

## **Commission Proposal for a new YOUTH IN ACTION Programme Common reactions and comments from the network of National Agencies**

In July 2004, the European Commission presented its proposal for a new YOUTH IN ACTION Programme 2007 - 2013. Many partners and stakeholders in the youth field have been looking forward to this proposal with great expectations. They have been contributing to several evaluations and consultations in preparation of this new programme and have been active partners in the area of European co-operation in the youth field, as a follow-up of the White Paper "A new impetus for European Youth".

The network of National Agencies for the YOUTH programme expressed its common opinions during the preparation of the new programme, in the discussion paper resulting from its meetings in Athens (EL). Following the presentation of the proposal for the new programme, the NA's felt the need to exchange ideas and views on this proposal. To take this forward they met in Bergen (NL) from 7 till 9 October 2004 in a network meeting.

The current document aims at communicating the results of the discussions in the network to the European Commission and to all parties involved in the debate on the new proposal. It is a contribution to this debate, in view of promoting the approval of the new programme, and also an initial step in the process of preparing the implementation of the new programme, once it has been approved. In this respect, the text is also an expression of the commitment of the network of NA's to the development of the YOUTH IN ACTION programme and a first response to the invitation, expressed by the Commission in the NA meeting on 15 September 2004, to start the thinking on the further implementation of the several actions in the programme.

We'd like to stress that this document only reflects the ideas and observations that are shared unanimously by all National Agencies present in the meeting. There was more input in the discussion, which has not been taken up in the conclusions. However, the network is confident that there will be other occasions and opportunities to discuss further and in depth, in the framework planned by the Commission.

In general the network welcomes and highly appreciates the fact that a lot of its concerns and opinions, as expressed in the Athens paper, have been taken into consideration, as well as the results from the consultations and the interim evaluation of the current programme. Nevertheless there are a number of items that needs to be discussed further or, as we hope, could be developed with some modifications.

## **The network of National Agencies welcomes :**

1. the fact that the Commission proposes a unique and specific YOUTH IN ACTION programme, with a more active name that strengthens its identity. The general objectives of the programme, create a focus on the core issues of European youth work and youth policy : the promotion of young people's participation and active citizenship. In this respect the new programme fulfils an important supportive role towards the needs of European youth policy, as stated in the White Paper and the Common Objectives in priority areas. As a result, the youth political significance of the new programme becomes much stronger
2. the fact that the new programme enables the involvement of young people in European policy making and that it supports the interactive dialogue and co-operation with policy makers on all levels : local, regional and national. The current programmes and budget lines for the promotion of Europe wide active youth organisations, of the European Youth Forum as well as pilot projects for the participation of youth, have been successfully integrated, which results in a more coherent and transparent programme proposal.
3. that all young people, irrespective of differences and backgrounds, can and must have access to the programme activities and that, at the same time, the programme emphasises the participation of young people with fewer opportunities and the need for particular efforts towards these target groups.
4. that the Western Balkan countries and Switzerland become participating countries in the programme. The network also welcomes the wider enlargement of the geographical scope of the new programme, giving it a clear global dimension. The concerns of many young people about global issues can be addressed through the "Youth in the World"-action. It is also a confirmation of the fact that global "sensitivity" is an indispensable part of European values and active European citizenship.
5. that the programme promotes the recognition of non-formal and informal learning experiences of young people and that it continues to contribute to the European Union's actions in the context of a Europe of knowledge and of lifelong learning.
6. that the programme urges the participating countries to take the necessary measures to remove mobility obstacles for participants, also from partners countries, so that they are guaranteed access to health care, social protection and the right of entry, residence and free movement.
7. that the new programme allows natural persons to receive grants and that the proposed legal basis includes relevant exceptions in the implementation of financial and administrative regulations. This creates the necessary preconditions for an administrative approach that fits the programme, it's target groups and it's objectives. It confirms and strengthens the expressed intention of the Commission to simplify the implementation of the programme.

8. that the Commission confirms its intention to implement and administer the programme primarily on a decentralised basis and that more detailed regulations for the setting up of national agencies by the programme countries have been integrated in the proposal.

**The network of National Agencies is mainly concerned about :**

1. the disappointingly low increase of the budget for the new programme. Taking into account the already existing programmes and budget lines, that have been integrated in the programme, we calculate an increase around 17 % to 20 %. This is insufficient, looking at the achievements and the level of demand under the current programme and considering the expansion of participating and partner countries, the widening of the age limits and the actions resulting from the increased significance of European co-operation in the youth field. In principal every enlargement of age groups within the new programme should be in balance with an adequate increase of the budget in order to avoid more exclusive conditions for the participation of young people in the programme. It is also far below the general level of budgetary increases for other programmes in the field of education and culture, that have been proposed recently by the Commission
2. the balance between Action 1 and Action 2 or short term and long term activities. Activities in Action 1 or short term activities like Group Exchange or Group EVS have the potential to give access to Europe and a first experience with intercultural learning and citizenship for a higher number of young people, especially for those people with fewer opportunities. As in the current programme the balance between these Actions or the short term and long term activities inside these actions should be maintained. There is no justification to give a strong quantitative priority to Action 2, compared to Action 1.
3. the developments in the Action 2 – European Voluntary Service. The concepts behind the strand “Group EVS” and “Co-operation between civil and voluntary services” are not clearly defined and give way to many developments that should be avoided or modified, e.g. :
  - the possibility to expect “special capacities” from participants of group voluntary service does not correspond with the spirit of the programme
  - in the “Group EVS” strand other type of projects, which are not only linked with international or European events, should be developed. Also the “intervention” idea should be adapted to that ambition.
  - It is not clear from the description in the annex which strands are open for partner countries outside Europe. Some elements seem not to have been mentioned in the text.
  - the spirit of the EVS-action as a learning experience, does not always correspond with the spirit of other national services in this field. The programme needs a clear definition of these concepts. Also a clear distinction between voluntary and obligatory services should be maintained.

- the limitation in the average funding for individual EVS-projects should not lead to exclusion of potential participants. In case the duration of EVS-projects is limited the “learning value” of such an experience will be damaged.
4. the diversification of age limits as described in the annex to the proposal. Although the principle of having specified age limits for different actions is not questioned, the annex to the proposal gives a too detailed elaboration of this approach for every sub-action, which makes the network raise many questions about the transparency and simplification of the programme. The main item for discussion is the change in the age limit for “youth initiatives” to 18-30 years. The network doesn’t see a motivation to do this and is convinced that this step is contradictory to the aims, objectives and the profile of the main target group for this action. The exclusion of 15-17 year old is even more incomprehensible, when looking at the age limits for the other strands of Action 1.
  5. the enlargement of the geographical scope of the programme means a change of “status” for the Caucasus and the Latin-American countries, in comparison with the current programme. This leads the network to state that a further discussion is needed in order to give the wider geographical scope of the programme a more structured direction, without damaging the “global dimension”. In respect of co-operation with partner countries it was stressed not to underestimate the benefits of bilateral projects, certainly not when co-operation in the field of “youth initiatives” is also made possible.
  6. the nature of Action 4 activities and the role of the National Agencies and Salto Resource Centres. The new Action 4 aims at the development of professional competences of those active in the youth field, as the network also has been promoting in its Athens paper. However, the current action does not clearly mention the aim of supporting youth workers in their process towards a project under the Actions 1,2 or 3. This remains a clear need, certainly when aiming at creating opportunities for always new generations of youth workers.

Besides that we are concerned that the budget calculated in action 4 does not reflect the effect and outstanding significance of this action for organisations, youth workers and young people, as became obvious from the mid-term evaluation. This doesn’t correspond with the need and intended aims for the development of quality in the programme activities. In order to guarantee this the budget must be increased in proportion to the other actions.

In the same way the National Agencies, have stressed in the Athens Paper the value and the need for specific instruments like the Training and Co-operation Plan and the Salto Resource Centres, in order to support the quality of projects. The network would like to stress this again, as it doesn’t see these instruments mentioned in the description of this Action 4.

7. the supportive role of the National Agencies in the implementation of the programme. The network has always stressed the role of NA's in supporting potential and active users of the programme. At the same time the network stated that "NA's have the capacity and skills to support the objectives of the European political co-operation in the youth field". In this respect the network of NA's regrets that the proposal for the new programme only refers to National Agencies as managing bodies, which only seem to need technical and management skills and capacities.

The network of National Agencies therefore proposes that Article 8, §6,b) also mentions the condition that National Agencies should have the necessary competence in the field of youth work and youth policy and the capacity of guaranteeing the supportive approach towards the users of the programme.

### **Conclusions :**

Taking into account all considerations and arguments mentioned above, the network of National Agencies for the Youth programme is looking forward to take up the discussion in order to elaborate and develop the new programme.

The network would like to recommend :

- to include in the proposal "competence in the youth field" and "capacity to develop a supportive approach", as necessary characteristics for the National Agencies
- to start up as soon as possible the debate on diversification of age limits in different actions and to restore the minimum age limit for "Youth Initiatives" to at least 15.
- to stress, as a general objective, the contribution of the programme to the development of non-formal learning and to the EU life long learning strategy
- to clarify the different concepts used in the proposal for the Action 2 and discuss the nature of the different strands and how they relate to each other
- to keep supportive measures in view of YOUTH projects in the programme, as well as the Training and Co-operation Plan and the Salto Resource Centres.
- to avoid any more limitations in the participation of young people in projects by raising the programmes budget.
- to keep the balance between Action 1 and Action 2 or short term and long term activities and to guarantee the effects and outstanding significance of Action 4 for organisations, youth workers and youth through an increased budget.
- to guarantee that a supportive approach becomes or remains possible by making maximum use of relevant derogations from existing financial and administrative regulations.

Bergen, the Netherlands,  
9/10/2004.