

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the 'European year of creativity and innovation (2009)'

(2008/C 257/09)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- welcomes the European Commission's initiative to designate 2009 as the European Year of Creativity and Innovation. Europe's creative potential is the key to meeting the Lisbon objectives and thus to becoming the world's most innovative, knowledge-based economy;
- notes that, in the European cities and regions and at local level, culture, creativity and innovation are the key sources of growth, investment and new jobs;
- highlights the particular importance of early, pre-school learning and primary education for the development of basic competences, i.e. the knowledge, skills and attitudes that equip people to live and work in modern European society, and to acquire additional knowledge;
- stresses that the initiative makes an ideal follow-on to the Year of Intercultural Dialogue. Linking up the themes of a number of different European 'years' helps ensure that the activities do have an impact in the medium and long term;
- notes the absence of any specific funding for the Year of Creativity and Innovation. If creativity is seen as a vital ingredient of European social development, it should not be restricted to the fields of education and culture alone. Interdisciplinary thought engenders new and creative solutions.

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Reference document

Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the European Year of Creativity and Innovation (2009)

COM(2008) 159 final — 2008/0064 (COD)

I. POLITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. welcomes the European Commission's initiative to designate 2009 as the European Year of Creativity and Innovation. Taken in a very broad sense, as the Commission rightly does in its proposal, creativity is the ability to find new solutions in the most varied fields of human activity and is the *sine qua non* of technical, cultural and social innovation. Europe's creative potential is the key to meeting the Lisbon objectives and thus to becoming the world's most innovative, knowledge-based economy;

2. endorses the Commission's analysis of the fundamental conditions needed for the development of creativity and innovation. It would thereby highlight the particular importance of early, pre-school learning and primary education for the development of basic competences, i.e. the knowledge, skills and attitudes that equip people to live and work in modern European society, and to acquire additional knowledge;

3. backs the Commission's view as to the importance of education in encouraging creativity, and considers that creativity should not be restricted only to pre-school learning and a child's early years at school. Artistic subjects should remain important throughout the school career. Nor must creativity be restricted to so-called 'creative subjects'. Creative problem-solving abilities and innovative thinking must be an integral part of all formal education processes. In this connection, the CoR would draw particular attention to the importance of multilingualism;

4. stresses the need to ensure not only the promotion of excellence and high achievement, but also proper education and training for the people in every region as the foundation for individual and collective prosperity and for the ability of regions to innovate;

5. notes that, in the European cities and regions and at local level, culture, creativity and innovation are the key sources of growth, investment and new jobs. To succeed in European and global competition, regions must develop their creative potential and capacity for innovation. Regional and local authorities are generally responsible for facilitating lifelong learning, pursuing an active labour market policy, developing regional innovation

strategies and fostering innovative and creative economic sectors;

6. emphasises again the major importance of local authorities and regions in developing innovative environments. Relevant here are local innovation policies, technology centres, business incubators, science parks and venture capital;

7. makes clear that this applies not only to the creative sector and knowledge-based modern industries. On the contrary, creative solutions are needed to the social, environmental and economic challenges facing modern societies at all levels;

8. welcomes in particular the explicit recognition of the role of regional and local authorities in the Commission legislative proposal, which notes that

— the challenges of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation can only be met by a combination of measures at European, national, regional and local level;

— by being involved in the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, local and regional authorities will be able to organise their activities more effectively and more efficiently; and

— such involvement helps foster implementation of the planned measures at European and national level;

9. endorses this assessment and advocates the broad involvement of local and regional authorities in the European Year of Creativity and Innovation;

Detailed assessment of the initiative

10. backs the objectives of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation (Article 2). The comprehensive approach underpinning these objectives makes it possible to go beyond art and artistic aspects alone and take a broad view of how Europe's creative potential is developed and harnessed. During the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, the CoR feels that steps must be taken above all to promote and draw attention to interdisciplinary activities involving lifelong learning facilities, cultural bodies and players, business, science and civil society. It is also necessary to promote creative learning based on the search for and development of knowledge, as opposed to imitation and memory-based learning;

11. stresses that the initiative makes an ideal follow-on to the Year of Intercultural Dialogue. Linking up the themes of a number of different European 'years' helps ensure that the activities do have an impact in the medium and long term. Activities undertaken as part of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue are designed to promote a more open, tolerant and flexible European society and tie in closely with creativity and innovation. Coming into contact and engaging with other cultural expressions and trends can act as a fillip to creativity and open up new pathways to resolving homegrown issues;

12. notes that the Commission proposal makes specific reference to the key lifelong learning competences called for by European Parliament and the Council. The CoR would refer to its opinion on this recommendation ⁽¹⁾, in which it highlighted the special significance of mathematical and scientific competences. In that opinion, the CoR also underscored the importance of encouraging women to take up these disciplines through the tools of lifelong learning. In future, European societies will have to do even more to encourage young people, and young women in particular, to train in scientific and technological disciplines and to study engineering and take up work in that sector;

13. notes that interplay between working life, society and higher education is an important prerequisite for innovation and growth at local and regional level. An inclusive, non-discriminatory infrastructure is needed to encourage active citizenship and joint responsibility for social cohesion and sustainable development;

14. advocates better education and training, in order to optimise the value of Europe's greatest resources — its young people. This education should focus particularly on studying technology, so as to boost European research, development and innovation, but care should also be taken to provide sufficient training in humanities and values; it is important to give the teaching of European history and culture the attention it deserves within the education system;

