

Brussels, 17 March 2004

OPINION

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 11 February 2004

on the

Communication on the follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth. Proposed common objectives for the participation and information of young people, in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field

COM(2003) 184 final

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Having regard to the Communication on the follow-up to the *White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth*. Proposed common objectives for the participation and information of young people, in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field, COM(2003) 184 final;

Having regard to the decision of the European Commission of 14 April 2003 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European

Community;

Having regard to the decision of its Bureau of 1 July 2003 to instruct its Commission for Culture and Education to draw up an Opinion on this subject;

Having regard to the EU Commission's White Paper "*A New Impetus for European Youth*" (COM(2001) 681 final) and the CoR Opinion on the subject CdR 389/2001 fin¹;

Having regard to the EU Commission's working document analysing Member States' replies to its questionnaire on youth participation and information;

Having regard to Article 149 of the EC Treaty;

Having regard to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 setting a new framework for cooperation in the youth field COM(2001) 681 final;

Having regard to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning²;

Having regard to the Council Resolution of 28. June 2001 on "*Promoting young people's initiative, enterprise and creativity: from exclusion to empowerment*";

Having regard to the Council Resolution approved on 30 May 2002 on European Cooperation in the Field of Youth;

Having regard to its draft opinion (CdR 309/2003 rev. 1) adopted on 5 December 2003 by its Commission for Culture and Education (Rapporteur: **Mr Jens Kramer Mikkelsen**, Lord Mayor of Copenhagen (DK/PES))

Whereas:

1) It is important for Europe's future that the increasing alienation of young people in particular from political life, despite the higher level of education, should be combated at all levels; research has shown that the democratic behaviour of young people is closely linked to activities of direct interest to them;

2) Local and regional authorities play a decisive role in European youth policy, since it is these authorities that are in contact with young people, and it is at this level that young people in and out of school get their first experiences of democracy as participants in a democratic society;

3) Youth policy in Europe should be a *cohesive* policy for and with young people, involving the relevant administrations and political subject areas so as to better utilise available resources;

4) The Council resolution dated 24 November 2003 on the future of cooperation in the field of youth (CONS 1475/03);

5) Article III-182 of the Convention's draft for a treaty establishing a constitution for Europe;

6) Youth policy in Europe should be visible at all administrative and political levels and in all countries, and be communicated through the channels and in the language that young people in Europe use;

adopted the following opinion at its 53rd plenary session, held on 11-12 February 2004 (meeting of 11 February)

1. The Committee of the Regions' views and recommendations

1. The CoR recognises the EU Commission's course of action in connection with its questionnaire, which covers all the Member States including the candidate countries, and welcomes the European Youth Forum's hearing and position paper³. The course of action is a positive follow-up to the method in the White Paper entitled "*A New Impetus for European Youth*" (COM(2001) 681 final), in which a large proportion of the countries' young people, experts and politicians at all levels make their views heard.
2. The CoR has already welcomed the use of the open method of coordination and the principle of subsidiarity in relation to European youth policy, provided that this method pays full attention to involving regional and local authorities. The CoR would therefore suggest that in future it should be consulted and not merely informed when initiatives are taken in the field of youth policy.
3. The CoR shares the EU Commission's view that a consistent European youth policy, which takes account of the situation in individual countries and the challenges and problems facing young people in Europe today, will help to implement the strategic objective of the European Councils of Lisbon and Barcelona to make Europe "the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy".
4. The CoR agrees with the EU Commission that non-formal and informal education and actions to promote mobility are a key factor in the personal development of young people and in making them active citizens, and that such forms of education should be given a high priority in youth policies at local, regional, national and European level. In particular, these objectives should be incorporated, at European level, into the new generation of programmes, *Youth for Europe* and *Grundtvig*, for the period 2006-2012.

Common objectives to enhance the participation of young people

5. The CoR agrees with the EU Commission's overall objective that "*measures to encourage young people to be active citizens should be instituted and supported and that their effective participation in democratic life should be reinforced,*" but feels that it is vital to stress the importance of also involving young people in formulating the concrete objective of a youth policy, and this means *all young people*.
6. The CoR shares the EU Commission's view that young people in particular are becoming increasingly removed from political life and urges that intensive research be conducted into the reasons for this and that measures be proposed to tackle the root of the problem and involve young people more. This must be in parallel with the implementation of the common objectives regarding young people's participation in democratic life.

Greater participation by young people in the life of the community in which they live

7. The CoR agrees with the EU Commission and the Council of Europe's *European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life* that local society has a major role to play and calls upon the governments of the Member States, together with local actors, to create the appropriate conditions in terms of legislation and resources for work on involving all young people in local political life.

1.8 For this reason, the CoR would encourage and support the establishment of youth councils at local level.

1.9 The CoR approves the proposed increase in involvement, but feels that strong emphasis should be placed on the equal participation of young people of both sexes and that an effort should also be made to involve groups of young people who for social or ethnic reasons, because of physical or mental disability, or for other reasons have extra difficulty in expressing themselves in political life. The CoR considers it to be imperative to champion equal access to democratic processes.

1.10 The CoR feels that if the *Involvement* project is to succeed, it is absolutely essential for there to be a better interplay between private NGOs, youth and leisure clubs, associations and parents, on the one hand, and the public authorities and politicians on the other. The same principle applies to cooperation between the local, regional, national and European levels.

1.11 The CoR welcomes the involvement of *youth* in the European Commission's *pilot projects (DG EAC 43/03) in favour of youth participation* and is pleased at the great interest shown in the Commission allocating more resources to the next round of project proposals, as only a very small proportion of projects in the last round were able to be financed.

Greater participation by young people in the mechanisms of representative democracy

1.12 The CoR agrees with the need for a change in attitude and behaviour among young people, but also among politicians. Among young people this can only happen if they feel

they have a concrete political influence. Dialogues with young people should therefore be organised especially in those places where the young have achieved/can achieve an enhanced possibility of taking part in political decisions, by encouraging them to get involved in the planning and management of services of relevance to them, and by experimenting with ways for young people to play an active part in community life. Initiatives in this direction should be concrete and, among other things, contain proposals for seeking out work with a view to involving young people who are not organised into associations or the like.

1.13 The CoR would stress the importance of European youth organisations and other organisations that are active in the field of youth policy being given the economic opportunities to work closer together in networks with a view to exchanging good practice in this area, and is therefore pleased with the *Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision establishing a Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth*⁴.

1.14 The CoR agrees that many young people are prevented from taking part in democratic processes for social, economic, educational, ethnic, cultural, or gender-based reasons or because of physical or mental disability. It is therefore essential that, in addition to mainstream activities, resources are provided, particularly at local level, for research into the underlying reasons for the lack of participation among these young people and that, at the same time, initiatives are taken that can prevent and put right the negative factors that are discovered.

1.15 The CoR therefore strongly supports the fact that Article III-182 of the Convention's draft for a treaty establishing a constitution for Europe proposes supplementing the current treaties' provisions relating to youth policy with the objective that Union action should aim to encourage young people's participation in democratic life in Europe.

Learning to participate

1.16 The CoR agrees that education - in its various forms, be it informal (initiatives to facilitate access to education for the underprivileged sectors of the population), formal or non-formal (e.g. Second Chance Schools and similar initiatives that support a holistic outlook) - is one of the cornerstones of developing youth involvement in the processes of democracy, and feels that it is up to national, regional and local authorities to formulate educational policies that actually aim to provide a decidedly democratic form of instruction.

1.17 The CoR agrees that it is important for young people to have some understanding and experience of representative democracy, and calls for concrete measures and initiatives to be taken, such as "youth political days and for means of participatory democracy to be set up where young people congregate (schools, youth centres, etc.) and/or at urban level."

1.18 The CoR considers the *social heritage* to be another factor of decisive importance as regards the ability and desire to participate in the processes of democracy. So, together with formal, informal and non-formal education, attention should also be paid to the effective involvement of parents and the family in the widest possible sense of the term.

1.19 The CoR agrees that there is a need for research to be carried out into the reasons why groups of young people are marginalised, not least in terms of the social heritage and the consequences of globalisation, and calls for concrete initiatives, including benchmarking, to be taken at European level.

COMMON OBJECTIVES TO IMPROVE INFORMATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

1.20 The CoR agrees with the view that, in the main, the provision of information for young people has to target two groups: (1) young people themselves and (2) adults who come into contact with young people. It is therefore important to be aware of which group is being targeted when providing information for young people so that content, resources and other arrangements can be tailored accordingly. Information, guidance and advice service specifically geared to young people must be provided (Infoyouth).

1.21 The CoR recognises that both the Member States and local and regional authorities are responsible for providing information for young people, but would emphasise that the key actors in implementing such measures are to be found in particular at local and regional level, and so it is they who should be involved as much as possible in strategic planning.

Improving young people's access to information services

1.22 The CoR takes note of the EU Commission's conclusions when analysing the Member States' youth information services, including the remark that many of these services exhibit certain inadequacies as regards form and level, coordination between the European, national, regional and local levels, and utility, and therefore agrees that there should be a fundamental improvement in these areas, especially with respect to target groups of young people who represent the most disadvantaged, including those with physical or mental disabilities. These information services should involve actively seeking out types of information and young people themselves.

1.23 The CoR agrees with the call for increased coordination of the various information services and closer vertical and horizontal cooperation in Europe, but would like a few more details on how this is to be done.

1.24 As regards information for the disadvantaged, the CoR thinks that before any efforts are made to ensure equal information opportunities for these groups, the results should be obtained of research into the factors that hamper disadvantaged young people.

Provision of quality information

1.25 The CoR welcomes the EU Commission's proposal for a code of standards in the area of information provision and counselling services for young people, including common quality criteria and quality control mechanisms, but also sees the need for a benchmarking of the effects. The European dimension will be enhanced automatically through working with a common code of standards.

1.26 The CoR agrees with the EU Commission that staff working in the field of youth information should be better trained. Such training should particularly cover the world of young people and its rapidly changing channels of communication, where new technology such as mobile phones, SMS and internet games play a decisive role.

Enhancing young people's participation in the shaping and dissemination of information

1.27 The CoR accepts the EU Commission's proposal to involve youth organisations and young people generally in the planning and implementation of youth information strategies,

but would like to stress the importance of ethnic and other minorities being involved in the processes of provision, production and dissemination, especially as regards target groups of vulnerable young people.

IMPLEMENTING AND MONITORING MECHANISMS

1.28 The CoR notes with satisfaction that the EU Commission is planning to use the open coordination method for implementing and monitoring the common objectives in a flexible way and in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

1.29 The CoR requests that the active role of the local and regional authorities be defined and respected as regards exchanges of experiences and good practice and when taking part in the projected regular transnational meetings.

1.30 The CoR also requests the Member States to consult the local and regional authorities when preparing the national reports on the implementation of the two priorities *participation* and *information* in 2005 that the EU Commission is to use as a basis for drawing up a progress report for the Council.

Brussels, 11 February 2004.

The President
of the
Committee of the Regions

The Acting Secretary-General
of the
Committee of the Regions

Peter Straub

Gerhard Stahl

¹ OJ C 287 of 22.11.2002, p.6

² OJ C 163 of 9.7.2003

³ Implementing Common Objectives to enhance the participation of young people and improve information for young people (25-26 April 2003).

⁴ COM(2003) 272 final

CdR 309/2003 fin EN-FR/ET/ms

CdR 309/2003 fin EN-FR/ET/ms