

CONTRIBUTION TO THE CONVENTION ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

AUGUST 2002

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Volunteer Centre (CEV) is a European umbrella organisation of twenty-two National and Regional Volunteer Centres across Western, Central and Eastern Europe. CEV's key aims are to:

- **be an effective voice for volunteering in Europe;**
- **strengthen the infrastructure for volunteering in the countries of Europe;**
- **promote volunteering and make it more effective throughout the Continent.**

In preparing its first contribution to the Convention on the Future of Europe, CEV has worked closely with its twenty-two member organisations who have extensive knowledge and experience of volunteerism and its related fields such as poverty, social exclusion, education, employment, culture, the environment and more. This contribution to the debate on the Future of Europe represents their collective views and concerns, as well as those of the thousands of volunteers whom they represent throughout Europe. We urge Members of the Convention to consider their thoughts and proposals carefully.

This Paper, presented by CEV to Members of the Convention, outlines how best to support the fundamental principles of human dignity, freedom, democracy and inclusion within the Union, how to bring Europe closer to its citizens, how best to support volunteerism and how to ensure sustainable and just development within Europe for all its citizens.

In particular, CEV calls for:

Respect for the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity on which the European Union was founded

- **Incorporation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms into the Treaties on European Union**
- **Strengthening of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights** to include:
 - the right of civil society, including non-governmental organisations to be consulted at European level

Respect for the fundamental democratic and inclusive principles on which the Union was founded

- **The creation of a Treaty Article on the right of consultation of civil society organisations**
- **Recognition of non-governmental organisations as social partners** with the same status as the existing social partners
- **Simplification of the political decision-making process**
- **Strengthening of the role of the European Parliament** by strengthening the powers of co-decision
- **Reform of the European Economic and Social Committee** to include representation of non-governmental organisations

The development of integrated policies to ensure sustainable development and a Europe of solidarity

- **The fight against unemployment, poverty and social exclusion as key objectives** of the Union
- **Policies that favour of the positive integration of traditionally excluded social groups**
- Declaration 38 on voluntary service activities should be built on by linking it to a **new Treaty amendment** in any future Treaty on European Union, which should recognise the **general interest nature of volunteering** and **the important role volunteerism plays in almost every field of both social *and* economic activity**
- **Policies that factor volunteer effort into their design and implementation**

INTRODUCTION

The European Volunteer Centre (CEV) welcomes the initiative of the Council of the European Union to convene a Convention on the future of Europe at the Laeken Summit in December 2001. It represents an ambitious process, aimed at considering the key questions concerning the future development of the European Union. CEV welcomes the launch of this process and the decision to broaden the remit from the narrow agenda set in Nice. CEV also welcomes the creation of a Forum, which gives civil society organisations the opportunity to make specific contributions to the debate. We urge Members of the Convention to give due attention to what Europe's citizens want, and expect, from the European Union.

The work of the Convention will last one year and will be followed by an Intergovernmental Conference in 2004. This preliminary contribution therefore represents the first step CEV wishes to undertake with the Convention. CEV will continue to work hard to ensure that volunteerism is central to the debate on the future of Europe.

This paper, presented by CEV to members of the Convention, is structured around the consideration of several key issues, which we believe important in relation to modification of the Treaties on European Union. These are:

- 1. Respect for the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity on which the European Union was founded**
- 2. Respect for democratic and inclusive principles and bringing Europe closer to its citizens**
- 3. The development of integrated policies reflecting both social and economic elements to ensure sustainable development and a Europe of solidarity**

It is on the basis of these questions that CEV makes the following concrete proposals.

1. Respect for the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity on which the European Union was founded

1.1 The legal status of the Charter of Fundamental Freedoms of the European Union

The Laeken Declaration on the future of Europe poses the question of whether the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union should be included in the basic Treaty on European Union, and whether the European Community should accede to the European Convention on Human Rights.

The European Union was, according to the Preamble of EU Charter of Fundamental Freedoms, founded upon the, *“indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity: it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law.”* CEV believes these fundamental rights and freedoms should be placed **at the heart of the Union**. We therefore ask the Convention to **reflect upon the legal status of the Charter, and to include the Charter in the Treaties on European Union**.

1.2 Strengthening the Charter of Fundamental Freedoms of the European Union

However CEV also recommends that, at the same time, **the Charter be strengthened**. In particular, CEV calls upon the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights to include:

- I. **the right of civil society, including non-governmental organisations to be consulted at European level must be established within the Charter**. This is particularly important in the context of organisations representing social groups traditionally excluded from the political decision-making process.

2. Respect for the democratic and inclusive principles on which the Union was founded and bringing Europe closer to its citizens

2.1 Democracy, Participation and Consultation on the European Project

We agree with the Laeken Declaration on the future of Europe which states that the European Institutions must be brought closer to its citizens, and particularly young people. In order to carry on developing, the European Union needs the support of its citizens, and we agree with the European Council for Voluntary Organisations (CEDAG), which states that this support may only be obtained if citizens and social actors are invited beforehand to participate in the European project. Currently, many citizens are not involved in political life at European level and in fact, feel excluded from participation. EU institutions and procedures remain largely misunderstood and the Commission’s position on civil dialogue has traditionally been weak. We agree with the principles of openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence as outlined in the European Commission’s 2001 White Paper on Governance.¹ CEV therefore makes the following concrete recommendations to members of the Convention:

¹ European Governance: A White Paper (COM (2001) 428)

- I. CEV agrees with the Platform of European Social NGOs and calls on the Convention to create a **Treaty article on the right of consultation of civil society organisations**, including NGOs, on all policies of relevance to them, in order to guarantee a more participative form of democracy within the European Union. The Treaty article should also **recognise non-governmental organisations as social partners with the same status as the existing social partners**;
- II. **Simplification of the political decision-making process** in order to make it more transparent and understandable to citizens.

