

Commission proposes a European year 2011 of volunteering



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S. Hofschlaeger)

Ulrike Wisser, Brussels (EU, Belgium)

After a long period of lobbying and promotion from NGO side in Brussels the European Commission finally presented a formal proposal to the Council of the EU and the European Parliament to launch a “European Year of Volunteering” for 2011.

It proposes to allocate a budget of €6 million for the European Year and an additional amount of €2 million for the preparatory actions starting in 2010.

Volunteering has been an important political issue in past debates and political initiatives not only in member states but as well at EU institution levels. By making 2011 the Year of Volunteering, the Commission, seeks to make volunteering into “an active expression of civic participation which strengthens common European values such as solidarity and social cohesion”. Involvement in voluntary activities can provide people with new skills and competences and even improve their employability.

Believing that volunteering has a great, but so far under-exploited, potential for the social and economic development of Europe, the year 2011 should help raising awareness on volunteering in member states, regional and local communities and among civil society.

The following objectives are mentioned in the proposal:

- Work towards an enabling and facilitating environment for volunteering in the EU
- Empower volunteer organisations and improve the quality of volunteering
- Reward and recognise volunteering activities; and
- Raise awareness of the value and importance of volunteering.

The proposed activities will take place in all member states and should focus on communication and awareness-raising measures, such as conferences, seminars, exchange of experience and publications. The emphasis will be placed on funding projects with a volunteering dimension in the EU’s action programmes, such as the ‘Youth in Action Programme’, which aims to involve all levels – European, national, regional and local. The ownership of the European Year shall remain with the volunteers and the volunteer organisations, and many activities and celebrations will be organised from the bottom-up.

Ulrike Wisser works as policy adviser in the field of EU youth, education and social politics at BBJ Servis gmbH, Brussels office.

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