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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION
TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

pursuant to the second subparagraph of Article 189 b (2) of the EC-Treaty

**CONCERNING THE COMMON POSITION OF THE COUNCIL ON THE ADOPTION OF A
DECISION ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMME
“EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE”**

1. INTRODUCTION

As required under Article 189b of the EC Treaty, this document presents the Commission's position on the common position of the Council of 28 October 1997 on the Community action programme "European Voluntary Service for Young People". On the basis of the European Parliament's opinion of 12 June 1997 on the Commission proposal (COM(96) 610 final COD 96/0318), at first reading, the Commission has drawn up an amended proposal which it has forwarded to the Council.

2. THE COMMISSION'S POSITION ON THE COMMON POSITION

- 2.1. The Council's joint position is based on the Commission proposal, as modified on the basis of the European Parliament's amendments. The Council has incorporated most of the European Parliament amendments into its common position, in the spirit if not in the letter. Nearly half the amendments are incorporated entirely or partially into the common position.

The bulk of the Council's amendments are intended to provide additional information or clarification and, with the exception of certain points of divergence, such as the overall amount of the budget, the duration of the programme, the undertaking by the Member States to remove obstacles to the mobility of young volunteers, there are no fundamental differences between the text of the Council's proposal and the Commission proposal.

Some of the amendments make the programme more coherent in itself and make it more readable. It is for this reason that the number of sections has been reduced to four. This has not made any real difference to the proposed measures: Section 2 on "Innovative networks" has been incorporated into the section on complementary measures, since it is not concerned directly with young people. It was again to make the programme more readable that the Council changed the structure of Section 5.1 of the amended proposal (Section 4.1 of the common position) on mentors and project leaders. The title of Section 4 of the amended proposal (Section 3 of the common position) has been changed to place more emphasis on the idea of monitoring the young volunteers. Finally, the introduction to the annex of the common position also defines the concept - as a guideline - of the young EVS volunteer. This is to avoid misunderstandings, to prevent the risk that the voluntary work may replace paid jobs, and to confirm the idea of a common, clearly defined approach.

The amendment which the Commission opposes, because there is a danger that it will reduce the scope of the programme, is discussed in point 2.4 of this Communication.

In addition, a number of the European Parliament's amendments have not been adopted by the Council because they refer:

- either to aspects already present in the proposal for a decision, sometimes in a more complete or appropriate form, such as the monitoring of the volunteers, the need for adequate preparation to enable them to integrate into their host community and the need to develop European youth policies in the near future;
- or to questions which are more relevant to the financial statement and which could be counterproductive or have adverse effects if contained within the decision itself, such as comments on the number of young participants and the critical mass;
- or again to matters which are within the jurisdiction of the Member States or in contradiction with the principle of subsidiarity, such as the link with the national civil services and any aspects concerning the European status of the young volunteers;
- or, finally, to aspects concerning the principles of comitology. The European Parliament would prefer an advisory committee, while the Council has opted for a mixed committee and preferred to retain the Commission text which is based on the text of Council Decision of 1987 on Comitology.

2.2. The Commission stresses that the Council gave its unanimous approval to the overall structure of the programme. Of the points on which convergence was developed in the course of the discussion and with regard to the main principles underlying the Commission proposal which are supported and supplemented by the European Parliament amendments, the Commission would like to mention the following:

- the need to reinforce informal education activities, as one of the general objectives of a policy of cooperation in the field of youth, and to establish a coherent approach by the year 2000;
- the considerable added value of European voluntary service as compared with the existing transnational exchanges between young people in the Union, because of the new aspects it introduces: it provides the opportunity for young people to play an active role in services of benefit to the community; it provides a stimulating framework for gaining broader experience and for active integration into society; it allows young people to make an active contribution to the ideals of democracy, tolerance and solidarity in the context of European integration; it gives them an advantage in future job-seeking;
- the need to integrate activities with third countries wholly into the programme and to ensure complementarity with programmes under which projects for young volunteers from third countries may be financed;

- the importance of adequate preparation of young volunteers, particularly linguistic and intercultural, and of ensuring that they are given sufficient information and made sufficiently aware of their rights and obligations;
- the importance of cooperation with the local authorities and initiatives, particularly in the monitoring of young volunteers;
- the importance of ensuring that the European voluntary service activities do not have the effect of restricting or replacing potential or existing paid jobs;
- the need for a certain amount of flexibility in the age range, in certain justified cases;

2.3. As regards removing obstacles to the mobility of young volunteers, problems do still exist. The Council, while recognising the importance of these problems, did not want to enter into them in too great a detail in the legislation itself, since they are to a large extent within the jurisdiction of the Member States. The Commission, at this stage, has underlined the importance which it attaches to this point.

2.4. **The main disagreement** lies in the **total amount** of the budget:

2.4.1. In its joint position, the Council fixed the **total budget** estimate at ECU 35 million for the period 1998-1999.

2.4.2. The Commission has taken note of the Council's position. It maintains that it would be necessary to consider a budget of ECU 60 million for the period 1998-1999, as mentioned in the financial statement in annex to the Commission's proposal for a decision. The Commission feels, that given the programme's requirements (in terms of preparation, follow-up, adaptation to the needs of young people and final objectives), it is necessary to attain a critical mass in order that the infrastructures set in place are cost-effective and to ensure information and access at local level. For the two years in question, the target number is around 12 000 young volunteers which, in view of the experience with the pilot measure, is a reasonable objective.

3. CONCLUSION

The Commission wishes to confirm its will to contribute to the development of a satisfactory global agreement between the three institutions. It will continue to work with the European Parliament and Council accordingly. The aim is to allow for the development of a Community action which will contribute to European integration from grass-roots level and which calls on young people, whatever their social, cultural or educational background, to take the initiative. The Commission hopes that this programme will be as close as possible to its proposal and that a final decision can be made soon so that it can be implemented quickly and effectively for the benefit of young people, the programme's main target population.