

English edition

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EN

II

(Preparatory Acts)

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the 'Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions report requested by Stockholm European Council: "Increasing labour force participation and promoting active ageing"'

(2002/C 287/01)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, requested by the Stockholm European Council: 'Increasing labour force participation and promoting active ageing', COM(2002) 9 final;

having regard to the decision taken by the European Commission on 24 January 2002 to consult the Committee under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

having regard to its Bureau's decision of 6 February 2002 to instruct the Commission for Economic and Social Policy to prepare the Committee's work on this subject;

having regard to the Commission communication on the future of health care and care for the elderly: guaranteeing accessibility, quality and financial viability, COM(2001) 723 final;

having regard to the Commission communication: Supporting national strategies for safe and sustainable pensions through an integrated approach, COM(2001) 362 final;

having regard to the Committee of the Regions' opinion on the EU economy: 2000 review, (CdR 469/2000 fin)⁽¹⁾;

having regard to the Committee of the Regions' opinion on 1999 — International Year for Older People, (CdR 442/98 fin)⁽²⁾;

having regard to the Committee of the Regions' opinion on the demographic situation in the European Union, (CdR 388/97 fin)⁽³⁾;

having regard to the conclusions of the European Council meeting at the Barcelona Summit, 15 and 16 March 2002;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 253, 12.9.2001, p. 29.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 374, 23.12.1999, p. 36.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 251, 10.8.1998, p. 14.

having regard to the final declaration of the United Nation's Second World Assembly on ageing, in Madrid, Spain on 8-12 April 2002 and the consequent plan of action;

having regard to the Draft Opinion CdR 94/2002 rev of the Commission for Economic and Social Policy, adopted on 17 April 2002 (rapporteur: Mr van Nistelrooij — NL-EPP, Member of the Noord-Brabant Provincial Executive),

adopted unanimously the following opinion at its 45th plenary session on 3 and 4 July 2002 (meeting of 3 July).

1. Views of the Committee of the Regions

1.1. The Committee considers the European Commission's report to be highly significant, not only because it focuses political attention on the ageing issue in the European Union and its social and socio-economic impact but also because it underlines the necessity of including an additional policy on the European agenda.

1.2. Increasing the labour force participation of older people is an essential element in tackling the ageing issue. Given the major impact of ageing on the labour market because of the low activity rates of older workers, the Committee endorses the target set by the Stockholm European Council to increase the average EU employment rate among older women and men (55-64) to 50 % by 2010.

1.3. The Committee feels that if this ambitious target is to be attainable, short-term action is essential. The policy priorities set out in the report are an important starting point. The Committee considers it vital that, when implementing the policy proposals, greater account is taken of demographic developments in regions and local authority areas than has been the case so far.

1.4. Member States must transpose the European Council's target figure into the national action plans which they draw up under European employment policy. Given the important role played by regional and local authorities in labour-market policy in general, and in fostering the labour force participation of older people in particular, these annual reports must include 'decentralised' labour-market developments. The Committee feels that this consideration must also be borne in mind in the 2003 assessment of the European employment strategy.

1.5. Clearly, the choice of tools used to meet the target is contingent on national, regional and local circumstances. That

said, however, the Committee thinks that, to be successful, any action taken must be part of a comprehensive, balanced strategy. The Committee considers it desirable to pursue an integrated approach, not only in view of the close correlation between the labour market and social security and pensions, but also in order to strike a good balance between financial and social targets.

1.6. A comprehensive approach means that, in addition to measures designed to increase the labour-force participation of older people, other issues connected with ageing also have to be broadly addressed. These include pensions and health care. Both these sectors must adapt to the rapid growth in the number of people aged 65 and over. This category will be made up of two groups: (i) very old, dependent people with major care and nursing needs and (ii) active, healthy pensioners. Higher life expectancy also means that people are pensioners for longer. The existence of more pensioners — who are drawing their pensions for longer — makes a review of current pension systems essential.

