

European Year of Volunteering 2011

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the report drawn up by Marco SCURRIA (EPP, IT), approving unanimously, under the consultation procedure, the proposal for a Council decision on the European Year of Volunteering (2011).

The main amendments are as follows:

Designation of the Year: Members consider that, as it stands, the Commission's proposal does not sufficiently stress the need to highlight to the public the importance of volunteering for European society. In the same vein, they consider that it is vital to give greater emphasis to the objective of **making volunteering activities more attractive to citizens**. This is why they have amended the title of the Year so that it now becomes **'European Year of Voluntary Activities promoting active citizenship'**.

Legal base: MEPs stress the fact that volunteering is inextricably linked with the notion of citizenship. In their view, the Treaty establishes a Union citizenship that complements national citizenship of the Member States and which is a vital element for strengthening and safeguarding the European integration process. This is why they insist on the need to reconcile the proposal with the competences devolved to the Union by the Treaties. The report indicates that the Parliament's Legal Service stressed the need to better explain the choice of using Article 308 as the legal base, as is the case of this proposal.

Objectives of the Year: Members have added important details to the Year's objectives. In addition to the exchange of experience and good practices, the Year should also support innovative approaches and create, in civil society, the conditions conducive to volunteering in the Union, as well as **raising the profile of volunteering activities in the Union**. Members stress, in particular, the fact that volunteering is an essential element in **fostering active citizenship, nurturing civil society and strengthening solidarity**.

The other **main objectives** of the Year may be summarised as follows: i) highlight the vital concept of **partnership**, with a view to ongoing cooperation between administrations at all levels and volunteer organizations; ii) promote volunteering and volunteer organisations' **access to adequate, sustainable funding**; iii) encourage initiatives in urgent humanitarian and/or environmental situations; iv) provide for **proper health and safety cover** for volunteers in the form of accident and personal liability insurance during periods of voluntary work; v) facilitate the **validation of experience** acquired by volunteers and the recognition of equivalence for the purposes of training and job seeking; vi) encourage international and European solidarity by promoting peace, North-South cooperation and protection of the environment through volunteering; vii) promote good practices and their disseminations throughout the Union.

According to MEPs, the Year should also be the occasion to encourage Member States to create **legal certainty for volunteers** as regards their legal status. They also insist that European volunteering should contribute to the harmonious development of European societies, promoting social inclusion, combating racism and contributing to intercultural and interreligious dialogue. This is the reason why they ask that volunteering activities should be open to **asylum seekers**.

On the other hand, they stress that volunteering should be used neither as a means of meeting basic needs normally met by social services nor as a substitute for action by the public authorities.

Actions to be undertaken: in addition to the amendments to the Year's objectives, a number of amendments were made to the actions to be undertaken. These include: i) the creation of efficient systems

of cooperation and networking between volunteer organisations; ii) improved dialogue and raising of awareness of the importance and value of volunteering; iii) the **creation of a European portal** on volunteering; iv) the establishment of a **European online database** of the actors, organisations and stakeholders involved in a given volunteering area; v) the promotion of the use of volunteer time as matching funding for European projects. Members also underline the important role played by **vocational training in voluntary activities**. This has a vital role to play in the personal growth and well-being of individuals, bringing an added value to the society.

Role of the national coordinating body: Members consider that each Member States should ensure that the national coordinating body properly involves a wide range of stakeholders at national, regional and local level, particularly when drafting the national work programme and national measure(s), for the entire duration of the European Year. The funds foreseen to fulfil the objectives of the Year shall be granted to civil society organisations involved directly with voluntary activities and work. In this regard, they insist that special attention must be paid in each national programme to the simplification of administrative procedures.

Budget: MEPs consider that the budget for the Year is inadequate to attain its objectives. The amount proposed by the Commission was EUR 6 million. Instead, they call for a budget of **EUR 10 million**, stressing, however, that the change in the allocation should not undermine the funding of other programmes or activities in heading 3b of the current financial framework.

Contributions in kind: co-funding of national actions may amount to a maximum of 80% of total costs, according to the Financial Regulation. However, Members propose that the possibility of in kind calculation should be given to beneficiary organisations in the Member States where the legislative framework allows in order to help them to obtain the grants.

Cooperation with other organisations: in addition to cooperation with the international organisations concerned (United Nations, Council of Europe), MEPs also suggest that there should be cooperation with other international organisations so as to promote programmes for international volunteering aiming to encourage the exchange of best practices on volunteering in third countries.

It should be noted that the annex to the proposal has also been amended in line with the amendments to the main body of the proposal. A series of measures was also added to clarify the activities that are eligible for co-funding in the Member States.