

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019

(2006/C 115/12)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Having regard to the Proposal from the European Commission for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council *establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019* COM(2005) 209 final — 2005/102 (COD);

Having regard to the decision of the European Commission of 30 May 2005 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 25 July 2005 to instruct its Commission for Culture and Education to draw up an opinion on this subject;

Having regard to its opinion on the Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision establishing a Community initiative for *The European Capital of Culture event* (CdR 448/97 fin) ⁽¹⁾;

Having regard to its opinion on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and Council amending Decision 1419/1999/EC *establishing a Community action for the 'European Capital of Culture' event for the years 2005 to 2019* (CdR 393/2003fin) ⁽²⁾;

Having regard to its opinion on Culture and cultural differences and their significance for the future of Europe (CdR 447/97 fin) ⁽³⁾;

Having regard to the opinion of the Commission for Culture and Education, adopted on 22 September 2005 (CdR 251/2005 rev. 1) (rapporteur: Mr Seamus Murray, Member of Meath County Council and the Mid-East Regional Authority (IE/UEN-EA));

unanimously adopted the following opinion at its 62nd plenary session, held on 16-17 November 2005 (meeting of 17 November):

1. The Committee of the Regions' views

On the European Capital of Culture (ECOC)

development strategy and feels that it is important that the ECOC promote more sustainable approaches to cultural development. Furthermore, the Committee recognises that the ECOC is increasingly adopting a regional dimension, with cities involving their surrounding areas in the development and implementation of their cultural programmes;

The Committee of the Regions

1.1 **regards** the ECOC as a powerful tool to showcase, support, enrich and experience European and local cultures and appreciates that ECOC designation has very positive impacts for cities, not just in the cultural sector, but in providing economic and employment opportunities in the tourism, leisure and sports sectors and in acting as a catalyst for city regeneration;

1.2 **recognises** that the impact of the ECOC can be greater when the event is an integral part of a city's long-term cultural

1.3 **considers** that the value and potential of the ECOC has been underestimated, primarily as a result of low levels of EU financial assistance, a lack of focus on developing the European dimension of the ECOC and developing visibility for cities and an absence of support in helping cities to prepare and implement their cultural programmes;

1.4 **considers** that in the past the European Union has missed an opportunity to exploit the ECOC initiative to help promote European integration and identity, bearing in mind the ECOC's high visibility and broad awareness. The Committee feels that the ECOC can help citizens identify favourably with the European Union.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 180, 11.6.1998, p. 70.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 121, 30.4.2004, p. 15.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 180, 11.6.1998, p. 63.

On the Proposed Selection and Monitoring Procedures

The Committee of the Regions

1.5 **welcomes** the proposal from the European Commission to reform the selection procedure for the ECOC and to provide a monitoring process for designated cities during the preparations of their cultural programmes;

1.6 **considers** that the proposal from the European Commission addresses many of the weaknesses of the current selection process and accepts that the proposed approach represents a good balance between the need: to have a genuine element of competition between cities; to enhance the role of the selection panel; to have greater emphasis on the European dimension of the ECOC; and to recognise the input of the Member States and the role of the Council in the nomination and designation process;

1.7 **welcomes** and supports the following aspects of the proposed selection and monitoring procedure:

- the earlier designation of the ECOC and the extension of the lead-in time for the cities to prepare their cultural programmes;
- the greater clarity provided to cities by grouping the cultural programme criteria into the 'European dimension' and the 'city and citizens' and providing objectives for each;
- the greater transparency of the selection process and the emphasis given to the European added-value in the process;
- the introduction of an element of competition as an incentive and inspiration to the designated cities to raise quality and artistic elements of their cultural programmes;
- the regular contact between the designated cities and the Monitoring Panel in an effort to monitor progress, provide guidance and address potential problems at the earliest stage in the preparation phase;

1.8 **asks** the European Commission to fully consider the central role cities will play during the selection and monitoring process and in this regard feels that the proposal, as currently drafted, is both ambiguous and prescriptive and provides uncertainty for cities wishing to host the ECOC;

1.9 **has** some reservations about the following aspects of the proposed selection and monitoring procedure:

- the potential burden placed on designated cities in terms of delivering mid-term, monitoring and evaluation reports. This may be disproportionate in comparison to the very limited EU financial contribution to the overall budgets of cities for ECOC and in particular a problem for smaller cities wishing to host the ECOC;

- based on past experience, the ability of the Monitoring Panel to provide the cities with expert support on preparing their programmes and practical 'hands-on' experience in implementing the ECOC;

- the potential for delay that still exists in the new designation process, especially between the nomination of a city by the Member State and the designation decision by the Council;

