

Presentation by Mr Renzo RAZZANO

SUMMARY

Issues and solutions

- Up until now a shared definition of volunteering does not exist and its mention in the Lisbon Treaty is lacking and episodic. The definition we propose is: *unpaid and non profit making activities carried out of free choice, benefitting others, the community and in order to achieve the common good.*
- An adequate knowledge base is missing: there isn't any systematic and comparable research on volunteering; the need is felt, thus, for specific and comparable statistics; moreover studies on the contribution to social capital creation and individual well-being promotion and on impact evaluation are lacking.
- The recognition of the social and economic value of volunteering in EU policies is episodic, both in general policies and specific sector policies. Such recognition is nowadays a priority in facing the effects of the social and financial crisis and cannot ignore the adoption of the principle of subsidiarity which implies the implementation of measures to grant volunteering participation in the decisions about welfare policies at European, national and local authorities level. Similarly the value of volunteering activities for the attainment of life long learning and as basis for a truly participated democracy is not adequately recognized.
- There is no coordination among the different DG of the Commission and the need is felt for a single voice at this level which could take the form of a Directorate specifically devoted to volunteering.
- Support to volunteering representation at European level is scarce: backing is too often limited to annual projects and does not extend to core funding.
- Establishing reference elements of the legal framework concerning volunteering, is not yet in the agenda and, on the basis of our experience and research, this is a need especially felt in new EU member and candidate countries; particularly the need is felt for homogenous and widespread regulations concerning insurance coverage for volunteers and impulse on national governments to take up the costs involved. I also would like to remark the lack of regulations, in many member states, in support of working hours flexibility and granting leave of absence from work to employees who are engaged in volunteering activities.
- I would like to point out that the access to European funding is particularly difficult for voluntary organization especially small ones, since calls for proposals are open to various types of different legal entities and therefore the requirements and some conditions are often not attainable by the majority of voluntary associations; moreover when defining the calls for proposals the specific ways of acting of volunteering and the appraisal of the

emerging social needs deriving from these actions are not taken into consideration. Finally we stress that the current co-funding system makes participation impossible, unless a financial evaluation of the contribution of volunteering as a form of co-funding is consistently adopted.

- The need for tax breaks is felt, in particular concerning the VAT regime, relieving the associations of financial burdens inappropriate for providers of free of charge services.
- A European, and in many states also a national, policy of support and funding to volunteering infrastructure does not exist, particularly towards the development of the volunteer support centres network.
- Initiatives promoting the experience and good practice exchange must be strengthened and extended to all age groups.