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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

on the implementation of the Culture 2000 programme

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report is presented under article 8 of Decision n° 508/2000/EC¹ of 14 February 2000 establishing the Culture 2000 programme (hereafter "the programme"), which requires a final evaluation on the programme's implementation to be carried out upon its completion. It puts forward 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

These conclusions and recommendations are based on extensive surveys of Culture 2000 participants and key stakeholders, the detailed results of which form an annex to the Final Evaluation report.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE PROGRAMME

According to Decision N° 508/2000 (hereafter "the Decision"), the programme aimed at contributing to the promotion of a cultural area common to Europe's peoples by supporting cooperation activities among artists, cultural operators, private and public promoters and cultural networks.

These activities had to contribute, or be capable of contributing, to attain the following objectives:

- promoting cultural dialogue and mutual knowledge of European peoples
- promoting creativity and transnational dissemination of culture, with a strong emphasis on young and socially disadvantaged people and on cultural diversity
- highlighting of cultural diversity and development of new forms of cultural expression
- sharing of the common cultural heritage of European significance
- taking into account culture's role in socioeconomic development
- fostering intercultural dialogue and mutual exchange between European and non-European cultures

¹ OJ L 63 of 10 March 2000

- recognising culture as an economic factor as well as a factor in citizenship and social integration
- improving EU citizens' access and participation in cultural activities

The programme had three main actions. These are: action 1 – specific innovative and/or experimental actions; action 2 – integrated actions covered by structures, multiannual transnational cultural cooperation agreements; and action 3 – special cultural events with a European or international dimension.

The Programme was established for the period from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2004; as its duration was extended in 2004², it ended definitively on 31 December 2006. However, its main components have been integrated into the current Culture programme for the period 2007-2013.

3. THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

3.1. Terms and purpose of the evaluation

Based on the framework service contract n° EAC/03/06³, ECOTEC Ltd was selected to carry out the evaluation.

The external evaluation aimed to assess the implementation of the programme and the achievement of its objectives, to report on the extent to which the actions adopted so far have contributed significantly to the objectives specified in the Decision and to the overall objectives of Community action in the field of culture as provided for in Article 151 of the Treaty;⁴ and to provide lessons learned to support the implementation of any new programmes in the field of culture, in particular the new Culture programme 2007-2013.

This final evaluation follows on from the first and second external interim evaluations.⁵ It covers all actions funded during the period 2000-2006. The analysis of the Education Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) was limited to its role in the management and implementation of the Culture 2000 programme from the date of its establishment in January 2006.

3.2. Methodology

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

- documentary review of documents from project files;
- interviews with European Commission and EACEA staff;

² Decision n° 626/2004/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 31 March 2004, OJ L 99 of 3rd April 2004

³ Framework contract on evaluation, evaluation-related services and support for impact assessment

⁴ The Treaty states that "The Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore." It also highlights specific areas where Community support can be given.

⁵ The evaluations are available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/index_en.htm

- structured surveys of members of the Programme Management Committee, Cultural Contact Points, experts involved in selection and other cultural experts; and of cultural operators involved in the programme as project leaders or co-organisers;
- country and project case studies;
- an evaluation seminar; and
- e-consultation.

This resulted in a series of recommendations, on which the Commission's position is summarised in this report.

3.3. Findings

1. External coherence

The concept of external coherence refers to how Culture 2000 fits within the broader context of cultural policy and programmes.

The evaluation found that a large proportion of EU programmes such as the structural funds, Media and Active Citizenship, do have cultural elements to them and that similarities do exist between their objectives, target groups, outputs, results and impacts and those of Culture 2000. Similarly, a number of regional intercultural cooperation initiatives and bilateral initiatives also exist.

However, evidence from the review of EU programmes and the email surveys of stakeholders clearly indicates that Culture 2000 occupied a unique position. There were no other European Union-wide programmes aimed at supporting and fostering European cultural co-operation and when the distinct focus and intended outcomes of each EU and regional programme is taken into account it is clear that any apparent duplication was only superficial.

The evaluator's conclusions are that Culture 2000 was fully complementary to other EU and national/regional cultural programmes and did not duplicate activities undertaken elsewhere through other such programmes.

Enhancing the exchange of information and best practice among participating countries remains a challenge, but the evaluation shows that Culture 2000 has raised the importance and awareness of intercultural dialogue among participating countries

The consensus among interviewees and from survey respondents was that the programme's objectives were relevant and that the activities supported were appropriate to their achievement. Some stakeholders questioned the programmes ability to achieve the objectives given its relatively small financial resources.

2. Effectiveness

Evidence from the project document review and the web-survey of projects indicates that the programme was successful in achieving its results and impacts to at least some extent.

The evaluator concludes that some barriers did exist that prevented the participation of cultural actors in the programme, specifically in terms of organisational experience and

financial resources. However, it was found that given the limited budget of the Culture 2000 programme, it is difficult to see how these could have been overcome within the programme.

Overall visibility of Culture 2000 among cultural operators was felt to be good, but survey respondents expressed doubts over the depth of understanding of the programme by cultural operators.

