European voluntary service for young people: Community action programme 1998-2002

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The Committee has adopted the report by Nicole FONTAINE (EPP, F) on the European voluntary service programme. If the programme is to reach all young people and not only a privileged minority, funding is of prime importance. The Committee on Culture is thus proposing a financial package of ECU 80m. for the first two years of the programme (1998-1999) instead of the ECU 60m. envisaged by the Commission. The committee has tried to make improvements to the basic proposal by removing obstacles to young people taking part in the programme. Information on the rights and obligations of volunteers should be provided at European, national and local level. An assessment should be carried out every year to identify the obstacles that prevent young people with the greatest difficulties from taking part. The Member States should also adopt measures to ensure that the European voluntary service is compatible with national civilian services and is progressively integrated into such services. It should not have the effect of restricting potential or existing paid employment. In addition to questions of residence rights and the preservation of social protection, the Member States should adopt measures on tax exemption in respect of payments and allowances received by young volunteers for their travel, accommodation and subsistence during their service. Priority should be given to young people between 18 and 25 but the age limit is extended to people up to 29 years of age for voluntary service in non-EU countries, especially developing countries. The Commission must put forward proposals for a European statute for young voluntary workers that will be recognized in the countries of origin and host countries, to ensure that volunteers enjoy the same mobility as other EU citizens. The report was adopted unopposed. The chairman commented it was a very good decision that sent out very positive signals to young people.