Volunteering and voluntary activity in Europe

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PURPOSE: to present a report on the implementation, results and overall achievements of the European Year of Volunteering 2011.

BACKGROUND: following consultation launched by the Commission in 2006, the European Parliament adopted a declaration calling for a European Year of Volunteering 2011. In 2009, the European Parliament and the Council endorsed the Commission's proposal to designate 2011 as the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (EYV2011).

Fully respecting the principle of subsidiarity, the EYV2011 was designed to encourage the efforts undertaken by Member States, regional and local authorities to create better conditions and higher visibility for voluntary activities in the European Union, by pursuing four objectives:

- to work towards an enabling environment for volunteering in the EU in order to anchor volunteering as part of promoting civic participation;
- to empower organisers of voluntary activities to improve the quality of the latter;
- to recognise voluntary activities;
- to raise awareness of the value and importance of volunteering.

In accordance with the Decision establishing the European Year of Volunteering 2011, the Commission presents a report offering an overview of the implementation, results and overall achievements of the European Year, building on the conclusions of an external evaluation.

CONTENT: the report states that the EYV 2011 acted as a catalyst for policy changes both at European and national level. Several initiatives were undertaken in the extension of this Year, and the European Year of Citizens 2013 will build upon the achievements of EYV 2011.

Budget: in 2011, a total budget of EUR 7.7 million supported activities at European level and in the 27 EU Member States. A separate budget of EUR 2 994 million for preparatory actions had been available in 2010 to develop an information and communication campaign for the EYV2011 and to set up the coordination structure bringing together the main stakeholders at European level.

Implementation of the European Year in Member States: in order to organise its participation in the European Year, each Member State designated a National Coordination Body (NCB), the range of which showed the diversity of volunteering traditions in Member States. NCBs were granted a total of EUR 3.549 million to coordinate national EYV2011 activities in line with a national work programme developed by each NCB and approved by the Commission.

The report describes the activities that took place at national, regional and local level, including: (i) awareness-raising activities (communication campaigns, visibility events, competitions and award ceremonies, websites, leaflets, promotional items, media work, social networking, etc.); (ii) debates (conferences, seminars, meetings, etc.); (iii) expertise-related activities (research, studies, publications, etc.).

European actions: the EU also co-financed certain “flagship” initiatives to promote networking and innovation in the field of volunteering. This corresponds to one project per country in fourteen Member

States, as well as multiple projects in certain countries. The budget allocated to the co-financing of flagship projects was EUR1 964 million. The Commission's co-financing was limited to a maximum of 60% of a project's total eligible costs.

Priority was given to projects testing and developing new and innovative schemes and building long-term partnerships between civil society organisations and public sector bodies involved in volunteering.

Lastly, the European Year covered awareness-raising at EU level and awareness of the Year amongst relevant stakeholders and the general public was promoted by means of a series of actions described in the report.

Main conclusions: the main **conclusions** of the report are as follows:

- The European Year of Volunteering has had a **positive impact on the world of volunteering**, both at European and at national level. The objectives and activities of the Year were relevant, and the targeted, results-oriented approach was successful in reaching the objectives in all Member States, even though the impact varied according to specific national situations.
- The European Year **created and catalysed changes in the volunteering environment** at European and national level and led to the adoption or modification of volunteering strategies and legislation in some Member States. For example, a specific legal framework was created for the first time in Slovakia, Slovenia and Lithuania during 2011. In Bulgaria, a law on volunteering was elaborated during 2011 and adopted in 2012. Poland adopted a new strategy on volunteering, Austria renewed its law on volunteering and Portugal prepared a new law to be adopted in 2012. The idea of a European Charter for Volunteering, built on a rights-based approach and initiated by the European Youth Forum, was discussed during 2011.
- The EYV **empowered organisers** to improve quality, and to focus attention on areas such as corporate volunteering and volunteering as a non-formal learning experience. It increased the recognition of volunteering through a wide range of initiatives and raised awareness of volunteering and its value to society through the media and the European communication campaign. The national activities had a valuable multiplier effect for these EU-level activities.

- The European Year contributed above all to the **development of networks and new initiatives**. It complemented existing activities and it highlighted the European dimension of volunteering.
- The EYV 2011 left a **legacy** in the continuation of activities and structures which were put in place during 2011 and in the adoption of good practices that will bring changes in the years to come.
- The EYV 2011 triggered the **adoption of five EU policy documents** dealing with volunteering in the European Union, i.e. a Commission Communication, two sets of Council Conclusions, an Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee and a Report of the European Parliament.

The European Year of Active Ageing 2012 has ensured some **continuity** with EYV 2011 through some specific actions. Sustainability will be assured through synergies with the European Year of Citizens 2013. By organising a series of European years on themes related to citizenship focussing on different aspects (European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010, European Year of Volunteering 2011, European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity 2012 and European Year of Citizens 2013), the Commission has sought to contribute to the exploration of the concept of civic engagement in its different dimensions.