

Brussels, 15 October 1998

OPINION
of the Economic and Social Committee
on the
**Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision establishing the Community
action programme for "Youth"**
(COM(1998) 331 final - 98/0197 COD)

On 1 October 1998 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 198 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision establishing the Community action programme for "Youth"
(COM(1998) 331 final - 98/0197 COD).

The Section for Social, Family, Educational and Cultural Affairs, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 16 July 1998. The rapporteur was **Mr Rupp**.

At its 358th plenary session of 14 and 15 October 1998 (meeting of 15 October) the Economic and Social Committee appointed **Mr Rupp** rapporteur-general and adopted the following opinion by 89 votes to one with no abstentions:

1. Introduction

1.1 The aim of the Community youth action programme is to bring together hitherto independent and basically uncoordinated parallel programmes, thereby generating a fresh quality which involves not only updating, but also concentration and coordination.

1.2 The programme is based in particular on the Communication from the Commission entitled Towards a Europe of knowledge¹ and is a continuation of the "Youth for Europe" programme.²

1.3 Over the past few years, the Economic and Social Committee has adopted the following opinions on this topic:

- Opinion on the Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision adopting the "Youth for Europe III" programme designed to promote the development of exchanges among young people and of youth activities in the Community³,
- Opinion on the Proposal for a European Council Decision establishing the Community action programme "European voluntary service for young people"⁴,

¹ COM(97) 563 final

² Decision No 818/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 1995 adopting the third phase of the "Youth for Europe" programme, OJ L 087, 20 April 1995

³ COM(93) 523 final - ESC opinion, OJ No. C 148, 30 May 1994

⁴ COM(96) 610 final (OJ No. C 302, 3 October 1997) - ESC opinion, OJ No. C 158, 26 May 1997

- Opinion on the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "Towards a Europe of knowledge"⁵.

1.4 The proposed Commission decision on young people both prolongs and widens the scope of the current action programmes. Together with the proposed decisions on education and vocational training, the Commission is underlining its intention to pursue an integrated approach. The policy aim is to place the central educational objective of *life-long learning* within a European context.

1.5 Life-long general education and vocational training and youth policy seek to achieve three broad objectives:

- a) to promote employment;
- b) to enhance knowledge potential and;
- c) to give ordinary people access to European experience.

1.6 The proposals aim to gradually create an open and dynamic European educational dimension and contain specific arrangements for joint action.

2. General comments

2.1 The draft presented by the Commission provides a major opportunity for a coordinated, common policy on young people in the Member States, particularly in the light of the plan to enhance the integration of youth and education policy.

2.2 It is essential to bring together these two policy areas which traditionally have been artificially split, not least since the issues involved in youth and education policy are increasingly interdependent, and, as such, cannot be resolved separately.

2.3 Developments in academic proposals and educational practice also match this approach. In the Member States, for example, primary and particularly secondary education is increasingly run - and options offered - on the basis of integrated youth and education policy.

2.4 Against the backdrop, therefore, of Community efforts

- to promote knowledge and encourage skills development,
- to deepen the sense of European citizenship and
- to advance professional skills,
- to boost human development potential,

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ESC opinion, OJ No. C 157, 25 May 1998

it seems only consistent to launch a Community youth action programme; the word "Community" here should not only mean the community of states which make up the EU, but should also refer in particular to a common strategy in youth and education policy.

2.5 At any rate, the success of this programme will essentially depend on whether the different arrangements for assigning responsibilities in youth and education policy in the various Community countries can be dovetailed to avoid any conflict of remit and negative competition. The past has shown that, in some countries, this is a major obstacle to coordinated youth and education policy.

2.6 A further difficulty lies in the differences of approach to youth welfare and teaching in schools. There are undoubtedly different and - despite an identical client base - opposing "educational worlds". Actual developments in youth welfare and teaching, however, indicate that there are links between the various different trends. The Community's youth programme can give long-term support and backing to this process.

2.7 By addressing such developments in youth and education policy, the programme also has a role in setting standards.

2.8 In addition, the youth programme offers a "leaner", more diversified approach to Community youth and education policy. It incorporates the main tenets of these policy areas while at the same time displaying extensive decentralization and diversity within the individual action programmes. Framed for all young people without exception, the programme machinery thus reflects modern management which is harnessed to the needs and expectations of the clients it seeks to serve. No distinction is made between the institutional and non-institutional areas in which young people are involved.

2.9 Bringing together current schemes and new, innovative action programmes can, particularly via the support measures, strengthen the Community's youth policy as a whole and generate new momentum. This also provides the opportunity to reach more young people than hitherto, and thus to consolidate European citizenship and a European identity at a formative stage in young people's political and structural development.

2.10 The efficiency of the programmes themselves should be monitored and analyzed and the findings disseminated, including via the media.

2.11 Young people should also be brought into this programme who have completed an apprenticeship or vocational training. This serves to acquaint young people with the business world, including small and craft-based businesses.

3. **Specific comments**

3.1 The following comments refer to specific articles of the Commission proposal wherever the Economic and Social Committee has deemed this necessary.