1.7. The Lisbon European Council considered that adapting pension and health-care systems, and systems for care of the elderly, was one way of cushioning — as far as possible — the impact of an ageing society. As well as increasing labour-force participation, the Council also mentioned debt reduction. All the Committee would say on that subject in this opinion is that Member States have the potential for further public debt reduction, thus giving their budgets greater scope to meet increased ageing-related spending.

2. Committee of the Regions' recommendations

2.1. *Labour-force participation: a broader context*

2.1.1. The Committee endorses the overall thrust of the priority policy initiatives set out in the European Commission report. It notes, however, that the Commission report sees the

whole issue very much in economic terms, in particular by laying stress on the need for older workers to have access to, and take part in, the labour market, since, after all, a job in older age can help boost personal well-being. The Committee would point out, however, that older people's well-being may also be determined by non-economic activities and making an important contribution to the 'social economy'. For instance, many older people perform voluntary work in their spare time and provide informal care. The Committee recommends that better recognition be given to the unpaid work done by older people.

2.1.2. The Commission report touches briefly on the status within the labour market of people with a disability. The Commission rightly notes that the vast majority of people with a disability are sidelined, yet it fails to submit any proposals to alleviate their social exclusion. The Committee considers it vital that the social inclusion of people with a disability should be high on the European, national, regional and local political agenda. In policy terms, the starting point must be (i) that people with a disability should have equal access to the labour market and should enjoy job security, (ii) that the guiding principle should be the United Nations' standard rules on the subject, and (iii) the numerous positive examples of integrating people with a disability — even serious disabilities — into the labour market, through national policies and especially through local programmes, taking into due account the results and experiences of projects financed by past and present Community programmes and initiatives whilst at the same time guaranteeing the involvement, in relevant decision-making processes, of civil society bodies (NGOs, trade unions, voluntary organisations, social services) representing the interests of people with a disability.

Likewise, particular emphasis should be placed on ensuring that people with disabilities are able to remain in employment on a more long-term basis throughout their lives, and action should be taken to encourage this.

2.1.3. The Committee backs European Commission efforts to improve the status of women on the labour market. Although responsibility for increasing the labour-force participation of (older) women lies in the first place with local and regional authorities and with national governments, the European Union can play a key role, especially in promoting new insights into the issue and fostering the exchange of good practices. As local employers, local and regional authorities can apply these practices in a variety of ways within their own organisations in order to increase labour-force participation, particularly among older women.

2.1.4. The Committee regrets that the European Commission report fails to specifically address the relationship between older workers and ICT. It calls for a policy to deal with this problem, because access to the labour market — and people's ability to keep their jobs — are increasingly dependent on information and communication-technology skills. The fact that older workers often do not possess these skills substantially reduces their chances of working in ICT-sensitive sectors.

2.1.5. The CoR also draws attention to population ageing in rural areas, which results from urbanisation: young people moving away from rural areas to cities. This leads to a quick increase in the average age of the population in several rural areas and calls for specific attention and action. Similar phenomena can be identified in other outlying regions, be they mountain regions, island regions or those suffering industrial decline on the outskirts of large cities. At the same time, considering the rising trend amongst young families to leave city centres in favour of renting, buying or building their homes in residential areas, there is an urgent need to draw attention to the opposite phenomenon, whereby the centres of large cities are mainly populated by older people often living alone.

2.2. *Lifelong learning*

2.2.1. The Committee shares the Commission's view that a policy geared specifically towards older people is, in reality, limited and outdated. The Committee strongly advocates promoting the participation of older people in the labour force by spreading education, training and workload more evenly across a person's career. The aim must be a less rigid distribution of work, learning and leisure throughout life.

2.2.2. A key condition for achieving this aim is a fundamental change in the attitudes and behaviour of employers and workers alike. Changes in cultural and psychosocial factors must, among other things, lead to companies developing incentives as part of human resources management so that people have an interest in working longer and invest more in timely efforts to improve their own knowledge and skills. As well as an age-sensitive staffing policy, this also requires that people be discouraged from taking up early retirement by introducing flexible pension rules and adapting the social security, labour and education systems.

2.3. Pensions

2.3.1. The European Commission feels that it is essential to support national strategies for safe and sustainable pensions. The mutually reinforcing policymaking areas that have an impact on pension sustainability (employment, social and economic policy) must be coordinated and integrated. To this end, the European Commission proposes applying the open coordination method.