3. Efficiency

Commission and EACEA staff indicated that their workload was persistently heavy with extensive administrative duties that restricted their ability to provide support to projects. Assuming the inherent validity of evidence from respondent staff, the evaluator concludes that there was a mismatch between the deployment of staff resources and the volume of work during the life of the programme, particularly at peak times.

Concerning the IT systems in place the evaluator's assessment is that programme managers were not supported by appropriate infrastructure.

Cultural Contact Points have been established in the Member States and in most of the other participating countries for promoting the programme and facilitating access to it. According to the evaluation, they have overall used their grants to provide an effective and efficient service to cultural operators.

Participants were satisfied with the application process and were equally positive about the information provided about the programme. The majority of web-survey respondents felt that the process was clear and that the frequency of calls was about right although their timing was inappropriate. The second source of criticism was the length of the process itself.

However, the evaluation recognises that factors such as the Management Committee procedure and the European Parliament's right of scrutiny affect the length of the process and cannot be avoided. The evaluator concluded that the main scope for shortening the Culture 2000 selection procedure would have been to use additional human resources to speed up the processing of applications and their assessment.

According to the survey respondents the programme dissemination activities could have been substantially improved.

The evaluation found that the final project reports were of variable quality and usefulness as information on outputs, results and impacts were not systematically collected and analysed in relation to the programme's objectives. Almost all survey respondents felt that the monitoring and reporting forms were easy to use and the guidance on completing them was of acceptable quality, although some areas for improvement were nevertheless identified.

The Commission and EACEA assessments of the final reports did involve substantial financial checks to identify and remove ineligible expenditure. In this respect, the monitoring process was effective at identifying and removing such expenditure from the final payments to projects.

4. Utility

In terms of the changes that Culture 2000 has produced in Europe, there has been, according to the evaluator, a clearly demonstrable and wide-ranging impact, and in particular on cultural

operators, cultural practices and policy. The establishment of Culture 2000 gave cultural operators in Europe the opportunity to participate in a comprehensive programme of transnational cooperation with partnerships covering over 30 countries. This opportunity was and is not provided by any other mechanism and the result of this is that cultural operators, who tended previously to be focused on activities within their own countries, have become more outward-looking and more open to transnational intercultural cooperation.

5. Sustainability

Cultural operators reported that they have established, strengthened and extended transnational networks across Europe that are not only sustaining their links and activities, but generating new cooperation projects. These new cooperation projects are taking place within the context of EU culture programmes but also independently of them.

Additionally, the evaluator's assessment, based on both project documents and case studies, demonstrates that at least part of the activities and outcomes of Culture 2000 projects continue after the funding has expired.

Although there is no evidence that Culture 2000 led to the establishment of new regional or national intercultural cooperation initiatives, the programme had a clear impact on cultural policies in some participating countries. The programme inspired the amendment of some existing cooperation structures and has resulted in the establishment of new co-financing arrangements in many countries, with the effect of increasing the overall amount of funding available in particular for intercultural dialogue.

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

The main recommendations⁶ from the evaluator are presented in italics and grouped per theme where appropriate, while the Commission's position is in standard fonts.

1. Programme management system

Recommendation 1

The Managing Authorities should evaluate existing ways of working against current models of good practice to investigate the mismatch between the deployment of staff resources and the volume of work during the life of the programme.

Recommendation 2

The Managing Authorities should schedule an annual visit programme to a proportion of projects to provide support and guidance on technical issues.

Recommendation 3

⁶ Where they are addressed to "the Managing Authorities" it is meant that the addressees are both the European Commission and its Education Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)

The Managing Authorities should provide detailed qualitative feedback to all applicants to the culture programme. This will allow applicants to determine whether to reapply with a revised project proposal and how their proposal can be improved.

Recommendation 8

The Managing Authorities should explore the possibility of developing an online searchable partner-matching database to assist cultural operators to find partners and develop project concepts.

Recommendation 9

The Managing Authorities should take over responsibility for the management and maintenance of the CUPID project database or should develop an equivalent.

Recommendation 14

The Managing authorities should develop an interim programme management database to assist in monitoring applications and projects until SYMMETRY is available. This should contain basic information about each application (e.g., lead partner contact details, co-organiser contact details and outline of the budget) and record key administrative milestones (e.g., contracting, payments and reporting).

Recommendation 15

The Managing Authorities should continue moves to improve the guidance available to support applicants to submit an application from. This guidance should be extended to include the interim and final project reports and project management. Quality guidance and support to applicants and project promoters will improve the quality of applications coming forward for support and will improve the quality of funded projects. The SOCRATES Guide for Applicants, June 2004 edition provides a good example.

Recommendation 16

The Managing Authorities should take steps to reduce the length of the application process by securing more short-term administrative resources for application processing and project contracting and additional culture experts for application assessment.

Commission's position

The Commission generally agrees with these recommendations. It has already started a wide-ranging simplification process that led to significant improvements in 2007, including in-depth revision of the calls for proposals and application procedure, more transparent definition of award criteria, simplification of the forms and documents to be provided, more detailed feedback to applicants, streamlining of the current programme database, increased flexibility for the duration of the support to bodies active in the field of culture, namely the new possibility for funding on a multiannual basis.

