Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on a 'Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Decision No 508/2000/EC of 14 February 2000 establishing the Culture 2000 programme'

(2004/C 23/05)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Decision No 508/2000/EC establishing the Culture 2000 programme COM(2003) 187 final — 2003/0076 (COD);

having regard to the decision of the Council of 5 May 2003 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

having regard to the decision of its President of 23 January 2003 to instruct its Commission for Culture and Education to draw up an opinion on this subject;

having regard to its draft Opinion (CdR 165/2003 rev.) adopted on 11 July 2003 by the Commission for Culture and Education (rapporteur: Mrs Rosemary Butler, Member of the Welsh Assembly (UK/PES),

unanimously adopted the following Opinion at its 51st plenary session, held on 9 October 2003.

1. The Committee of the Regions' views

The Committee of the Regions

1.1. affirms the importance of cultural activities at European level and the political relevance of the objectives of the Culture 2000 programme;

1.2. welcomes the contribution that the Culture 2000 programme and its predecessors (Kaleidoscope, Ariane and Raphael) have made to date in promoting cultural cooperation across participating countries;

1.3. recognises that as set out in the Commission's own proposal on extending the programme, there is still room for improvement and the CoR would like, Not only to comment on the proposal to extend Culture 2000 to 2006, but also to make some proposals regarding the future orientation of the programme in the new programming period;

1.4. believes that safeguarding and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity is the fundamental principle underlying the process of European integration, and one of the main characteristics of Europe's identity. The successor programme to Culture 2000 must therefore embrace all local, regional, national and sub-state manifestations of cultural and linguistic diversity;

1.5. Notes that the culture programme only represents approximately 5 % of EC funding to the cultural sector, with the remainder coming from other programmes, Notably the Structural Funds. Therefore the CoR strongly believes that a reference to culture must be made in any future regulation as regards the Structural Funds post 2006, and that support for the cultural sector in the current programme should be analysed in the mid-term review of the structural funds. Currently the regulation of the Regional development Fund Notes that the Fund will participate in the financing of 'cultural investment, including the protection of cultural and natural heritage';

1.6. reiterates the point made in the resolution of the Council of 5 and 6 May 2003 that an extra effort needs to be made to include culture in other policy areas with the aim of placing culture at the heart of European integration. In this way, the CoR hopes that in future there will be closer co-operation with other funds such as the Information Communication TechNologies (ICT) or education and youth programmes.

Extending the 'Culture 2000' programme to 2006

The Committee of the Regions

1.7. welcomes the proposal to extend the Culture 2000 programme, due to end on 31 December 2004 to 2006. This will bring the Culture programme into line with the current EU multi-annual programming period, which ends on 31 December 2006;

1.8. agrees with the Commission that there is a need for stability in a period of major change (the accession of ten new Member states, the Inter-governmental Conference, the European Parliamentary elections and the appointment of a new Commission) and that Community support for cultural activities as provided for in the Treaty should Not be disrupted;

1.9. agrees with the Commission proposal that the programme remains largely unchanged for 2005–2006. While the CoR agrees that Now is Not an appropriate time to propose radical reform, given that results of the interim report are pending and the ongoing public consultation, it hopes that the Commission will take immediate steps to streamline the administrative and financial procedures associated with Culture 2000;

1.10. accepts the Commission's proposal that the overall budget for the extended Culture 2000 programme should be EUR 236,5 million. This is in line with the level of support that has been given hitherto and takes some account of the enlargement of the European Union. Moreover, given that the results of the interim evaluation of the programme are Not yet available, it is difficult to properly assess how successful the programme has been in meeting its objectives and to make a strong case for an increased budget for 2005–2006;

1.11. believes that while it is necessary to take a pragmatic approach to the funding of Culture 2000 in the years 2005–2006 for the reasons set out above, the global budget for the programme is nevertheless absolutely insufficient. For this reason, it calls for a more realistic budget to be allocated in the next programming period in recognition of the importance of culture in the European venture, and the fact that the dialogue that society has with itself is conducted through culture.

New European Community Framework Programme for Culture

The Committee of the Regions

1.12. would also like to take this opportunity to make some proposals regarding the orientation of the future European Community Framework Programme for culture;

1.13. welcomes the Commission's decision to launch a public consultation on the shape of a successor programme to Culture 2000. It believes that the programme to date has played a valuable role in promoting increased co-operation and exchange between cultural actors, but feels that it needs to undergo significant reform as regards content, administration, financing, information provision and project selection, if it is to become a genuine instrument for effective cultural action in European terms;

1.14. contends that the primary focus of the new programme should be on European cultural objectives: the development of quality, excellence, originality and challenge which contribute to greater inter-cultural dialogue. The programme should be addressed directly to cultural players, artists, creators and ultimately of course citizens. For example the new programme should allow professional artists to develop new skills;

1.15. would like the new programme to continue to place importance on the socio-ecoNomic benefits that culture can bring, in particular in terms of ecoNomic development, social integration, health etc, and should emphasize equality of access to culture. Culture 2000 and its successor programme must explore the means by which everyone has the opportunity and encouragement to experience and enjoy cultural events of the highest possible quality. A vital cultural life with a wide range of cultural facilities boosts the entire region's attraction. Culture is a major factor of territorial cohesion in Europe, providing substantial added value and exercising a multiplier effect on regional and local development projects;

