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**III DEPARTMENT VOLUNTEERING**

*“European institutions and the recognition of the active role of volunteering”*

The theme of the role of volunteering in Europe should be addressed in two ways:

- The role voluntary organizations and civil society assign to volunteering;
- The role the European institutions assign and recognize to volunteering.

According to what is the core competence of the Directorate General of the Third Sector and Social Entities, I will focus on the second aspect, which is also closely related to the objectives indicated in the Decision prompted by voluntary organizations, of the third sector and of active citizenship – of the Council of the European Union of November 27, 2009, which established the 2011 as European Year of Voluntary Activities promoting Active Citizenship. 2011 marks also the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers of the United Nations (proclaimed in 2001 by the UN).

The organization and coordination of the initiative has been entrusted to the DG Communication of the European Commission. In Italy in the National Coordinating Body is the DG Third Sector and Social Entities, already DG Volunteering, Associations and Social Entities, which together with the working group “European and International Volunteering in comparison” of the National Observatory for Volunteering developed the National Plan Italy 2011, approved by the European Commission on 21 October 2010.

The areas of the National Plan 2011 are the following:

**Promotion and Participation**
- Communication tools
- Awareness and proximity initiatives
- Communication campaigns with the media
- Institutional Awards
- Ambassadors
- Events in public places
- Public initiatives and of Third Sector organisations
- Presence in the existing major public and private events
- Lisbon Treaty: European active citizenship, rights and duties of European citizens

**Volunteer! Make the difference!**
- Orientation and training to the values of volunteering (The culture of giving, sharing and participating)
- Community needs and social community bonds
- Training needs, training, skills assessment and recognition
- Equal opportunities for participation
- European Volunteer Passport
- Exchange of good practices: themes, areas for intervention, target groups
- Exchange of good practices: pathways to quality, social innovation, effectiveness
- Social Responsibility: individual, community, corporate
- Volunteering and social cohesion: future perspectives for policies for combating poverty and social exclusion
- Ensuring compatibility between professional life and volunteering

**Youth**
- School and volunteering programme
- Workshops of shared and participatory citizenship
- National Civic Service
- Give youth space! Association projects for youth volunteering
- Aspiring Volunteers! Projects for active citizens 3-14
-Valorisation of active citizenship competencies through university curricula
- Information and awareness initiatives through youth media
- European Voluntary Service and opportunities for international mobility
- Legality and social community responsibility: the future of Europe

**Subsidiarity and dialogue with the institutions**
- Partnership: consultation and verification mechanisms
- Volunteering in the policy making process and in social cohesion
- Manifesto of volunteering: requests to the Italian Government
- Italian Parliament joint session with volunteers
- Regional Councils joint sessions with volunteers
- The role of volunteering in participatory democracy
- Registers: regional, European, thematic

**Research, data, social impact**
- “Volunteering in Europe. Organisations, promotion, participation”: dissemination of the results and comparative and in-depth analysis
- Statistical data on volunteers and voluntary organisations
- Measuring impact of volunteering on social and human capital
- Basic skills and transversal citizenship skills
- Accountability: financial, social and impact reporting
- IV Biennial Report on Volunteering
- Good examples of projects granted by the National Observatory for Volunteering – years 2006 - 2009
- Report of the 1st year of Participatory citizenship workshops
Next year will be published the results, the impact that various initiatives happening in different countries had on the European population, any improvements made to volunteering from the set of activities planned by the respective governments.

A year that was supposed to spread more the "idea" of volunteering as "freely given" activity directed to the community well-being, in a shared and mutual moral, cultural and human enrichment of the person who "helps and the person who is helped"; that volunteering being instrument for individuals’ training and the organizations for tackling needs and human, social, intergenerational and environmental worries; volunteering that contributes to create a European identity rooted in shared values of democracy, solidarity and participation, thereby promoting mutual openness between people in their communities and in Europe, encouraging in an active way and with responsibility the idea of European citizenship. Unfortunately, the expected results haven’t been reached so far, because in this moment at European level there are other concerns.

I think we should rather start from a direct and shared involvement, distinguishing the roles and responsibilities, concerning the analysis of the social situation of our communities. This should be done in order to finalize activities and interventions that take into account both the community well-being, but also the efficiency and effectiveness of specific interventions.

In the most important document the European Union has published in the recent years – Europe 2020, created with the intention of providing a unified response to the international crisis of the European Union: a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy, through the so-called seven flagship initiatives for the revitalization of Union policies, of the theme of poverty and social exclusion – there is almost no mention of the role of volunteering, although the flagship initiative "Youth on the Move" is supported by the youth volunteering. This "oversight" should make us reflect on how the EU is now facing the role of volunteering and the good relationship that produces the same orientation toward the centrality of the person.

To this end, to implement the objectives of Europe 2020, on the initiative of the Polish Presidency in May of this year, a working group on social issues developed initiatives to invite Member States and the Commission to adopt different actions based on the principle of subsidiarity and, in particular, asked in the initial draft of the document to: Support the development of civil society organizations at local, national and European level; publish and share the results of researches concerning volunteering and active

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citizenship; encourage companies and the private sector to support initiatives promoting and strengthening the voluntary sector in the context of corporate volunteering; preparing a green paper on volunteering; consider the possibility of including the development of programs implemented under the European Cohesion Policy, through the European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund.

After several meetings, many of the above issues have been "abandoned" for the opposition of the majority of countries and the result is a document devoid of truly innovative contents which will not make significant contributions in terms of growth and development aimed at social cohesion.

However, 3 October 2011 the EU Council issued the final Conclusions on the role of voluntary activities in social policy.

In the Council conclusions, thanks also to the many initiatives and debates held in the context of 2011 European Year of voluntary activities that promote active citizenship, it is stressed that volunteering is an expression of active citizenship in all spheres of social life and, as such, it contributes to the development of democratic values, human dignity, equality and subsidiarity.

In particular, herein are incorporated some of the most important Italian proposals, including those aimed at differentiating in a clear and unambiguous way the value of free given volunteering from for profit activities, and to emphasize the importance of volunteering in promoting, even outside of the EU, the principles of identity and common European values such as solidarity and social cohesion.