2.2 Subsidiarity as a principal of good governance

We believe **subsidiarity is a key principal of good governance**. CEV therefore calls for, in addition to the rules on **vertical subsidiarity**, the introduction into the Treaty of the principle of **horizontal subsidiarity**, according to which civil society organisations will be able to manage those issues they are better equipped to do so.

2.3 Strengthening the role of the European Parliament

CEV also believes that a transparent, democratic and inclusive Union requires **strengthening the role of the European Parliament**. CEV supports moves to strengthen democracy within the European Union by extending the powers of co-decision of the European Parliament to **all EU legislation** and **qualified majority voting** within the Council of Ministers.

2.4 Reform of the Economic and Social Committee

We believe that the Economic and Social Committee should be structured around the **representation of employers, workers and non-governmental organisations** in order to give a voice to groups who are traditionally excluded and whose voice is weak.

2.5 Strengthening the participation in the debate of the candidate countries

CEV also believes that, in accordance with the principles of democracy and inclusion, representatives from the candidate countries should be fully included in the debate on the future of Europe **to the same extent as Member States organisations**. Civil society organisations from the accession countries can make an important contribution to the development and consolidation of democracy and civil society in the region.

3. The development of integrated policies reflecting both social and economic elements to ensure sustainable development and a Europe of solidarity

3.1 The fight against unemployment, poverty and social exclusion

The Laeken Declaration also states that Europe's citizens want results in the fields of employment, in combating poverty and social exclusion, as well as in the field of economic and social cohesion, and asks how the Union can intensify cooperation among Member States in these areas. At CEV, we believe that any future Treaty on European Union should include **the fight against unemployment, poverty and social exclusion as key objectives of the Union**, in line with the founding principles of economic and social progress, balanced and sustainable development. We also urge members of the Convention to ensure that the Treaty explicitly states that **non-governmental organisations are to be involved in this process**.

3.2 Policies in favour of the positive integration of traditionally excluded social groups

We also ask that the Treaty **explicitly** allow policy-makers to develop **policies in favour of disadvantaged social groups** and their **positive integration into society**, such as the long-term unemployed, women, excluded young people, older people, the disabled, refugees and immigrants, and that members of the Convention recognise the important role that volunteerism plays in representing and involving such traditionally excluded social groups.

3.3 Recognition of the social *and* economic value of volunteering in the Treaty on European Union and support for the European dimension of volunteering

Declaration 38 on voluntary service activities, attached to the final act of the Treaty of Amsterdam, recognises the important contribution made by voluntary service activities to **developing social solidarity** and states that the **Community will encourage the European dimension of voluntary organisations** with particular emphasis on the exchange of information and experience as well as on the participation of the young and the elderly in voluntary work. CEV welcomes the progress made in recognising the value of volunteer work to social and cultural capital within Europe, but regrets the absence of an **explicit reference within the Treaty** to the role of volunteering in **promoting both social *and* economic cohesion in European Union**. CEV also regrets the lack of core-funding available to non-profit organisations such as CEV, which encourage the European dimension of volunteering through the exchange of information and experience, and which support diversity in volunteering in Europe.

CEV believes that Declaration 38 on voluntary service activities should be built on by linking it to a **new Treaty amendment** in any future Treaty on European Union, which should recognise the **general interest nature of volunteering** and **the important role volunteerism plays in almost every field of both social *and* economic activity in Europe**.

At the same time, the Treaty amendment should state that the Community will emphasise the **participation in voluntary work of not just young people and the elderly, but other often excluded social groups such as the long-term unemployed, women, the disabled, refugees and immigrants**.

3.4 Community Policies that factor volunteer effort into their design and implementation

CEV also asks that any future Treaty on European Union **explicitly** states that Member States are **obliged to factor volunteer effort into the design and implementation of Community policies**, in

order to avoid impacting negatively on citizens' opportunities and willingness to engage in voluntary activity, thus undermining a valuable Community resource.

3.5 Social Services provided by non-profit entities within the EU

CEV believes that there should be an **exemption from Community competition rules** of social services provided by non-profit entities.

3.6 Article 13 on non-discrimination

Finally, CEV calls on members of the Convention to strengthen Article 13 on non-discrimination and reaffirm the commitment of the Union to strengthen the rights of discriminated groups across Europe. We believe that **Article 13 should be given direct effect**, and decisions taken under the non-discrimination clause subject to **qualified majority voting** and not unanimity in the Council of Ministers.

CEV is actively engaged in promoting volunteering to the general public, the media and policy-makers at the European level, supporting existing National and Regional Volunteer Centres throughout Western, Central and Eastern Europe as well as supporting the development of new Centres. CEV also actively supports organisations promoting innovation and wishing to implement good practice in their involvement of volunteers.

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