1.10 **considers that** further clarification is required on some aspects of the proposed selection and monitoring procedure, in particular:

- the definition of 'independent experts' to be appointed to the selection and monitoring panels by the European Institutions and the implications this may have for the Institutions when making their nominations.
- the procedure for awarding the prize (as outlined in Article 11), to the designated cities that meet the criteria and the recommendations of the panels;

1.11 **supports** the composition of the Selection Panel (as set out in Article 5), with 13 members, seven from the EU Institutions and six nominated by the Member States concerned. However, requests that Member States include one nominee from the relevant national association representing local and/or urban government;

1.12 **welcomes** the criteria to have linkages between the programmes of the two designated cities, as it advocated in its previous opinion (CdR 393/2003 fin) and feels that the Monitoring Panel has a key role to play in ensuring that these synergies are developed in the programme preparation phase;

1.13 **emphasises** that all Member States are treated as equal in the ECOC initiative, regardless of the date of their accession. The Committee is disappointed that the European Commission has again made no provision for further enlargements of the Union and asks the European Commission to clarify the situation for countries currently negotiating their membership.

On Financing and Assisting the European Capitals of Culture

The Committee of the Regions

1.14 **welcomes** the proposal in the Culture 2007 programme providing for a tripling of the Community contribution to each Capital of Culture as compared to the current programme, as it believes that this will maximise the visibility of the EU's involvement, match the renewed emphasis on the European dimension of the cultural programmes of the cities and help to better meet the expectation of the designated cities;

1.15 **cautions** against any reduction in the budget for the European Capital of Culture, within the Culture 2007 programme, in the on-going negotiations on the Financial Perspectives 2007-2013;

1.16 **feels** that the Commission needs to immediately clarify its proposal on how it wishes to financially support designated cities through a 'prize' and to explain the potential benefits such a procedure gives to designated cities over current practice. Furthermore, the Committee would ask the Commission to use a term other than 'prize' for providing such assistance, as a prize suggests a reward or honour for winning a contest as opposed to a payment for fulfilling certain programme criteria;

1.17 **is concerned** by the long delays often experienced by cities in the processing of payments by the European Commission to the Capitals of Culture, where cities may not receive a significant amount of funds until after the year of designation has been completed;

1.18 **would welcome** further proposals on other ways in which the European Commission could support and assist the designated cities in preparing and implementing their cultural programmes;

1.19 furthermore **would welcome** support from the European Commission for cities, after their designated year has ended, to ensure that the impacts of the ECOC are sustained over a longer time period and that there is a cultural legacy in the city. The Monitoring Panel could play a role here in ensuring that the sustainability of action in the cultural sector is built into cities' programmes, but EU financial assistance would help deliver this.

On the Involvement of Third Countries

The Committee of the Regions

1.20 **supports** the Commission's general proposal regarding the inclusion of third countries in the ECOC through the resumption of the 'cultural month' initiative, rather than having an additional ECOC from a third country. The Committee would however like clarification on how the 'cultural month' initiative would be financially supported at the EU level;

1.21 **considers** that there must be synergies between the designated ECOC and the (at least two) cities hosting the 'cultural month' initiative, with such links focusing mainly on cross-border and inter-regional cultural cooperation. These actions and the linkages with the 'cultural month' should be a central element of the ECOC cultural programmes, as the Committee considers that such an approach would enhance the European dimension of the ECOC;

1.22 therefore, **considers** that the proposal on the future involvement of third countries should have been developed in conjunction with the current proposal on the ECOC, with a view to the designation processes happening at the same time for the ECOC and the 'cultural month' initiative.

On the Involvement of the Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the Regions

1.23 **remains** strongly committed to being involved in the ECOC action and is willing to continue to be an active member in the selection and monitoring process proposed by the European Commission;

1.24 **would like** the wording on the nomination of members to the selection panel (as set out in Article 5) clarified, to ensure that one of its elected members continues to represent the Committee in the designation process. The Committee would also like to continue the practice of nominating an ad-personam alternate, in order to maintain its active involvement in the event of inability of its representative on the panel to attend meetings.

2. The Committee of the Regions' recommendations

On the Selection and Monitoring Procedure

The Committee of the Regions

2.1 **recommends** that cities use the ECOC as part of a long-term cultural development strategy in order to promote more sustainable approaches to cultural development and enhance the impact and legacy of the ECOC in cities;

2.2 **asks** the European Parliament, Council and European Commission to keep potential delays between the nomination of the cities by the Member States and the designation by the Council to a minimum, in order to give cities the maximum time for programme preparation;

2.3 **requests** that Member States include one nominee from the relevant national association representing local and/or urban government, as a member of its six nominees to the ECOC selection panel.

