

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the European Year of Creativity and Innovation (2009)'**

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(2009/C 27/25)

On 7 April 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 concerning the European Year of Creativity and Innovation (2009).*

On 21 April 2008, the Bureau of the European Economic and Social Committee instructed the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship to prepare the Committee's work on the subject.

Given the urgent nature of the work, the European Economic and Social Committee appointed Mr Rodríguez García-Caro as rapporteur-general at its 446th plenary session, held on 9 and 10 July 2008 (meeting of 9 July), and adopted the following opinion by 108 votes in favour, with five abstentions.

## 1. Conclusions

1.1 The EESC fully supports any measures to encourage creativity and promote innovation among EU citizens, and welcomes the initiative to devote a European Year to supporting and fostering creativity, through lifelong learning, as a driver for innovation. The EESC has, on a number of occasions, stressed the importance of encouraging innovation in order to help achieve the goals of the Lisbon Strategy <sup>(1)</sup>. However, although the EESC supports the framework surrounding the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, it does not believe that this proposal for a decision is the best possible instrument for reaching the stated goal, on the basis of the observations made herein.

1.2 While other European Years have been organised with a long timeframe, enabling proposals to be made up to two years in advance, this time there will only be seven months from the Commission's proposal until the beginning of the Year, during which time the European Parliament and the Council must adopt the decision, and the Commission and Member States organise and coordinate the initiatives to be carried out. The EESC considers that this process is rushed and could jeopardise the Year, which deserves the proper preparation that befits such an important event.

1.3 The proposed decision remains very vague about two aspects that the EESC considers highly relevant and should be clarified in the text of the proposal: i) the funding of the Year and ii) the reference to support or participation from other EU policies and programmes outside the field of lifelong learning.

1.3.1 The EESC accepts the European Commission's proposal inasmuch as there is no need to create specific budgetary appropriations for the Year, and agrees that use could be made of the appropriations for the Lifelong Learning Programme, which includes specific objectives for promoting innovation. However, the EESC points out that the proposed decision does not mention how much might be earmarked for this event, stating only that the budget source is the Lifelong Learning Programme and that other programmes (which are not mentioned or specified) will co-finance the initiatives. In view of the provisions of the proposed decision, the Committee believes that some figures should be provided on the likely expenditure that this initiative will incur. The EESC therefore believes that the proposal should include a budget estimate.

1.3.2 When it comes to the funding support that could be provided from other programmes and policies, the proposal is even vaguer. It could be inferred from the text that since promoting innovation is one of the specific objectives of other programmes such as the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme and the ICT Policy Support Programme (both of which are included in the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme), these are the types of programmes that would co-finance European Year activities. In this context, the EESC believes that the proposal should specify which programmes will be used to co-finance the Year and to what extent, and how initiatives will be coordinated between the different co-financing programmes, which are managed by different Commission DGs.

<sup>(1)</sup> EESC opinion of 13.12.2006 on *Unlocking and strengthening Europe's potential for research, development and innovation*, Rapporteur: Mr Wolf (OJ C 325, 30.12.2006).  
EESC opinion of 14.12.2005 on the *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme*, Rapporteur: Mr Welschke, Co-rapporteur: Ms Fusco (OJ C 65, 17.3.2006).  
EESC opinion of 12.7.2007 on *Investment in Knowledge and Innovation (Lisbon Strategy)*, Rapporteur: Mr Wolf (OJ C 256, 27.10.2007).

1.4 On the basis of these arguments, which form much of the body of this opinion, the EESC proposes that the European Commission reconsider its proposal and take into account the comments made herein. The EESC also proposes that the European Parliament and the Council take these points into consideration and modify the text of the decision in those areas which require the greatest clarification.

## 2. Introduction

2.1 As well as highlighting the need for a European framework defining the new basic skills to be provided through lifelong learning, and emphasising that people are Europe's main asset, the conclusions of the extraordinary European Council held in Lisbon in 2000 stressed that European education and training systems should adapt both to the demands of the knowledge-based society and the need to improve the standard and quality of employment.

2.2 These basic skills or key competences for lifelong learning were identified in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006<sup>(2)</sup>, and can be considered an essential factor for the innovation, productivity and competitiveness crucial in a knowledge-based society. The EESC issued an opinion on the recommendation at the time<sup>(3)</sup>.

2.3 The conclusions of the European Council held in Brussels on 8 and 9 March 2007 called upon the Member States and EU institutions to continue working to create better framework conditions for innovation and greater investment in research and development. In the section on strengthening innovation, research and education, the Council recognised that Member States were 'determined to improve the framework conditions for innovation such as competitive markets and to mobilise additional resources for research, development and innovation activities'. It therefore invited the Commission and the Member States to 'push forward the implementation of the innovation policy strategy', given that education and training were 'prerequisites for a well-functioning knowledge triangle (education — research — innovation)'.

