



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 26.06.1997
COM(97) 338 final

97/0103 (COD)

Amended proposal for a

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND COUNCIL DECISION

amending Decision 819/95/EC establishing
the Community action programme
SOCRATES

(presented by the Commission pursuant to Article 189 a (2)
of the EC-Treaty)

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 14 March 1997, the Commission presented a proposal for a decision¹ pursuant to Articles 126 and 127 of the EC Treaty, involving a new Parliament-Council codecision procedure, for the purpose of amending the decision establishing the Community action programme SOCRATES². The only amendment proposed is that the programme's financial framework be enlarged. The Commission proposes an increase of ECU 50 million, bringing the total for the period 1995-99 to ECU 900 million rather than ECU 850 million. The Commission proposal was submitted to the European Parliament and the Council on 14 March 1997.
- 1.2 The Economic and Social Committee issued its opinion on 28 May 1997³, in which it underlined the importance of the programme, expressed the view that programmes which bring together the citizens of the EU should be given priority financing even in periods of budgetary constraints and welcomed the fact that the Commission was proposing an increase in the financial framework, although it considered that the proposed increase was insufficient (no alternative figure was proposed).
- 1.3 The Council has asked the Committee of the Regions to deliver its opinion by 19 September 1997.
- 1.4 The European Parliament adopted its opinion at the first reading on 12 June 1997⁴. This opinion contains six amendments to the wording originally proposed by the Commission. Five of these concern the recitals referring to the Decision. One amendment relates to the Decision as such and provides for an increase of ECU 100 million in the financial framework, rather than ECU 50 million.
- 1.5 The Commission is able to accept two of the amendments concerning the recitals. The other three are acceptable in principle and/or subject to rewording, but have been included in the Commission's amended proposal. The amendment concerning the Decision itself cannot be accepted at this stage.
- 1.6 The reasons for the position adopted by the Commission regarding these amendments are set out in section 3 below. Annex I contains the complete text of the original proposal (left-hand column) and the amended proposal (right-hand column).

¹ COM(97) 99 final, 14.3.1997.

² Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council No 819/95/EC of 14 March 1995 establishing the Community action programme SOCRATES, OJ L 87, 20.4.1995, p. 10.

³ SOC/337, ESC 593/97 - 97/0103 COD, 28.5.1997.

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2. Aim of the proposal

The programme spans the period 1995-99 and is applicable to the 15 Member States as well as the partner countries in the European Economic Area. Its overall aim is to promote quality by increasing mobility, encouraging cooperation and strengthening the European dimension in all areas of education.

SOCRATES is regarded as a cornerstone of a strategy to bring Europe closer to its citizens on the one hand and to improve the quality of human resources with a view to promoting European competitiveness and stimulating employment on the other. It was warmly received by the education community in Europe. SOCRATES is also a mainspring for the process of Community enlargement in the broad sense through the pre-accession extension of strategically important programmes to the associated countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Cyprus.

The financial framework was the subject of a conciliation procedure between the European Parliament and the Council when the Decision establishing the programme was adopted, with the figure adopted falling far short of the Commission's original proposal. At the end of the conciliation procedure, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission agreed that:

"Two years after the launching of the programme, the European Parliament and the Council will assess the results achieved by the programme. To that end, the Commission will submit to them a report accompanied by any proposal which it considers appropriate, including any concerning the funding set by the legislator within the meaning of the Joint Declaration of 6 March 1995⁵. The European Parliament and the Council will act on those proposals at the earliest opportunity"⁶.

On the basis of the mandate contained in the Joint Declaration, the Commission has produced a report analysing the first two years of SOCRATES (1995 and 1996)⁷, accompanied by the proposal for a decision to modify the financial framework of the programme with the aim of enabling it to continue to achieve its objectives.

3. Commission position regarding the amendments proposed by the European Parliament (first reading)

3.1 Amendments accepted

The Commission accepts amendments 1, 2 (subject to a slight rewording), 3 (subject to a slight rewording) and 5 (subject to a slight rewording). The reasons for this position are the following:

- *Amendment 1:* This amendment recalls the Commission's initiatives which tended to confirm the need for increased financing for European cooperation in the field of education. The final part of the amendment concerns the priority which the European Parliament would like to give to Community measures in the education sector. The Commission has itself now demonstrated that it attaches priority to this sector by

⁵ Declaration by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission of 6 March 1995 (95/C 293/03), OJ C 293, 8.11.1995, p. 4.

⁶ Joint Statement by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission concerning Decision 819/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 1995 establishing the Community action programme 'SOCRATES', OJ L 132, 16.6.1995, p. 18.

⁷ COM(97) 99 final, 14.3.1997.

proposing an increase in the financial framework for SOCRATES despite the extremely low rate of increase provided for in the budgetary proposals concerning heading 3 of the financial perspective. The amendment nevertheless refers only to resolutions of the European Parliament.

- *Amendment 2*: This amendment tends to back up the Commission's own arguments concerning the effects of the funding for the programme being maintained at its current level or not being increased sufficiently, particularly as regards the continuous reduction of funding. This amendment has therefore been accepted with a minor modification giving a slightly more balanced analysis of the implications of a failure to increase funding.
- *Amendment 3*: Given that the Commission itself, in its recitals, drew attention to the possible impact on the budget (for establishments in the Member States) of SOCRATES being extended to include associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Cyprus - an impact which will also have to be absorbed during the next budgetary period - this amendment was accepted with a slight change to its wording. If the costs relating directly to the participation of persons and institutions from the new countries are to be covered by the contributions from each participating country, cooperation with the new countries could in practice result in substantial costs for the institutions in the countries currently participating in the SOCRATES programme. The amendment was modified slightly in order to above all take account of the fact that the opening-up of the programme has not yet taken effect; this is planned for the second half of 1997.
- *Amendment 5*: This amendment makes a relevant reference to the budgetary arrangements allowing the increase proposed in the draft Decision submitted by the Commission to be financed. It was therefore accepted (subject to a slight rewording).

