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Follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth: evaluation of activities conducted in the framework of European cooperation in the youth field

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union has been developing programmes for young people since the late 1980s, but not until the Commission published its White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth¹ in November 2001 did the development of policy cooperation in this field really start. The cooperation process launched by the White Paper and, in particular, the implementation of an open method of coordination in this field have broadened and deepened the discussion of youth issues at European and national level, as well as at the level of those principally concerned, young people themselves.

The dynamic launched by this White Paper obtained more concrete form with the adoption by the European Council in June 2004 of the Constitutional Treaty for the European Union which provides for the development of the legal basis in the youth field.

The prospect of reinforcing its policies and activities to promote active citizenship, in particular among young Europeans, is also taken up in the Commission's proposals for a new financial framework from 2007 onwards². It will be for the Council and the newly elected European Parliament to consolidate and develop these guidelines, and for the new Commission to implement them, specifically in the context of the future YOUTH IN ACTION programme³.

In the context of the launch of a new cycle in youth policy, the Commission takes the view that it would be useful and opportune to take stock of the progress made since publication of the White Paper, in terms of the mandate expressly conferred upon it by the Council and the undertakings made with regard to all those involved in this process, in particular young people.

This document is therefore a response to the Council's request in its Resolution of June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field⁴. In this Resolution, the Council called on the Commission to draw up an evaluation report on the cooperation framework including an evaluation of the open method of coordination and, as appropriate, suggestions for its modification. The provisional timeframe was for this report to be examined by the Council in 2004.

2. EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN THE YOUTH FIELD

2.1. The process

The White Paper identified the main challenges for youth policy in a European socio-demographic context characterised by a growing disequilibrium between the young and the not so young and changing living conditions for young people, at a time

¹ COM(2001) 681 final of 21.11.2001

² COM(2004) 101 final of 10.2.2004

³ COM (2004) 471 of 14.7.2004

⁴ OJ C 168 of 13.7.2002

when the European Union is enlarging as never before and against the backdrop of increasing globalisation.

It was based on a very broad consultation among young people, reflecting the determination to bring citizens closer to the decisions affecting them, thus contributing to bringing political institutions closer to the public.

The White Paper announced a new ambition for youth and proposed a new cooperation framework for the EU in this field that was both ambitious, reflecting young people's aspirations, and realistic, setting priorities and being mindful of the various levels of responsibility.

The European Parliament⁵ supported the proposals in the White Paper and its implementation. The same applies to the European Economic and Social Committee⁶ and the Committee of the Regions⁷.

The White Paper was a turning point in youth policy. The Commission's main findings on youth turned out to be well founded, and the priorities were confirmed by researchers, national authorities and youth organisations.

The White Paper is still an important reference point in the Union and in the other countries of Europe and the wider world. However, the youth field is still evolving, and it will soon be time to look at the priorities to be dealt with over the coming years.

2.2. The framework of European cooperation in the youth field

The framework of European cooperation in the youth field, established by the Council Resolution of June 2002 based on the Commission White Paper, has two complementary strands:

- a) applying the open method of coordination (OMC) to the specific priorities of the youth field;
- b) taking better account of the youth dimension in other policies.

The Resolution establishes the principles of flexibility in the method, non-discrimination and equal opportunities, the involvement of young people and the association of the applicant countries in the cooperation framework.

In the Resolution, the four priorities proposed in the White Paper, i.e. (i) participation, (ii) information, (iii) voluntary activities among young people, (iv) greater understanding and knowledge of youth, are confirmed as priorities of the OMC, and the procedures to be followed which should lead to the adoption of common objectives by the Council and the Member States are laid down. The Resolution also provides mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the objectives.

⁵ Report No A5-0126/2002 of 19.4.2002

⁶ OJ C149 of 21.6.2002

⁷ Opinion 389 of 17.7.2002

The Resolution also states which policies and programmes should, henceforth, include a youth dimension: lifelong learning, mobility, employment and social integration, combating racism and xenophobia. The Commission's intention to convene a working group on the autonomy of young people in society is noted.

