and information of young people<sup>3</sup> which were adopted by the Council in its Resolution of 25 November 2003.<sup>4</sup>

In the present communication, the Commission proposes common objectives for voluntary activities of young people. This proposal for common objectives is based on the Member States' and acceding countries' answers to questions<sup>5</sup> about their own situation and their expectations at European level. It reflects the consensus resulting from the analysis of the answers.

The European Youth Forum was consulted during the preparation of the proposed common objectives. The Member States and acceding countries were also asked to consult young people, and in particular young volunteers, youth and volunteer organisations and other relevant stakeholders in the field.

The Commission's analysis of the Member States' and acceding countries' replies to the questionnaire can be found in a Commission staff working paper<sup>6</sup>. This working paper highlights the different challenges - at national as well as at European level - identified by the Member States and acceding countries on voluntary activities of young people. Concrete examples of good practice are given for the different described challenges.

In parallel to this exercise on voluntary activities the same procedure is being carried out for the priority a greater understanding and knowledge of youth.

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<sup>1</sup> Commission White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth", COM (2001) 681 final  
<sup>2</sup> Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, Meeting within the Council of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field (2002/C 168/02).  
<sup>3</sup> 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 co-operation in the youth field, COM(2003)184 final, of 11 April 2003  
<sup>4</sup> Council Resolution of 25 November 2003 on common objectives for participation by and information for young people (2003/C 295/04)  
<sup>5</sup> The questionnaire was drawn up in consultation with the Member States and acceding countries as well as with the Youth Forum. It was sent to the Member States, the acceding countries and to three candidate countries, i.e. Bulgaria, Rumania and Turkey. The latter were invited to reply on a voluntary basis.  
<sup>6</sup> Commission staff working Paper, Analysis of Member States' and Acceding Countries' replies to the Commission questionnaire on voluntary activities of young people

## **Voluntary activities in the White Paper**

The **White Paper** "*A new impetus for European youth*" identifies voluntary activities as a priority theme for future co-operation in the youth field. It considers voluntary activities for young people as a form of social participation, an educational experience and a factor of employability and integration. They thus represent an instrument for the development of active citizenship.

The White Paper lists the following possible actions regarding voluntary activities:

- Stepping up voluntary activities at national, regional and local levels.
- Examining the situation of young volunteers in terms of legal and social protection and removing the obstacles to the mobility of young volunteers.
- Recognising voluntary activities as an educational experience and a period of non-formal learning.
- Widening European Voluntary Service to include a partnership with worldwide bodies which organise and support voluntary action.

Shortly after the adoption of the White Paper the Council underlined the importance of voluntary activities of young people in a **Resolution on Voluntary Work for Young People**<sup>7</sup> which aims at reinforcing and further developing voluntary activities for young people.

Taking the White Paper as well as its previous Resolution into account the Council identified in its **Resolution regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field**, the following general objectives for voluntary activities:

- Facilitating opportunities for the exercise of solidarity and voluntary commitment by young people and promoting networks among all the actors involved.
- Promoting voluntary activities that allow young people to develop their sense of commitment and active citizenship, individual and social skills, and to gain useful knowledge and abilities which help them to play a fuller part in society and enhance their employability.
- Fostering recognition and appreciation of voluntary activities, inter alia, by public authorities, the business sector and civil society.

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<sup>7</sup> Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 14 February 2002 on the added value of voluntary activity for young people in the context of the development of Community action on youth

Due to the fact that there is a variety of traditions and practices of voluntary activities in the different States and in order to allow for clarity in the context of the questionnaire and the proposal for common objectives, the following definitions have been used:

**Voluntary activities** are all kinds of voluntary engagement. They are characterised by the following aspects: open to all, unpaid, undertaken by own free will, educational (non-formal learning aspect) and added social value.

**Voluntary service** is part of voluntary activities and is characterised by the following additional aspects: fixed period; clear objectives, contents, tasks, structure and framework; appropriate support and legal and social protection.

**Civic service** is a voluntary service managed by the State- or on behalf of the State- e.g. in the social field or in civil protection.

