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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND
THE COUNCIL**

**on the implementation of the Community action programme to promote bodies active at
European level in the field of Culture**

(presented by the Commission)

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report is presented under the terms of Decision N° 792/2004/EC¹ of 21 April 2004 establishing a Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of culture. It puts forward the achievement of the programme's objectives and the Commission's position on the main conclusions and recommendations of the final external evaluation of the programme that can be obtained via the link below:

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/index_en.htm

2. BACKGROUND OF THE PROGRAMME

2.1. Aim of the Programme

According to Decision N° 792/2004, the programme aims to strengthen Community action in the field of Culture and increase its effectiveness by supporting the activities of bodies active at European level in this field.

These activities must contribute, or be capable of contributing, to the development and implementation of Community cooperation policy and actions in the field of culture.

The decision mentions that the main activities of these bodies that are likely to contribute to the strengthening and effectiveness of Community action in the field of culture are as follows:

- Representation of stakeholders at Community level,
- Dissemination of information on Community action,
- Networking of bodies active in the cultural field,
- Representation and informing of the regional and minority language communities of the European Union,
- Finding and disseminating information in the legislation, education and media fields,
- Fulfilling the role of cultural 'ambassador', promoting awareness of Europe's common cultural heritage,

¹ OJ L 138/40 of 30.04.2004

- Preservation and commemoration of the main sites and archives associated with the deportations, symbolised by the memorials which have been raised on the sites of the former camps and other places of mass-civilian martyrdom and extermination, and the keeping alive of the memory of the victims at these sites.

2.2. General description of the Community support

The Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of culture is composed by three different parts:

- **Part I** of the programme is dedicated to the support of two bodies, which have been supported by the European Commission over the past 20 years: the European Bureau for Lesser-used Languages (EBLUL), and the Mercator network, consisting in three different centres, Mercator Media, Mercator Legislation, Mercator Education.

- **Part II** of the programme is dedicated to the support of bodies pursuing an aim of general interest in the field of culture. In 2004 and 2005, grants were awarded to the organisations earmarked in Annex II of the programme provided that they complied with all the requirements of the Financial Regulation and its implementing rules, and the basic act. In 2006, the grants were awarded through an open call for proposals.

- **Part III** of the programme is dedicated to the support of actions to preserve and commemorate the main sites and archives associated with the deportation. Grants were awarded through calls for proposals.

Two different types of funding were awarded: **annual operating grants**, for Part I and Part II, which support the bodies' annual work programme and **action grants** for Part III.

The Community action programme has covered a period of **3 years**: 2004, 2005, 2006.

2.3. Future framework for this Community support

The Programme came to an end on 31 December 2006. However, its components have been integrated into three different programmes for the period 2007-2013.

- Part I has been integrated in the Lifelong Learning Programme, namely in the transversal programme, under Key Activity 2: Language

- Part II has been integrated in the Culture programme for 2007-2013 under strand 2 : "Support for European Cultural Bodies"

- Part III has been integrated in the programme "Citizens for Europe 2007-2013" under action 4 "Active European Remembrance"

3. THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

3.1. Terms and purpose of the evaluation

Following the call for tender n° EAC 41/2006², Ernst & Young et Associés was selected to carry out the evaluation.

The external evaluation aimed at analyzing the effectiveness of the programme, and of each Part of it; the quality of the implementation of the programme and its efficiency, the sustainability of funded projects or bodies.

The evaluation has focused on the entire programme period (2004-2006). However, the insertion of the three parts of the programme into three new programmes from 2007 constitutes a specific issue, which is also addressed by the evaluation.

3.2. Methodology

The methodology used by the external evaluator can be summarized as follows:

- A detailed definition of the evaluation questions
- Collection of primary and secondary data
- Analysis of collected data
- Answers to evaluation questions
- Recommendations

Three types of data collection were used: documentary review, interviews with project promoters, non-selected applicants and European officials, and structured surveys.

3.3. The Evaluator's findings

The beneficiaries under Part I of the programme were the European Bureau for Lesser-used languages and the Mercator Network. The main activities of these bodies are to collect and disseminate information at European level in the education, media and legislation field of the minority languages, to give administrative support for applications to EU programmes, and to develop adequate partnerships in the field of minority languages.

Two thirds of the beneficiaries under Part II of the programme were associations or foundations, of which a majority are located in Brussels. Four beneficiaries of the 2006 selection are located in the new Member states. Main activities include networking activities, artistic performance, support to cultural creation, representation activities of organisations towards the European institutions, as well as research and training activities. The number of beneficiaries under Part II has been stable: 36 in 2004, 35 in 2005 and 34 in 2006, out of which 16 were new. In total, 53 different bodies received support.

