



**Doc. 12023**

16 September 2009

## Promoting volunteering in Europe as engine of democratic citizenship and social inclusion

### Motion for a resolution

tabled by Ms Christine McCafferty and other members of the Assembly

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This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

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2011 will be the tenth anniversary of United Nations International Year of Volunteers 2001 and the European Commission has decided to propose that it be designated the "European Year of Volunteering". The Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union of May 2007 stated that the contribution of civil society to achieving the objectives shared by the Council of Europe and the European Union will be encouraged.

On this occasion, ten years after the Recommendation on "Improving the status and role of volunteers as a contribution by the Parliamentary Assembly to the International Year of Volunteers 2001", the Council of Europe with the richness and variety of its different cultural histories and experience should send a positive message and recognise the value of active citizenship and citizens' involvement in public life.

The challenge of giving explicit economic, social and moral value to volunteers' contributions to their communities and nations needs to be addressed. They are often the promoters of key Council of Europe values such as peace, democracy, human rights, equality of opportunities, social justice, development and international solidarity, health, environment protection, intercultural dialogue, education and sport.

Voluntary action is not just a good deed; it is the engine of civil society which is essential for the health of our democracies. An activity which involves commitment outside one's personal environment or social group to helping creating a closer community through useful work is a key aspect of democratic citizenship.

Voluntary work is an important creator of social capital - the ties that bind communities together - and its value goes beyond service provision and advocacy work. The motivation behind it, the desire to contribute to the common good and to shape a better society, to promote values such as altruism and solidarity, are a fundamental resource which encourages and strengthens social inclusion. Research shows that social capital has a direct and positive impact on growth, contributing to economic and social cohesion.

Furthermore, involvement in productive activities, particularly volunteering, has important societal and individual benefits in the contemporary ageing environment and tackles social isolation and the erosion of support networks. Through volunteering and social contacts, older people stay more active and healthy physically, mentally, socially and spiritually which can only benefit society as a whole.



Considering the incalculable value for society and the public good of voluntary action, common features can be found in the various forms of voluntary action throughout Europe but, at the same time, unequal level of development and recognition. Ensuring appropriate incentives to encourage volunteering remains a key issue, including the need for more training, more flexible and diverse options, and more opportunities for intergenerational volunteering remain a topical issue.

*Signed (see overleaf)*

*Signed*<sup>1</sup>:

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1. EDG: European Democrat Group  
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party  
SOC: Socialist Group