2.3.2. The Committee feels that, in the coming year, it is important to examine the relationship between labour-force participation and older people and the implications for pension systems. It is important to consider the effects of pensions on government-budget balances in different countries. Pension-funding levels are low in many countries, and the future financing of pensions could become a problem if the pension-funding issue is not tackled right away. Crucial here is the goal of postponing retirement combined with a successful increase of labour participation. Making pension schemes more flexible, including integrated public/private systems, makes it possible for people to carry on working even after retirement age.

2.4. Health care

2.4.1. On the subject of health care, the CoR takes the view that in future, too, solidarity must continue to be the principle which underlies health-care systems. Member States' health-care systems differ from each other. What is imperative is that high quality health-care services be available to everyone at a reasonable cost. National approaches must be respected and differences in starting points taken into account. Besides placing emphasis on the goals of accessibility, quality, and affordability, as already expressed by the European Commission⁽¹⁾, attention should also be given to the aspect of freedom of choice.

2.4.2. The CoR recognises that one of the factors determining the quality of health care is the way in which it is able to respond to the preferences of users. Policy must not be based on the health-care services available. Demand-driven services are helping older people, too, to have freedom of choice.

⁽¹⁾ The Commission communication on the future of health care and care for the elderly: guaranteeing accessibility, quality and financial viability, COM(2001) 723 final.

2.5. Migration

2.5.1. Worker mobility in the EU can make an important contribution to achieving the strategic goal set at the Lisbon European Council of making the EU into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. Freedom of movement for workers in the European market can be promoted by a large number of measures, such as the recognition of training and diplomas, the removal of socio-economic differences which hinder migration, and the like.

2.5.2. The CoR does, however, believe that migration does not provide a lasting solution to the problem of the ageing population. Account must, though, be taken of the fact that labour shortages will encourage more worker-migration in future. A flood of workers may well migrate from the candidate states, in particular, to the present EU Member States. Given, inter alia, the demographic change which is likely to take place in these states, this may have a major impact on economic and social development in the candidate states. In the CoR's view, measures should be taken in these states to prevent a brain drain to the present EU Member States. In this context, too, regions can play a key role by making use of the 'learning regions' concept. Ongoing dialogues can be established with regions in the candidate states to exchange knowledge and information on regional labour-market policy in general and how to increase older people's participation in the labour force, in particular.

2.6. Partnership

2.6.1. Regional and local authorities are ultimately responsible for developing and implementing a broad approach which promotes the participation of older people in the labour force. The CoR shares the European Commission's view that such an approach will prove successful only if there is close cooperation with the social partners and other relevant organisations in society, such as educational establishments. The positive experience gained by the Province of North Brabant in the Netherlands, together with dozens of other regions, in implementing the EU territorial employment pacts confirms the usefulness of such forms of cooperation. The territorial employment pacts provide for close cooperation with local authorities and the social partners in the field of labour-market policy. The CoR therefore urges that formal ratification be given to these forms of cooperation.

2.6.2. On such an important issue as the ageing population, the public must also play a vital role. Policies for cushioning the effects of an ageing population have no chance of success if they fail to show an understanding of the knowledge possessed by older people and their wishes. Thus, senior citizens should take an active part in decision-making. There is a clear economic necessity to take the elderly seriously: an aged society has significant consequences for the age distribution within the labour force, the future affordability of social security systems and the financing of care and services. However there is also a social necessity. The elderly themselves are more and more often the ones who stand up for their own interests and rights, being more emancipated than elderly generations before them and wanting to continue taking an active part in society.

2.7. *Learning regions*

2.7.1. Schemes under which regional and local authorities can learn from each others' experience ('learning regions') are, in the CoR's view, very valuable. The CoR calls upon the European Commission to take measures to establish networks between regions and local authorities which would enable data and examples of good practice in increasing older people's participation in the labour force to be exchanged between regional and local administrations where the demographic trends are comparable.