1.16. points out that that many regional and local authorities have responsibility for culture and play a key role in promoting and celebrating the culture of their communities, Notably through community projects, the organisation of festivals, the guardians of artists' works and the preservation of cultural heritage. The future programme should promote the participation of regional and local authorities who work in partnership with cultural operators;

1.17. maintains that it is crucial that the new programme should encourage real inNovation and risk-taking and Not just pay lip-service to these goals, but recalls that the concept of inNovation is relative and depends on the regional and local context;

1.18. feels the successor programme to Culture 2000 should Not only allow, but encourage integrated cross-art form projects. While this was ostensibly the aim of developing a single framework programme from three disparate programmes, the reality has been that it is difficult for project promoters to put forward projects that cut-across two or more art forms, the reality of contemporary cultural life. Drawing up sectoral or thematic priorities restricts artistic freedom and ultimately makes for less exciting, challenging projects;

1.19. proposes that the programme should Not take a prescriptive view of eligible/Not eligible art forms. It should take a wide-reaching view of arts and culture to include for example community animation and film-making, which provide an excellent vehicle through which cultural exchange, co-operation and engagement can be achieved. The programme should give particular attention to artists seeking to extend the range of new media offered by recent developments in techNology;

1.20. applauds the willingness of the Culture 2000 programme to support the promotion of literature in lesser used languages and hopes that the successor programme will ensure that lesser used, regional and miNority languages will be properly integrated into the new programme;

1.21. recommends that the successor programme should favour initiatives undertaken by organisations at the local and regional level, as is currently the case, rather than large-scale activities. This would enable local and regional authorities to play a full role in the programme as project promoters or as partners, as they are often one of the main sources of co-financing for cultural operators. The CoR agrees that EU cultural action should promote sustainable cooperation with multiplier effects and believes that small scale local projects are often the beginnings of long term partnerships which provide an important added-value to EU cultural action;

1.22. encourages activity at a local and regional level which will allow more people to participate in the programme and is one of the current programme objectives, which should be maintained in the future. The CoR maintains that local and regional organizations being closest to the people are able to stimulate more active involvement in cultural activities in terms of contacts with artists, voluntary organizations, education establishments and the population in general and be able to get through more effectively to 'disadvantaged' groups. They are thus best able to ensure the widest access as possible to cultural activities and maximum benefit of opportunities available. In this context the CoR is concerned about the Commission's idea, set out in the public consultation 'Designing the future programme of cultural co-operation for the European Union after 2006', to establish 'European co-operation platforms ... to promote sustainable co-operation with multiplier effects' believes that the definition of 'European platforms' may be ambiguous and unclear, and could restrict free artistic creation. It therefore proposes that it be dropped or, at least, made clearer;

1.23. feels that the Commission should select priorities for the programme, which should Not be sectoral or thematic, but based on a set of programme objectives. These could include: inter-cultural dialogue within Europe which takes account of miNorities; the mobility of artists and works; inNovation; the promotion of cultural heritage; and cultural dialogue with third countries and promotion of locally-based cultural activities;

1.24. welcomes the Commission's proposal, as set out in the public consultation, that the music and publishing industries should be taken into account in Community Action;

1.25. points out that dialogue between people is more essential Now than ever, the CoR calls on the Commission to facilitate the involvement of third countries, especially our nearest neighbours in the Mediterranean and the stability pact countries, and also facilitate the opportunity for all Europeans, including those from Non-European backgrounds to develop their indigeNous cultural traditions and encourage the wider exploration and appreciation of all cultural traditions, European and Non-European, in the successor programme to Culture 2000.

Administration and financing

The Committee of the Regions

1.26. welcomes the Commission's statement, as set out in the decision to extend the Culture 2000 programme, that the general principle for the future programme of cultural co-operation after 2006 should be 'as straightforward and easy to use as possible'. To date the programme has been hampered by its excessively bureaucratic approach, onerous financial requirements and subject to significant administrative blockages, which actually discourages the inNovative or cutting edge projects that the Commission says it is trying to encourage;

1.27. feels that the application process itself must also be simplified, as the current complexity discriminates against smaller operators, small publishers for example, which are unable to afford administrators. Moreover, the application form must be made more appropriate to contemporary arts organisations for example, production costs do Not 'fit' into any of the sections in the current application form;

1.28. believes that the number of partners in the existing programme (three for one year programme and five for a multi-annual) is arbitrary. Projects should be judged on their intrinsic quality and bi-lateral projects should be allowed if the intrinsic quality of the project is high;

1.29. recognises that there is a real need for quicker access to funding. Transnational working is by definition expensive and arts organisations are almost invariably cash poor with little or No reserves and therefore need speedy access to finance, once the project has been selected. To date, access to EC financial support for successful projects has been slow, with some organisations driven to the brink of insolvency because of late arrival of EC funds and bank charges incurred during this time. A more flexible approach to in-kind funding would also be helpful;