Other measures are in preparation and will mostly if not completely be implemented in 2008, such as the introduction of a programme guide for the years to come in order to facilitate planning and preparation for applicants, closer monitoring through more visits to projects, wider use of flat rates, gradual development of an on-line application and reporting system.

Furthermore, steps have been taken internally to shorten the application process as much as possible. In 2008, grant decisions will replace contracts for an increasing number of strands, which should cut the process by a month on average. Increased use of flat-rates will, in addition to facilitating the application procedure, speed up the processing of applications within DG EAC and EACEA. As the evaluator points out, there are nevertheless external factors and legal constraints that prevent the process from being radically reduced. The Commission is, however, seeking to obtain a modification of the legal base, which would enable the Commission – with the exception of the multiannual projects - to directly adopt award decisions. If this is approved by the Council and European Parliament, the selection process could be reduced by several weeks.

In order to address the mismatch between the deployment of staff resources and the volume of work during the life of the programme, a specific Unit in charge of the programme has been created in the Commission and the relevant Unit in EACEA has been reorganised. Although this will vastly improve matters, the evaluator's conclusion that Commission and EACEA's persistently heavy workload with extensive administrative duties may restrict their ability to provide support to projects remains valid.

2. Programme communication system

Recommendation 4

The Commission should appoint a Publications and Communications officer. This officer should be responsible for the organisation, editorial content and quality control of the Culture webpages and all Culture Unit / Culture Programme publications such as programme thematic reports, the project compendium and the Culture Unit newsletter.

Recommendation 5

The Managing Authorities should publish an annual compendium of projects to be made available on the DG EAC culture webpages. The compendium should include an index and projects should be listed by cultural field and country of lead applicant.

Recommendation 6

The Managing Authorities should reintroduce a regular Culture 2007 newsletter. It is recommended that this covers EU cultural policy rather than the Culture programme specifically in order to allow a broader range of content

Recommendation 7

The DG EAC culture webpages should be redesigned and re-launched to comply with the Commission's Information Providers Guide and basic accessibility requirements

Commission's position

The Commission considers that appropriate communication activities are a key tool for good implementation of the programme. The DG EAC culture webpages were completely redesigned in early 2008 and the Culture newsletter will be relaunched. Communication and publications activities have been streamlined as part of the above-mentioned reorganisation of DG EAC and EACEA. EACEA will publish project compendia. The Culture Infodays, that

were launched in 2007 will be regularly organised in the future, and serve as a valuable opportunity to provide information to potential applicants.

3. Programme dissemination activities

Recommendation 10

The Managing Authorities should publish thematic reports on the programme to support dissemination of programme achievements and good practice lessons.

Recommendation 11

The Managing Authorities should run a programme of events (or a single event) where existing projects can showcase themselves to policy-makers, and newly selected projects can attend briefing sessions on project management for culture programme management (e.g., monitoring, evaluation, financial record keeping, etc.).

Recommendation 12

The European Commission should improve its collection of best practice information arising from EU culture programmes and promote policy lessons for intercultural dialogue to the culture Ministries of participating countries.

Recommendation 13

The Managing Authorities should restructure the final report templates to collect detailed information on project achievements, outputs, results and impacts. This information should be used to support programme dissemination activities.

Commission's position

The Commission made considerable efforts in 2007 to further improve the collection and dissemination of results, including the introduction of a specific award criterion in the calls for proposals. Measures are being taken to facilitate the down-loading of results into a new information sharing data base, which is near completion. The results of these changes will be available in the medium-term after a complete life-cycle of projects. Other initiatives are foreseen, such as organising seminars or conferences (possibly thematic) where projects could showcase best practices, collecting good practices on intercultural dialogue within the programme to be exploited in the context of the 2008 European Year of intercultural dialogue, or to make better use of Cultural Contact Points for dissemination activities at both European and local level.

5. THE COMMISSION'S CONCLUSIONS

The Commission shares the evaluator's overall assessment that the programme has provided a stimulus to cross-border cultural cooperation and encouraged more outward-looking approaches, resulting in a unique contribution to the promotion of a cultural area common to the peoples of Europe.

It clearly results from this final evaluation that Culture 2000 has appropriately implemented Community action in the cultural field as foreseen in article 151 of the Treaty and has met its objectives as set out in the Decision.

More than 1,500 grants were awarded to cultural operators under the programme's actions for the 2000-2006 period, with grant payments in excess of 190 Mio EUR.

The evaluator's conclusions show that, even if there is room for improvement in some areas, participants have nevertheless proved to be satisfied with the programme and recognise its European added value.

The Commission has greatly intensified consultation with the cultural sector and is paying close attention to the views expressed by stakeholders within this process and which are echoed in this evaluation report.

Building on the experience of Culture 2000, many new features and improvements have already been integrated in the current Culture programme for the period 2007-2013. Others are underway and will mostly be implemented in the course of 2008.

The Commission will take the results of this evaluation into account in the long run, when preparing the new generation of Community programmes in the field of culture for the period after 2013.