2.7.2. The CoR considers that the wealth of practical experience acquired in the different regions and sectors and (policy) performance comparisons provide a vital basis for establishing a strategy for increasing labour-force participation at regional and local level. The problem is that there is no clear overview of the measures which have been and are being taken at regional and local level. The CoR therefore reiterates the proposal it put forward in its opinion on 1999 — International Year for Older People — that a vademecum of good practice be drawn up setting out the experience gained by local and regional authorities with regard to the occupation of older people.

2.7.3. The CoR would at the very least propose that there should be an EU conference on local and regional perspectives and practices on facing the challenge of an ageing population, and is prepared to cooperate with the Commission and other relevant partners (such as NGOs) on this exercise. In the CoR's view, it is important that the proposed conference discusses demographic trends at regional level, which may, moreover, differ considerably from region to region. In this respect the improvement of statistical information, especially in the accession countries has to be discussed. Reliable information does, after all, help to determine the choice of instruments, such as peer review or benchmarking, for tackling the challenge of the ageing population.

Brussels, 3 July 2002.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Albert BORE

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the 'European Commission White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth'

(2002/C 287/02)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the European Commission White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth (COM(2001) 681 final);

having regard to the European Commission Decision of 22 November 2001 to consult it under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

having regard to the Decision taken by its Bureau on 6 February 2002 to instruct Commission — Culture and Education — to draw up an Opinion on this subject;

having regard to Article 149 of the EC Treaty;

having regard to Decision No 1031/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2000 establishing the 'Youth' Community Action Programme;

having regard to the Council Resolution of 8 February 1999 on youth participation;

having regard to the European Parliament Resolution of 9 March 1999 on a youth policy for Europe;

having regard to the Council Resolution of 14 December 2000 on the social inclusion of young people;

having regard to the Council Resolution of 28 June 2001 on promoting young people's initiative, enterprise and creativity: from exclusion to empowerment;

having regard to the Council Resolution of 29 November 2001 on the added value of voluntary work for young people in the context of the development of Community action on youth;

having regard to the Council Resolution approved on 30 May 2002 on European Cooperation in the Field of Youth;

having regard to the CoR Opinion on the Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth Programmes (CdR 226/98 fin) ⁽¹⁾;

having regard to the CoR Opinion on the European voluntary service for young people — action programme (CdR 191/96 fin) ⁽²⁾;

having regard to the CoR Opinion on the Daphne Programme (CdR 300/98 fin) ⁽³⁾;

having regard to the CoR Opinion on Local and regional cooperation to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect in the European Union (CdR 225/1999 fin) ⁽⁴⁾;

having regard to the Draft Opinion (CdR 389/2001 rev. 2) adopted by Commission — Culture and Education — on 23 May 2002 (rapporteurs: Mr Yannick Bodin, (F-PES) Vice-President of the Île-de-France Regional Council; Mr Lars Nordstrom, (S-ELDR) Regional Councillor, Västra Götalandsregion;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 51, 22.2.1999, p. 77.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 42, 10.2.1997, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 198, 14.7.1999, p. 61.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 57, 29.2.2000, p. 46.

whereas young people and the up-and-coming generation are of key importance to regional and local bodies;

whereas regional and local authorities play a major role in European youth policy since they are the first to come into contact with young people and their needs and it is at this level that young people gain their first experiences of organisational and political activity;

whereas the Commission has no competence for youth policy but, under EC Treaty Article 149, has a certain responsibility for promoting exchanges between young people and youth leaders;

whereas new measures are needed to take greater heed of young people's aspirations regarding European cooperation and to enable them to play a fully committed role at local, regional and national level;

whereas the open method of cooperation can contribute to a more dynamic youth policy which respects national, regional and local remits while creating new forms of European cooperation;

whereas it is important for youth aspects to be integrated into other areas of policy since the EU can assist indirectly in giving young people a good start in life and improving their chances of general well-being and personal capacity to succeed in life,

adopted the following opinion at its 45th plenary session on 3 and 4 July 2002 (meeting of 3 July).

The Committee of the Regions' views and recommendations

1.1. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the Commission's initiative in publishing the White Paper on 'A new impetus for European Youth'⁽¹⁾ and the extensive public consultation which preceded its presentation to the Council on 29 November 2001. This consultation is a good example of the way in which a wide range of ordinary people and recognised experts can be involved in the Commission's work and is completely in the spirit of the recommendations made in the White Paper on European Governance.

1.2. The Committee of the Regions shares the Commission's outlook on the challenges and problems facing European youth today and believes that new actions are needed to address more effectively the wishes of young people, particularly with respect to European cooperation, and to enable them to become fully involved at local, regional and national level. The White Paper on 'A new impetus for European Youth' concerns young people from 15-25 years. For decentralised authorities, however, a link should be established with policies targeting a younger age group (from 6-15 years) with a view to coordination with future preventive measures.

1.3. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the Council's support to the future work in the field of youth and in

particular the focus given to promoting youth participation at local and regional level as expressed in the Council resolution on European Cooperation in the Field of Youth approved on 30 May 2002 and the conclusions of the meeting thereof.

The open method of coordination

1.4. The Committee of the Regions feels that it is not enough for the Commission to note that 'the population of the EU is ageing'. It is also important for the Member States' governments to encourage positive demographic patterns through pursuing a dynamic pro-family policy. In particular, regional and local authorities must earmark resources for families with children and young people in different age groups and from different ethnic backgrounds.

1.5. EU youth initiatives have in the past been restricted by necessity to specific exchange programmes and contacts owing to the lack of a common policy for young people and of a legal basis for drawing up a Community policy for secondary and university education. The CoR shares the Commission's view that these programmes should be developed further and even more important, backed up by new measures, so that young Europeans can participate fully in cooperation in Europe.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2001) 681 final.

1.6. The CoR welcomes the Commission's proposal to apply the open method of coordination in relation to young people and also to take greater account of them in other policies. In particular the involvement of young people in the open method of coordination should not be restricted to consultation on the 'priority themes' but should involve all stages of the process. The Committee would point out, however, that no grounds for new European competences may be derived from any agreement between the Member States on guidelines and/or objectives — including the regular monitoring and evaluation thereof.

1.7. The CoR asks that the involvement of local and regional authorities in the open method of coordination be clearly recognised and respected. This new method must not in any way be used at the expense of local and regional authorities, but rather in close and active consultation with them. The principles of subsidiarity, proximity and proportionality should be respected in all new EU youth initiatives.

1.8. The CoR therefore asks to be consulted and not just informed on the common objectives that will be drafted for each of the four thematic priorities (participation, information, voluntary activities among young people and greater understanding and knowledge of youth) and presented to the Council. Furthermore the CoR calls on the Member States to consult local and regional authorities when preparing the questionnaires that will be the basis of the common objectives.

Young people's aspirations

1.9. The CoR would point out that young people must be considered as a heterogeneous social group, as their circumstances differ widely, regardless of their age group.

1.10. The Committee of the Regions believes that it should be made clear that Europe's young people do not speak with one voice, but that they are diverse. European youth policies must leave room for a wide range of viewpoints. It is therefore good that young people who do not belong to organised clubs or associations are also able to take part in the consultation exercises which the Commission is planning. The CoR considers that the European Youth Forum already meets the requirements of representativeness, diversity and transparency.

1.11. Whilst aware of the difficulties involved, the Committee of the Regions regrets that the consultation did not include disadvantaged young people from problem areas or more of their representatives.

1.12. The CoR recognizes that certain problems, needs and aspirations are typical of young people, as they make the transition from family to working life. Many of them want more independence, not only financially but also as regards access to certain rights such as housing, information, training, stable employment, healthcare and transport. Developing the autonomy of young people must be broadened beyond economic criteria to include their ability to make decisions in a wide range of areas. The CoR considers that promoting autonomy should be about empowering young people;

1.13. The Committee of the Regions shares the Commission's view of the need to factor young people's aspirations into national and EU public policy and notes with interest the Commission's express intention to improve understanding at European level of youth as a subject to be studied by networking existing structures and research.

Helping the most disadvantaged young people

1.14. The CoR believes that the specific needs and aspirations of young women must be taken into account. Young women are all too often victims of physical, verbal and a variety of other forms of abuse, and discriminated against both at school and in the workplace. The Committee of the Regions asks that European youth policies place a particular, practical emphasis on the situation of young women with a view to reinforcing specific programmes.

1.15. Similarly, the CoR stresses the need for action to assist categories of young people with specific needs. This is the case for the various immigrant groups (especially young women) who often have to deal with difficult personal situations and therefore must be able to benefit from special measures.

1.16. The same applies to disabled young people whose special needs must be accommodated in European strategies on social integration.

1.17. Lastly, the situation in the applicant countries requires specific attention and measures. Young people from these countries should be able to participate in European cooperation and the debate on the future of Europe at an early stage, in order to foster their integration.

Encouraging citizenship

1.18. The CoR notes with concern that diminishing numbers of young people are taking part in traditional political and social activities. The CoR considers that, in particular, the influence and place of young people in public life should be bolstered to restore their confidence in traditional political activity. The pilot projects proposed in the White Paper to promote participation at local, regional and national level offer a useful forum in which to develop new initiatives. At the same time, national, regional and local competences should be strictly respected when youth policy is mapped out and formulated.

1.19. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the Commission's recognition of the key importance of the regional and local dimension in youth policy. It is at local and regional level that government is in direct contact with young people and their needs, and where successful initiatives have already been implemented. Best practices should be studied and disseminated at European level to encourage exchange of experiences and effective cooperation in public policies on youth. Local and regional authorities have therefore a central role to play both in devising and applying European youth policies.

1.20. The CoR considers that the EU, the Member States and local and regional authorities should do still more to encourage young people to be active citizens, particularly by creating the conditions in which clubs and associations can flourish and by ensuring that young people have access to and participate in political life. The CoR awaits the work and contributions of the Youth Convention on the Future of the Union with keen interest.

1.21. The CoR shares the Commission's view that it is locally, at grass-roots level, that young people acquire active citizenship. The Youth programme's pilot projects should be made operational rapidly so as to develop participation at local and regional level and disseminate best practice on active citizenship for young people.

1.22. The CoR shares the Commission's positive outlook that, in addition to strengthening representative democracy, it is also important to develop participatory democracy in order to create an open, integrated society in which all may participate. Tomorrow's Europe must be an open society: tolerant and in touch with everybody's concerns. The purpose of promoting participatory democracy is to reduce the distance between citizens and the institutions of the Union.

1.23. Mindful that democracy has a price, the CoR considers that all public authorities should step up their support for youth movements, particularly on issues such as respect for democratic institutions, systems and values. All forms of racism, anti-semitism and xenophobia must be tackled. The CoR welcomes the proposal included in the Youth programme to set up an Internet platform designed for young people, and if possible run by young people, to combat these evils. The rise in extremism in an increasing number of Member States of the Union makes it all the more imperative to promote democratic values and tolerance, which are the basis for European cooperation and which are a prerequisite for all European public policy in relation to youth.

Lifelong learning and employment

1.24. The CoR shares the Commission's positive opinion of lifelong learning. Its principles should also be included in school curricula. It requires more precise quality standards and an assessment of skills acquired so that all the benefits of non-formal educational methods can be fully recognised and used in the interests of young people seeking employment or wishing to improve their occupational status.

1.25. The Committee also notes that in order to increase European awareness, basic and higher education curricula need to include specific references to the founding and development of the European Union.

1.26. The CoR encourages local and regional authorities to take immediate steps to recognise experience gained by young people in voluntary work and the European voluntary service programme.

1.27. The CoR would stress the decisive role of employment in any active youth policy. The specific needs of young people must be given clear consideration when national action plans for employment are drawn up. The CoR also considers that action could be taken within the Member States to ensure that discrimination against young people in minimum wages legislation is addressed where such legislation exists.

The Youth programme

1.28. The CoR notes with interest that the European voluntary service programme is still an important instrument for European cooperation and the exchange of experience. It is essential that information about the Youth programme also reach young people who are not involved in conventional European youth cooperation. It is also important to ensure

that local and regional players are also able to derive full benefit from this programme.

