

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Decision 1999/784/EC concerning Community participation in the European Audiovisual Observatory'

(COM(2003) 763 final – 2003/0293 (COD))

(2004/C 241/03)

On 14 January 2004 the Council of the European Union decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 157(3) of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the 'Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Decision No 1999/784/EC concerning Community participation in the European Audiovisual Observatory'.

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 10 May 2004. The rapporteur was Mr Green.

At its 409th plenary session of 2 and 3 June 2004 (meeting of 2 June) the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 171 votes in favour, with nine abstentions.

1. Introduction

1.1 By Decision 1999/784/EC⁽¹⁾, the Council adopted the proposal concerning Community participation in the European Audiovisual Observatory for a period ending on 31 December 2004.

1.2 On 22 September 1999, the European Economic and Social Committee endorsed the Commission proposal for Community participation.

1.3 The background to both the Commission proposal and the Committee's endorsement of it was the audiovisual industry's position as one of Europe's key strategic sectors, particularly radio and television broadcasting and film production.

2. The Commission proposal

2.1 The Commission is proposing:

- to extend Community participation in the European Audiovisual Observatory for two years to include 2005 and 2006;
- to maintain the annual budget at the 2004 level, i.e. EUR 235,000.

2.2 The proposal is prompted in particular by the following considerations:

- The observatory's activities in the area of market statistics and financial and legal information contribute effectively to achieving the objectives set. Thus, it is in the Community interest to support and consolidate both the structure of the observatory and bilateral cooperation.

- The observatory's contribution to achieving these objectives will be improved by implementing a new strategy at present under development with Commission participation. The appropriate observatory departments will adopt the updated remit and the relevant financial framework at the end of 2005. Implementation will start progressively in 2006 at the earliest.

2.3 Taking into account the positive experience gained in the past, which was summarised in a mid-term report⁽²⁾, the Commission feels it would be appropriate to extend the Community's participation in the observatory for a period of two years. This short extension will cover a critical period for the definition of the future patterns of the observatory's activity and can be lodged in the Community's present financial perspectives without any prejudice for future decisions, which will be taken in 2006 with the full knowledge of the features of the observatory's new remit and financial framework.

3. General comments

3.1 The European Economic and Social Committee originally backed the Commission's proposal for Community participation in the observatory, in the expectation that this would help make the European audiovisual industry more competitive by improving the transfer of economic and legal information, providing a clearer view of the market and promoting transparency and investments in infrastructure.

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 307, 2.12.1999, p. 61.

⁽²⁾ Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee on the implementation of Council Decision 1999/784 EC; COM(2002) 619 final.

3.2 The Committee feels that the overall expectations and original reasons for endorsing the proposal remain valid, not least the audiovisual industry's key importance for the economy, culture and democracy. This view is substantiated, among other things, by the report on the observatory's activities ⁽¹⁾.

4. Specific comments

4.1 The Committee feels it is important for the EU's own industry — and for consumers — to have access to reliable and up-to-date information of the kind produced by the observatory.

4.2 The Committee feels it is important that consumer protection and copyright law should remain priority issues for the observatory.

4.3 Given that other aspects — such as support for fields of particular interest or state aid — have already been tackled, the Committee also recommends that the observatory consider addressing the fiscal environment of the audiovisual sector (including films).

4.4 It is vital that the observatory should be able to operate on its current basis until a new strategy can be adopted and put into effect in 2006.

4.5 However, the Committee does feel that a new strategy may necessitate an increase in the budget beyond present levels, not least with a view to putting a stronger focus on multimedia and films.

Brussels, 2 June 2004.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The European Economic and Social Committee endorses the Commission's proposal to extend Community participation in the European Audiovisual Observatory for two years as this will help strengthen the competitiveness of the Community's audiovisual industry by improving the transfer of economic and legal information, providing a clearer view of the market and promoting transparency and investments in infrastructure.

5.2 The Committee would reiterate ⁽²⁾ the key strategic importance of the EU's audiovisual sector and its impact on job creation. The ongoing rapid advance of audiovisual industries and sectors across the world makes the availability of sound statistical information about this sector all the more important and strategic.

5.3 The Committee would also reiterate ⁽³⁾ that the Commission should set up a European Information Society Agency to help coordinate the various initiatives in the area of multimedia convergence and to improve scope for more practical action in the cultural sphere in order to defend and promote the European cultural identity and endow it with a political dimension.

The President

of the European Economic and Social Committee

Roger BRIESCH

⁽¹⁾ Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee on the implementation of Council Decision 1999/784/EC of 22.11.1999 concerning Community participation in the European Audiovisual Observatory.

⁽²⁾ See the Committee opinion on the Proposal for a Council Decision establishing a European Guarantee Fund to promote cinema and television production, OJ C 204, 15.7.1996, p. 5.

⁽³⁾ See the Committee opinion on the Proposal for a Council Decision concerning Community participation in the European Audiovisual Observatory (COM(1999) 111 final - 99/0066 (CNS)).