

# European Year of Volunteering 2011

2009/0072(CNS) - 03/06/2009 - Legislative proposal

**PURPOSE:** to designate the year 2011 as the 'European Year of Volunteering'.

**PROPOSED ACT:** Council Decision.

**BACKGROUND:** volunteering is a core expression of civic participation and democracy, putting European values such as solidarity and non-discrimination into action and contributing to the harmonious development of our societies.

However, volunteering is far from having fulfilled its potential. Although 3 out of 10 Europeans actively volunteer, close to 8 out of 10 consider helping others an important part of their life. The gap between actual and potential volunteers is even more significant among young people: although only 16% of young Europeans are engaged in voluntary activities, almost 3 in 4 are in favour of making more programmes encouraging voluntary work available.

Big differences between countries prove both the need for and the potential of mutual learning. Real potential can also be unlocked by increasing the mobility of volunteers in the European Union. Appropriate incentives must be devised for individuals and companies. The right balance should be struck between achieving a higher degree of professionalism and preserving the freedom and flexibility that are such valued characteristics of the sector.

In all Member States there are also real barriers to realising the potential positive impact of volunteering, such as the lack of awareness, information and support systems (training etc.), discouraging legal provisions, limited international exchange schemes and the absence of a legal status.

The European Year of Volunteering 2011 aims to overcome those barriers.

**CONTENT:** this proposal designates 2011 as the 'European Year of Volunteering'. In line with the EU's renewed social agenda, the overall purpose of the European Year will be to encourage and support - notably through exchanging experience and good practices - the efforts made by Member States, local and regional authorities and civil society to create the conditions conducive to volunteering in the EU.

Four objectives are proposed:

- (1) **Work towards an enabling environment for volunteering in the EU** - to anchor volunteering as part of promoting civic participation and people-to-people activities in an EU context;
- (2) **Empower volunteer organisations and improve the quality of volunteering** – to facilitate volunteering and to encourage networking, mobility, cooperation and synergies between volunteer organisations and other sectors in an EU context;
- (3) **Reward and recognise volunteering activities** - to encourage appropriate incentives for individuals, companies and volunteer-development organisations and gain more systematic recognition for volunteering by policy makers, civil society organisations and employers for skills and competences developed through volunteering.
- (4) **Raise awareness about the value and importance of volunteering** - to raise general awareness of the importance of volunteering as an expression of civic participation and an example of people-to-people

activity which contributes to issues which are of common concern of all Member States, such as a harmonious societal development and economic cohesion.

The measures to be taken to achieve the objectives include the following initiatives organised at Community, national, regional or local level, such as: (i) exchange of experience and good practices; (ii) dissemination of results of related studies and research; (iii) conferences, events and initiatives to promote debate and raise awareness of the importance and value of volunteering and to celebrate the efforts of volunteers; (iv) information and promotion campaigns to disseminate key messages. Details of the initiatives, which are eligible for Community funding, are set out in the Annex to the proposal.

The proposal also contains provisions in order to strengthen international cooperation with other relevant international bodies (Council of Europe and United Nations) and to ensure that the measures provided for are consistent with other Community, national and regional schemes and initiatives.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:** the budget for the 2011 European Year will be EUR 6 million. In addition, the Commission has proposed allocating EUR 2 million under the preliminary draft budget for the year 2010 to carry out preparatory work.