Under Part III, the largest number of projects supported were German. Target groups were the general public, young people, researchers and academics, etc. In terms of project output, the highest number of projects worked on maintenance/exploitation of archives for use for example in conferences, exhibitions, libraries etc., and on collection of testimonies from eye witnesses. Other projects were dealing with commemoration/events organisation, art work

² 2006/S 122-129441

and didactic or educational material, or restoration of highly symbolic sites. The number of projects selected under this part has also been characterised by stability: 28 in 2004, 25 in 2005 (out of which 24 were new), and 24 in 2006, out of which 20 were newcomers. 72 different bodies have thus received support in total.

3.3.1. Effectiveness

It proved challenging to draw global conclusions on the impact of the action at programme level, as it is by nature composed of projects that have little in common. However, the evaluator reported the widespread perception that the programme contributed to its general objective of *promoting bodies active at European level in the field of culture*.

The main objective was particularly achieved through the structures supported under Part I and the networks supported under Part II. The evaluator found that the organisations of the cultural actors improved, that the scope of their activities widened, and that their professionalism towards EU projects and EU partnerships increased. The beneficiaries classified as "ambassadors" contributed to the promotion at a more symbolic level.

The performance of the bodies in terms of the *main activities* that are mentioned in Annex I of the Decision as *likely to contribute to the strengthening and effectiveness of Community action in the field of culture* can be said to be good, if somewhat uneven, since more emphasis was put on some activities while others received less attention..

For example, the stakeholders were not convinced by the contribution of the programme to *representing stakeholders* at Community level and *dissemination of information* of Community action. The evaluator found that the very nature of the beneficiaries of the programme contributes to a relatively poor performance as far dissemination of information is concerned: the bodies are characterised by a specific expertise or field of interest within the minority language field, the cultural field or memorial actions. The evaluator perceives that only a few performance events (Part II) and a few Part III projects are addressed to the general public. The main challenge is however that dissemination appears not to be a main priority for the beneficiaries (Part II), although a certain improvement was noticed for some of them (e.g. for the limited information activities on the Community action towards minority languages under Part I). As a consequence, the programme lacked visibility.

In general, dissemination activities are not a major priority for the beneficiaries of Part II. The networks funded under this part carried out some information and dissemination activities, particularly on information regarding the EU. Whereas translations remain rare, a high number of beneficiaries (18) organised conferences, and nearly all of them improved their websites. Furthermore, their representation activities developed over time. The bodies funded under Part II of the programme in fact score better at representing stakeholders at European level.

The evaluator found that the programme succeeded in promoting bodies active at the European level in the field of culture as well as their *networking*, particularly through the structures supported under Part I and the networks supported under Part II. Over time, the partnerships supported under Part II increased.

The *dissemination of European information in the regional or minority language communities* is an objective for the bodies supported under Part I. The evaluator concludes that results on this objective remain limited, particularly for the Mercator network. This is due to the

following shortcomings: the Internet is the main tool of dissemination (Internet accessibility and accessibility of the website); the cost of translations does not allow a high coverage of languages; and the limited (although rising) number of users. The immediate integration of the new Member states in the scope of activities of the organisation(s) is instead a strong point.

Based on a number of indicators or descriptors, the evaluator concludes that the bodies supported under Part I of the programme participated considerably in *collecting and disseminating information in the legislation, education and media fields of the minority languages*. The indicators include the diversity of the information collected and identified, the development of the tools for dissemination, and the number and geographical dispersion of contacts asking for information.

The projects supported under Part III did in general meet the objectives of *preserving and commemorating the main sites, and preserving the archives associated with deportations*. Project promoters themselves however point to the limited contribution of the actions to improvements of the knowledge of the present and future generations on the deportations. Actions supported by the programme have helped avoid a *decrease* in this knowledge. Beneficiaries thus agree that the objective of *keeping alive the memory of victims* has been only partially met. Additional efforts should be made to collect testimonies (which would imply the need for additional means) – this work is urgent as the eye witnesses of the deportations are disappearing.

2. Efficiency

In general, the lack of monitoring data made it difficult to quantify the overall efficiency of the programme. The evaluator concludes that the efficiency of the action varies both between and within its three different parts. For example, the Mercator network (Part I) improved its efficiency: while the yearly grant remained the same during the period, the level of activities increased steadily. More systematic monitoring of projects and activities, particularly for those allocated amounts over average of the grants, would improve the efficiency of the actions.

Beneficiaries and applicants under part II expressed the need for more transparency in the *application process* (e.g. regarding the selection criteria, and the composition and appointment of the evaluation committee). Several respondents found that more *quantifiable selection criteria* would have given the selection process more legitimacy. In the application stage, more technical assistance and better communication would have been useful.

For Part II of the programme, the introduction of the *calls for proposals* structure in 2006 was a positive development towards a transparent and competitive process from an earmarking system, permitting beneficiaries to be chosen from a wider basis of applicants. Beneficiaries of projects selected under the Part II procedure in 2006 found that the results of the call were announced late, and that the announcement should have been made before the expected starting date of the programme, at the latest. It was perceived that an earlier publication of the results would have contributed to the achievement of the bodies' objectives.

The evaluator found that the *typology of beneficiaries* of the call for proposals under Part II of the programme, - splitting beneficiaries into ambassadors, European networks or bodies organising cultural events - had only limited merit, as the analysis of the activities of the organisations proved that they were very heterogeneous.

The evaluator found that under Part III of the programme, projects produced concrete results despite their small size and limited time frame. Thus small grants created concrete products. Lack of funds for translation however contributed to the limited visibility of these projects.

At programme level, it should be stressed that no matter how cost-efficient the output of spending on an action is, the merit is limited when the dissemination of the results is sub-optimal.

3. Sustainability

It is difficult to generalise in terms of the sustainability of the actions at programme level. Under each part of the programme, there is however evidence that the results will last beyond the duration of the project.

The programme support under Part I helped the bodies develop their expertise and contributed to progress in research on minority languages. These structures have seen participation in the programme as an opportunity to prepare themselves for the competition in the framework of the new programmes. Stakeholders confirmed that the networks and their expertise have achieved a level of acknowledgement that will help them find alternative sources of financing. The sustainable character of the network reinforces the efficiency of the EU grant.

The results from Part II also show longer-term effects: a great majority of the beneficiaries assert that they have created stable relationships with the members of the networks. Ninety per cent of the bodies pointed out that the results of their activities are used by other organisations, and it was felt that the EU grants helped increase the visibility of the organisations as well as their credibility with other financing bodies.

Some specific partnerships were established under the Part III projects, but were limited in number. According to the project promoters, partnerships are less relevant for this type of project. In the view of the evaluators, more partnerships within the memorial projects would have been beneficial in terms of both dissemination and sustainability.

4. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION AND COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSION

The main recommendations of the evaluator are presented in italics, while the Commission's answer is in standard fonts.

Effectiveness and efficiency

The Commission should strengthen links between the cultural sector and other political issues, in order to fully benefit from the potential added value of cultural activities, in terms of citizenship. Structured cooperation with other DG could be implemented for the monitoring of specific projects, with high symbolic value.

The Commission agrees. Mainstreaming culture in all relevant EU-policies has been put forward in the Communication on "A European agenda for culture in a globalizing world" adopted in 2007. The Commission is strengthening its internal inter-service coordination and deepening its analysis of the interface between cultural diversity and other Community policies in order to strike the right balance between different public policy objectives,

including the promotion of cultural diversity, when making decisions or proposals of a regulatory or financial nature.

The Commission should respect deadlines indicated in the provisional calendar for the selection procedure and ensure the publication of applicants' selection earlier because a lot of bodies follow the calendar year. It would therefore be relevant to align EU grants remittance and bodies activities realisations at the end of the calendar year.

The Commission agrees with the desirability of shortening the length of the procedures for calls for proposals and has already taken steps to shorten the process as much as possible for the operating grants for bodies active in the field of culture. For example, in 2008 grant decisions will replace contracts, which should cut the process by a month on average. Increased use of flat-rates should help to speed up the processing of applications. The introduction of multi-annual grants as of 2008 (see below) will also help to avoid delays in the future.

It is also worth mentioning that other factors such as the Comitology procedure (consultation of the Management Committee and right of scrutiny of the European parliament once before publishing the calls, and a second time before announcing the outcome of the selection process) have a great impact on the lengthy selection process. The Commission is, however, seeking to obtain a modification of the legal base of the Culture programme, which would enable the Commission to directly adopt award decisions concerning operating grants for bodies active in the field of culture. If approved by the Council and European Parliament, the selection process could again be reduced by several weeks.

The Commission should improve the assistance for beneficiaries through guidelines for technical assistance in order to provide a homogeneous answer and a better reactivity for the answers provided to the beneficiaries.

It should be pointed out that the creation of the Executive Agency, which is responsible for implementing a large part of DG EAC's programme actions from 2006, is helping improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the management of calls for proposals.

