



European Economic and Social Committee

SOC/144
FUNDING - YOUTH NGOs

Brussels, 24 September 2003

OPINION

of the European Economic and Social Committee

on the

Proposal for a European Parliament and of the Council decision establishing a Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth

COM(2003) 272 final – 2003/0113 (COD)

On 24 June 2003, the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 149 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

Proposal for a European Parliament and of the Council decision establishing a Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth

COM(2003) 272 final – 2003/0113 (COD).

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 10 September 2003. The rapporteur was **Mrs van Turnhout**, the co-rapporteurs were **Mr Soares** and **Mr Pezzini**.

At its 402nd plenary session (meeting of 24 September 2003), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 128 votes in favour and 1 vote against.

1. **Executive summary**

1.1 The European Economic and Social Committee welcome this measure, which ensures continuity of essential funding to bodies active at European level in the field of youth.

1.2 However the EESC is critical of the proposal to reduce funding by 2.5% each year after the third year. In this opinion we have outlined the probable impact of this proposal. In addition we argue that these organisations should be treated as per Article 162 of the Commission Regulation (EC, Euratom) No. 2342/2002¹. They are bodies who pursue an aim of general European interest² and therefore should not be treated under Article 113(2) of the Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No. 1605/2002.

1.3 The EESC welcomes the stability of funding this measure will give to the European Youth Forum, ensuring that it can continue to grow and strengthen.

1.4 The EESC notes with concern the trend over the past years, which has seen a gradual reduction of funding to some international youth organisations. The EESC calls on the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission to actively work to increase this budget line. The growth and development of international youth organisations is essential to the development and future of Europe, this needs to be recognised.

¹ Article 108 of the Financial Regulations

² Article 162 of the Commission Regulation (EC, Euratom) No. 2342/2002. A body pursuing an aim of general European interest is: (a) a European body involved in education, training, information or research and study in European policies or a European standards body; or (b) a European network representing non-profit bodies active in the Member States or in the candidate countries and promoting principles and policies consistent with the objectives of the Treaties.

1.5 The EESC notes that this proposal covers the period 2004-2006. We urge the Commission to commence and consult as wide as possible on how funding post-2006 will be handled.

1.6 The EESC urges the immediate implementation of the outstanding recommendations contained in the Evaluation Report on support for International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations, produced by the Commission.³

1.7 The EESC notes that this proposal is one of several referred by the Commission concerning Community action programmes and measures across a diverse range of fields. The EESC strongly advocates that the Commission takes a coherent approach across these fields, particularly to the eligibility for funding criteria.

2. Background

2.1 The European Economic and Social Committee welcomes the establishment of a *Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth*. This proposal will provide a basis for operating grants to bodies active at European level in the field of youth, for a period of three years (2004-2006).

2.2 For several years this support has been provided without a legal basis, under budgetary headings entered in the Commission's administrative expenditure:

- heading A-3023 co-finances the operating costs of the European Union Youth Forum.
- heading A-3029 provides support for international non-governmental youth organisations.

2.3 This support has provided essential core funding for the European Youth Forum through the Youth Forum of the European Union. With regard to the International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations this support has provided vital funding for the administration and secretariat of these organisations, funding which is otherwise unavailable at European level.

2.4 In drafting this response the European Economic and Social Committee has consulted the European Youth Forum and its member organisations, both International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations (INGYOs) and National Youth Councils (NYCs), over 90 organisations in total.

3. European Youth Forum

3.1 The EESC welcomes the stability of funding this measure will give to the European Youth Forum, ensuring that it can continue to grow and strengthen. Currently funding for this organisation must be channelled through the Youth Forum of the European Union of which some members of the European Youth Forum are not full members, e.g. National Youth Councils based outside the EU. On the face of it, it could just be seen as the removal of a technical barrier but the

³ SEC(2003) 934 Commission Staff Working Paper, Support for non governmental youth organisations (Evaluation Report)

EESC also recognises the political significance of having only one body at a pan-European level for youth.

3.2 The EESC welcomes in Annex 2.1 the recognition of the independence and autonomy of the Youth Forum. In spite of this it also refers to the principle of the “broadest possible involvement in the European Youth Forum’s activities of non-member organisations and young people who do not belong to organisations”. The EESC believes that this should not be seen as a condition of funding as the Youth Forum already strives to have a broad membership in the same manner as UNICE and ETUC at European level.

4. International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations

4.1 For several years the European Commission has provided vital funding for the administration and secretariat of these Youth NGOs, which is otherwise unavailable at European level. The majority of National Youth Councils within the European Union enjoy a similar arrangement for funding from their governments at Member State level.

4.2 A clearer definition and understanding of the work of International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations (INGYOs) is essential for the operation and success of this proposal. The EESC would welcome criteria that ensures Youth NGOs are run by and for youth; have a real democratic structure; enable participation of youth on local, regional, national and European level; are non-profit making and are volunteer led. A consistent measurement needs to be applied that will ensure only Youth organisations who fulfil the criteria listed herewith can avail of the funding.

4.3 The EESC strongly rejects the proposal to reduce funding by 2.5% each year after the third year as outlined in Annex 5.6.

- Not to provide sustained support to youth NGOs would waste the experience and knowledge that has been built up in organisations over years; from a taxpayer's point of view it would mean destroying the investment of public funds allocated in the past.
- For youth NGOs the sustainability of their structures is a particularly crucial question, as membership, volunteers and staff have – due to the very nature of youth organisations – a high turnover rate. Additionally, more than other voluntary organisations youth NGOs rely on volunteers with little prior experience when they become involved in the organisation.
- Youth NGOs involve a section of society with little own income which impacts on the organisations’ possibility to raise money from their constituency.

4.4 In addition the proposal to reduce funding after three years may encourage organisations to splinter, regroup and then reapply under their newly formed grouping. The incentive should be for organisations to strengthen and grow. If funding to individual organisations continues to

reduce on a yearly basis, the EESC understands why sections of an organisation may break away and apply for funding separately. Measures need to be put in place to reduce this risk.

4.5 The EESC highlights the importance of including measures to encourage new organisations to establish, particularly when they represent organisations and young people that are traditionally not represented or are under-represented groups. In this the European Year of People with Disabilities, the EESC believes particular efforts need to be made to ensure the development of organisations including and serving young people with disabilities.

4.6 The EESC underlines the importance of the involvement of the Commission in the selection process for funding. While the EESC understands the wish of the Commission to outsource some of this work, the political decision-making and control must remain the responsibility of the Commission.

4.7 The EESC notes that the English language version of the document in Annex 1 refers to in-formal education instead of non-formal education. The other language versions refer to non-formal education which is in agreement with the EESC understanding of these terms.

Brussels, 24 September 2003.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Roger Briesch

Patrick Venturini