2.4 The introduction of a European Year of Creativity and Innovation is a good way to contribute to the discussion on the challenges facing Europe, by raising public awareness of the importance of creativity and a capacity for innovation in improving personal development and increasing general wellbeing.

## 3. Summary of the proposal

3.1 The proposal for a decision establishes 2009 as the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, with the overall objective of supporting 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 the personal, occupational, entrepreneurial and social competences of all individuals in society. In addition to this overall objective, it pinpoints thirteen factors which could contribute to promoting creativity and a capacity for innovation.

3.2 The measures proposed to achieve the stated objectives include conferences and initiatives to raise awareness of creativity and a capacity for innovation, campaigns to promote key messages, identification and dissemination of examples of good practice, and studies conducted on a Community or national scale.

3.3 The proposal establishes the position of national coordinator of the European Year, who will be responsible for organisation. Activities will be coordinated at EU level through meetings of national coordinators organised by the European Commission.

3.4 Lastly, the proposal establishes that funding will come from the Lifelong Learning Programme, without prejudice to the support and co-financing that might be given by programmes in other fields such as enterprise, cohesion, research and the information society.

## 4. General comments on the proposal

4.1 The EESC fully supports any measures to encourage creativity and promote innovation among EU citizens. In its own-initiative opinion on *Innovation: Impact on industrial change and the role of the EIB*<sup>(4)</sup>, the EESC stated that 'innovation must above all build on the basis of broad education and training in line with the criterion of lifelong learning'. Therefore, and in line with this position, the EESC will strongly support the use of any instruments that can help to promote creativity and innovative capacity. However, it does wish to make the following comments on the proposal under consideration.

4.2 The EESC welcomes the initiative to devote a European Year to supporting and promoting creativity among European citizens, through lifelong learning, as a driver for innovation. The EESC has, on a number of occasions, stressed the

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ L 394, 30.12.2006.

<sup>(3)</sup> EESC opinion of 18.5.2006 on the *Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning*, Rapporteur: Ms Herczog (OJ C 195, 18.8.2006).

<sup>(4)</sup> EESC opinion of 11.7.2007 on *Innovation: Impact on industrial change and the role of the EIB*, Rapporteur: Mr Tóth, Co-rapporteur: Mr Calvet Chambón (OJ C 256, 27.10.2007).

importance of encouraging innovation as part of the process to achieve the goals of the Lisbon Strategy. In this context, the Aho report <sup>(5)</sup> considered that a culture of innovation should be promoted in order to address Europe's productivity and social challenges.

However, although the EESC supports the framework on which the Year is based, it does not believe that the proposal for a decision in question is the best possible instrument for reaching the goal put forward, owing both to the content of the document and the form in which it is being drawn up and approved.

4.3 The EESC believes that the basic approach of the initiative is not the most suitable for this type of action. Point 3 of the Explanatory Memorandum, regarding the consultation of interested parties, states that informal discussions have been held with Members of the European Parliament and with the Member States. This means that the proposal has been drawn up using a 'top-down' approach, from the institutions to the citizens.

The EESC considers that a top-down approach, where members of society and organisations have not taken part in planning and developing the Year, is more likely to go unnoticed by the public than if steps had been taken to seek the active involvement of those whose input is ultimately essential for success.

In this context, it is worth mentioning a comment made by the EESC in its opinion on the *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the European Year of People with Disabilities 2003* <sup>(6)</sup>. In the opinion <sup>(7)</sup>, the EESC called on the European institutions to favour a bottom-up approach in the preparations of such initiatives in the future. The EESC therefore stresses that this methodology should be used when preparing for the European Years.

4.4 As the European Year of Creativity and Innovation is planned to begin on 1 January 2009, and considering the timeframes that still remain for its adoption by the European Parliament and the Council (first reading), the EESC believes that the agenda for drafting and approving this European Year is extremely rushed. On previous occasions, the EESC adopted

its opinion a year before the start of the European Year <sup>(8)</sup>, which illustrates the forward planning shown by the Commission. One good example of this forward planning is the EESC's adoption, at its plenary session of May 2008, of its opinion <sup>(9)</sup> on the *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010)* <sup>(10)</sup>.

It might be more sensible to postpone this initiative, without making 2009 a European Year, than to rush into the adoption of a decision that will not be able to meet its objectives because there was not enough time to plan the relevant actions.