15. has repeatedly stressed the particular importance of promoting research, training young scientists, supporting scientists' mobility and backing European-level scientific cooperation. The development of a research-friendly climate and the promotion of patents — together with the effective protection they provide — encourage innovative processes in both society and economy;

16. emphasises the need to create standards and protection rights for intellectual property and the development of a European charter for the handling of intellectual property;

17. in this connection, would also highlight the key importance of the Structural Funds, and in particular the Regional

Development Fund, in supporting the practical application of scientific findings in innovative products and processes;

18. deplores the tardy publication of the initiative. Such a short run-up period risks compromising the venture's success. It is thus particularly important that the Commission should now make every effort to involve as many partners in the process as possible;

19. highlights the specific role played by the audiovisual media in developing creative environments. In many European regions, successful economic clusters are being established thanks to a combination of talent promotion, outstanding education and training centres and the media sector. Such developments should be given special recognition during the European Year of Creativity and Innovation;

20. bemoans the Commission's failure to mention the wide range of possibilities available under the European mobility programmes. Mobility during education and training — inter-regional exchanges across Europe — can be particularly helpful in unleashing young people's potential for creativity and innovation;

21. also criticises the absence of any provision for monitoring the success of the initiative and the failure to lay down the basic parameters under which the objectives are to be met;

22. feels that the European Year of Creativity and Innovation can only succeed if the Commission as a whole takes up the challenge involved and if the opportunities are fully exploited in all the directorates-general. Strong support is also needed from the Member States and from towns, regions and local authorities. The CoR therefore calls for the inclusion not only of education policy but of other policy areas as well in actively helping shape the European Year of Creativity and Innovation;

23. points out that fostering creativity and innovation is an integral part of many regional and local development plans. In giving practical shape to the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, care should be taken to avoid any suggestion that Commission initiatives are the only way to tap into these resources. The focus, not least in the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, should be on highlighting successful approaches pursued in the local authorities, regions and Member States and support should be given to disseminating examples of best practice. All Commission initiatives should comply with the subsidiarity principle;

24. draws attention to the rich experience of local and regional authorities and civil society organisations, as expressed, for instance, in local and regional policy activities and during

⁽¹⁾ CdR 31/2006 fin.

the *Open Days* organised by the CoR. This experience is indicative of the many and varied ways of developing and supporting the creativity and innovation that is such a mark of our European local authorities and regions;

25. notes the absence of any specific funding for the Year of Creativity and Innovation. On the question of funding the activities, the Commission proposal makes explicit reference only to the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 and the Culture Programme 2007-2013, albeit the issues at stake here — creativity and innovation — go far beyond the confines of these schemes. Other issues also need to be addressed, including, not least, the scientific dimension, cooperation between industry and science, European mobility, rural development and social policy. If creativity is seen as a vital ingredient of European social development, it should not be restricted to the fields of

education and culture alone. Interdisciplinary thought engenders new and creative solutions;

26. Point 4.4 of the Commission proposal speaks of '*refocusing communication activities on the themes of the Year*', yet the proposed measures give no further indication of how this is to be done. The CoR makes clear that any such measures must be coordinated between the Community, the national, the regional levels and the local levels;

27. supports the Commission and offers to work with it in giving practical shape to the European Year of Creativity and Innovation. The cities, regions and local authorities are the natural partners for this venture and are the birthplace of many creative solutions. The CoR expects the Commission to involve it fully in the activities and to brief it comprehensively on all measures at an early stage.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AMENDMENTS

Amendment 1

Article 2(1)

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
The overall objective of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation shall be to support the efforts of the Member States to promote creativity, through lifelong learning, as a driver for innovation and as a key factor for the development of personal, occupational, entrepreneurial and social competences and the well-being of all individuals in society.	The overall objective of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation shall be to support the efforts of the Member States <u>and the local and regional authorities</u> to promote creativity, through lifelong learning, as a driver for innovation and as a key factor for the development of personal, occupational, entrepreneurial and social competences and the well-being of all individuals in society.

Reason:

The Member States may be the Commission's consultative partners, but key issues are at stake here that fall directly within the remit of local and regional authorities.

Amendment 2

Article 3, second paragraph

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
In addition to activities co-financed by the Community in accordance with Article 6, the Commission or the Member States may identify other activities as contributing to objectives of the Year and permit the use of the name of the Year in promoting those activities insofar as they contribute to achieving the objectives set out in Article 2.	In addition to activities co-financed by the Community in accordance with Article 6, the Commission, or the Member States <u>or the local and regional authorities</u> may identify other activities as contributing to objectives of the Year and permit the use of the name of the Year in promoting those activities insofar as they contribute to achieving the objectives set out in Article 2. <u>Other, non-governmental players should, within the framework of the declared objectives, be encouraged to take part in the activities of the European Year.</u>

Reason

Use of the 'European Year' name must not be restricted to the Member States alone. A large number of stakeholders must be involved in fleshing out the European Year venture.

*Amendment 3***Article 5**

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
The Commission shall convene meetings of the national coordinators in order to coordinate the implementation of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation at European level and to exchange information on implementation thereof at national level.	The Commission shall convene meetings of the national coordinators in order to coordinate the implementation of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation at European level and to exchange information on implementation thereof at national level. <u>Representatives of the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee shall be invited to attend these meetings.</u>

Reason

CoR and EESC involvement is the only way to ensure that the concerns and submissions of the local and regional authorities are taken into consideration properly and systematically.

Brussels, 19 June 2008

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Luc VAN DEN BRANDE
