

WRITTEN QUESTION P-0157/04
by Catherine Guy-Quint (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Twinnings with Bulgaria and Romania

I would like to draw your attention to the arrangements for 2004 as regards the future of twinnings between EU countries and candidate countries. I note that twinnings with Bulgaria and Romania have been excluded from the selection procedures described in Call for proposals No 64/03 published by the Directorate-General for Education and Culture, when no mention of such a restriction is to be found in any of the documents deriving from the interinstitutional work that preceded the publication of that call for proposals. My question therefore relates both to the legal validity of that interpretation and to the political appropriateness of these countries not being eligible to receive Community grants for twinnings.

With the aim of providing the Community action programme to promote active European citizenship (civic participation) with the formal legal basis which the new 2002 Financial Regulation requires for Community grants, and following the forwarding of the European Commission's basic proposal (COM/2003/0276) and the European Parliament's report (A5-0368/2003), Parliament issued an opinion on the proposal for a Council decision on 20 November 2003. The report made no reference to the possible restriction of twinnings with candidate countries whose accession had been confirmed for 2004. Quite the contrary, it stated that 'As part of the enlargement of the European Union, it is essential that there should be a significant increase over 2003 in the volume of appropriations made available to town twinning schemes.'

Furthermore, from a political perspective, it seems relevant to point to the usefulness of supporting town twinning activities fostering active European citizenship. In the current context of extending the scope of European citizenship to future Member States, all states should be able to benefit from these measures, without distinction. The very large numbers of twinnings in those countries supports this view. Romania, for example, has, since 1990, participated in over 231 twinning projects funded by the European Commission, making for an average markedly higher than many Member States (source: Directorate-General for Education and Culture). Why, in that case, break the continuity of something that has been pursued for many years in terms of know-how, experience exchanges and therefore of creating a requisite sense of European citizenship in those countries which are to accede to the Union?

As Mrs Reding stated at the 'Golden stars of town-twinning' awards ceremony on 14 May 2003, European integration (at local level) would not be where it is today without the efforts and goodwill of people who devote their time to creating partnerships with citizens and organisations from other towns and cities across Europe. Three of the ten prizes awarded at that ceremony went to projects initiated by candidate countries.

I would therefore like to know why and on what legal bases the Commission is creating a distinction between the candidate countries as regards eligibility for a measure that is of benefit to them all, and whose success is widely acknowledged.