



Brussels, 14.02.2007

Mr. José Manuel Barroso
President of the European Commission

We would like to express our sincere thanks for your initiative to consult the Civil Society actors in the constitutional debate, in the light of the forthcoming 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome and the new political declaration to be adopted on this occasion.

This year is of great importance for **CEV- European Volunteer Centre** as well. We have just expanded our membership to 50 member organisations, which in an excellent way coincides with the 50th anniversary of the European Community. Our fifty members are the national, regional and local volunteer centres and volunteer development agencies from throughout Europe. Together we work to strengthen volunteering as an expression of active citizenship in Europe and beyond. CEV, its members and partners give a voice to more than 100 million European volunteers – a voice which shall be heard when discussing the declaration for the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome.

Why is it essential to recognise the importance of volunteering in the Declaration?

President Barroso, during the meeting with the civil society representatives in Brussels on the 23rd January 2007, presented the basic values, which will be mentioned in the Declaration: solidarity and social cohesion, sustainability, accountability and legitimacy, security, global responsibility of EU and promotion freedom and justice. We would like to underline that volunteering as a horizontal issue does play a role in strengthening every single of these values.

- Volunteering is an excellent means of **social inclusion and integration** of most vulnerable groups (migrants, disabled, poor or unemployed people) and creates strong social bonds and a feeling of mutual trust and **solidarity**. It is the **glue that holds our societies together**.
- Volunteering contributes to **sustainability** by providing the best outcomes for the human and natural environments thanks to thousands of volunteers involved in preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystems, and planning and acting for the ability to maintain these ideals in a long term perspective. Volunteering builds the social capital needed to make our societies sustainable and worthwhile contexts to live in.
- Volunteering is part of direct and participative **democracy** and strategies to enhance the EU's democratic **legitimacy** and **accountability** needs to take them into account.
- Volunteers contribute – often as pioneers - to preserve **peace** and **security**, to help finding common grounds in **divided societies** and to contribute to **freedom** and **justice** in the world.
- Volunteering is an excellent expression of **active (European) citizenship**. Volunteering has a great potential for building a European identity as volunteers throughout Europe do engage for the same values – if a European dimension is added to their engagement at local level.

Volunteering as an expression of active citizenship and an instrument towards forging a European identity clearly merits mentioning in the declaration.

50 years ago, we could not even dream of reaching the present state - a free and united Europe of 27 countries. However, we believe that much still needs to be done to succeed in creating a Europe for its citizens living up to their aspirations. The recognition of the value and importance of volunteering in Europe and its great political, social and economic benefits to European society is a step into this direction.

Sincerely yours,

Markus Held
CEV Director