

Brussels, 26 November 2001

OPINION

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 15 November 2001

on the

Proposal for a Council decision on

The European Year of People with Disabilities 2003

(COM(2001) 271 final – 2001/0116 COD)

The Committee of the Regions,

HAVING REGARD TO the Proposal for a Council decision on **The European Year of People with Disabilities 2003**, (COM(2001) 271 final – 2001/0116 COD);

HAVING REGARD TO the decision of the Council on 2 July 2001 to consult the CoR on this subject in accordance with the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

HAVING REGARD TO the decision taken by its Bureau on 12 June 2001 to instruct Commission 5 - Social Policy, Public Health, Consumer Protection, Research and Tourism - to draw up the relevant opinion;

HAVING REGARD TO the 1993 UN Declaration on Disabled People and UN Standard Rules on the equalisation of opportunities for persons with disabilities (Adopted by the United Nations' General Assembly, forty-eighth session, resolution 48/96 and annex, of 20 December 1993 - <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/dissre00.htm>);

HAVING REGARD TO the Council Resolution of 20 December 1996 on equality of opportunity for people with disabilities¹;

HAVING REGARD TO the Council Resolution of 17 June 1999 on equal employment

opportunities for people with disabilities²;

HAVING REGARD TO the Council Directive of 27 November 2000 on a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, and a Community action programme to combat discrimination³;

HAVING REGARD TO its Opinion of April 2000 on anti-discrimination (CdR 513/99 fin)⁴;

HAVING REGARD TO its Opinion of December 2000 on “Towards a barrier-free Europe for people with disabilities”(CdR 301/00)⁵;

HAVING REGARD TO the European Parliament resolution on “Towards a barrier-free Europe for people with disabilities” (A5-0084/2001);

HAVING REGARD TO the Committee of the Regions Bureau meeting of 3 April 2001, at which members agreed to extend the CoR Equal Opportunities Action Plan to cover all under-represented groups covered by Article 13, in order that the composition of the secretariat better reflect the diversity of the European society that the institution seeks to represent;

HAVING REGARD TO the Draft Opinion (CdR 282/2001 rev. 1) adopted by Commission 5 on 10 September 2001 (rapporteur: **Mr Keith Brown** (UK/EA) Leader of Clackmannanshire Council);

WHEREAS

- equal opportunities are a political priority of the Committee of the Regions;
- the proposed European Year in 2003 would mark the 10th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Disabled People;
- lack of awareness and lack of understanding about disability among the public at large is the principal barrier to accessing the full and equal inclusion of disabled people in society;
- the April 2001 Eurobarometer Survey shows that the majority of EU citizens want more to be done to ensure better integration of people with disabilities into society, and 66% of EU-15 respondents consider that local authorities are responsible for improving access to public spaces for people with disabilities;
- local and regional authorities have an important role as educators, employers, service-providers, purchasers of goods and services, opinion-formers, catalysts for innovation, and demonstrators of best practice;
- the management of the European Year and the selection of projects for financial assistance

will be overseen by National Coordination Bodies. The European Commission envisages that these bodies will comprise “representatives of the relevant Ministries, of organisations of people with disabilities and of important segments of society”, but not necessarily representatives of local and regional government;

- the evaluation report of the European Year against Racism pointed out that a successful European Year should serve as a starting point, by laying the foundation on which future long term action can be built. The key to such success consists in supplementing European-level dynamics with corresponding measures within the Member State. The success of the European Year will thus depend first and foremost on the willingness and ability of partners at European, national, *regional and local* levels to contribute actively to the Year. Furthermore, experience accumulated from International Years suggests that it is critical to ensure the involvement of all stakeholders in the preparation and in the implementation of the Year. The full and active participation of local and regional authorities, and of representatives of people with disabilities, is therefore essential;
- people with disabilities are under-represented in the membership, political offices and secretariat of the Committee of the Regions;

has adopted the following opinion unanimously at its 41st plenary session on 14/15 November 2001 (meeting of 15 November):

The Committee of the Regions

1. reiterates its commitment to equality, in this case specifically in respect of people with disabilities, which it regards as a human rights issue;
2. welcomes the proposal for a European Year of People with Disabilities in 2003, and reiterates its view (CdR 301/00) that this will highlight the key and active role that disabled citizens can play in the European Union and help highlight the problems that they can face. The European Year should be part of a detailed strategy to raise awareness of the needs of people with disabilities and contribute towards their integration into economic and social life;
3. considers that EUR 12 million spread across activities of 15 Member States is insufficient, in particular given that the participation of people with disabilities in an activity has important additional costs to ensure their equal access (personal assistants, sign language interpretation, easy-to-read information, disability accessible meeting rooms and more expensive hotel rooms, etc.);
4. calls on the European Commission, as part of the European Year, to submit a proposal for a Directive on disability, consistent with the recent Directive on race and ethnic origin;
5. supports the European Parliament's request for a specific disability action programme in 2004 to follow-up the work of the European Year;
6. considers that the Year would provide an excellent opportunity to raise public awareness and understanding about disability, and will promote better relationships between stakeholders at local and regional level;

7. considers that all major stakeholders - including local and regional government - should participate in the National Coordinating Bodies;
8. advocates the creation of regional coordinating bodies as a means whereby local and regional partnerships could be developed;
9. encourages local and regional authorities to show their commitment to the European Year by making funds available to local disability projects for the European Year activities. Particular efforts must be made to involve persons with severe and multiple disabilities;
10. undertakes to examine how local and regional authorities can work directly with local disability organisations to take up the opportunities provided by the European Year to develop activities to promote the UN Standard Rules at local and regional level;
11. considers that the European Year provides an excellent opportunity to undertake a study of best practice by local and regional authorities on disabilities, as employers (e.g. good equal opportunities practice), as service-providers (e.g. education), as representative bodies (e.g. promoting participation of disabled persons in political life) and calls on the European Commission to undertake or commission such a study;
12. undertakes to host a public hearing or conference on disability policy during 2003 with the involvement of the European Disability Forum in order to create closer ties between the European disability movement and local and regional authorities in Europe;
13. because of the important role of local and regional government, proposes the inclusion of CoR speakers and representatives in Community-wide activities in connection with the European Year;
14. calls on both the Council (as appointing body) and the Member States and other bodies involved in the nomination process to improve the representativeness of the CoR membership in the next mandate, which covers the period of the European Year of People with Disabilities;
15. calls on all EU institutions to establish disability action plans in terms of personnel, infrastructure and buildings policies, and the labour market, training and forms of cooperation (accessibility), and proposes that the institutions should report annually on a collective basis to review progress made by the institutions in this regard. It also instructs its Secretary-General to contact other institutions to initiate this process and to incorporate disability into the CoR equal opportunity action plan, as requested at the 3 April 2001 Bureau;
16. repeats its call (CdR 301/00) for the CoR Bureau to establish a cross-commission working group on equality, covering the range established by Article 13 of the Treaty, or to create a mechanism that would perform a similar function.

Brussels, 15 November 2001.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

Jos Chabert

Vincenzo Falcone

¹ OJ C 12, 13.1.1997

² OJ C 186, 2.7.1999, p. 3

³ Council Directive 2000/78/EC and the Community programme to support and supplement legislative measures at Community and Member State level set up by Council Decision 2000/750/EC

OJ L 303, 2.12.2000, p. 16 & p. 23

⁴ OJ C 226 of 8.8.2000, p. 1

⁵ OJ C 144 of 16.5.2001, p. 67

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