**Civilian service** is an alternative to compulsory military service in some countries, but not voluntary.

## 1.2. European Voluntary Service (EVS)

The European Voluntary Service (EVS), which is the Action 2 of the YOUTH Programme<sup>8</sup>, allows 3.500 young people from 31 European countries<sup>9</sup> as well as from third countries per year to engage in volunteering in a variety of areas either in EU countries or in third countries, with a funding of approximately 33 million EURO in 2004. The EVS is a quality model for transnational voluntary service and aims at developing the solidarity of young people, promoting their citizenship and supporting the mutual understanding of young people. A key element is the balance between providing service to the community and non-formal learning. Young volunteers receive training and acquire new skills and competences. A European certificate is issued at the end of the service.

The Commission is developing the EVS further in view of giving it a stronger impact and visibility, but also to strengthen its collective aspect and the cooperation between voluntary services. Within the context of its proposal for a future generation of the YOUTH Programme, it envisages to enlarge the EVS in order to give young people the possibility to express their personal engagement but also to associate them to the actions of solidarity of the European Union.

## 1.3. Mobility of volunteers

The European Parliament and the Council adopted a Recommendation on 10 July 2001 on mobility<sup>10</sup> within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers and recommended therein measures which

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<sup>8</sup> More information on the YOUTH Programme and EVS can be found on <http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth>

<sup>9</sup> The 25 EU Member States as of 1 May 2004, the 3 countries of the European Economic Area and the 3 pre-accession countries. For further details please see the User's Guide for the YOUTH Programme on <http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth>

<sup>10</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers (2001/613/CE)

specifically concern volunteers. In a recent report on the follow-up to the Recommendation on mobility<sup>11</sup> the Commission concluded, among other things, that

- The specific status of volunteers is still lacking recognition in national legal and administrative frameworks.
- In a number of countries voluntary work is treated as equivalent to employment and is therefore subjected to the same regulations.
- Volunteering at European level is mainly through the European Voluntary Service (EVS) within the framework of the YOUTH Programme whose basic legal act also calls for the removal of obstacles to mobility.
- EVS seems to be the only case of certification of voluntary activity abroad.
- Equally, it is only in the case of EVS that volunteers are automatically insured when undertaking a period of volunteering abroad.

#### **1.4. Recent political developments in the context of voluntary activities**

##### **Draft Constitutional Treaty:**

In its draft Constitutional Treaty for the European Union, the European Convention proposes to set up of a voluntary corps of young people in order to establish a framework for joint contributions from young Europeans to actions of solidarity of the European Union, particularly in the international context.

Without prejudging on the final contents of the Constitutional Treaty, the Commission may take any useful initiatives to promote coordination between actions of the European Union and those of the Member States, in order to enhance the efficiency and complementarity of Union and national measures of solidarity involving young people.

##### **Rome Conference: Closer cooperation of civic services and the youth sector**

From 28-29 November 2003 the Italian Presidency organised the **first European conference on Civic Service for Youth** with support from the Commission. The conference aimed at allowing an exchange of views, activities and national practices on the civic service of young people. Another objective of the conference was to identify ways of a closer cooperation between civic services at European level, including the European Voluntary Service (EVS). Participants were high level officials from the Member States and future Member States, the Commission and NGOs active in the youth field or in voluntary service.

In the Conclusions of the President of the conference<sup>12</sup> it is suggested to further discuss, follow up and monitor the cooperation among civic services in the

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<sup>11</sup> Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Report on the follow-up to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community of students, persons undergoing training, volunteers and teachers and trainers, COM(2004)21final of 23 January 2004

framework of the open method of coordination for youth. A reinforced participation of young people in these activities with a view to strengthening their citizenship and solidarity is proposed.

Other issues reiterated in the Conclusions are: the reinforcement of the transnational cooperation and of the exchange of young volunteers in a number of domains, the recognition of the civic service experience and a systematic and regular exchange of information and good practices<sup>13</sup>.