1.30. calls for increased awareness of the differing ability of cultural operators to find co-financing, and Notes that operators in the accession countries often have particular difficulties, with many examples of operators having to withdraw from the programme for this reason. There is clearly a need for a more flexible approach. For example the percentage of co-financing from cultural operators participating in the programme from the accession countries could be decreased from the current minimum of 5 % to 2,5 % until the end of the 2007-2013 programming period;

1.31. recognises that it is also the case that the current caps on total project spending (EC + co-financing) for one year and multi-annual projects, are unworkable and should be revised in future. Care should also be taken Not to spend a large amount of the project costs on administration, in the CoR's view this should be limited to a maximum of 20 %;

1.32. regrets in terms of timing, the late appearance of calls for proposals and calls for more effort to ensure an end to the administrative delays that have dogged the programme. This would ensure that operators could start their projects at the beginning of the year, rather than mid way through and make involvement in the programme easier, particularly for smaller operators at local and regional level, which often promote the more cutting edge projects;

1.33. stresses that proportionality must be a guiding principle for the future. The negotiation and decision-making progress currently take far too long as compared to the size of the budgets in question, and there is a strong case for developing strict limits, such as two months for project assessment and ultimate rejection or agreement.

Information provision

The Committee of the Regions

1.34. stresses its concern that information provision on the current programme is something of a lottery, given the varying levels of performance between the cultural contact points in the Member States participating in the programme. An executive agency, as suggested by the European Commission, could be helpful here, if it is designed with the specificity of the sector in mind;

1.35. highlights the need for more transparency and openness in terms of information provision regarding the special (action 3) culture events with a European or international dimension as these have been a somewhat opaque part of the programme;

1.36. considers that the national cultural contact points have a valuable role to play in disseminating information about the programme to local and regional players, and is particularly pleased that some contact points have regional offices bringing their services closer to potential project promoters on the ground. The role they currently play in giving comments on draft Culture 2000 proposals and managing expectations is also very valuable and should be continued in future;

1.37. encourages all local and regional authorities to prepare reports on the benefits to be gained from raising the level of financial and administrative supports within their locality for cultural activities by an agreed percentage on an annual basis.

Projection selection

The Committee of the Regions

1.38. calls for the method of project selection to be improved and made more consistent for the next cultural cooperation framework programme. For the credibility of the programme, it is crucial that members of the jury should be specialists in their field;

1.39. calls on selection to be based solely on the jury's evaluation of the project content and artistic value.

2. **The Committee of the Regions' recommendations**

The Committee of the Regions

2.1. welcomes the Commission's intention to call for preparatory actions in 2005–2006 to prepare the ground for a stronger successor programme to Culture 2000. The Commission should take this opportunity to test experimental and inNovative ideas, and to pilot actions in the field of music, a sector which has Not to date been taken specifically into account in community action;

2.2. welcomes the proposal to extend the Culture 2000 programme, due to end on 31 December 2004, to 2006;

2.3. agrees with the budget proposed by the Commission for 2005-2006, but considers that the global budget for the next culture programme from 2007–2013 should be increased so that it can be a genuine instrument for effective cultural action;

2.4. considers that the successor programme to Culture 2000 should focus its activities on local and regional level activities rather than major, large-scale actions in this way allowing increased participation;

2.5. calls on the Commission to ensure that regional and miNority languages are integrated into mainstream programmes like Culture 2000 and its successor programme in the spirit of the upcoming EU language strategy and action plan;

2.6. judges that the future programme of cultural cooperation should Not only allow but actively encourage interdisciplinary projects;

2.7. urges the Commission to simplify its administrative procedures in line with the principle of proportionality;

2.8. calls on the Commission to ensure that in future, promoters of selected projects receive EC funding quickly and are Not subject to undue delays which can be disastrous for smaller operators;

2.9. requests that the project selection process be improved with the jury chosen on the basis of their being specialists in their field and projects selected only on artistic merit.

Brussels, 9 October 2003.

The President

of the Committee of the Regions

Albert BORE

Opinion of the Committee of the Region on:

— **a 'Proposal for a decision of the EP and of the Council modifying Council Decision No 821/2000/EC of 20 December 2000 on the implementation of a programme to encourage the development, distribution and promotion of European audiovisual works (MEDIA Plus — Development, Distribution and Promotion)', and**

— **a 'Proposal for a decision of the EP and of the Council modifying Decision No 163/2001/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 January 2001 on the implementation of a training programme for professionals in the European audiovisual programme industry (MEDIA-Training) (2001-2005)'**

(2004/C 23/06)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council modifying Council Decision No 821/2000/EC of 20 December 2000 on the implementation of a programme to encourage the development, distribution and promotion of European audiovisual works (MEDIA Plus — Development, Distribution and Promotion (COM(2003) 191 final — 2003/0067 (COD));

having regard to the proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 January 2001 on the implementation of a training programme for professionals in the European audiovisual programme industry (MEDIA-Training) (2001-2005) (COM(2003) 188 final — 2003/0064 (COD));

having regard to decision of the Council of 5 May 2003 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 and Article 150 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;