

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA
STANDING COMMITTEE
OF THE EFTA STATES

4/TD/W/014
30 August 2002
Brussels

WORKING GROUP ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH

Comments by the EEA EFTA States on the Commission's White Paper
"A new impetus for European youth"

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The EEA EFTA States welcome the Commission's White Paper, including the open process carried out during its preparatory phase. In general, one agrees with the choice of the four priority areas of the White Paper, although other areas are also important for an integrated and coherent youth policy. In this context, special reference is made to the area of Education, lifelong learning and mobility as well as to Youth combating racism and xenophobia. The EEA EFTA States also regard gender equality as a fundamental part of youth policies. Furthermore, young people in danger of being marginalised and those with special needs should be a central part of a youth policy. As full participants in the Youth programme, the EEA EFTA States look forward to taking an active part in implementing the White Paper.

INTRODUCTION

The EEA EFTA States welcome the White Paper *A new impetus for European youth*, presented by the European Commission on 21 November 2001.¹ The White Paper addresses important political issues related to the development of an integrated and coherent youth policy at national level in European countries. The EEA EFTA States will use the opportunity to present their position on the proposals and the content of the White Paper. We will also take the liberty to comment on the position of the Council (Education/Youth) in its Conclusions of 14 February 2002 and its Resolution of 30 May 2002.

The EEA EFTA States will first of all underline the open and positive process the Commission has carried out during the preparation of the White Paper. We have especially noted the strong involvement of young people in the process, not only from the Member States of the European Union, but also from the EEA EFTA States and the candidate countries. The White Paper launches closer cooperation between the members of the European Union in developing policies in the field of youth. This

¹ COM (2001) 681 final

constitutes an important step towards putting youth questions on the political agenda in Europe, which will not only be of concern to the 15 Member States, but will influence all European countries aiming at developing a national youth policy.

THE CONTENT OF THE WHITE PAPER

In general, the EEA EFTA States agree with the choice of the four priority areas of the White Paper: Participation, Information, Voluntary service and Greater understanding of youth. We note with interest and expectation the decision to use the open method of coordination as the working method in implementing these priorities. The open method of coordination, as outlined in the White Paper and in the Council Resolution of 30 May 2002, will give new possibilities to develop common objectives, identify good practices and innovative approaches, which will be of common interest for the European countries.

The EEA EFTA States will, however, underline that the other policy areas mentioned, Education, lifelong learning and mobility, Employment, Social integration, Young people against racism and xenophobia and Autonomy for young people, also are important elements in an integrated and coherent youth policy. Especially the relation to Education, lifelong learning and mobility as well as Youth combating racism and xenophobia should be priority areas in this context. The three programmes, Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth, have common objectives including possibilities for joint actions. Racism and xenophobia are important issues for many youth groups, and are areas where young people can play an important role in combating extremist movements and intolerance.

The EEA EFTA States also regard gender equality as a fundamental part of youth policies. We have noted with satisfaction that the Council in its Resolution of 30 May stresses the principle of gender equality and non-discrimination within the framework of European cooperation on youth matters. We would also like to express the opinion that the question of including young people in society, especially young people in danger of being marginalised and those with special needs, should be a central part of a youth policy. We would recommend these areas to be included in the implementation of the theme "participation".

The EEA EFTA States have taken note of the proposal in the Council Resolution of 30 May 2002 that the application of the open method of coordination will start with the priorities concerning participation and information. This, together with the timetable outlined, seems to us to be a realistic and constructive approach.

The EEA EFTA States would also like to draw the attention to the work done by the Council of Europe in the field of youth policy cooperation. The Council of Europe has over a long period of time achieved considerable experiences and competence in this field, especially concerning the areas of participation and information. In order to benefit from these results and to avoid double work at European level, we would strongly recommend close and constructive cooperation with the Council of Europe in implementing the White Paper.

THE ROLE OF THE EEA EFTA STATES

The EEA EFTA States should be able to contribute to as well as benefit from taking part in the further process of developing and implementing the content of the White Paper. We would therefore express our genuine interest in taking part in the process of implementing of the White Paper. In this context we will also underline the fact that the White Paper foresees an active use of the Youth programme, in which the EEA EFTA States are fully participating, in implementing the various proposals. We are therefore ready, in cooperation with the Commission, to find suitable mechanisms to be included in the future work, in accordance with rights, obligations and limits provided for in the EEA Agreement.

* * * * *