

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Decision No 1719/2006/EC establishing the Youth in Action programme for the period 2007 to 2013**

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(2008/C 224/25)

On 6 March 2008 the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

*Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Decision No 1719/2006/EC establishing the Youth in Action programme for the period 2007 to 2013.*

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 7 May 2008. The rapporteur was Mr Czajkowski.

At its 445th plenary session, held on 28 and 29 May 2008 (meeting of 29 May), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 78 votes to 0 with 1 abstention.

## 1. EESC opinion

1.1 The European Economic and Social Committee welcomes the Commission's initiative to change the procedures for awarding project-based grants and for the management of the Youth in action programme, which should ensure that funds are distributed more quickly to applicants under the programme.

1.2 The Committee supports this departure from the previous procedure, as prolonged decision-making, the lengthy project evaluation process, data verification by the programme committee and the National Agencies lead, at best, to delays and — at worst — to substantial financial problems or even bankruptcy for some of the applicant organisations, as well as the non-utilisation of funds.

## 2. Introduction

2.1 The Youth in Action programme, planned for the period 2007-2013 and adopted by Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, is an EU programme for non-formal learning. It is primarily aimed at those persons for whom non-formal education is the only opportunity available for individual and personal development and the acquisition of the knowledge and skills needed in the modern world.

2.2 The principal objectives of the programme are to overcome the barriers, prejudices and stereotypes which exist among young people, to support their mobility and to promote active citizenship, seen as a dynamic learning process. The programme provides funding for projects which support the personal development of young people. It acts as a stimulus for people to get involved in their local communities and helps promote tolerance. It encourages various kinds of action promoting the idea of a united Europe.

2.3 The European Commission has ultimate responsibility for the operation of the **Youth in action** programme. The Commission oversees the day to day management of the budget

and sets the programme's priorities, objectives and criteria. In addition, it directs and monitors the programme's overall implementation, as well as project follow-up activities and programme evaluations at EU level.

2.4 The Commission's tasks also include the comprehensive monitoring and coordination of the activity of the National Agencies — the offices established by the authorities responsible for youth policy in each country participating in the programme. The European Commission works closely with the National Agencies and supervises their activities.

2.5 The EU Member States, as well as the other participating countries, are jointly involved in managing the Youth in Action programme, particularly through the programme committee, to which they appoint representatives. The authorities in these countries also appoint the National Agencies and monitor their activities; the latter task is carried out jointly with the European Commission.

2.6 The Youth in Action programme is primarily realised on a decentralised basis, which makes it possible to cooperate as closely as possible with beneficiaries and to take account of the specific nature of the various systems and conditions governing young people's lives in the different countries. A National Agency has been set up in each participating country. These National Agencies are responsible for the promotion and implementation of the Programme at national level and act as a link between the European Commission, project promoters at local, regional and national level, and the young people themselves.

2.7 Project promoters wishing to receive grants are required to follow a procedure for calls for proposals established and published by the National Agencies. Under the procedure, the Commission subsequently makes selection decisions concerning proposals for the award of grants; as measures to implement the programme, these must follow a specific inter-institutional procedure.

2.8 The Council, in the acts which it adopts, confers on the Commission powers to implement the rules which the Council lays down and may impose certain requirements in respect of the exercise of these powers; these requirements come under the heading of 'comitology'. This means that it is compulsory to consult a committee on the implementing measures which are determined by the basic instrument. Before the consultations are completed, the Commission already formally has at its disposal the resources earmarked for the projects. The committee which assesses the projects is composed of representatives of the Member States and is chaired by a representative of the Commission.

2.9 There are various types of committee procedure; the basic instrument establishing the Commission's implementing powers may provide for the application of these various procedures in order to carry out the implementing measures

### 3. Conclusions — in view of the new situation

3.1 The Committee welcomes the Commission's initiative to change both the procedures for awarding project-based grants and management procedures. The Parliament's right to monitor the implementation of legislative instruments adopted under the co-decision procedure, which allows it to contest any measures envisaged by the Commission combines responsibility for projects with a safeguard mechanism under the co-decision procedure.

3.2 The European Parliament has one month in which to examine a draft measure before the Commission takes the formal decision, in accordance with the procedures provided for in the Council decision.

3.3 At present, the management procedure used for the Youth in Action programme for 2007-2013 applies to all decisions, including those for high-value grants, politically sensitive projects and grants in excess of EUR 1 million, as well as smaller-scale projects.

3.4 The Commission proposes that decisions relating to smaller projects of under EUR 1 million should not be subject to the comitology procedure. In return, the Commission has undertaken to inform the programme committee and the European Parliament immediately of any selection decisions which have not been subject to the management procedure. The EESC fully endorses this declaration addressed to the Council and the European Parliament.

3.5 The Committee supports this departure from procedure in the case of small-scale projects, as prolonged decision-making, the lengthy project evaluation process, data verification by the programme committee and the National Agencies lead, at best, to delays and — at worst — to substantial financial problems or even bankruptcy for some of the applicant organisations, as well as the non-utilisation of funds.

3.6 The Committee, after consulting the statistical data provided by the individual National Agencies, notes that the vast majority of applicants are small organisations, associations and foundations for whom the whole procedure and process of waiting for the results are sufficiently costly and time-consuming to a decline in interest in the programme over the long term. The administrative costs of servicing the programme could have a negative impact on the programme budget in the future.

3.7 The EESC welcomes the Commission's arguments which provide an accurate assessment of the consultation procedure. Projects are usually realised over a very short time frame after the submission of an application; accordingly, a consultation process of at least two to three months can jeopardise the execution of many projects, which will have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the programme as a whole.

3.8 The EESC also welcomes the fact that the programme committee has agreed to amend its rules of procedure in order to reduce the time required for consultations concerning selection decisions which are subject to the consultative procedure. The committee now uses the written procedure and has a period of five days in which to comment on the selection decisions submitted for its opinion. The European Parliament has also accepted a temporary arrangement which reduced the time required for its right of scrutiny from one month to five days during the previous summer period. This development has allowed the Commission to speed up work on adopting projects for realisation, but it is treated as a temporary solution.

3.9 In view of the above arguments, the current consultation procedure should be lifted and be replaced, on the basis of a Commission declaration, by a procedure whereby the Commission provides the programme committee and the European Parliament with immediate information on the selection decisions which it adopts.

Brussels, 29 May 2008.

The President  
of the European Economic and Social Committee  
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS

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