

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the programme 'Citizens for Europe' to promote active European citizenship for the period 2007-2013

(2006/C 115/18)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

HAVING REGARD TO the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the programme 'Citizens for Europe' to promote active European citizenship for the period 2007-2013 (COM(2005) 116 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the decision of the European Commission of 6 April 2005 to consult it, under articles 151, 265(1) and 308 of the ECT, on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the programme 'Citizens for Europe' to promote active European citizenship for the period 2007-2013;

HAVING REGARD TO the decision of its President of 20 January 2005 to instruct the Commission for Constitutional Affairs and European Governance to draw up an opinion on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the programme 'Citizens for Europe' to promote active European citizenship for the period 2007-2013;

HAVING REGARD TO the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe signed on 29 October 2004, in particular articles I-10 and III-280;

HAVING REGARD TO Council decision 2004/100/EC of 26 January 2004 establishing a Community action programme to promote active European citizenship (civic participation) ⁽¹⁾;

HAVING REGARD TO its opinion of 20 November 2003 on the Proposal for a Council decision establishing a Community action programme to promote active European citizenship (civic participation) and the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on measures to be taken by Member States to ensure participation of all citizens of the Union to the 2004 elections to the European Parliament in an enlarged Union (CdR 170/2003 fin ⁽²⁾);

HAVING REGARD TO its opinion of 21 November 2002 on the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on an information and communication strategy for the European Union (COM(2002) 350 final) (CdR 124/2002 fin ⁽³⁾);

HAVING REGARD TO the fourth European Commission report on citizenship of the Union — 1 May 2001-30 April 2004 — (COM(2004) 695 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the European Commission on Making citizenship work: fostering European culture and diversity through programmes for Youth, Culture, Audiovisual and Civic Participation — (COM(2004) 154 final);

HAVING REGARD TO its draft opinion (CdR 120/2005 rev. 2) adopted on 4 October 2005 by the Commission for Constitutional Affairs and European Governance (rapporteur: Ms Claude du Granrut, Member of Picardy Regional Council, First Deputy Mayor of Senlis (FR/EPP);

- 1) **WHEREAS** part two of the Treaty establishing the European Community has created European citizenship; under Article 17 of that treaty, that citizenship complements but does not replace national citizenship; these stipulations have been included in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (Article I-10); moreover, this treaty includes a Title VI entitled 'The democratic life of the Union';
- 2) **WHEREAS** citizenship is exercised first and foremost at local level; and whereas local and regional authorities must, in line with the subsidiarity principle, play an active role in promoting it;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 30, 4.2.2004, p. 6.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 73, 23.3.2004, p. 46.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 73, 26.3.2003, p. 46.

- 3) **WHEREAS**, as the representative body of local and regional authorities and the defender of local democracy in the Community decision-making process, it is directly concerned with the promotion and implementation of such European citizenship;
- 4) **WHEREAS**, by means of the above-mentioned decision of 26 January 2004, the Council has established a three-year Community action programme to promote active European citizenship, and whereas the actions launched under this programme for a reference amount of EUR 72 million must be continued;
- 5) **WHEREAS**, in the context of enlargement of the European Union, a special effort must be made to promote European citizenship in the new Member States;
- 6) **WHEREAS** the Council of Europe has proclaimed 2005 European Year of Citizenship through Education to highlight the importance of education in promoting and protecting human rights, and whereas a youth summit, which demonstrated the extent to which young people who are active and aware of their new identity are the best means of promoting active citizenship, took place in 2005 on the fringes of the third summit of the Council of Europe in Warsaw;

adopted the following opinion unanimously at its 62nd plenary session, held on 16 and 17 November 2005 (meeting of 17 November):

1. Comments of the Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the Regions

1.1 **believes** that the European Union has a duty to make its citizens aware of the European dimension of their citizenship;

1.2 **firmly believes** that the increased diversity of the European Union that has resulted from the accession on 1 May 2004 of ten new Member States and will result from the future accession of other countries requires specific efforts to promote active European citizenship in these new Member States, as well as in the other 15, where promotion of European citizenship must take account of the cultural, social and linguistic diversity resulting from enlargement;

1.3 **is concerned** that Europe's citizens feel that they are being kept at a distance from the European Union's decision-making bodies and that they lack information, and therefore have reservations about the political development of the European Union;

