



Committee of the Regions

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OPINION

of the Committee of the Regions

YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND INFORMATION: FOLLOW-UP TO THE WHITE PAPER ON A NEW IMPETUS FOR EUROPEAN YOUTH

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- judges it essential, especially given the current debate on the future of Europe, to step up participation by, and information for, young people in the communities where they live;
- stresses the need for youth issues to be addressed across the board by all councils, as young people should be taken into account in all the EU's area of interest;
- recalls that young people represent a key factor for achieving the objectives of the new Lisbon strategy, and considers it essential that they be provided with better education, training, mobility, entry into employment;
- does not, however, underestimate the major challenges facing young people today, such as unemployment, late entry into the world of work, the insecure nature of work, difficulties in obtaining housing and consequent difficulties in choosing one's path in life;
- advocates projects that encourage young people to take part in local and regional government and in the management of their respective communities, as well as links between local authorities and schools with a view to fostering a civic awareness and informed use of the right to vote;
- calls upon the Commission to support initiatives to disseminate European youth policies and the provisions of the European Youth Pact at local level, using local authorities' networks and giving young administrators an active role.

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council on European policies concerning youth participation and information *Follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth : Implementing the common objectives for participation by and information for young people in view of promoting their active European citizenship and the appended Commission Staff Working Document containing a detailed analysis of the Member States' national reports for participation and information* (COM(2006) 417 final - SEC(2006) 1006);

Having regard to the decision of the Bureau of 13 June 2006 to instruct the Commission for Culture, Education and Research to draw up an opinion on this subject;

Having regard to the European Commission White Paper *A New Impetus for European Youth*, COM(2001) 681 final;

Having regard to the Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field;

Having regard to the Council Resolution of 25 November 2003 on common objectives for participation by and information for young people;

Having regard to the European Youth Pact;

Having regard to the Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on implementing the common objectives for youth information;

Having regard to the Council Conclusions of 24 May 2005 on new indicators in education and training;

Having regard to the Resolutions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the evaluation of activities conducted in the framework of European cooperation in the youth field, and on implementing the common objective: to increase participation by young people in the system of representative democracy;

Having regard to the Communications from the Commission on the period of reflection and Plan-D (COM(2005) 494 final and COM(2006) 212 final) and the European Commission White Paper on *A European Communication Policy – Debating Europe, involving people* (COM(2006) 35 final);

Having regard to its opinion on the Communication from the Commission *The Commission's contribution to the period of reflection and beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate and the White Paper on a European communication policy*;

Having regard to its opinion on the Communication from the Commission on European policies concerning youth *Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe – implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship*;

Having regard to the Communication from the Commission *Follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth: Implementing the common objectives for participation by and information for young people in view of their active European citizenship* (COM(2006) 417 final);

Having regard to the recent Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on implementing the common objective for participation by and information for young people in view of their active European citizenship;

Having regard to the present draft opinion on the Communication from the Commission to the Council on European policies concerning youth participation and information *Follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth : Implementing the common objectives for participation by and information for young people in view of promoting their active European citizenship*;

Having regard to the draft opinion adopted by the Commission for Culture, Education and Research on 30 November 2006, (CdR 334/2006 rev. 1) (Rapporteur: **Mr Roberto Pella**, Member of the Council of the Province of Biella, vice-sindaco Valdengo (IT/EPP));

adopted the following opinion at its 69th plenary session, held on 23 March 2007:

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1. Introduction

The Committee of the Regions

- 1.1 **welcomes** the new Communication from the Commission, which assesses the follow-up given by the Member States to the common objectives regarding *participation* by and *information* for young people;
- 1.2 **considers** that since the publication of the White Paper in 2001, the Member States have made progress towards a greater focus on young people, but that much more remains to be done, either through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the youth field, or through further action under related policies;
- 1.3 **takes note** of the recent Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, which has identified new measures designed to strengthen the application and implementation of the common objectives for participation by and information for young people;
- 1.4 **agrees** with the Council that the four priority themes proposed by the White Paper (participation, information, voluntary activities and greater knowledge and understanding of youth) and the relevant common objectives remain highly topical, and **believes** that they should guide the work of the Member States and the European institutions in this particular sector, and in all other policies concerning young people;
- 1.5 **stresses** the need for youth issues to be addressed across the board by all Councils, as young people should be taken into account in all the EU's areas of interest;
- 1.6 **points out** however that the Council could have given greater weight to the importance of local and regional authorities, especially in the sections outlining measures designed to further the implementation of the common objectives, seeing that local and regional authorities perform a crucial role in education and in fostering civic awareness among young people;
- 1.7 **judges it essential**, especially given the current debate on the future of Europe, to step up *participation* by, and *information* for, young people in the communities where they live, in order to increase their feeling of belonging to the Union, to ensure that they can exercise those rights set out in the European Union's charter of fundamental rights, and to help give new impetus to the European venture by making the concept of European citizenship a reality, **emphasises** that particular attention should be given in these respects to participation by, and information for, young people living in island regions;
- 1.8 **does not**, however, **underestimate** the major challenges facing young people today, such as unemployment, late entry into the world of work, the insecure nature of work, difficulties in obtaining housing and consequent difficulties in choosing one's path in life, the lack of

appropriate means of acquiring the right skills, poverty, premature school leaving and social exclusion;

- 1.9 **believes** therefore that the objectives of participation and information for young people can be achieved more effectively if the Member States and institutions make every effort to offer them better prospects in life, guaranteeing full enjoyment of the fundamental rights set out in the European Union's charter of fundamental rights (which include the right to work, the right to marry and found a family, and the right to reconcile family and professional life);
- 1.10 **recalls**, in this regard, that young people represent a key factor for achieving the objectives of the new Lisbon strategy, and **considers** it essential that they be provided with better education, training, mobility, entry into employment, social inclusion and services for young families:
- a) better education and training, in order to optimise the value of Europe's greatest resources – its young people. This education should focus particularly on studying technology, so as to boost European Research, development and innovation, but care should also be taken to provide sufficient training in humanities and values; it is important to give the teaching of European history and culture the attention it deserves within the education system;
 - b) mobility: young Europeans need to have real opportunities for mobility throughout the EU, whether to work or study, as such opportunities generally bring considerable cultural enrichment and a greater *sense of Europeanness*;
 - c) entry into employment: young people are one of the groups with the highest levels of unemployment. New measures must be promoted in order to make it easier for them to enter the labour market and thus become integrated into society;
 - d) social inclusion: particular attention must be paid to young people who have specific needs or suffer from social exclusion. Migrants deserve specific mention in this context;
 - e) services for young families: young families face particular problems that should also be addressed by the EU authorities. In concrete terms, there must be measures to help reconcile working and family life and facilitate the definitive integration of women into the labour market;
- 1.11 **considers** therefore that local and regional authorities' youth policies can take on a European dimension by means of appropriate national policies and funds, together with specific Community programmes that increase information and participation opportunities for young European citizens in local, regional, national and European civic and political life;
- 1.12 **recalls** that the Union is founded on the principles of freedom and democracy and believes that for that reason more practical steps must be taken without delay to ensure that all

European citizens, starting with the very youngest, are able to participate in it, with due respect for the principle of subsidiarity.

2. **Concerning participation by young people**

Participation in the life of the community

- 2.1 **notes** that the Council views the aim of "participation by young people in the life of the community" principally as promoting their involvement in participatory structures;
- 2.2 **recalls** that it is possible to take part in the life of the local community without belonging to an organised structure; **believes** therefore that this objective should be interpreted in a broad way, encouraging initiatives which also seek the involvement of young people who spontaneously decide to take part in the life of their local community;
- 2.3 fully **agrees** that special attention should be focused on the most disadvantaged young people and **considers** that they should be identified more accurately in each local area; **pays tribute** to the initiatives taken by Poland and Lithuania geared to young people living in rural areas;
- 2.4 **urges** the Commission and the Member States to set up and make budgetary provision for measures designed to boost the involvement in European civic life of young people from the outermost regions of the EU, as their remoteness makes it particularly difficult for them to become integrated and involved;
- 2.5 also **appreciates** all those initiatives undertaken by public authorities to support participatory structures by means of financial contributions or by providing equipment, technical assistance, human resources, premises or help with setting up Internet sites.

Participation in the system of representative democracy

- 2.6 **views** this objective as of fundamental importance if active citizenship is to be put into practice: allowing young people to hold more sway in local, regional and national bodies and even ministries and political parties, and ensuring that young men and women enjoy equal opportunities;
- 2.7 **highlights** the importance of harnessing new technology in order to bring the EU closer to young people. It is therefore essential for the European institutions to encourage the various innovative measures that the European social players and, in particular, local and regional authorities could offer; in this context, **considers** that exchanges of best practices would be particularly beneficial and, specifically, **proposes** that the Commission promote the organisation of an Annual Youth Forum where young people and public institutions could exchange ideas and encourage new initiatives;

