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FIRST EUROPEAN CIVIC DAYS

La Rochelle – 4, 5, 6 September 2008

RECOMMENDATIONS

The first European Civic Days were held in September 2008 in La Rochelle (France). 1000 leaders of more than 500 associations coming from all over the European Union, the Balkans, Turkey, Ukraine and Moldavia, gathered together on this occasion to discuss the topic “Mobility, Dialogue, Participation: towards an active European citizenship”.

This note summarizes the main propositions that came out of the fourteen thematic debates related to “Mobility, Dialogue, Participation”, for the purpose of informing the European Union, its present French Presidency and the member states institutions. It compiles some important recommendations for the decisions concerning the place of the organized civil society within the democratic functioning of our societies.

The present propositions and recommendations aim at enshrining in the everyday life the European values as defined within the article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty¹, and to reinforce the relations with the European and national institutions outlined in the two first paragraphs of article 11².

I – MOBILITY

Relying on the success of the existing programmes such as “Youth” with its European voluntary service, “Leonardo”, “Grundtvig”, “Erasmus”, “Europe for citizens” with its town twinning activities, the “Mobility” debates concerned how to facilitate young people’s access to mobility opportunities and how to design the programmes to meet these needs.

▪ ISSUES:

- design programmes more accessible for young people, including those from most vulnerable groups;
- encourage young people to speak three languages: their mother tongue, an international auxiliary language and a personal adoptive language;
- stimulate the involvement of all categories of the population;
- reinforce the association’s capacity in countries where they are still weak.

1- The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

2-The institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action. The institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society. The European Commission shall carry out broad consultations with parties concerned in order to ensure that the Union's actions are coherent and transparent.

▪ **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- develop operational programmes in the long term, provided with increased resources;
- build up programmes at every level, both in the field of formal and non-formal education;
- simplify the administrative procedures proportional to the amount of budget allowed in order to facilitate the access for all associations;
- set up suitable financial instruments to support and to develop association twinning, following the example of Town Twinning.

II – DIALOGUE

The « Dialogue » topic was considered from two perspectives: multiple-identities and intercultural dialogue; governance and civil dialogue. The debates proposed ways of a better living together and reflected the importance of getting the citizens more involved within the European project including the voice of the organized civil society.

▪ **ISSUES:**

- rely on the association's activities to embody EU values within societies where many feel in many ways excluded;
- reduce the gaps between citizens' preoccupations and the national and European institutions;
- make European civil dialogue include the diversity of national situations.

▪ **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Concerning EU values in practice:

- make youth mobility policies compatible with the purposes of intercultural dialogue;
- improve citizenship of residence through national and European educational, social or cultural programmes;
- develop migrant reception and inclusion policies.

Concerning dialogue with organized civil society:

- move fast to set up a formalized dialogue framework with the organized civil society, following the example of charters (or « Compacts ») existing at national level;
- enhance associations' practical involvement in European Union issues;
- set up financial instruments to facilitate associations' participation within the civil dialogue both at national and European levels.

III – PARTICIPATION

The « Participation » issues discussed the idea that **there is no European citizenship without social European citizenship**, just as civic and social dimensions are related at national level.

Citizenship implies that proper policies address the social consequences of European decisions. Support to associations should facilitate their role in implementing the many policies which impact on citizenship.

- **ISSUES:**
 - reinforce the practice of an active citizenship through personal involvement in associative activities;
 - consult with the associations at each stage of European policy development to make sure that the social dimension is been taken into account;
 - having a legitimate civil society advocacy, recognised by the European institutions;
 - ensure European civil dialogue reflects the diversity of national situations.
- **RECOMMENDATIONS:**
 - support the development of active citizenship in the formal and non-formal education. Include this objective within the task of a lifelong learning institute;
 - promote the role of sport common practice as a tool for an active citizenship.
 - consult with the associations at each stage of European policy making;
 - be inspired, where appropriate by the tools of the social dialogue when developing the civil dialogue;
 - create a statute for the European association that would formalize the freedom of assembly;
 - reinforce the presence of associations within the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC);
 - acknowledge the associations' activities and volunteer practices by declaring 2011 the « European year of volunteering ».

IV – FOLLOW-UP

Held with the financial support of the European Commission, of the French presidency of the European Union, of the Poitou-Charentes region and La Rochelle Municipal council, the first European Civic Days led to propositions and recommendations which emerged from the rich diversity of European associations' community.

The positive feedback given by the participating institutions concerning the role of the associations within the European democracy encourages the European Civic Forum to forward these propositions to the public authorities. European associations have high hopes. They call for an ambitious answer in return.