## 2. COMMON OBJECTIVES TO PROMOTE VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Having regard to Member States' and acceding countries' replies to its questionnaire, and taking into consideration the initiatives and developments described above, the Commission proposes the following **overall goal** for voluntary activities of young people:

**In view of enhancing active citizenship and solidarity of young people, voluntary activities should be developed, promoted, and recognised at all levels.**

To achieve this overall goal the following common objectives are proposed:

- (1) *Develop voluntary activities of young people with the aim of enhancing the transparency of the existing possibilities, enlarging their scope and improving their quality.*
- (2) *Making it easier for young people to carry out voluntary activities by removing existing obstacles.*
- (3) *Promote voluntary activities with a view to reinforcing young people's solidarity and engagement as citizens.*
- (4) *Recognise voluntary activities of young people with a view to acknowledging their personal skills and their engagement for society.*

### 2.1. Objective 1 - Develop voluntary activities of young people with the aim of enhancing the transparency of the existing possibilities, enlarging their scope and of improving their quality

The possibilities for young people to engage in voluntary activities vary considerably in the different countries. There is a wide range of voluntary activities available for young people within the Member States and acceding countries covering structured organised voluntary services as well as occasional voluntary engagements. But the situation varies widely from one Member State to another. In almost all Member States youth and voluntary organisations have a major role to play. The European Voluntary Service (EVS), part of the European Union's YOUTH Programme, is sometimes the only possibility for young people to carry out a voluntary service.

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<sup>12</sup> The conference was chaired by the Italian Minister responsible for the contacts with the Parliament, Mr. Carlo Giovanardi

<sup>13</sup> The full text of the Conclusions of the conference can be found on <http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth>

The lack of visibility and clarity in the organisation of voluntary activities in the Member States makes it difficult for young people interested in volunteering to find out about the existing possibilities, be it at national or European level. It is equally difficult for voluntary and youth organisations to identify potential partners for networking and cooperation, be it at local, regional, national, European or international level. Likewise it is not easy for decision-makers to guide their support to voluntary activities of young people. Better visibility and transparency should be accompanied by supporting and incentive mechanisms to enlarge the scope and possibilities of youth voluntary activities as well as their overall quality.

In order to achieve objective 1 the following **lines of action** are proposed:

At national, regional and local level

- Identify and classify existing voluntary activities (e.g. voluntary service, occasional voluntary engagement, etc...) in view of creating a clear and visible picture of voluntary activities available for young people.
- Enhance existing voluntary activities of young people by developing the different categories of these activities further by supporting civil society organisations active in voluntary engagement of young people, reinforcing voluntary services where they already exist and, where appropriate, create new ones.
- Foster training opportunities for young volunteers and those supervising and managing with a view to improving the quality of voluntary activities and their organisational framework.

At European level

- Encourage a better coordination of the various voluntary activities, and in particular of the transnational cooperation of civic services, where they exist, and encourage the exchange of young volunteers in various domains.
- Disseminate and promote the exchange of information on national voluntary programmes and their European dimension.
- Take into consideration the opportunity and feasibility of extending the European Voluntary Service (EVS) to a wider range of actions with a view to giving young people the possibility to participate in actions of solidarity of the European Union.

## **2.2. Objective 2 - Making it easier for young people to carry out voluntary activities by removing existing obstacles**

Young people who want to engage in voluntary activities meet a number of difficulties. These difficulties are of different natures: lack of social protection, taxation of pocket money, refusal of visa and residence permits (this can affect voluntary activities of EU nationals in third countries and of third country nationals in EU countries but should not affect EU nationals in another EU Member State), language problems, lack of training, heavy procedures, etc... These difficulties represent real obstacles to the exercise of voluntary activities of young people and limit the access to them of a greater number of young Europeans.



In order to achieve objective 2 the following **lines of action** are proposed:

At all levels

- Take the measures considered appropriate “... to remove the legal and administrative obstacles to the mobility of persons undertaking ... a voluntary activity...”, as set out in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on Mobility<sup>14</sup>.
- Ensure that young volunteers receive the visas and residence permits when and where needed.
- Enhance the exchange of information, experience and good practice of all relevant actors in the field of voluntary activities of young people with the aim of removing obstacles.
- Consider if legal means and instruments could help reach the aim of making it easier for young people to carry out voluntary activities.