- 2.8 **welcomes** all Member State initiatives to sustain dialogue with young people: local, national and regional councils, youth parliaments, specific youth commissions, ombudsmen or correspondents, and inter-ministerial meetings; and **hopes** that these will be further developed;
- 2.9 **reports** that in Italy, a consultative body for young administrators has been set up within the framework of the National Association of Italian Local Authorities, one of whose many tasks is to monitor, encourage and enhance the involvement of young people in local administrations;
- 2.10 **trusts** that both the Member States and local and regional authorities will mainstream programmes for learning to participate democratically in institutions into the official education system and that they will encourage interactive links between formal and non-formal education;
- 2.11 **points out** that links between schools and local authorities can be an effective means of encouraging student participation in the life of their own communities, and **calls on** local administrators – especially young administrators – to serve as ambassadors, organising public debates on matters of local interests which would also be open to young people who have left school;
- 2.12 **is convinced** that opening up local government to young people entails as an objective a real understanding of responsibility in managing one's own area, helps to generate civic awareness, and helps to foster informed exercise of the right to vote, which to date has been of little interest to all too many young people;
- 2.13 **hails** the Finnish initiative in extending voting rights for local elections to young people over the age of 16, and the German initiative on youth projects for urban regeneration, and **welcomes** the Council's call to envisage a debate on lowering the voting age;
- 2.14 **expresses its appreciation** of the city of Stockholm's case of a young woman as deputy mayor;
- 2.15 **holds** the Council of Europe's *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life* to be a highly valuable instrument, and **hopes** that it will be disseminated among the local and regional authorities of the Union, together with closer cooperation in this sphere between the Committee of the Regions and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

Participation in the development of the European Union

- 2.16 **agrees** with the Commission's proposals, confirmed by the Council, on how to reach this objective;

- 2.17 **is pleased to note** that the European Commission has taken into consideration the CoR's previous comments¹ concerning a sustained policy of debate and consultation with young people and strongly supports the idea of improved dialogue on the European Agenda. However, **reiterates** that this must involve in particular local and regional authorities;
- 2.18 **welcomes** the new "Youth in Action" programme and the other youth education and training programmes, which have allowed many young people to gain practical experience of Europe, and **urges** ever broader access and wider dissemination of them, with a special focus on the most disadvantaged young people, **encourages** the Commission and Member States to further decentralise the management of this programme, in order to ensure subsidiarity in its management by regional authorities, and **regrets** the discontinuation of the Young Entrepreneurs programme, which supported many young people in starting up businesses and gaining important experiences;
- 2.19 **proposes** that European local and regional authorities provide a forum for young people from their respective communities who work in the institutions, in European offices or are involved in European programmes, and that they recruit them as ambassadors in debates on Europe, thereby strengthening the dual participation approach and giving value to work and to educational and vocational experience abroad;
- 2.20 **calls upon** the Commission to support initiatives to disseminate European youth policies and the provisions of the European Youth Pact at local level, using local authorities' networks and giving young administrators an active role.

3. **Concerning information for young people**

Access for young people to information

- 3.1 **recalls** that the right to information lies at the heart of the youth information work undertaken by the European Union; **considers** it in consequence the duty of the Member States and, where appropriate, local and regional authorities, to implement policies as part of the educational process ensuring effective exercise of this right by young people, putting special focus on promoting clarity and ease of access to information;
- 3.2 strongly **welcomes** the fact that the European Commission took on board the CoR's comments on the importance of local and regional dimension in youth policy, recognising that the mobilisation of local authorities is crucial for fostering the local participation of young people. **Reiterates** in this respect the importance of the local and regional dimension since it is at this level that the first direct contact with politics is made and that active citizenship becomes a reality;

¹ CdR 253/2005 fin.

- 3.3 **notes** with satisfaction that Internet sites providing information for young people have been set up in almost all the Member States, but **urges** that an effective information strategy covering questions and subjects of interest to young people be set up in various fields;
- 3.4 **agrees** with the Council that the European youth portal is a highly useful tool that should be developed and disseminated, and that locally-provided instruments and those at national and European level must be better coordinated, in order to circulate information more rapidly and easily;
- 3.5 **believes** that networks of young people's associations operating at local level should be involved in the process of consulting and involving young people, to avoid the danger of only major national networks participating, and **calls for** the development of channels for the involvement and consultation of young people who do not belong to associations. To this end, direct involvement of municipalities which can develop their own models for young people to take part in the consultation and cooperation processes will be welcomed.

Quality information

- 3.6 **is informed** by the Commission that only a few Member States focus on training for those working in the sphere of information for young people; **calls for** more attention in this regard, with specific study programmes;
- 3.7 **considers** that the Commission should place greater emphasis on the connection between information and counselling, with a view to helping young people to developing skills in obtaining, selecting and assessing information, in order to become informed users. The Member States are urged to use all existing channels to disseminate information to young people (Internet, mobile phones, video, cinema).

Participation by young people in information

- 3.8 **is pleased to note** the new focus given to local youth councils, with systematic involvement of young people in local decision-making bodies, involving the support of regional and local authorities. **Calls** on the Commission to encourage the drafting of precise criteria regarding the objective of participation of young people in order to support local participation and active citizenship;
- 3.9 **highlights** the importance of involving young people in fine-tuning information strategies, devising information products, disseminating information and in counselling activities;
- 3.10 **considers** that the contributions of individual young people or youth organisations in this regard represent a valuable resource that should be harnessed as effectively as possible, and calls on the Commission to urge the Member States to identify new forms of participation.

4. **Concerning the Open Method of Coordination**

4.1 **is well aware** that the youth sector is an area for which the Member States are responsible, and therefore calls for joint commitment on the part of the Commission and the Member States, in collaboration with local and regional authorities;

4.2 **considers** moreover that the Commission could highlight the achievements, and more specifically the best practices of the Member States.

5. **The Committee of the Regions' conclusions**

Concerning participation

5.1 **recommends** that the Member States guarantee equal opportunities between all citizens but especially between juveniles and young men and women;

5.2 **trusts** that resources will be allocated fairly between projects for youth associations and those targeting individual young people, while not overlooking programmes for the most disadvantaged groups;

5.3 also **hopes** that the Member States will encourage young people to become involved in local, regional and national bodies, ministries and political parties, and that they will consult them through youth councils and other participatory structures;

5.4 **advocates** projects on the part of the Member States that encourage young people to take part in local and regional government and in the management of their respective communities, as well as links between local authorities and schools with a view to fostering a civic awareness and informed use of the right to vote;

5.5 **calls upon** local, regional and national authorities to bring young people into the debates on the future of Europe, in order to boost their participation in the development of the European Union, giving an active role to those who work in the institutions or European offices or are involved in European programmes.

Concerning information

5.6 **deems** it essential that the Member States uphold the right to information by means of specific strategies, reflecting young people's needs and with a special focus on the most vulnerable groups, at the same time providing proper training courses for all those involved in educating and bringing up young people;

- 5.7 **restates** that the creation of a citizens' Europe and the integration into society of young people is one of the Committee's main political priorities, and wishes to make a contribution by undertaking to organise structured and systematic dialogues, meetings with representatives of local and regional youth associations and councils, and envisages setting up a working group to monitor and promote the real commitments of local and regional authorities, checking on local and regional best practice with the support of the relevant national associations; will aim to be instrumental to assist Member States in implementing the recommendations concerning youth participation and information;
- 5.8 **undertakes** to disseminate information on European issues more widely to feed debates at local and regional level, and on European events organised for young people, in order to step up the participation of the broadest possible;
- 5.9 to encourage participation in the European Union's development, **calls upon** the Commission to provide for an *ad hoc* information campaign to disseminate all European youth programmes.

On the open method of coordination

- 5.10 **appreciates** the Council's stated intention of adapting and improving the lines of action and to take on board the measures outlined in the recent Resolution, and therefore **asks** that the comments and proposals made in the present opinion be taken into account;
- 5.11 **urges** the Member States, as part of existing routine reporting, to continue providing the Commission with information on their own youth policies, thus supporting the OMC and enabling best practice to be more accurately identified and disseminated;
- 5.12 **agrees** that the lines of action on which the Member States intend to concentrate with regard to participation and information, in order to identify the relevant action plans and in particular to disseminate best practices more widely, should be established by March 2007 at the latest;
- 5.13 **asks** the Commission to identify the best means of ensuring effective analysis of the progress made by the Member States by means of efficient statistical methods and qualitative research;
- 5.14 **advocates** setting up a working group responsible for defining instruments to assess the implementation of measures to strengthen the common objectives, and calls for representatives of local and regional authorities to be involved through the Committee;
- 5.15 **reaffirms** that the common objectives regarding youth will best be attained by providing young people with better living conditions. **Hopes** that, under the European Youth Pact, the Commission will devise an action plan which can better guide and uphold individual Member State initiatives, providing funding to this end, possibly tied to innovative actions and exchanges of best practice;

- 5.16 **calls** on Member States to allocate appropriate funding to local and regional authorities to carry out the implementation of the common objectives;
- 5.17 **hopes** ultimately that in order to better achieve the objectives of youth, that the issue of unstable employment among young people should be tackled by the Member States and also in the context of the discussion on the Commission's new Green Paper on labour law.

Rome, 23 March 2007.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions

Michel Delebarre

The Secretary-General
of the Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl
