

European Year of Volunteering 2011

2009/0072(CNS) - 26/11/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 551 votes to 19, with 10 abstentions, a legislative resolution amending, 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: Parliament considers that 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 it has amended the title of the Year so that it now becomes '**European Year of Voluntary Activities promoting active citizenship**'.

Reconciliation the proposal with the Treaty in regard to citizenship: Parliament insists on the fact that volunteering is inextricably linked with the notion of citizenship. 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 Parliament stresses the need to reconcile the proposal with the competences devolved to the Union by the Treaties.

Objectives of the Year: Parliament has amended substantially the Year's objectives. Besides 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) encourage international and European solidarity by promoting peace, North-South cooperation, protection of the environment and the social economy through volunteering; vi) promote good practices and their disseminations throughout the Union.

Parliament also emphasises the following points:

- opening of actions to asylum seekers: the Year should also be the occasion to encourage Member States to create legal certainty for volunteers as regards their legal status. Parliament also insists 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 it calls for volunteering activities to be open to asylum seekers, refugees and legally resident immigrants, in particular because they are not eligible for employment. This would help combat discrimination in their regard;
- recognition of the experience acquired by volunteers: Parliament underlines the importance of the role played by vocational training in volunteering activities. It stresses, in particular, the need to ensure the recognition of volunteering as an appropriate activity through which to acquire competences and skills, (e.g. through YOUTHPASS with a linkage to EUROPASS);

- 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. Parliament also underlines 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: Parliament considers 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 small associations of limited means), 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, it insists that special attention must be paid in each national programme to the simplification of administrative procedures.

Budget: Parliament considers that the budget for the Year is inadequate to attain its objectives. The amount proposed by the Commission was EUR 6 million. Instead, Parliament calls for a budget of **EUR 10 million** for the period 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011, 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, Parliament proposes the possibility of in kind contributions, where this is possible, in order to recognise the value of the work of volunteers and to facilitate voluntary organisations in carrying out their activities.

Cooperation with other organisations: in addition to cooperation with the international organisations concerned (United Nations, Council of Europe), Parliament also suggests 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.