



EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION EUROPEENNE DE LIBRE-ECHANGE

Brussels, 9 May 2005

Ref. No.: 1054286

**EEA EFTA COMMENTS ON
THE PROPOSAL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE
YOUTH IN ACTION PROGRAMME FOR THE PERIOD 2007-2013
(COM(2004) 471 final)**

I INTRODUCTION

1. Under the EEA Agreement, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway are participating fully in all Community youth programmes. The present programmes, the YOUTH Programme being the most important, terminate at the end of 2006. On 14 July 2004, the Commission adopted a proposal the Youth in Action Programme from 2007 to 2013 (COM (2004) 471 final). This programme is a prolongation of actions in the YOUTH Programme and is an integration into the programme of the promotion of active bodies at European level in the field of youth and pilot actions on youth participation, decided upon in the field of youth. It is also the intention of the EEA EFTA States to take part in the new programme and in accordance with provisions in the EEA Agreement, comments on the Commission's proposal that have been prepared by the Working Group on Education, Training and Youth are hereby presented.

II GENERAL REMARKS

2. The EEA EFTA States welcome the proposal for the Youth in Action Programme, subscribing fully to the general objectives expressed in the preamble, as well as to the general and specific objectives set out in Articles 1, 2 and 3 of the proposal. Also, we appreciate the Commission's preparatory work on the proposal, which has been conducted in a very transparent way and in close collaboration with the participating countries and the stakeholders of the programme. Through this wide-reaching process, several institutions and organisations in the EEA EFTA States have been able to give their input at various stages in the shaping of the new programme.

3. The Commission's proposal is soundly based on the actual policy developments in the field of youth, as well as on experiences and evaluations of past

and present programmes. The EEA EFTA States express their great satisfaction with the participation in the YOUTH programme and fully conform to the positive mid-term evaluation made. We would like to underline that young people in our countries obtain many new possibilities by cooperating with other European youths and participating in the programmes and we believe that our participation has also given added value to the European dimension of the programmes.

4. We also endorse the Commission's choice to propose one general programme in the field of youth cooperation and with that proposal to divide the programme into five actions. The EEA EFTA States will at this stage not comment on the proposal for budgetary allocations for the programme period 2007-2013. We have the understanding that this question to a large extent is depending on the results of the EU discussion on the general financial perspectives for the period.

5. The EEA EFTA States are also in agreement with the philosophy that seems to lie behind the proposal, namely that the implementing details are kept to a strict minimum, leaving much room for flexibility and development. This will, however, put an even higher responsibility than before on the participating countries given their decisions in the Programme Committee to assist the Commission on the implementation of the programme. We would however underline the need to apply a flexible and transparent system in carrying out the various actions of the programme. We believe it would be of value to continue and strengthen the decentralised philosophy of previous programmes in giving the national agencies a major responsibility in the decision-making process.

6. The EEA EFTA States will contribute financially to the overall programme budgets in accordance with the rules laid down in the EEA Agreement. We therefore expect to have the possibility to participate on an equal footing as the EU Member States in all the actions and sub-actions of the programme.

III SPECIFIC ISSUES

7. The EEA EFTA States draw the attention to the need to have a user-friendly application and decision-making process. Great improvements have been made recently, but we believe there is still room for the simplification of the application in reporting on funded projects. The target group is young people and this should be taken into account when drawing up the practical mechanisms for the implementation of the programme. In this context, we also underline the need to improve the financial transfers to projects being granted support. Local youth groups will often have problems in advancing costs related to projects which they have been granted.

8. The EEA EFTA States expect to participate in the Committee, referred to in Article 10, on the same level as in previous programmes. This implies that the EEA EFTA States have the same rights as EU Member States, except on the right to vote, but in that case, opinions expressed on votes are to be included in the minutes. Article 10 of the proposal for decision is only referring to Member States and is not including the EEA EFTA States or other countries contributing financially to the overall programme budget. We would like to ask the Commission to take initiatives to amend

this article in order to include a formulation removing any confusion about the participation of the EFTA EEA States in the Committee.

9. The EEA EFTA States have noticed that some parts of Action points 4 and 5 may refer to the implementation of the common objectives elaborated by the EU Member States as a part of the process of the follow-up to the White Paper on Youth. It has not been possible for the EEA EFTA States to participate in this process, even if we have expressed interest to do so given the limitations on us in not being a member of the EU but a partner in the EEA Agreement. We would like to ask the Commission to take steps in order to solve this question when the Programme Youth in Action is to be implemented. In the same way, we would appreciate steps to be taken in order to have the possibility to participate in Euro-Med youth projects on the basis of separate financial regulations.

10. The EEA EFTA States are of the opinion that Action Point 3, "Youth of the World", should give priority to European countries not participating in the programme.

11. The EEA EFTA States have noticed that the main target group in general has been extended to young people from 13 to 30 years of age, with specific age limits for the different actions. In our opinion, the age limits should be practiced with flexibility and take into consideration national practice and experience. To include young people down to 13 years of age is in conformity with the child and youth policy concept of the EEA EFTA States. We would however underline the need of proper preparation and inclusion of experienced leaders when a large number of participants in a project are under the age of 18. We agree with the intention that participants in the Voluntary Service should be 18 or older. The age group 25 to 30 should only be valid to the Voluntary Service and its follow-up.

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