Article 1:

3.2 In paragraph 3, the concepts likely to foster the full exercise of citizenship are interpreted too narrowly. Apart from knowledge and skills in the narrower sense, the programme also has to facilitate the formation of attitudes and opinions; only when a positive outlook on continuous, life-long learning has been acquired, will it be possible to organize and manage learning processes autonomously.

Article 2:

3.3 As well as the continuation of current programmes mentioned in paragraphs 1a) and 1b), particular importance is attached to the programme objectives outlined in paragraph 1c). In fact, this is the focal point of the entire programme. The aim is not only to instruct young people, but also for young people themselves to get involved on their own initiative and through their common experience of informal education. This process thus exploits peer group dynamics which, according to pedagogical research, makes for much more efficient learning processes than are generally possible where group management is based on external educational and teaching methods⁶.

Article 3: paragraph 1, Actions

3.4 European voluntary service

3.4.1 The incorporation of this scheme into the youth programme is deemed advantageous, but the conditions must be attractive for the individual. One way of doing this is to provide insurance cover within the voluntary service and to pay appropriate allowances.

3.4.2 Care should be taken to ensure that a considerable number of schemes are organized with non-EU countries.

3.5 Youth for Europe

3.5.1 Youth exchanges continue to play a central role in building up a European identity. The value of exchanges with non-EU countries in particular cannot be stressed too highly when it comes to creating a positive image of Europe.

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Note on the wording of German text: The German word *Unternehmergeist* (literally: "entrepreneurial spirit", translator) is misleading in this context; its use in German-speaking countries will be misinterpreted, giving the impression that this programme seeks to promote an economic elite. What is meant is *Unternehmungsggeist* (literally: "spirit of enterprise", translator), in other words the ability to tackle difficulties, develop creativity, resolve problems and shoulder responsibility.

3.5.2 Youth exchanges may be the motor for realizing fundamental Community political objectives (an ability to live in peace, tolerance etc.).

3.5.3 In conjunction with action 3 (Opportunity for Youth), initiatives should be promoted to encourage young people to run youth exchanges themselves.

3.6 **Opportunity for Youth**

3.6.1 This action gives the entire programme its particular focus (see above) since it promotes young people's own activities and innovation. Young people, therefore, are not only on the receiving end, but are already constructively involved and taking responsibility even in the planning stage.

3.6.2 That said, this action should not be established as an adjunct to the volunteer programme. It is to be run independently, albeit with links to the other actions. The reasoning behind this is given in the second part of the annex relating to action 3. There is still a need to define target groups to profit from this action.

3.6.3 The Community should be receptive not only to initiatives involving cultural and sporting activities as a form of communication but also to different areas of activity and types of interaction. These include:

- programmes promoting self-worth and self-esteem;
- programmes encouraging intergenerational learning;
- programmes, involving for instance, young people in research activities in the social sphere.

3.7 **Joint actions**

3.7.1 This scheme is the second, more political and structural, focus of the programme since it brings education policies together. The Commission's plan to link traditional and state-of-the-art learning options and methods is especially suited to meeting this objective, at least provided that action 3 gives young people themselves the opportunity to make a real impact on how such activities are structured. This may be put into effect particularly successfully in the field of new media (internet).

3.8 **Support measures**

3.8.1 Support measures not only back up the actions mentioned above, but are, in the final analysis, their very foundation. Solid financing is therefore essential. The education and training of the multipliers (youth workers) is particularly important here. They are the mainstay of the interpersonal networks established by the actions.

3.8.2 Paragraph 4 of the text in the annex should be particularly highlighted in connection with action 3.

3.8.3 It is also essential to evaluate joint youth and education policy in academic and political terms. Against the backdrop of the artificial split between youth and education policy, the findings show the extent to which it is possible to work in a more politically efficient way to promote young people's welfare and to build up the Community.

Article 4:

3.9 The programme covers around 14% of the EU's population and is open to all young people from the ages of 15 to 25. Appropriate funding is therefore essential. (cf. point 3.12). The Committee expressly endorses the targeted promotion of disadvantaged young people.

Article 7:

3.10 The last sub-paragraph of paragraph 5 does not take adequate account of the committee in question. It should read: "The Commission shall incorporate the proposals contained in the Committee opinion." In this context, the ESC would propose the establishment of a European advisory body for users.

Article 8:

3.11 The financial resources of ECU 600 million over a five-year period are too small for a scheme designed to reach over 50 million young people. This represents an outlay of ECU 12 for every young person concerned. A figure of at least ECU 20 per young person would be appropriate. It is thus necessary to earmark resources of at least 1 billion euro as part of the financial planning for the period 1999-2003.

Article 12:

3.12 The programme must be assessed academically, politically, and in practical terms. Together with the central issues outlined in action 5, Article 12 should ensure that this happens. The findings of this assessment should be part of the reports submitted by the Commission.

Brussels, 15 October 1998.

The President
of the
Economic and Social
Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
Economic and Social
Committee

Beatrice Rangoni Machiavelli

Patrick Venturini
