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Debate in the European Parliament
Plenary session

Report Harkin
"Role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social
cohesion"

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Strasbourg

Introductory remarks

Mr President, I wish to thank Ms Harkin very much indeed for her report. The report relates to many EU policies and many initiatives, emphasising the strong link between volunteering and active citizenship.

- I particularly appreciate your comments on the PEACE programme where the involvement of volunteering was indeed strong. We will meet here again in May to discuss the report of Barbara de Bruin, in which, I am convinced, examples of local empowerment, in particular through the voluntary sector and non-governmental organisations, will be strongly present.
- With regard to your recommendation on in-kind contribution, let me say that, while Article 56 of the general Regulation on European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund already allows for in-kind contribution to EU co-

financed projects, the real challenge is the use of this provision. But let me say that in particular in local initiatives, which are co-financed by the Social Fund, it is quite common that volunteers to provide a noteworthy contribution, while there have been also many activities, especially within the URBAN initiative in Germany, Italy, the UK and Greece, which have supported a wide range of voluntary organisations.

- Volunteering can be seen as a strong component of partnership principle. Many times in this House, I have reiterated the Commission's **full commitment** towards the effective implementation of the partnership principle, in particular in the new generation of cohesion policy. We insisted on partnership during the negotiations of new programmes and we have now many positive examples of strong commitment to the partnership. But of course, as you know, we have a great **variety of approaches towards** partnership and **volunteering** in our Member States.
- I also see the role of your report in preparing the ground for the next own-initiative report on governance and partnership at national, regional and local, to be presented by Jean Marie Beaupuy.
- Let me say a few words on specific policies and initiative in the area of volunteering in which the Commission has been particularly active. Worth mentioning is the **European Voluntary Service** and an **Active European Citizenship** in the European citizenship in the EU's new lifelong learning EU programme.

- My colleague Ján Figel is currently preparing a **new initiative on voluntary activities of young people**, which will incorporate many of the aspirations expressed in your report. Enhancing and promoting trans-European voluntary activities will further reinforce the mobility of our young citizens. In its new initiative, the Commission will seek to ensure a greater interoperability of existing national voluntary schemes.
- The **White Paper on sport** also stresses that voluntary activities in the sport sector strengthen social cohesion and inclusion and promote local democracy and active citizenship. There is also the reference to sport in the Lisbon Treaty, which provides for "the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of [...] its structures based on voluntary activity".
- Here we share the view that we need a more holistic **approach** to the contribution of volunteering to Europe's economic and social cohesion. This should certainly take into account the challenge of an **ageing European population**. In this respect, your suggestion of "intergenerational volunteering" merits further exploration.
- In this context, I am happy to tell you that the Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Training, Culture and Youth is about to launch an assessment of the **state of play of volunteering in Europe**. This assessment will serve as a source of better knowledge and a solid basis for further initiatives in this

field, as no systematic and integrated approach towards volunteering has been developed so far at EU level.

- I am convinced that all those you are addressing in the motion for a resolution will be responsive to your call. You can certainly count on the Commission's support.
- Let me also assure you that all other requests that are addressed more specifically to the Commission will be examined, in particular by Commissioners Figel' and Spidla.

Conclusive remarks

Mr President, just two very short points.

- Let me say that even the best equipped policies cannot deliver without the strong involvement of all those who feel a co-responsibility, and also the need for commitment and contribution. Volunteering and partnership are the best ways to ensure that involvement.
- Let me also assure that I will share your conclusions with my colleagues in the Commission. I am convinced that the future assessment of the state of play of volunteering in Europe, and the follow-up to it, will take inspiration from the resolution you are going to adopt, and also from the discussion I have had the privilege of sharing with you tonight.