1.29. The CoR notes with interest that the European voluntary service programme is to become permanent. The Commission and the national governments must ensure that the free movement of young people participating in the programme is not restricted and that flexible systems are set up for the social and legal status of occasional unpaid voluntary work in Europe.

1.30. The local and regional players must, of course, be represented in the dialogue planned with young Europeans. The future of European integration depends on the involvement and commitment by young people to the European project and the values which underpin it. The consultation should therefore be organised around the five principles underpinning the White Paper on European Governance: openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence.

Brussels, 3 July 2002.

*The President
of the Committee of the Regions*
Albert BORE

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on:

- the ‘**Communication from the Commission: “Adapting to Change in Work and Society: a new Community Strategy on Health and Safety at Work 2002-2006”**’, and
- the ‘**Proposal for a Council Recommendation concerning the application of legislation governing health and safety at work to self-employed workers**’

(2002/C 287/03)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the Communication from the Commission: ‘Adapting to change in work and society: a new Community strategy on health and safety at work 2002-2006’ (COM(2002) 118 final) and the Proposal for a Council Recommendation concerning the application of legislation governing health and safety at work to self-employed workers [COM(2002) 166 final — 2002/0079 (CNS)];

having regard to the decision taken by the European Commission on 3 January 2002 to consult the Committee under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

having regard to its Bureau’s decision of 6 February 2002 to instruct the Commission for Economic and Social Policy to prepare the Committee’s work on this subject;

having regard to its opinion on the ‘Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision on a programme of Community action on health promotion, information, education and training within the framework for action in the field of public health’ (CdR 246/94) ⁽¹⁾;

having regard to its opinion on the ‘White Paper on European Social Policy: A way forward for the Union’ (CdR 243/94) ⁽²⁾;

having regard to its opinion on the Communication on the Medium-term Social Action Programme 1995-97 (CdR 297/95) ⁽³⁾;

having regard to its opinion on the ‘Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision adopting a Programme of Community Action on Injury Prevention in the context of the framework for action in the field of public health’ (CdR 456/96 fin) ⁽⁴⁾;

having regard to its opinion on the ‘Communication from the Commission on the Social Action Programme 1998-2000’ (CdR 277/98 fin) ⁽⁵⁾;

having regard to its opinion on the Principle of subsidiarity ‘Developing a genuine culture of subsidiarity. An appeal by the Committee of the Regions’ (CdR 302/98 fin) ⁽⁶⁾;

having regard to its opinion on the Commission Communication ‘Promoting Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness’ — The Commission’s response to the BEST Task Force Report (CdR 387/1999 fin) ⁽⁷⁾;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 210, 14.8.1995, p. 81.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 210, 14.8.1995, p. 67.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 100, 2.4.1996, p. 91.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 19, 21.1.1998, p. 1.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 93, 6.4.1999, p. 56.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 198, 14.7.1999, p. 73.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ C 293, 13.10.1999, p. 48.

having regard to its opinion on the 'Competitiveness of European enterprises in the face of globalisation — How it can be encouraged' (CdR 134/1999 fin) ⁽¹⁾;

having regard to its opinion on the Communication 'Social Policy Agenda' (CdR 300/2000 fin) ⁽²⁾;

having regard to its opinion on the Communication from the Commission 'Employment and social policies: a framework for investing in quality' (CdR 270/2001 fin) ⁽³⁾;

having regard to its opinion on the 'Green Paper on Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility' (CdR 345/2001 fin) ⁽⁴⁾;

having regard to the draft opinion CdR 168/2002 rev. of the Commission for Economic and Social Policy, adopted on 11 June 2002 (rapporteur: Mr Boden — UK-PES, Leader of the North West Regional Assembly);

whereas the communication emphasises the consolidation and improvement of existing legislation, rather than the development of new regulations at this time,

adopted the following opinion unanimously at its 45th plenary session on 3 and 4 July 2002 (meeting of 3 July).

Views and recommendations of the Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the Regions

1. Welcomes the European Commission's wide-ranging approach to drawing up a strategy and in particular its espousal of the International Labour Organisation's aim of promoting well-being at work — physical, moral and social — within a broad societal context and its recognition that truly sustainable competitiveness rests upon the achievement of this aim. However, in the CoR's view, the employer does not bear sole responsibility for fostering well-being at work.