On Assistance to the European Capitals of Culture

The Committee of the Regions

2.4 **asks** the European Commission to reduce the administrative burden placed on designated cities during the preparation process, with the implementation of the new monitoring arrangements;

2.5 **requests** that the designated cities are informed, well in advance of the implementation of their programme, of the amount of EU financial assistance they will receive in order to assist the planning process. The Committee is encouraged by the intention of the European Commission to award the 'prize' to the cities, that meet the criteria, six months in advance of the year of designation commencing but would like further information on how and under what conditions the 'prize' would be awarded;

2.6 **demands** that the European Commission immediately streamlines procedures for the application of funds and speeds up the processing of payment of these funds to the Capitals of Culture;

2.7 **requests** that the European Commission, as part of the monitoring process, enables designated cities to have ready access to practical experience and expertise by supporting the provision of a mentoring service. This service should be responsive and tailored to cities' needs and should be additional to any information provided to cities via the Commission's website and could be delivered either by:

- a) making available to cities a directory of mentors, such as directors and technical experts from cities that have previously hosted Capital of Culture programmes; or
- b) re-invigorating the Network of European Capitals of Culture and Cultural Months, to facilitate this exchange of experience and act as a support service to newly designated cities;

2.8 **asks** the European Commission to make further proposals on other ways in which it could support and assist the designated cities in preparing and implementing their cultural programmes, in particular through:

- a) direct assistance to cities in marketing activities, the wider distribution of promotional materials and giving greater visibility to the ECOC;

- b) preparing guidance on how cities can meet the extensive evaluation and monitoring requirements;

2.9 **requests** the European Commission to provide some financial and other supports to cities, after their designated year has ended, to ensure that the impacts of the ECOC are sustained over a longer time period and that there is a cultural legacy in the city;

On Wider Involvement in the European Capitals of Culture

The Committee of the Regions

2.10 **asks** the European Commission to clarify, without delay, the provisions in the ECOC for further enlargements of the Union;

2.11 **recommends** that two cities from third countries host the 'cultural month' initiative and that these cities be designated at the same time as the ECOC, in order to allow synergies develop between them at an early stage in preparations and to enhance the European dimension of the ECOC cultural programmes.

On the Involvement of the Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the Regions

2.12 **underlines** that its representative on the Selection Panel must continue to be one of its elected members, as has been standard practice in the past, and to facilitate internal coordination, requests that this representative be appointed for two years, rather than three years.

Recommendation 1

Article 5(3)

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR Amendment
Two Panel members shall be appointed by the European Parliament, two by the Council, two by the Commission and one by the Committee of the Regions.	Two Panel members shall be appointed by the European Parliament, two by the Council, two by the Commission and one by the Committee of the Regions.
These selection panel members shall be independent experts with no conflict of interest and with substantial experience and expertise in the cultural sector, in cultural development of cities or in organization of European Capital of Culture.	These selection panel members shall be <u>leading independent figures</u> experts with no conflict of interest and with substantial experience and expertise in the cultural sector, in cultural development of cities or in organization of European Capital of Culture.
By way of derogation to the first subparagraph in the first year this Decision is in force, two experts shall be appointed by the Commission for one year, two by the European Parliament for two years, two by the Council for three years and one by the Committee of the Regions for three years.	By way of derogation to the first subparagraph in the first year this Decision is in force, two <u>members</u> experts shall be appointed by the Commission for one year, two by the European Parliament for two years, two by the Council for three years and one by the Committee of the Regions for <u>two</u> three years.

2.13 **asks** that the proposal for a Decision would confirm the role of the Committee of the Regions in the Monitoring Panel and that this panel would be tasked with and play an active role in ensuring that the synergies between the cultural programmes of the designated cities are developed in the programme preparation phase.

Recommendation 2

Article 9(2)

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR Amendment
No later than 24 months before the event is due to begin, the Commission shall convene the seven experts nominated by the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission and the authorities responsible for the implementation of the programmes of the cities designated as European Capitals of Culture.	No later than 24 months before the event is due to begin, the Commission shall convene the seven <u>members</u> experts nominated by the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, <u>the Committee of the Regions</u> and the authorities responsible for the implementation of the programmes of the cities designated as European Capitals of Culture.
From this stage these experts form a 'monitoring panel'.	From this stage these <u>members will</u> experts form a 'monitoring panel'.
They shall meet to evaluate the preparation of the event, particularly concerning the European added value of the programmes.	They shall meet to evaluate the preparation of the event, particularly concerning the European added value <u>and the synergies between the two cities'</u> of the programmes.

Brussels, 17 November 2005.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Peter STRAUB