3. THE OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION IN THE YOUTH FIELD

3.1. Implementation of the OMC

In accordance with the Resolution, the European Commission sent questionnaires to the Member States and the applicant countries in July 2002 concerning participation and information and, one year later, questionnaires on voluntary activities and greater understanding of youth.

The Commission analysed all the replies, drafted summary reports and drew up draft common objectives accompanied by lines of action.

The Commission organised, at European level, consultations on the questionnaires, summary reports and draft common objectives involving the main parties concerned. The European Youth Forum⁸ was systematically consulted, without excluding other forms of consultation, for example during the conferences with young people (point 5.1). Depending on the theme in question and the opportunities provided, the network of researchers in youth issues and the young people themselves attending the conferences organised by the Presidencies of the Council were also consulted.

The common objectives relating to young people's participation and information were proposed by the Commission in April 2003⁹, and the Council adopted them in a Resolution of November 2003¹⁰.

The proposed common objectives for voluntary activities¹¹ and for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth¹² were adopted by the Commission in April 2004 and should be the subject of resolutions at the Council meeting in November 2004.

The meeting of the Directors-General for Youth, a body for discussion and informal policy consultation, has become particularly important in supporting the implementation of the common objectives adopted by the Council.

Three working groups have started examining 1) participation at local level, 2) information and 3) young people's commitment and the recognition thereof. The aim of these groups is to promote the exchange of good practices in order to support and speed up the implementation of the objectives established. The results will be used

⁸ <http://www.youthforum.org/en/> – The European Youth Forum is an international organisation comprising national youth councils and international youth NGOs representing the interests of young people throughout Europe. It is the only platform in Europe representing youth organisations at international bodies such as the European Union, the Council of Europe and the UN.

⁹ COM(2003) 184 final of 11.04.2003

¹⁰ OJ C 295, 05.12.2003.

¹¹ COM(2004) 337 final of 30.04.2004

¹² COM(2004) 336 final of 30.04.2004

for the implementation of the objectives at national level and the drafting of the reports which the Member States have undertaken to produce by the end of 2005. They will also serve as a basis for the Council's Youth working party and the Ministers themselves to deal with these subjects.

3.2. The fourteen common objectives of the OMC

The Commission proposed fourteen objectives, four of which come under the heading of a greater understanding and knowledge of the youth field and ten target young people directly:

- To create the conditions for young people's active citizenship, three **participation** objectives were adopted by the Council concerning young people's participation in the life of their local community, their participation in the system of representative democracy and learning to participate.
- With regard to young people's **information**, a precondition for participation, the three objectives adopted by the Council relate to access to information, the quality of systems and the greater involvement of young people in the preparation and dissemination of information.
- **Voluntary activities** exist in all the Member States in various forms, and the European Voluntary Service has been enjoying ever more success within the framework of the YOUTH programme. The Commission's objectives are to develop these activities in their diversity, facilitating access to them for even more young people and promoting and better recognising their individual and collective benefit.
- Policy discussion and action must be based on a **greater understanding and knowledge of youth**. The Commission's first two objectives focus on identifying and updating existing knowledge, firstly on priority themes specific to the youth field and in a second stage on other themes of general interest to young people, whilst the next two objectives relate to the quality of the methods and tools, on the one hand, and the promotion of exchanges, dialogue and network creation on the other.

3.3. Evaluation of the OMC

The new framework of European cooperation has become a reality, and the Commission's undertakings have all been fulfilled. The youth field is now a political field where all those involved are mobilised, in dialogue and cooperating with each other.

The choice of a flexible open method of coordination adapted to youth has facilitated the setting up of a coherent plan of action and the establishment of political priorities. These European priorities also constitute a reference point for the establishment of national priorities.

This method of working has mobilised the national administrations and given visibility to activities developed for youth. The speed at which the work plan has been developed has enabled each of the successive Presidencies to make the process

of implementing the objectives coming under the responsibility of the Member States even more dynamic.

