



**European Economic and Social Committee  
President of Group III**

## **Declaration of the President of Group III of the EESC**

### **Conference 'Europe of Active Citizens: volunteering'**

Organised in collaboration with the Chancellery of the President of Poland, the Polish Ministry for Labour and Social Policy and the Representation of the European Commission to Poland  
Warsaw, 30 September 2011

**Volunteering constitutes a fundamental element of active citizenship, which contributes to social cohesion and solidarity, provides valuable economic benefits to society and enables individuals to realise their potential. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) was the first institution to propose a European Year of Volunteering. The realisation of this objective in 2011 has provided the opportunity to raise awareness of the value-added of the voluntary sector and has helped to make voluntary organisations more effective actors at the local, national and European levels. The European Year of Volunteering has also directly contributed to the recognition of the role of volunteering as a resource for societal problem-solving and confidence-building. Within this context and based on both the work of the EESC to date and on the discussions in Warsaw on 30 September 2011, the following are recommended:**

*In order to ensure an effective and sustainable voluntary environment*

- Creating a European Charter for Volunteering, which would establish the basic principles for the rights and responsibilities of volunteers and their organisations. Such a Charter would also help to guide improvements to the legislative environment for voluntary activities;
- Introducing national legislation in Member States which will actively encourage volunteering, protect volunteers and remove legal impediments to their activities. However, over-regulation should be avoided and volunteer organisations should be directly involved in the formulation of the legislation;
- Setting up efficient and well-structured infrastructure for volunteering in the EU Member States. In addition, supporting facilities of voluntary organisations and volunteer centres to provide information, training and coordination of activities between volunteers and organisations;
- Ensuring accessible and sustainable funding of volunteers and voluntary organisations and assisting them to adapt to the new funding environment which is increasingly based on public procurement procedures. The EU is also called upon to increase financial support for volunteering in EU-funded programmes and Structural Funds;
- Taking steps to ensure quality volunteering by encouraging the highest standards of practice in organisations, whilst maintaining the voluntary character of the sector.



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*Raising awareness of the socio-economic contribution of the voluntary sector*

- Widely disseminating information on the economic impact of volunteering. As a first step, it is necessary to implement the European Volunteer Measurement Project which aims to harmonise the methodology for collecting data on volunteering;
- Highlighting the necessity to collect national data beyond GDP, for example data on 'social indicators' as a measure of social wealth;
- Investing in the training of volunteers and in raising awareness of the voluntary sector as an instrument for decent work and non-discrimination;
- Actively promoting the skills and competences gained through volunteering, by recognising non-formal education and informal learning at the national and European level. To this end, the future 'European Skills Passport' should take into consideration the needs and aspirations of the voluntary sector;
- Recognising that although the voluntary sector has an important contribution to make to the provision of social services, these services should in all cases be *complementary* to those of local and/or national authorities.

*Maintaining the momentum for the future*

- Steps should be taken to maintain the momentum of the European Year of Volunteering beyond 2011 and to keep the voluntary sector in the national and European public agendas;
- Within this context, the recent Council Conclusions on the role of voluntary work in social policy and the European Commission Communication on EU policies and volunteering are very welcome;
- However, it is crucial that the European Commission also adopts a White Paper on volunteering and begins the consultative process. This White Paper could be considered as the legacy of the European Year of Volunteering;
- Coordination of the voluntary sector, the exchange of good practices and the creation/consolidation of volunteer platforms with the participation of all relevant stakeholders (employers, trade unions, other sectoral bodies, national authorities and the EU) should be maintained beyond 2011;
- Moreover, efforts should continue to actively promote volunteering among the young and among senior citizens, noting that special support structures to involve the latter will be necessary;
- Support for corporate volunteering should be increased in the future, with Member States introducing initiatives (e.g. tax reliefs) and encouraging partnerships with the voluntary sector.