4.5 Point 3.2. of the Explanatory Memorandum of the proposal states that the Year is expected to have at least as significant an impact as previous initiatives such as the European Year of Lifelong Learning and the European Year of Education through Sport. However, the proposal does not make any reference to the subsequent analysis of the results of the actions undertaken. It can therefore be assumed that the impact will be analysed either empirically or through indirect indicators from the Lifelong Learning Programme or other programmes concerned by the initiative.

4.6 The EESC agrees with the Commission that the flexibility for setting priorities on an annual or multiannual basis in the Lifelong Learning Programme and other relevant programmes provides a financial margin that is sufficient to ensure that separate resources need not be earmarked for the Year. Promoting innovation is one of the specific objectives of the Lifelong Learning Programme, and others such as the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme and the ICT Policy Support Programme, both of which are included in the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme. Therefore, and although the proposal does not explicitly mention the Framework Programme, the EESC believes that the initiative could be organised on the basis of existing programmes and budgets as stated in point 5 of the proposal's Explanatory Memorandum.

<sup>(8)</sup> EESC opinion of 8.12.1999 on the *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council: European Year of Languages 2001*, Rapporteur-general: Mr Rupp (OJ C 51, 23.2.2000).

EESC opinion of 24.4.2002 on the *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Year of Education through Sport 2004*, Rapporteur: Mr Koryfidis (OJ C 149, 21.6.2002).

EESC opinion of 14.12.2005 on the *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and the Council on the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007) — Towards a Just Society*, Rapporteur: Ms Herczog (OJ C 65, 17.3.2006).

EESC opinion of 20.4.2006 on the *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008)*, Rapporteur: Ms Cser (OJ C 185, 8.8.2006).

<sup>(9)</sup> EESC opinion of 29.5.2008 on the *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010)*, Rapporteur: Mr Pater, Co-rapporteur: Ms Koller: OJ C 224, 30.8.2008, p. 106.

<sup>(10)</sup> COM(2007) 797 final.

<sup>(5)</sup> *Creating an innovative Europe* EUR 22005 ISBN 92-79-00964-8.

<sup>(6)</sup> COM(2005) 486 final.

<sup>(7)</sup> EESC opinion of 14.2.2006 on the *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the European Year of People with Disabilities 2003*, point 1.2, Rapporteur: Ms Anca (OJ C 88, 11.4.2006).

## 5. Specific comments on the proposal

5.1 Article 2 of the proposal sets down the specific objective of highlighting a number of factors which could contribute to promoting creativity and a capacity for innovation. These factors are divided into three broad categories, each comprising a number of aspects.

The EESC believes that these objectives and/or factors should be clarified, so that the actions to be implemented focus on a number of essential aspects relating to creativity and innovation as key strands of the initiative, the public (particularly young people) as targets for the actions undertaken, and educational establishments and the socio-economic and business network as channels for this action.

5.2 A European Year devoted to Creativity and Innovation should comprise innovative measures to achieve its stated aims. The measures covered in Article 3, while appropriate overall, are those usually employed for any kind of awareness, promotion or publicity campaign. The EESC believes that it would be most instructive, particularly for young people, if the actions proposed included some innovative measure, so as to achieve the objectives of the proposal. For example a competition could be held to find ideas for a tool to help permanently promote creativity and innovation more visibly throughout Europe. Another possibility would be to set up a European prize (yearly or biennially) to enhance and encourage truly innovative ideas and creativeness among young people, in all possible areas and activities.

5.3 Without prejudice to its general comments on the co-financing of the Year through the Lifelong Learning Programme and the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework

Programme, the EESC believes that Article 6 of the proposal should further clarify this aspect, which is of great importance for its success.

5.3.1 The decision should include, at the very least, a budget estimate. This could be expressed as a sum allocated for 2009 and subsequent financial years under the programmes co-financing the Year, or as a maximum percentage of the expenditure under these programmes in the relevant financial years. Either of these solutions would be fitting, as the EESC believes that it is not advisable to leave the estimated cost of this initiative completely undefined.

5.3.2 Article 6 of the proposal begins: 'Without prejudice to the support that may be given to the Year by programmes and policies in other fields such as enterprise, cohesion, research and the information society ...'. The EESC considers that, owing to the ambiguity of this phrase, the type of participation and co-financing from other Commission DGs and programmes relating to education, culture and lifelong learning remains unspecified. The EESC believes that the article should define which programmes will be used to co-finance the Year and to what extent, and how initiatives will be coordinated between the different co-financing programmes, which are managed by different Commission DGs.

5.4 Last but not least, the EESC considers that the text of the proposed decision should include a reference to the assessment of the results and scope of the Year. At the end of the Year, there must be an assessment of the actions carried out and the results obtained so that lessons can be learned in order to prepare for other European Years, and the scope and success of the efforts made can be gauged.

Brussels, 9 July 2008.

The President  
of the European Economic and Social Committee  
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS