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KEEPING YOUNG EUROPEANS INFORMED

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I. INTRODUCTION

Information - "in formatio" - embraces the concept of "giving shape", structure or meaning to something. In other words, it is, in essence, central to any act of knowledge, judgment or properly considered choice and hence to culture and involvement in social and political life. As the keystone of the democratic system, anchored in the rule of law and freedom of opinion, information is also a vital instrument for understanding the increasingly complex ways in which economies and societies are organized.

The extraordinary upsurge in the media over the past few decades, due both to the opportunities created by technological progress and to constantly growing demand, clearly demonstrates the growing importance of information to the advanced societies in which we live.

At the outset the main focus of the European Community was on the economic aspects, but now, with every day that passes, it is developing more and more in the direction of becoming a common living space for its citizens. Hand in hand with this positive development there needs to be a major public information drive, so that ordinary people can really feel that they are at the heart of the great Community venture which is taking shape for them and cannot be fully achieved unless they play an active part.

Citizens, especially the young, must become aware of the new opportunities opened up for them by the completion of the internal market.

Young people: a European priority

As the 20th century draws to its close, the signs are already there pointing to the immense changes which will be the foundation for the coming millennium. We will have to cast a fresh eye over a Europe in ferment, to make sure that the Community can continue to play the vital role which befits it as we move towards a union of its peoples.

Of the Community's 340 million citizens, 130 million are now young people under 25. Their sheer numbers and the potential for life and hope which they represent already make them important - and they personify the future of Europe.

The Member States, aware that young people are an essential component of society, have already taken steps to facilitate their integration and participation in political and social life.

In parallel with these national policies, Community action should enable young people to understand the European context they live in and the privileges and responsibilities which flow from belonging to that shared living space.

An information campaign aimed specially at young people

The Commission realizes how vitally important it is to let young people play their full part in building Europe and believes that there should be a proposal for a campaign to meet their particular information needs.

Two goals should be borne in mind: the campaign should seek to compare experiences at national and regional level, and provide appropriate information on Community policies and activities of interest to young people. In addition, the campaign should facilitate dialogue with youth movements and should make it easier for young people to develop their full potential in society, and it must treat them as fully fledged citizens.

II. BACKGROUND

At their first informal Council meeting in July 1988, which was organized by the Greek Presidency, Ministers for Youth stressed the need to provide young people with information geared to their particular needs and designed to help them play a more effective part in the life of the Community.

There have been constant reminders of that need at every meeting since then, particularly at the ministerial meeting on "The '93 generation: the new frontier" held in Paris in November 1989 with France in the chair.

The meeting the Irish Presidency organized at Dromoland Castle in March 1990 also confirmed the trend and placed the emphasis on the problems of disadvantaged young people.

More recently, a broad consensus on the urgent and vital need to devise a Europe-wide information campaign for young people emerged among speakers at the informal meeting organized by the Italian Presidency in Rome on 9 November 1990.

Discussions in the Council of Europe, too, have highlighted the fundamental role of information as part of youth policy and have led to the adoption of Recommendation (90) 7 concerning information and counselling for young people. That role was reaffirmed at the conference of European Youth Ministers held in Lisbon in September 1990.

The Commission has been alert to these trends and devoted a special section of a chapter of its Memorandum on "Young people in the European Community"¹ to informing young people.

The Commission believes there is now a broad consensus among the Member States as to the need to devise better ways of getting information to young people at Community level and is submitting this communication to Ministers as a set of suggested guidelines for their discussions.

III. IDENTIFYING YOUNG PEOPLE'S INFORMATION NEEDS

For an information campaign to be effective and accessible to all young people, their actual requirements must be evaluated as fully as possible, with proper regard for the rapid pace of change which is a feature of that section of the population.

¹ COM(90) 469 final/2, 8 November 1990.

In drafting the kind of measures which could be adopted in the information field, the Commission did not merely study the decisive part played by youth associations but widened its investigations to include other suppliers of information, so as to gain a better idea of what is needed.

The Commission therefore called in outside consultants to look at the following channels for information:

- youth information centres;
- organizations and associations for young people;
- teachers;
- the audiovisual sector;
- newspapers and magazines for young people.

Their reports were submitted to meetings of experts from the Member States and specialist organizations in Europe for their opinions.

As well as this direct research, there were two other studies:

- one, which covered the 15-25 age group, was based on the Eurobarometer surveys of young people and the most recent national polls;
- the other, covering the under-15s, related to finding ways of supplying that specific age group with specially tailored information.

The objectives the Commission is proposing are based on that series of investigations and on proposals and ideas put forward by Youth Ministers and the professionals in the field.

A) Youth information centres

Before the development of the mass media, young people were traditionally supplied with information through the educational structure and the family. In the last 20 years most of the Member States have set up information and advisory centres whose task is to set out information for the young in a clear form and to supply data on young people themselves.

The first information centres in the Member States sprang up in the 1960s and have since expanded or been consolidated, while others have been set up, often on government initiative, in countries where there were none.

There are now nearly 1300 local, regional or national structures serving the Community's 130 million young people. These structures all have the same aim: to give young people the information and advice they need to make the choices vital for their future.

These structures are of very different types. In some Member States¹ they are the outcome of initiatives by local or regional authorities or private associations and are recognized and to some extent financed by local government. In others² central government runs a youth information service covering the whole country. In Belgium and the Netherlands local centres are organized in the form of associations recognized and part-financed by the authorities.

1 Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy and the United Kingdom.

2 France, Greece, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain.

The same varied pattern is found in terms of staffing [numbers, voluntary or paid capacity] and the numbers of people using the centres. The largest of all, CIDJ in Paris, has more than a million young visitors a year. In some countries the centres have recently started to feature Europe Sections.

For a long time now contacts, particularly bilateral and ad hoc ones, have been taking place between youth services in the different countries. Since 1986 the national bodies which coordinate information centres have been working together in the European Youth Information and Counselling Association, ERYICA, to which 28 organizations in 11 countries now belong.

The Euro-Jeune scheme, which is the only instance of practical cooperation in the field of information, at the moment involves four Member States: France, Spain, Portugal and Greece. The object of the scheme is to set up computerized links between the national centres at Community level, and current work consists of an exchange of data on youth mobility, with diskettes being translated and sent to the various participants. Funding is, however, meagre, although the usefulness of the scheme has been clearly established.

At the moment, youth information professionals are acting at one and the same time as suppliers of information, youth leaders and social workers; they are having to adjust to an occupation for which there is as yet no specific vocational training.

B) Organizations and associations for young people

Organizations and associations for young people give them an opportunity to play an active part in social, political, sporting and cultural life in their countries. For a young person to join a youth organization represents a personal step and commitment within the life of a community.

That being so, a youth organization can play an active part in conveying information to young people to prepare them for later life.

As voluntary movements whose underlying principle is self-determination by their members, these are non-governmental structures encompassing social and political activities in the Member States.

Structures, funding methods and membership numbers differ from one Member State to another. In most cases the grants the associations receive only partly cover the projects they run. This is particularly true in the case of international youth organizations. At the moment only three Member States - Germany, Belgium and Denmark - provide legal guarantees of financial support for youth associations and organizations.

The European Youth Forum,¹ set up in 1978 by the national youth committees and the international non-governmental youth organizations, has no official status in its dealings with the Community institutions, but has established regular working links with the Commission and Parliament. Its status differs from that of other comparable organizations in that the Community gives it substantial financial aid covering 100% of its costs (ECU 1 195 000 in 1991).

Notwithstanding the international exchange programmes, the lectures, seminars, research and other cultural activities carried on by youth associations are essential to the task of extending knowledge and nurturing involvement by young people in the work of building Europe.

Against that background, youth movements have a right to proper information about Europe, about the Commission's measures to help young people and about young people themselves, which means there must be coordination between the youth movements themselves and with the Community institutions. This information effort must also take account of the network of youth centres (Maisons des jeunes, Youth Clubs, Maisons des jeunes travailleurs), which provide a useful and effective information network.

In conclusion, staff working for youth organizations are often poorly informed and prepared for their work and must be put in a position where they can supply full and proper information about the Community.

C Teachers

To date most Community measures for young people have been aimed at 15- to 25-year-olds. Looking forward to recognition of fully fledged European citizenship, from now on the entire Community population must be targeted, which means including the under-15s as well.

In its review of the campaign for a people's Europe (September 1988) Parliament stressed the importance of developing European awareness from an early age.

Teachers play a vital role in this context since they are better placed than others to transmit information, knowledge and values to young people.

The advisability of reinforcing a sense of European identity in young people has been underlined before. In a resolution of 24 May 1988 the Council (Education) Ministers emphasized the need to reinforce the European dimension in education.¹ With this in view it stipulated the tasks incumbent on the Member States and those where the Community would have a role to play.

The implementation of this resolution has already brought results. Experiments involving introducing a European dimension into basic and in-service teacher training are under way, for example the establishment of the network of training institutions.

1 The European Youth Forum consists of the national youth committees of all the Member States and 37 international non-governmental youth organizations.

1 OJ C 177, 6.7.1988

In most Member States, too, teachers on their own initiative or teachers' associations have carried out a number of activities to promote awareness.

Despite these moves, the provision of information about Europe in schools is not systematic and in some cases is not properly geared to the recipients' needs; school syllabuses do not yet give enough space to specific material about the Community and its policies.

Adequate documentation and information specifically adapted to recipients' needs is not available, and this constitutes yet another obstacle to activities to promote awareness in schools.

D The audiovisual sector

Information for young people in the past was provided through the educational and family structures.

In the last decade there has been a spectacular advance in audio visual media. The place filled by television in everyday life has provided a primary source of information, particularly since the proliferation of channels, cable and satellite television etc.

In nearly every television station in the Community, general and informative programmes are designed for young people to meet their questions and expectations. Although such programmes when slotted into the scheduling have their own distinctive features, there is a wide degree of convergence as regards the topics covered: education, financial independence, sexuality, drug abuse etc.

These topics are no longer given a moralizing treatment: they are put across in the form of real-life experience, and include practical and specific information.

These programmes seek to take account of the fact that young people's concerns and wishes change substantially from one age group to another.

Europe sometimes features as a subject in this type of programme, the interest of which often lies in the fact that they provide an opportunity for young people openly to express their views and criticisms. Some television companies have even brought in young people, whether or not they were trained professionals, as members of their teams.

Most producers of programmes for young people are keen to cooperate at European level. Some are already involved in an EBU (European Broadcasting Union) working party on programmes for young people.

For some years now there has been rather a decline in broadcasts mainly due to the competition to attract viewers. Young people's programmes are not the only ones to suffer; many quality programmes no longer have the resources to make any impact. The problem of ratings, however, has less impact on programmes for the under -14s. In practice they can easily be fitted into slots which do not compete with peak viewing hours (before 6 p.m. and on Saturday and Sunday mornings).

Nor does this phenomenon affect music and sports programmes, shows and leisure activities, which although designed for the general public particularly attract young viewers who want to watch television in prime time. This type of programme does not, however, answer young people's wish for information, which - as has been shown by surveys and studies in recent years - has turned towards more specific issues (education, employment, training etc.).

Young people cannot easily relate to the Europe, too often limited to economic and commercial aspects, which is generally shown on television.

E Newspapers and magazines for young people

The fundamental role of the press is to respond to citizens' need for information and to promote diversity in public opinion.

In its various forms, by reporting on political, social and cultural happenings of interest to the younger age group, the youth press has an important part to play and helps to motivate young people to look for ways of solving their problems.

Unlike the daily press, the press for young people rarely includes articles or reports on the subject of Europe.

It could, however, play a useful role in providing young people with points of reference and the basic facts needed to understand the Community at work.

In the Community countries, the press for young people could be classified into three groups:

The "youth" press

The "youth" press consists mostly of material produced by youth organizations and distributed free to members. It reflects the specific aims and activities of the actual organization concerned.

In some Member States the "youth" press is regarded as an integral part of any youth policy and under that heading receives financial support from the government or local authorities. Nevertheless, contributions of that kind are fairly limited and do not give publishers any access to specific information about young people.

As regards structures, at present Germany is the only country where the "youth" press is nationally organized. In the other Member States the absence of a platform for institutionalized cooperation between journalists writing for young people is mainly due to a lack of funds, or, in at least three of the Member States,¹ the absence of a "youth" press.

School magazines

¹ Greece, Portugal and Italy.

Generally, these are periodical publications produced at school by pupils or students and covering day-to-day subjects connected with education and life at school.

Other subjects, such as culture, politics or European integration, have been introduced recently in a few magazines.

These student publications do not usually receive any financial support. In most cases they are short-lived, surviving for between six months and a year. In some Member States (particularly Luxembourg) experiments involving setting up computerized networks for school magazines have been initiated. The Petra programme helped to finance some of these experiments and other initiatives to produce school publications.

With respect to structures, only two Member States, France and Germany, have student press associations.

Commercial press for young people

At present, this section of the press is tending towards producing magazines focusing on the specific interests of particular age groups (sport, music, entertainment etc.) or about education in the broad sense. It includes, for example, Bayard-Pressé in France (with 18 titles).

In addition, more and more newspapers or news magazines are bringing out special pages or supplements for young people. These include El País, La Repubblica, Le Monde, L'Express, The Independent, the Frankfurter Rundschau and the Stuttgarter Zeitung.

Young people are showing a growing interest in a type of information designed specially for them; in countries where the specialized press for young people is best developed the readership figures are significant:

France:	9 million (school and commercial press)
United Kingdom:	15 million ("youth", school and commercial press)
Germany:	12 million ("youth", school and commercial press)
Ireland:	500 000 ("youth" press).

IV. THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY

Better information is important if young people are to participate in the life of the Community. Requirements in this area are such that measures specifically targeting young people need to be carried out at Community level. To observe the subsidiarity principle, the measures should cover two aspects: facilitate the exchange of experience at national and regional level, and provide suitable information on Community policies and activities of interest to young people.

The criteria for the measures should be that they:

- provide information for all, involving implementation of an information programme accessible to everyone, irrespective of sex, race, nationality, or economic or social condition;

- supply information as an aid, to help young people - particularly those in a marginal or disadvantaged situation - to find their bearings and make the right choices;
- make up for the shortcomings in information at Community level with a major information drive going hand in hand with the development of Community programmes for young people. Information should also be targeted at the under-15s to encourage early awareness of the meaning of European citizenship;
- encourage dialogue, both at official level and between young people.

Without prejudging future discussions based on this communication, the Commission believes such measures should take the form of a programme geared to the following objectives:

- developing information structures for young people;
- encouraging information professionals to exchange experiences and update their knowledge;
- spreading awareness of the concept of European citizenship;
- diversifying information by filling in existing gaps;
- facilitating exchange of information at European level.

V. THE OBJECTIVES OF COMMUNITY ACTION

In establishing the objectives of Community action, the Commission is aware that the operations stemming from it meet different but complementary criteria. Some of these operations come under the heading of the duty to inform citizens, and therefore young people, of its policies and activities. In that respect, it seems useful to underline the role played by the Commission Offices in the Member states. These Offices allow the dissemination of information and building up of direct contacts.

In addition, if young people are to derive any real benefit from the real opportunities opened up by an area without frontiers, they must have access to the legal and practical instruments they will need if they go to another Member State for a short stay or to become established there.

Really effective Community information concerning mobility presupposes concerted action between the Commission and the Member States (including the agencies designated by the Member states for the decentralized management of Community programmes for young people), and close cooperation between the Member States in linking up decentralized structures. Such information should be directed at the young people themselves and also to experts who work for and with young people.

Finally, it is up to the Member States to define the means of information to be given to young people on the areas of interest to them or which affect them in their daily life (employment, education, health, sports, etc.). In the mean time, the Commission through the specific projects and in agreement with the Member States can play a major role by facilitating meetings, exchanges of experience and operations carried out in a national context.

(A) Developing information structures for young people

The Euro-Jeune project

The aim of the Euro-Jeune project is to give young people direct access to information on other Community countries in their own languages.

Four Member States¹ currently participate in the Euro-Jeune scheme, which involves exchanging data in the form of diskettes which are translated and sent to the various participants. The information put out by Euro-Jeune at the moment concerns mobility, i.e. transport, accommodation, cultural activities and emergency accident assistance.

Several Member States having expressed interest in the scheme, the Commission considers it provides a point of departure enabling the Member States to set up a flexible system for the exchange of information adapted to the requirements stated by national delegates.

From the Commission's preliminary work it would appear that such a scheme could take the form of a coordinated operation (role of European coordination unit) in support of decentralized activities (carried out by national or regional information centres).

In this context, a system for the exchange of information could be set up which would provide for:

- the participation of the Member States through their national and/or regional centres responsible for the collection and dissemination of information at national level;
- computer link-ups between centres through a European coordination unit which would receive and relay information in the nine Community languages in the formats stipulated by the Member States;
- the extension of the project to other fields on the Member States' initiative and in cooperation with the European coordination unit.

At the Council's request, and in concertation with the Member States, the Commission could continue its work based on the Euro-Jeune scheme with a view to the preparation of a Community-level programme.

Europe sections

These are set up by certain countries to group together practical information on Europe at a specific point in the centres. In them, the Community can provide young people with directly identifiable and accessible information on its policies and activities.

The Community could provide financial support for the establishment and development of Europe sections which have proved their usefulness to users.

Provision should be made to supply documentation and promotional material.

¹ France, Spain, Greece and Portugal.

(B) Encouraging information professionals to exchange experiences and update their know-how

Those whose occupation it is to provide young people with information have not usually been able to obtain vocational training dealing specifically with this area.

Future training measures, which often take some time to organize, could usefully be accompanied by information measures for persons who work with or for young people. With this in mind two types of information operations could be envisaged:

- operations in the context of European structures (European teachers' associations, international youth organizations, Carrefour européen de l'information des jeunes etc.), facilitating the updating of knowledge about the Community and its activities, particularly those affecting young people;
- operations carried out in cooperation with the Member States, facilitating the exchange of experience, and national and regional operations (meetings between producers of programmes for young people, professionals active in the field of youth journalism and information centre staff).

(C) Spreading awareness of the concept of European citizenship

The Commission has been active in the field of youth information since the early days of the Community, as part of its promotion of the idea of European citizenship. It has produced considerable information material for young people, and its Offices in each Member state provide a direct response to questions posed by young people themselves, as well as by teachers, schools and youth workers and associations.

In addition, a number of Community programmes and activities concerning young people are managed through agencies in Member states (eg. the agencies responsible for the Lingua or "Youth for Europe" programmes; or the Ministries responsible for the European Social Fund). These agencies all have information activities that reach out to young people; and because the programme activities themselves are concrete and of direct concern to young people, these information activities represent a good way of enabling young people to understand what European citizenship can be.

So far as youth information in the more general sense is concerned, it may be noted that through the PETRA programme, the Commission has since 1988 supported some 160 information projects run by young people for young people, through small, non-renewable grants. The projects have involved the production of videos, brochures, magazines, youth newspapers, etc. Although the majority of these projects have been local in nature, there is some transnational cooperation in the form of a "Theme-based Partnership", in which projects from 4 Member states (Denmark, Ireland, Italy and the United Kingdom) are cooperating on the production of youth information material.

European citizenship, actual legislation apart, will only become a reality if people are made sufficiently aware of belonging to the Community, and that depends on how conscious they are of its cultural wealth and diversity.

Exhibitions about Europe, of a touring or one-off type, should be organized in cooperation with schools and youth organizations to help young people - especially the most disadvantaged - appreciate the relevance of Europe to their daily lives.

The under-15s should also be included through projects directly aimed at increasing their awareness, for example the establishment of a "Euro-Junior" club, in cooperation with the specialized press.

A number of projects carried out by or in conjunction with young people already receive specific Community funding. Support to encourage the creativity of young people in the field of information and to reward the best projects could be stepped up and integrated in an information for young people programme.

(D) Diversifying information by filling in existing gaps

Substantial efforts should be made, in conjunction with the Member States, to extend the range of information available and develop suitable materials.

Range of information

Information of European nature must not only be seen to meet the main areas of interest of young people but also call their attention to subjects that will be important in their future life and particularly in the context of their professional activities (eg. health, security and hygiene on the work place). When questioned last December on the areas in which the Community is active, young Europeans were able to identify those on which they sought better information, for example the fight against cancer and drug abuse (39.4%), the environment (39.1%), the right of establishment, workers' rights (26%) (source: Eurobarometer 34.2).

The Community should therefore provide adequate information on its action in specific areas for young people such as education, health, sports, culture and the environment.

When Community action covers the same ground as action by the Member States, its role should be limited to promoting an exchange of information at European level by supporting specific projects worked out in concertation with the Member States.

Development of materials

Information materials obviously play a crucial role in linking information with the user.

Materials for young people should be attractive, clearly presented and written, up to date and communicative and are distinct from the basic material for teaching purposes used by professionals in the field of information for young people.

The Commission has supported the preparation of handbooks for young people, some of which contain information concerning mobility (young visitor's guide) and others are intended for local, regional or national use (Young Scot, Passeport Jeunes, Neoi Stin Eliada, Guia Jovem, Jongerenpaspoort). These guides were widely disseminated in all the Member states and appreciated by the users.

Therefore Community effort should focus on two aspects:

- i.e. preparation of educational material setting out the operations, policies and activities of the Community to be distributed mainly through the educational documentation centres for use by schools;
- i.e. support for the establishment of practical information instruments for young people (e.g. Guide on Young People's Rights in the Community) and professionals (e.g. Newsletter for Producers of Young People's Programmes, Directory of Information Centres in Europe, Directory of National and International Youth Organizations).

(E) Facilitating exchange of information at European level

For European action to be effective, it needs to be properly coordinated to maximize the contribution of everyone involved and to benefit from the methods used in the Member States.

This has often been pointed out by Youth Ministers - most recently at the informal meeting in Rome in November 1990. Ministers there stressed the need to promote dialogue with young people (through youth organizations), and to develop closer cooperation between the Commission, the Council of Europe and the Youth Forum of the European Communities.

In addition, it has become clear that those working with young people have difficulty accessing the existing data or obtaining reliable information or materials on European youth.

A "European Youth Resource Centre", accessible to all, would stock materials (photos, videos, publications, etc.), research papers, studies, statistics and opinion polls - both national and European - and organize briefing sessions and seminars.

The aim would not be to create a new structure, but to pool existing resources and make the most of them at European and Member States level. In this context, a study should be made with the Youth Forum of the role the latter could play in the establishment and operation of the Resource Centre.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In drawing up this communication, the Commission has taken note of the views of Youth Ministers, its own experience in Community programmes and activities relating to young people, independent surveys, and a whole range of studies carried out among young people.

The Commission is aware how important information is in encouraging young people to participate in the construction of Europe and hopes that the Ministers in charge of youth policies meeting within the Council, and Parliament, will take note of this communication.

The aim of the communication is to provide a basis for an initial discussion, without which the Commission cannot formulate specific proposals. On the basis of the discussion the Council and the Ministers in charge of youth policies could request the Commission to draw up an information for young people programme at Community level.