### **2.3. Objective 3 - Promote voluntary activities with a view to reinforcing young people’s solidarity and engagement as citizens**

The promotion of voluntary activities among young people aims at raising young people’s awareness about volunteering and increase the number of young volunteers. Moreover it aims particularly at creating conditions for an increased participation of young people with less opportunities in voluntary activities. In order to achieve objective 3 the following **lines of action** are proposed.

At national, regional and local level

- Disseminate information on volunteering at all appropriate levels, with the aim to raise young people’s awareness about volunteering, inform them about concrete possibilities to volunteer, provide advise and support and promote a positive image of volunteering.
- Encourage an enhanced cooperation between all relevant actors (young people, youth and voluntary organisations, public authorities, private economic sector, etc...) on the promotion of voluntary activities, by exchanging information, experience and good practice.
- Analyse more carefully the phenomena that lead to the exclusion of certain groups of young people from voluntary activities and develop approaches focused on encouraging them to participate in voluntary activities, also by creating possibilities of voluntary activities at the appropriate levels that correspond to the needs of these groups.

At European level

- Launch appropriate information actions with a view to promoting voluntary activities of young people as well as the values of voluntarism.

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<sup>14</sup> See point 1.3.

#### **2.4. Objective 4 - Recognise voluntary activities of young people with a view to acknowledging their personal skills and their engagement for society**

Young people who engage in voluntary activities often experience that this engagement is not or not properly recognised. Recognition of the voluntary experience at all levels and by various actors, e.g. public authorities, private business, social partners and civil society should be enhanced. It would acknowledge the young people's voluntary engagement for society, their educational experience gained through non-formal learning, their such acquired social, personal competencies and professional skills. Recognition would also enhance their status and employability. In order to achieve objective 4 the following **lines of action** are proposed:

At national, regional and local level

- Develop measures that lead to an enhanced recognition of voluntary activities with a view to acknowledging the young people's voluntary engagement and acquired skills. Recognition should be reinforced at all levels and by various actors, e.g. public authorities, private business, social partners and civil society and young people themselves. The level and format of recognition should be appropriate to the voluntary activities carried out and could take the form of certificates, reward schemes, awards, reduced fees, study and employment incentives, etc...
- Develop actions that lead to an enhanced recognition of voluntary activities with a view to acknowledging the added social value that the voluntary sector offers to society. Recognition could take the form of a National Volunteers Day, a National Volunteers Action Week, awards to groups of volunteers, etc....

At European level

- Enhance the recognition of voluntary activities at occasions as the European Youth Week, the European Volunteer's Day, etc....
- Ensure a better recognition of voluntary experience of young people in the framework of ongoing processes and by existing means in other policy fields, as e.g. the open method of coordination in the education field, the life-long learning strategy, the development of the Europass, the social dialogue, etc...

### **3. IMPLEMENTING AND MONITORING MECHANISMS**

Implementing and monitoring the common objectives is a major element of the open method of coordination set up in the Resolution regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field. This principle was already applied to the priorities participation and information of young people for which the Council adopted a Resolution on common objectives on 25 November 2003. In this Resolution the Council invited the Member States to specify implementing and follow-up measures, in the light of their particular circumstances and national priorities. It also invited them to submit reports on the national contributions to the implementation of the common objectives by the end of 2005.

On the basis of the national reports the Commission will prepare a progress report for submission to the Council and propose, if appropriate, amendments to the common objectives– and inform the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions thereof. Pursuant to an invitation by the Council the Commission will also convene, when appropriate, representatives of the national administrations dealing with youth, in order to promote the exchange of information on the progress made and on best practice.

It is suggested to apply the same principles to the common objectives on voluntary activities. In consequence the Commission proposes that Member States agree to achieve all the common objectives approved and submit reports on the national contributions to the implementation of the common objectives on voluntary activities by the end of 2006, after consulting young people and their associations, young volunteers and volunteer organisations, as well as, if appropriate, national and regional youth councils via the channels they consider appropriate.

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