European youth: opening up decision-making process to young people. White Paper

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PURPOSE: to set a policy agenda for greater youth participation in the governance of Europe.
CONTENT: this White Paper needs to be viewed within the context of the White Paper on Governance which was presented to the Member States and European Parliament in July 2001. It examines ways in which to offer young people in Europe a greater say in political governance - not just at a European level but at a national and regional one as well. The White Paper estimates that following EU enlargement there will be 75 million young people in Europe between the ages of 15 and 25. At this age, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background, most young people consider themselves fully fledged citizens expecting all the attendant rights and obligations that go with such a status. The EU Treaties themselves encompass many policy fields having a direct impact on the lives and concerns of today's youth, including: employment, education, vocational training, culture, health, consumer protection, freedom of movement, environmental protection, mobility for young researchers and social issues such as exclusions, discrimination and racism. In addition to the policy goals set by the Treaties, the EU has introduced a number of its own initiatives under the YOUTH programme based on Article 149. These programmes encourage mobility and exchange schemes for young people. The Council of Youth Ministers has similarly adopted a series of resolutions relating to: - youth participation, the educational potential of sport, social integrations and entrepreneurship amongst the youth. Authors of the Commission the White Paper fear however that declarations are no longer enough to tackle some of today's youth issues such as: - Demographic and social change. By 2020 it is estimated that the 65-90 age group will increase to 21% of the total population while the 15-24 age group will fall to just 11%. This could make relations between the generations complex. - the widening gap between young people and public affairs at national, European and international levels. - investing in the quality of the debate on the future of the European Union and encouraging closer links with people, civil society and local players. Bearing these issues in mind the White Paper proposes a new policy with which to tackle some of the issues outlined above. The two main aspects to the new co-operation framework are: - application of the open method of coordination in the more specific field of youth; and - taking more account of youth in other policies. Concerning the first aspect, i.e. the open method of coordination, the White Paper proposes this should involve fixing guidelines for the Union. These guidelines should be translated into national and regional polices by setting specific targets taking into account national and regional differences. It offers a way of encouraging cooperation, the exchange of best practice and agreeing to common targets for Member States to implement. In this way the White Paper hopes that young people will be taken into account when it comes to: Youth participation, the dissemination of information, voluntary service among young people, understanding youth, taking youth into account on other policy issues, education, lifelong learning and mobility,employment, greater youth autonomy and social integration.