The open method of coordination for youth is different from the open methods of coordination in other areas to the extent that:

- the objectives laid down are still qualitative, and there are no plans to quantify them at this stage ('benchmarks');
- the implementation of the objectives, left up to the Member States, is not the subject of national plans of action coordinated at European level.

Without bringing these choices, which have proved to be indispensable for a consensual approach in the implementation of the new cooperation framework, into question, it is important to consider the necessary balance between the method's flexibility and effectiveness.

The implementation of the common objectives by the Member States is crucial for the success of the OMC. Each Member State, depending on its national situation, should draw up a plan of action to achieve the agreed objectives.

Finally, it is essential for young people to be consulted at all levels, European as well as national, and at the various stages of the procedure (answers to questionnaires, drafting and follow-up of the national actions, reports for the Commission, etc.).

4. REINFORCING THE YOUTH DIMENSION IN OTHER POLICIES

Certain policies have a considerable impact on young people's lives, in particular those mentioned as priorities in the White Paper and listed in the Council Resolution of June 2002: lifelong learning, mobility, employment and social integration, combating racism and xenophobia, and autonomy to exercise citizenship. The following actions have been developed at European level:

4.1. Lifelong learning

The Council's Youth working party contributed to the Council Resolution of June 2002¹³ on lifelong learning, which recognises the value of non-formal and informal education in youth activities outside a formal educational framework.

Follow-up was ensured in the form of the implementation of the work programme on the objectives of education and training systems¹⁴ and the Copenhagen Declaration on Enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training¹⁵.

The European Commission has also jointly drafted a working document with the Council of Europe¹⁶, and organised a research seminar on the recognition and validation of education and training in the youth field¹⁷.

¹³ OJ C 163, 09.07.2002.

¹⁴ http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html

¹⁵ http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/copenhagen/index_en.html

4.2. Employment and social integration

The Council's Youth working party contributed to the Employment Committee with a view to taking young people's situation into account in the revision of the European Employment Strategy and its guidelines in 2003.

In May 2004, the Youth Council adopted a Resolution on young people and social inclusion which recommends, in particular, that young people with fewer opportunities be given priority in the open method of coordination relating to combating social exclusion.

4.3. Combatting racism and xenophobia

In May 2004, the Council adopted a Declaration on Racism and Intolerance in relation to Young People¹⁸ which establishes a plan of action up to the end of 2005.

The Commission has stepped up its cooperation with the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia¹⁹ and has supported many projects to combat racism and xenophobia using the YOUTH programme, in particular a European Internet site against racism and xenophobia for young people²⁰.

4.4. Autonomy for young people

In October 2003, the Commission organised a seminar on young people's autonomy for experts on various subjects. This is a complex subject relating to young people's economic independence, their free choice of path in life and their personal development. Young people's autonomy is linked to other policies: education, employment, social protection and financial security. Suggestions for action to be taken were made in May 2004 to the Directors-General for Youth, who approved them.

4.5. Evaluation of the taking into account of the youth dimension in other policies

The various policies recognised as priorities in the White Paper have all been examined closely to ensure that they take into account issues relating to young people.

The initiatives taken are helping to build bridges for the necessary interactions between the various methods, plans of action and programmes.

The results are encouraging, but the first lessons to be drawn are:

¹⁶ http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/Youth/2._Priorities/research_partnership.asp#TopOfPage

¹⁷ <http://www.training-youth.net/>

¹⁸ Declaration of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on Racism and Intolerance in relation to Young People (9405/04 of 28 May 2004).

¹⁹ <http://www.eumc.eu.int/eumc/index.php>

²⁰ <http://www.d-a-s-h.org>

- that you have to better understand the situation of young people with regard to these policies in order to influence them, which is why a greater knowledge and understanding of youth is important;
- that all actors (policymakers, youth organisations) at all levels (local, regional, national and European) have to be mobilised in order to have real impact.

