



Brussels, 22 April 2004

**Regarding: European Volunteer Centre Response to the European Commission Communications on “The New Generation of Community Education and Training Programmes After 2006 (COM (2004) 156 final) and “Making Citizenship Work: Fostering European Culture and Diversity through Programmes for Youth, Culture, Audiovisual and Civic Participation “ (COM (2004) 154 final)**

The European Volunteer Centre (CEV) strongly welcomes the European Commission’s two recent Communications on “The New Generation of Community Education and Training Programmes After 2006 (COM (2004) 156 final) and “Making Citizenship Work: Fostering European Culture and Diversity through Programmes for Youth, Culture, Audiovisual and Civic Participation “ (COM (2004) 154 final). In particular, we welcome the opportunity to comment in detail on the communications since both documents state that, “*nothing in [the communications] prejudices the final content of the legislative proposals to be adopted by the Commission, including their financial aspects*” and “*the Commission remains committed to examining further ways of simplifying and rationalizing the implementation of these proposals.*”

The European Volunteer Centre is the association of Europe’s national and regional volunteer centres that together work to support and promote voluntary action. CEV channels the collective priorities and concerns of its members to the institutions of the European Union. It also acts as a central forum for the exchange of information, policy and practice. It supports networking among its members and organizes conferences, seminars, workshops and other activities such as research. The members of CEV together represent thousands of volunteer organizations and associations, and other voluntary and community groups at local, regional and national levels.

Volunteering, as a tool for non-formal education, training and life-long learning, as well as active civic citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity are now much more widely recognized. Indeed, CEV member organizations have been actively involved in the design of many programmes, projects, research and methodologies that have aimed to demonstrate the important role volunteering has to play in the achievement of these objectives. In February 2003, CEV also contributed, with its response, to the open public consultation on the future generation of Community education, training and youth programmes. In this context, we feel we have specific expertise, and interest in making a series of brief comments on the two communications that we hope you will find helpful.

Firstly, in relation to the Communication on “The New Generation of Community Education and Training Programmes After 2006 (COM (2004) 156 final), CEV very much welcomes the ambitious nature of the new programmes. In particular, we welcome the new paradigm of learning which places the learner at the centre of the learning process, and whose definition encompasses the full spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. The Communication goes on to state however, that lifelong learning strategies after 2006 “*should promote more effective partnerships between key actors including business, the social partners and education institutions at all levels.*”<sup>1</sup> CEV would also argue that many non-governmental and community organizations are also important players in lifelong learning strategies and that it is imperative to extend effective cooperation to them also. The Communication then points to the importance of “*validation of prior learning*

---

<sup>1</sup> English language version, paragraph 1.6, page 6

*in order to motivate people to learn.*"<sup>2</sup> We very much agree with this, and welcome the fact that the Commission has acknowledged this as an important issue within the Communication. In addition, we would go on to point out that many volunteer centres, and voluntary and community organizations in general, are doing a lot of good work on developing methodologies and tools for the validation of competences gained through voluntary activities. Again, we would like to stress that these organizations are important stakeholders in the development of common principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and lifelong guidance, and therefore key in the active implementation of the "Copenhagen Declaration".

The Communication then speaks about the importance of enabling the mobility of "*students, trainees, adult learners, teachers, trainers and academics.*" Such mobility is "*crucial to the development of the knowledge society*", the Communication argues.<sup>3</sup> While CEV most certainly agrees with this, we would also want to see "volunteers" added here.

The Communication also discusses the important policy challenge of the ageing society, and the fact that Member States have been invited to "*develop policies for active ageing*".<sup>4</sup> In this regard, we were somewhat surprised not to see *in either Communication* any hint of increased levels of support for voluntary service exchanges of older persons and in particular of inter-generational programmes and activities. As stated in our original response to the open public consultation on the future generation of programmes in education, training and youth, "*in volunteering, it is true that in general terms, volunteerism among older people is on the increase, growing in terms of numbers, of the range of activities, and of the impact on communities and societies. CEV considers that transnational voluntary activity among older people will not only bring considerable experience and skills to local communities, but will help foster continued participation and a stronger European identity among this generation.*"<sup>5</sup> We regret therefore that these proposals appear not to have been taken on board and that in fact, Member States active ageing policies will continue to focus only on the employment rate of older workers.

It is true that the new Grundtvig mobility actions will aim to support the greater mobility of adult learners, but we feel that the emphasis within the Commission Communication is very much on formal education and training, and support to formal adult education providers. This seems ironic given that the Commission Communication also discusses the importance of "second chance" opportunities for those that have left the formal education system without basic qualifications, and in particular the importance of innovative pedagogical approaches. CEV would like to stress that for this target group, voluntary activities have a key (complementary) role to play here, and of course the work undertaken by volunteer centres on the validation of competencies gained through volunteering is of particular interest.

Paragraph 2.12, page 10 (English language version) argues that periods of study and training abroad can help contribute to a labour force equipped to deal with the rapid changes brought about by the process of globalization and the knowledge-driven economy. While CEV certainly agrees with this, it would add here that periods of voluntary service abroad can also help to achieve such objectives.

CEV also welcomes a number of other actions and improvements proposed by the Communication. These include an acknowledgement of the need to overhaul administrative and financial procedures associated with the Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci Programmes, as well as a need to strengthen dissemination of good results obtained. This is to be congratulated: for a long time, lengthy bureaucratic procedures and delays for relatively

---

<sup>2</sup> As above

<sup>3</sup> English language version, paragraph 2.2, page 8

<sup>4</sup> English language version, paragraph 2.11, page 10

<sup>5</sup> CEV formal response to the European Commission open public consultation on the future design of education, training and youth programmes after 2006, February 2003

small grants have prevented many smaller organizations from taking forward applications. CEV also agrees that decentralized programmes, closer to the beneficiary, remain a more appropriate form of programme organization and management.

Furthermore, in relation to the design of a new “Integrated Programme”, CEV, on the whole welcomes the creation of four separate sectoral programmes and two transversal, horizontal programmes. All we ask however, is that within these four sectoral programmes which cover school, higher, adult and vocational education and training, the important role of volunteering within each strand is fully taken into account and adequately supported. Indeed, research in a number of countries has shown that in fact, many young people enter jobs in areas more closely related to their experiences as a volunteer than their academic studies.

Equally, within the Jean Monnet Programme, the European Commission must recognize that transnational networks and associations active in the volunteering sector also play a key role in developing innovative non-formal education and training programmes and voluntary activities. Such networks provide a central forum through which to exchange information, experience, policy and practice. They provide opportunities for support and partnerships. They are therefore fundamental in the context of fostering wider grassroots participation in the programmes and for developing a “European identity”. Appropriate funding support therefore must be available, within the framework of this new programme, to EU NGOs active in the volunteering sector on the basis that they are essential infrastructure bodies. Such support should not only be made available to formal education and training providers. We believe that the EU must aim to strengthen partnerships and synergies between the formal education and training sector and the non-formal voluntary sector, which the Commission and Parliament have admitted has *“a wealth of experience in non-formal education on which governments could draw in implementing lifelong learning measures and strategies.”*<sup>6</sup> Operating grants should also be selected on the basis of a competitive calls for proposals system. In this regard, we were pleased to see this within the Communication.

Finally, within the Tempus Plus Programme, CEV was pleased to see a “vocational education and training strand” which will support, in particular, the mutual recognition and transmission of qualifications and of learning and especially non-formal and informal learning. The strand will also aim to strengthen *“VET and adult education systems”*.<sup>7</sup> Here, we would add that support within this programme must also be channelled towards voluntary sector providers of non-formal education, training and learning.

Moving on to the Commission Communication, “Making Citizenship Work: Fostering European Culture and Diversity through Programmes for Youth, Culture, Audiovisual and Civic Participation “ (COM (2004) 154 final), CEV again warmly welcomes this initiative. In particular, we welcome the tabling of civic participation and European citizenship as priority issues for the period 2007-2013. CEV strongly believes that volunteering enables citizens of all nationalities, religions, socio-economic background, ability and age to participate in the life of their local communities. This creates bond of trust and encourages cooperation (i.e. it creates social capital) as well as promotes the social inclusion of the socially excluded. Voluntary action also promotes participation in public affairs which is vital for the preservation of democratic principles. Furthermore, volunteer exchanges of both the young and the old to other European countries have been shown to contribute to the development of a “European identity” among participants as well as active citizenship on return home. Volunteering is therefore central to European ideals of democracy, inclusion and active citizenship. In this context, the Communication is of particular interest to our network, including the new Community Action Programme to promote active European citizenship (civic citizenship).