3.2 Amendments acceptable in principle

Amendment 4 seems to be acceptable in principle. However, the Commission considers that the arguments contained in it are sufficiently encompassed by amendments 2 and 3, each of which the Commission accepted with minor modifications. It has therefore rejected amendment 4.

3.3 Amendments not accepted

While the Commission considers that the additional recitals strengthen its arguments in favour of an increase in the financial framework, it is unable at this stage to accept amendment 6 concerning an increase in the additional funding. The Commission is quite aware of the fact that the financial perspective in force would in principle have allowed a proposal going well beyond the increase in funding provided for in its proposal. However, the Commission considers that, at a time of continuing budgetary constraints, it would be premature to propose a larger sum.

4. Conclusion

The Commission recommends that the European Parliament and the Council approve the amended proposal set out in Annex I.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND COUNCIL DECISION

amending Decision 819/95/EC establishing
the Community action programme
SOCRATES

Initial proposal ⁸	Amended proposal
<p>Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council</p> <p>amending Decision 819/95/EC⁹ establishing the Community action programme <i>Socrates</i></p>	Unchanged
<p>THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,</p> <p>Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Articles 126 and 127 thereof,</p> <p>Having regard to the proposal from the Commission¹⁰,</p> <p>Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee¹¹,</p> <p>Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions¹²,</p> <p>Acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 189b of the Treaty¹³,</p>	Unchanged
<p>Whereas Decision 819/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 1995 establishes the Community action programme SOCRATES;</p>	Unchanged
<p>Whereas Article 7 of this Decision provides for a financial framework for the implementation of the programme during the period 1.1.1995 - 31.12.1999;</p>	Unchanged
<p>Whereas the Joint Statement by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission concerning the above-mentioned Decision of 14 March 1995 provides that two years after the launching of the programme, the European Parliament and the Council will assess the results achieved by the programme, and that to</p>	

⁸ OJ C 113, 11.4.1997.

⁹ OJ L 87, 20.4.1997, p. 10.

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<p>this end the Commission will submit to them a report accompanied by any proposals which it considers appropriate, including any concerning the funding set by the legislator within the meaning of the Joint Declaration of 6 March 1995¹⁴, and that the European Parliament and the Council will act on those proposals at the earliest opportunity¹⁵;</p>	
	<p><u>Whereas the European Parliament called for an increase in the allocation for the programme in its resolution on the Commission White Paper on Education and Training “Teaching and learning: towards the learning society” (COM(95)0590)¹⁶ and its resolution on the Commission Green Paper on “Education - Training - Research: the obstacles to transnational mobility” (COM(96)0462)¹⁷; whereas, in its resolution on the guidelines for the 1998 budgetary procedure¹⁸, it included encouragement for youth and education programmes among its priorities:</u></p>
<p>Whereas the report submitted by the Commission¹⁹ pursuant to the above-mentioned Joint Statement has set out the outstanding results achieved by the programme during the first two years following its adoption;</p>	<p>Unchanged</p>
<p>Whereas the programme has been particularly well received in the educational community, and there is a need to maintain its forward momentum towards achieving its objectives;</p>	<p>Unchanged</p>
<p>Whereas the demand for support is already many times higher than the available resources and is continuing to rise;</p>	<p>Unchanged</p>
<p>Whereas there is a need to ensure that a critical mass of funding is maintained, <u>thereby ensuring that the quality of the collaborative activities to be supported is not endangered;</u></p>	<p><u>Whereas the success of the programme would be seriously compromised both if the percentage of projects supported were to be reduced and if the annual average amount of</u></p>

¹⁴ Declaration by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission of 6 March 1995 on the incorporation of financial provisions into legislative acts (95/C 293/03), OJ C 293, 8.11.1995, p. 4.

¹⁵ OJ L 132, 16.6.1995, p. 18.

¹⁶ (EP 257.132, 12.3.97, p. 47).

¹⁷ (EP 259.215, 14.5.1997, p 66).

¹⁸ (EP 225.133, 13.3.1997, p. 78).

¹⁹ COM(97) 99 final, 14.3.1997.

	<u>support granted to projects fell below a critical threshold, which would mainly disadvantage those from less favoured backgrounds; whereas there is therefore a need to ensure that a critical mass of funding is maintained;</u>
Whereas there is a need to provide continuity of support for projects during their developmental phase, while nonetheless reserving sufficient funds to support new projects and activities, thereby safeguarding the programme's potential for contributing to innovation,	Unchanged
	<u>Whereas the associated countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Cyprus may participate in the programme from 1998 onwards; whereas their financial contribution will call for a similar contribution by the Union in order to ensure reciprocal mobility in line with the Union's political objective,</u>
Whereas there is a need to adjust the financial framework for the programme in order to maintain the programme's capacity to fulfil the objectives set out in the Decision establishing the programme,	Unchanged <u>Whereas additional funding can be incorporated within the overall allocation for heading 3 of the financial perspective and within the limits of the appropriations available during the two financial years concerned,</u>
HAVE DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:	Unchanged
Article 1	
Article 7(1) of Decision 819/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 1995 shall be replaced by the following: "The financial framework for implementation of this programme for the period referred to in Article 1 shall be ECU 900 million."	Unchanged
Article 2	
This Decision shall enter into force on the day of its publication in the <i>Official Journal of the European Communities</i> .	Unchanged

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DOCUMENTS

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