1.4 **emphasises** the key role of local and regional authorities in developing active European citizenship;

1.5 **welcomes** the proposal for a decision establishing a Community action programme to promote active European citizenship with a budget of EUR 235 million for the period 2007-2013, which picks up where the 2004-2006 programme, whose limited budget of EUR 72 million the Committee had criticised in its above-mentioned opinion 170/2003, leaves off;

1.6 **believes that** promoting citizenship is a horizontal issue and that it must be taken into account in the European Union's other actions; programmes adopted in the areas of education, culture and youth must thus include a citizenship dimension, as must actions launched by DG Freedom, security

and justice under the programme on fundamental rights and citizenship for the period 2007-2013;

1.7 **believes**, on the other hand, that certain aspects of programmes such as those concerning values common to European citizens and the key events in their history have a strong citizenship dimension and belong more in the *Citizens for Europe* programme;

1.8 **believes** that the improvement of citizen projects is achieved by putting in place measures supporting the exchange of best practice carried out at local and regional level;

1.9 **welcomes** the European Commission's efforts to hold, as part of the drafting of this proposal, a wide-ranging public consultation, which culminated in a consultative forum being held on 3 and 4 February 2005, in which the Committee was involved;

1.10 **supports** the priority given in the action programme to town twinning, to which almost one-third of the budget of the whole programme is assigned;

1.11 **nonetheless notes** that to judge by the financial perspectives of the new programme there is likely to be a reduction in the number of projects financed, and **is concerned** about the discouraging effect of this on those running projects;

1.12 **believes** that twinning of other local and regional authorities should also be encouraged, whilst respecting national legislation;

1.13 **believes** that cross-border areas, which are in contact with several national cultures, hold the greatest potential for the development of a European identity, and **supports** the discussions that have been started, *inter alia* at DG Regio on the implementation of structures for cross-border cooperation to include the citizenship dimension;

1.14 **supports** the principle of opening the programme to EFTA countries, signatory countries to the EEA agreement, candidate countries with a pre-accession strategy, and to countries of the Western Balkans in line with the conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council of 19 and 20 June 2003, but **regrets** that the proposal for a decision does not take into account EU citizens who live outside the EU;

1.15 **approves of** support for active civil society in Europe and **stresses** that priority should be given to these projects;

1.16 **underscores** the value of an active long-term information and communication policy, which it prefers over the systematic organisation of high-profile events that do not always provide a significant return;

1.17 **welcomes** the efforts being made to lighten the burden of red tape for beneficiaries, whilst abiding by the relevant financial rules, which have room for improvement;

1.18 **welcomes** the proposed monitoring and evaluation process, in particular the publication of three reports in 2010, 2011 and 2015, but **regrets** that no interim evaluation of the 2004-2006 three-year programme is yet available;

2. The Committee of the Regions' recommendations

The Committee of the Regions:

2.1 **hopes** that the European Parliament and the Council will adopt this decision without delay in order to ensure continuity of the activities currently taking place under the 2004-2006 three-year programme;

2.2 **calls** on the European Commission to include consideration of the citizenship dimension in all its proposals, in particu-

lar those that affect education, culture, youth and the protection of fundamental rights, and to transfer some aspects of other programmes to this programme when their main aim is to promote citizenship;

2.3 **believes** that the projected funding must be revised upwards and given a specific budget heading for the promotion of active European citizenship in the new Member States;

2.4 **emphasises** the need for town twinning to increase and **proposes** that other local and regional authorities be encouraged to twin and to get involved in existing twinning arrangements by drawing on the best practices that have already been identified;

2.5 **hopes** that particular attention will be paid to promoting European citizenship in cross-border areas;

2.6 **requests** that a debate be launched on the means of promoting European citizenship among EU citizens living outside the EU;

2.7 **encourages** a long-term information and communication policy, inter alia targeted at young people, and whose European origin should be clearly identifiable;

2.8 **requests** that efforts to reduce red tape be continued;

2.9 **hopes** that local and regional administrations will act as channels in the information and communication policy;

2.10 **proposes** that a recommendation be drawn up aimed at promoting education in European citizenship at schools and universities under the auspices of the European Commission and with the involvement of the Committee as the representative of education authorities.

Brussels, 17 November 2005.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Peter STRAUB