5. OTHER INITIATIVES AND ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN IN THE CONTEXT OF IMPLEMENTING THE WHITE PAPER PRIORITIES

In addition to the activities provided for in the Council Resolution, the Commission undertook to step up the Union's political action in the priority areas identified in the White Paper.

5.1. Participation

The participation of young people is a policy objective and is treated as such in the OMC. It is also one of the principles of good governance at European level. In this context:

- The Commission has organised a direct dialogue with young people and their organisations at each step of the OMC.
- The conferences co-organised with the Council Presidencies on subjects relating to young people's participation and voluntary activities have facilitated the development of regular and structured dialogue between young people, administrations and policymakers.
- The Commission has supported the initiatives to involve young people actively in the discussions surrounding the drafting of the new European Constitution (YOUTH 2002, convention for young people in July 2002).

In the context of new activities for the benefit of young people, the Commission has launched two calls for proposals for pilot projects in favour of youth participation²¹ and their networking.

5.2. Information

The European Youth Week from 29 September to 5 October 2003²² enabled to highlight the political action taken in favour of young people at European level and in the Member States, as well as the results of the YOUTH programme, with a series of events at the European Parliament, the Commission and throughout Europe.

The launch of the European portal on youth²³, in May 2004, was the conclusion of a long-term project to provide accessible, useful and high-quality information for young Europeans, as announced in the White Paper.

²¹ OJ C/140 of 14.6.2003 and OJ C/113 of 30.4.2004

²² http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth/youthweek/index_en.html

²³ <http://europa.eu.int/youth/>

5.3. Voluntary activities

Together with the Italian Presidency, the Commission organised, in November 2003, a conference on civic services in Europe. The conference called for enhanced cooperation between these services at European level²⁴.

5.4. Greater understanding and knowledge of youth

The Commission has published the results of two Eurobarometer surveys, one in 2001 for the Member States of the Union²⁵, the other in 2003 for the then candidate countries²⁶, confirming that young people's interest in Europe is accompanied by a certain mistrust of traditional political institutions.

Researchers working in the youth field were involved in drawing up the White Paper, the proposed common objectives, the conferences organised by the Presidencies and the work of the group on autonomy.

An agreement between the Commission and the Council of Europe has led to progress in the development of a database on youth policies, and the development and enhancement of analyses and data on the OMC priorities.

5.5. New European programme for youth

On 14 July 2004, the Commission proposed a new European programme for youth for the period 2007-2013, entitled YOUTH IN ACTION. This new programme will ensure continuity with the current programme and facilitate the development of new activities in support of the priorities established in the context of policy cooperation, in particular young people's participation, which contributes to their active citizenship, the extension of voluntary activities and support for the studies and research required to gain a better understanding of youth.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The Commission calls on the Council to recognise the results achieved so far in the area of European cooperation in the youth field.

All the undertakings in the Commission White Paper have been fulfilled. A consistent cooperation framework has been created. A widespread mobilisation of young people, youth organisations, public authorities, ministers and European institutions has been achieved.

Yet, already, the Union is facing new challenges in this field. It is important to prevent any loss of the new impetus imparted by the White Paper. Once the new Constitutional Treaty has been ratified, new actions will be needed, given that society in general and youth in particular are evolving so fast.

²⁴ http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth/whitepaper/post-launch/post_en_3.html#voluntary

²⁵ EB 55.1 'Young Europeans in 2001'

²⁶ CCEB 2003.1 'Youth in the New Europe'

For this reason, the Commission would like to draw the Council's attention to the following aspects:

- The priorities of the framework of European cooperation in the youth field, which should guide political action in this area in the coming years (reinforcing existing priorities, new priorities, etc.) must be discussed.
- The balance between the flexibility and effectiveness of the open method of coordination in the youth field must be reassessed.
- The open method of coordination must lead to effective action at Member State level, in particular in order to continue to guarantee young people's support for and commitment to the process.
- Young people should be consulted constantly, in a structured and effective way at both national and European level.

The Commission will communicate its conclusions to the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.