

THE CEV RESPONSE
TO THE COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION ON PROMOTING THE ROLE
OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS IN EUROPE COM (97) 241
final

1./ CEV is the association of Centres for Volunteering in Europe, whose members collectively represent many hundreds of volunteer organisations in 15 European countries. CEV also has contact with volunteer organisations in a further 16 countries through its administration of the Phare and Tacis LIEN Programme of the European Commission. CEV is the voice for volunteering in Europe.

2./ CEV welcomes the Commission's Communication on promoting the role of voluntary organisations and foundations in Europe. The paper is a very clear and useful statement of the current position, and contains much helpful information.

3./ CEV particularly welcomes the very clear acknowledgement in the Communication of the range, scale and depth of the contribution of voluntary action to the social economy in Europe. We welcome its recognition that voluntary organisations and people who give time as volunteers, have a major impact on the delivery of services, and the development of new services:

- In response to need, in advocacy, in support of people in need or of specific causes, and through the medium of mutual aid or self-help, through which people work together to meet their own, shared needs;
- Voluntary action is seen as having economic significance, creating jobs and services, and as having social significance, in terms of solidarity and active citizenship, and therefore political significance in terms of resource development and civic engagement.

4./ CEV promotes the development of volunteering and of voluntary organisations as a powerful and effective expression of citizen engagement, which offers to Europe's citizens a means of meaningful participation in the life of their communities.

5./ CEV welcomes the Commission's continuing commitment to the development of voluntary action and looks forward to the further development of a supportive policy and resource framework.

6./ CEV has a particular interest in, and commitment to, the development of volunteering i.e., the involvement of citizens as volunteers. We would have welcomed clearer recognition of this in the social and community life throughout Europe. The Eurovol study, published in 1991, gives some indications of the scale, range and value of volunteer effort, freely given. In the UK alone, it is estimated that volunteers give some 100 million hours per week which represents a contribution of some 41 billion pounds a year to the national social economy.

7./ Because these gifts of time are not paid for, they do not appear in the balance sheet. They nevertheless have huge, indeed almost incalculable, social and economic value. Like all precious resources, they require investment to promote volunteering and to develop good practice in order to ensure its efficiency and effectiveness. CEV urges the Commission to declare its commitment to the development of volunteering and to encourage its Member States to develop networks of volunteer centres at local, regional and national levels.

8./ At European level, CEV is justly proud of its record of success in the development and administration of the Phare and Tacis LIEN Programme, for which it acts as the Commission's technical assistance agent. The Centre needs now to move into a further stage of its development, to take forward its core task as the co-ordinating body for National and Regional Volunteer Centres in Europe. In this context, CEV particularly welcomes to the Commission's recognition of the importance of civil dialogue. We look forward to taking part in this dialogue at all levels.