---

<sup>6</sup> European Parliament Report on the Commission Communication, “Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality” (COM (2001) 678, Rapporteur, Kathleen van Brempt

<sup>7</sup> English language version, paragraph 5.5, page 21

Within the Communication, CEV welcomes the acknowledgement by the Commission that young people express a desire to participate in public life, “*but in novel ways*”.<sup>8</sup> The Communication also points to the challenge of fostering the active engagement of this generation and proposes that youth policy gives young people the opportunity to enhance their education and training in a less formal way than formal education and training systems. CEV agrees with this approach and has for a long time argued that volunteering, both locally and abroad, has an important role to play in achieving these objectives. In this regard, we strongly welcome the decision of the European Commission to significantly expand the European Voluntary Service Programme, which has proved a successful and worthwhile programme. We also welcome the decision to extend the age range of participants from 13-30 years.

Nevertheless, as we have stated earlier in this paper, CEV regrets that voluntary service is still very much viewed by the European Commission as a sub-category of youth work, as opposed a worthwhile action in its own right, for all ages. However, we do support efforts to explore ways in which national civil services, international solidarity activities and the European Voluntary Service Programme could complement each other, as well as efforts to expand the geographical scope of the programme to third countries. All we ask however, is that decisions as to which countries are involved and which are excluded should be made public, civil society organizations must participate in this debate, and final decisions should in no way reflect former colonial ties of individual Member States. This should be clear in any final legislative proposals. In addition, we welcome effort by the Commission to financially support those NGOs that contribute to meeting the four priority areas on youth.

The Communication then proposes five actions for young people: “Youth for Europe”; “European Voluntary Service”; “Youth of the World”; “Socio-educational Instructors and Support Systems” and “Support for Political Cooperation.” On reading the Communication however, it did not seem at all clear what are the concrete differences between the “Youth for Europe” and the “European Voluntary Service” actions. Both appear to support the exchanges of young people to other countries and the active engagement of young people in society. If clear differences do exist, or are foreseen within current proposals, these must be clearly communicated externally to avoid confusion. If there are no concrete, or only small differences between the two programmes, then duplication should be avoided and the two actions merged into one to promote greater efficiency of resources.

We welcome the efforts the Commission is making to develop both the European Voluntary Service Programme and the idea of the Youth of the World Programme, but we feel that it should be noted that such exchanges and programmes could only be properly managed and effective in the context of an appropriate European legal framework for volunteers.

Within the “Socio-educational Instructors and Support Systems” strand, CEV welcomes the decision to financially support the organizations and structures engaged in youth work at European level, as well as measures to support the programmes’ structures at national, regional and local levels. All we would say however is that, where possible, such measures should aim to work with, and strengthen existing infrastructure already in place, as opposed create new, competing bodies. Furthermore, regarding “Support for Political Cooperation”, the Communication proposes “*cooperation with international organizations with responsibilities for youth*”.<sup>9</sup> CEV would go even further here, and argue that a structured civil dialogue is necessary with civil society organizations active in the field of youth on policies that are of relevance to them.

We do however, warmly welcome efforts to simplify the future programmes, make them more flexible and carried out in a decentralized way. We hope that this will encourage many more smaller organizations to

---

<sup>8</sup> English language version, paragraph 3.1, page 6

<sup>9</sup> English language version, paragraph 3.3.2, page 8

become involved and thus promote innovation even more actively. However, we do feel that *both of the Communications* fail to identify how these exciting new programmes will be promoted to the European population and how to make sure that no group is left unaware of the opportunities available to them.

Finally, in relation to the Community Action Programme to promote active European citizenship (civic citizenship), we would like to thank the European Commission for the creation of this new budget line: it demonstrates that the Commission believes it is vital to promote active civic citizenship and engagement with the EU institutions, something that CEV also strongly agrees with. However, we have also, in a previous letter expressed our deep concern over certain elements of the programme and over the processes that resulted in the creation of this new Community Action Programme. These concerns related principally to the “ear-marking” for 2004 and 2005 of operating grants to sixteen organizations without consultation of civil society organizations potentially affected by this programme. Neither was civil society consulted at any stage on the design or content of this programme. In fact, all discussions relating the establishment of this programme were conducted in a highly non-transparent, non-public manner. So while CEV on the one hand welcomes the creation of this new Community Action Programme, it finds these processes unacceptable. We enclose, for your reference a copy of the letter that was sent to you several weeks ago in this regard.

CEV sincerely hopes that these comments and proposals will be helpful in the elaboration of final legislative proposals to be adopted this summer. Indeed, CEV is delighted to lend its expertise and network to this process in any way possible.

Yours Sincerely,

Gail Hurley,  
Coordinator

Richard Perrin,  
Research Assistant