2. In this context the CoR welcomes the Proposal for a Council Recommendation which attempts to ensure that legislation governing health and safety at work to self-employed workers is applied and extended throughout the Union. The CoR agrees that self-employed workers, whose work is not subject to any employment relationship with an employer or, more generally, who are not bound by any link or contract of employment to a third party, are generally subject to the same health and safety risks as are employees, and therefore should have the same rights.

3. Considers that, in general terms, ever-increasing workloads lead to stress as a potential outcome; similarly, the emergence of new workplace risks will also present both real and perceived risks to health and safety. The CoR therefore

recommends support and encouragement for employers, together with their partners, to participate in broader research activities to determine causal and remedial effects for both new accident and ill-health risks. In addition more research is required on gender issues, and on other societal groups, especially in relation to occupational illness.

4. Recommends that the strategy should include a requirement for employers to avail themselves to competent occupational safety and health advice, not least with a view to adopting effective health and safety management systems.

5. Considers it necessary that workforces be made competent and properly trained to safely conduct the work that they are required to undertake.

6. Considers that the terminology 'Risk Prevention' is too closely linked to the insurance industry notion of 'insured risks', which is managed through indemnification, by the payment of insurance premiums. Internationally, the phrases 'accident prevention' and 'ill-health prevention' are more appropriately used in the present context.

7. Considers it essential for the new strategy to address the need for interplay and reconciliation of work activities with other spheres of life, for women and men, thereby recognising the benefits of achieving a balance between the two.

8. Feels that two aspects are not sufficiently highlighted in the communication:

— workers must be trained and informed, but they also have an own responsibility to comply strictly with safety rules

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 57, 29.2.2000, p. 23.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 144, 16.5.2001, p. 55.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 107, 3.5.2002, p. 98.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 192, 12.8.2002, p. 1.

— since non-work related illnesses and accidents can lead to absence from work, the communication should include more proposals for measures to promote a healthy life style and risk avoidance.

9. Expresses its concern at the absence in the communication of any specific reference to local and regional authorities, which it considers to have a pivotal role in developing and implementing the strategy, particularly in regard to SMEs, by virtue of their function — in partnership with national agencies and local and regional representatives of employers and workers — in monitoring, developing and enforcing the provisions of the Communication, and because they are very significant employers in their own right.

10. Considers therefore that the role of local and regional authorities in implementing, promoting, monitoring and enforcing health and safety at work should be recognised and supported, particularly in relation to SMEs in view of the latter's increasing importance in the EU economy and their evident need for assistance to improve their performance on health and safety at work.

11. Expresses its concern at the absence of any specific reference to the role that trade unions and workers' representatives can play in health and safety at work. They, more than anyone, have direct personal and collective experience of the ill effects arising from health and safety risks which are actually encountered by workers.

12. Calls therefore for the omission of the role of trade unions and workers' representatives to be rectified and their

participation in health and safety at work partnerships to be facilitated.

13. Whilst generally welcoming the partnership approach to health and safety at work, believes it to be essential that the regulatory framework gives the strategy the 'teeth' to ensure the co-operation of those who do not accept the partnership concept.

14. Considers that the need for adequate resources to develop and implement the strategy at EU, national, regional and local levels should be recognised and that targets be set for reducing occupational accidents, injury- and sickness-related absence and health and safety problems. The CoR advocates that provision be made for Structural Fund support. However, it has its doubts regarding the proposal that the EU's employment policy be used as a driving force for working environment strategy, and in particular as regards stress at work.

15. Calls therefore on the Commission to work with the appropriate authorities and social partners in the Member States to harmonise, simplify and strengthen the regulatory and enforcement framework to give backing where necessary to the partnership approach to health and safety at work.

16. Recommends that there should be recognition of bodies such as the European Network of Safety and Health Practitioner Organisations (ENSHPO) which aim to promote sharing of good practice across Europe and to establish agreed levels of competence for pan-European practitioners.

Brussels, 3 July 2002.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Albert BORE
