

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1621/05
by Antonio De Poli (PPE-DE)
to the Council

Subject: No to the amendment of Framework Law No 266/91 and the ensuing cuts in funding for the voluntary sector

The Italian Government intends to change the law relating to voluntary work, splitting this into two separate channels by means of the decree law entitled 'Action plan for economic, social and spatial development'. Voluntary work is by definition an activity that is non-commercial and free-of-charge, and it is therefore incomprehensible that the law concerning voluntary work should be amended by means of an instrument designed to boost economic competitiveness. In detail, Article 17 of the decree law seeks to amend Law 266/91 (the framework law on voluntary work), and in particular Article 15 relating to volunteer service centres, stipulating that the allocations to the special regional funds, totalling one fifteenth of the banking foundation revenue, should be subdivided as follows:

50% to the volunteer service centres and 50% at the disposal of the management committees, composed predominantly of the representatives of the banking foundations, for their operating costs, for voluntary organisation projects and for national civilian service projects.

Under the Italian Constitution (Article 118), which lays down the rules relating to subsidiarity, and in accordance with the standard legislative procedure, the Italian Government should delete Article 17 of the legislative decree and reintroduce it in a more appropriate draft act on the overall reform of the law on voluntary work, thereby allowing the Italian Parliament, and the voluntary sector itself, to discuss its contents.

It should be pointed out that the national Civilian Volunteer Service established by Law 64/2001 is a tangible instrument for the active civil participation of young Italians and at the same time an essential means of achieving a welfare state that is responsive to needs, and which should therefore be financed by state institutions without resources being spirited away from the voluntary sector. On the contrary, new and additional sources of funding should be sought, not least through banking foundations. If the proposal for amendment of the law remains unaltered, the voluntary sector could find itself facing a 50% reduction in the resources currently allocated to it.

Is the Council aware of the situation in Italy? Does it not consider that action should be taken, on the basis of good European practice and using the means at its disposal, to remind the Italian Government that this is a sensitive issue, bearing in mind that even now the voluntary sector does not benefit from massive funding but nonetheless manages to contribute enormous added value to civil society in terms of mutual support, raising awareness with regard to the needy and social consensus.

Does the Council not agree that this proposal for legislative reform in Italy runs contrary to the European principles of promoting social awareness and unity among the peoples of Europe, themes that have been stressed by the European Parliament's new working party on voluntary work, of which I have the honour of being chairman and which comprises many Members of that Parliament and European representatives of the not-for-profit sector?