Since the beginning of the new generation of programmes (2007-2013), efforts have been made by both the Commission and the Executive Agency to better assist applicants. Several useful tools and services have been developed (including practical guidelines, frequently asked questions, more user-friendly forms, a special mailbox, etc.).

Moreover, in 2007 the Commission and the Executive Agency organised two sessions of info-days in Brussels, during which applicants received practical guidance on how to prepare good applications and had the opportunity to ask questions. This successful experience will be repeated in the future.

The Commission should develop a data base for closer monitoring, and consolidate and follow monitoring data resulting from final reports.

The Commission shares this opinion. The Executive Agency has developed a new data base which should allow closer monitoring in the future and facilitate reporting on actions co-financed by the European Union.

Visibility of outputs and results

The Commission is invited to introduce specific criteria related to visibility in the selection process. The Commission should provide a booklet for each beneficiary setting forth beneficiaries' good practices related to the improvement of the visibility of outputs and results.

The Commission fully shares the need to improve the level of visibility and dissemination of the actions supported. In the new generation of calls for proposals (Programmes 2007-2013), the visibility and dissemination of outputs constitute an important award criteria. This means that applicants are also judged on the level of visibility, dissemination and exploitation of the planned activities (different kind of communication tools used, quality of the media-plan, number of people reached by the action, etc.).

The Commission is also developing a new data base (called "EVE") on which a lot of useful information on supported projects will be available to the public.

Sustainability

The Commission should offer multi-annual grants. A combining of annual and multi-annual grants could be proposed, depending on the nature of the project. Applicants could choose between annual or multi annual grants.

The Commission is aware of the desirability of giving enhanced stability and security to beneficiaries applying for an operating grant and recognises that multi-annual grants would greatly assist some bodies to run their permanent activities. The Commission has therefore looked into the possibility of offering multi-annual grants, while respecting the provisions of the Financial Regulation. As a result, from 2008 onwards, the Commission will be offering the applicants of Strand II of the Culture Programme the possibility to apply for either a multi-annual or annual grant. From 2007 onwards the Commission offers the possibility for the bodies of ex-Part I to apply for multi-annual grants in the context of the Lifelong Learning Programme.

To maintain the requirement of a low external financing (20% for part II and 25% for part III) that is fitted to the particularities of cultural sector. Even if amounts concerned by the principle of gradual reduction of grants are low, its implementation has a symbolic value, and it is perceived as a constraint by beneficiaries. The evaluation found that the relation between the benefit and the cost of the implementation of this principle is negative for the objective targeted.

The Commission agrees that when supporting cultural bodies (operating grants), it would be desirable to maintain a high community co-financing rate, especially for structural support. However, the principle of degressivity in the Financial Regulations cannot be avoided for operating grants. The Commission would however like to apply this principle through as low a rate as possible. In 2007 and 2008 it was only 1%, and it is applied to the co-financing rate, rather than directly to the grant.

The Commission should strengthen qualitative monitoring during the implementation of projects, and improve the resources dedicated to the knowledge of the cultural sector and its stakeholders within DG EAC and the Executive Agency

The Commission agrees that it would be desirable to be closer to the cultural sector as a whole, and in particular, to have greater contact with cultural operators during the

implementation of their project. The Commission will look into the possibility of making more on-the-spot visits and participating in some events organized by the beneficiaries of EU grants.

In the context of the Communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world, the Commission is setting up a structured dialogue with the cultural sector (forums, conferences and other structures facilitating communication).

5. THE COMMISSION'S CONCLUSIONS

The Commission shares the overall assessment of the evaluator that the programme has achieved its main objectives. Although it has been difficult to draw a general conclusion at programme level, the analysis of output and results for *each part of the programme* shows that their operational objectives have been met.

A number of cultural networks and organizations of all sizes and kinds – choirs, museums, orchestras, theatres, cultural foundations – have received support by the programme to implement activities and projects with a European dimension. Part III of the programme has funded remembrance projects with strong European added value that would not have taken place without European funding. The fact that all cultural fields have been represented among the beneficiaries' activities has allowed a broad public to benefit from these actions. The Commission however recognizes that there is potential for improvement in terms of the dissemination and visibility of the results.

The evaluation has provided a number of useful recommendations. Further to the ending of the previous programme, the three parts have been integrated in three different programmes. The modifications made to these programmes and the calls for proposals as of 2007 already reflect the advice of the evaluator. For example, in the new calls for proposals for the Culture, Lifelong Learning and Europe for Citizens programmes (Parts I and II), the *dissemination of results* has become one of the main criteria for assessing the quality of applications and the possibility of multi-annual grants is offered.