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STATEMENT BY MR. ELCO BRINKMAN

1119/D

MINISTER OF WELFARE, HEALTH AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS, THE NETHERLANDS

1. Introduction

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Ladies and gentlemen,

3. Youth policy and participation by young people

Young people play a part in the community in many different ways. They participate in the labour market, they are by far the largest category of consumers of education and, partly because of the overall increase in prosperity, they have become important consumers in their own right. However, there is more to young people than production and consumption. The other side of the coin is the cultural and political dimension to their participation in society. Young people's transition into adulthood may be seen as a process of increasing participation and integration in the community. At the same time, however, being young means belonging to a peer group: the younger generation. In reality, it is difficult to distinguish one facet of growing up from the other.

Participation in the political and cultural life of the community can make a significant contribution to forming young people's ideological, cultural and political views, thus helping them to function as fully-fledged members of that community.

The social participation of young people takes different forms in the different parts of Europe, as a result of cultural and historical differences. In the countries of northern Europe there is a strong tradition of participation in organised frameworks, through young people's sections of political parties and trade unions, organisations based on religious or ideological principles and youth work organisations. In southern European countries, such participation is partly government-organised, but may also be expressed in cultural or campaigning form. In central Europe, young people are forming organisations of their own, alongside the existing organised frameworks, for short-term activities of various kinds.

All over Europe, young people are choosing from a wide range of social issues in deciding on the activities for which they wish to assume responsibility, in the long or the short term. The young women of Hengelo, in the east of the Netherlands, for example, have taken the initiative of establishing an open house for young women, where they can meet, take part in activities and attend courses. This is a scheme of a social and cultural nature which developed alongside traditional frameworks, as did the photographic centre set up by young people in Amsterdam as a place where they could attend courses or simply rent a darkroom or a studio. There are currently 35 young people working there on a voluntary basis. The aim is to create a number of paid jobs. Rotterdam is the home of a pop centre where the city's approximately three thousand amateur bands can rehearse and make recordings in professional studios. The centre also stores the tapes made so that youth clubs which are interested in inviting bands to play may listen to them.

I have given only a few examples, but they show that young people are forming organisations, albeit with an interest only in certain themes, on a somewhat fragmentary basis and for short periods. There can be no doubt that young people have become more mature and self-reliant, although in a number of countries they demonstrate this maturity in schemes of their own as well as in the traditional organised frameworks. I believe that even where this is so, young people should be given the chance to participate in the Council of Europe's arrangements for young people.

As I said earlier, by the year 2000 young people's participation in society will take a different form. The infrastructure of youth policy, which rests on helping young people to take an integral part in society as a whole, should be designed in such a way that it creates the conditions for such participation and integration while at the same time offering opportunities to young people who are in danger of missing out altogether. What are the strategies we should adopt to achieve this goal? I intend to put forward some answers to this question at local, national and European level.