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Interim evaluation report on the implementation of the Culture programme

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COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
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1. INTRODUCTION

This report is presented under article 13.3a) of Decision n° 1855/2006/EC¹ of 12 December 2006² establishing the Culture programme (hereafter "the programme"), which requires an interim evaluation report on the results obtained and on the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the implementation of the programme to be submitted to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions by 31 December 2010. It puts forward the European Commission's position on the main conclusions and recommendations of the final external mid-term evaluation of the programme that can be obtained via the link below:

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc539_en.htm

2. BACKGROUND OF THE PROGRAMME

According to Decision n° 1855/2006/EC (hereafter "the Decision"), the general objective of the programme is to enhance the cultural area shared by Europeans and based on a common cultural heritage through the development of cultural cooperation between the creators, cultural players and cultural institutions, with a view to encouraging the emergence of European citizenship. This aim is to be achieved through the programme's specific objectives, namely:

- promoting the transnational mobility of cultural players;
- encouraging the transnational circulation of works and cultural and artistic products;
- encouraging intercultural dialogue.

The programme has three main strands. These are:

¹ OJ L 372 of 27 December 2006, p 1.

² As amended by Decision n° 1352/2008 of 16 December 2008, OJ L 348 of 24 December 2008, p. 128.

- strand 1 – support for cultural actions, in particular multi-annual cooperation projects, cooperation measures and special actions;
- strand 2 – support for bodies active at European level in the field of culture;
- strand 3 – support for analysis and the collection and for the dissemination of information and for activities maximising the impact of projects in the field of European cultural cooperation.

Strand 1 includes cultural cooperation actions, grants for literary translation, special actions comprising support for cooperation with third countries, the European Capitals of Culture, as well as four European prizes in the field of culture. The two latter actions are managed directly by the Commission (DG EAC), while the others are managed on its behalf by the Commission's Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

The programme is established for the period from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2013. This report covers all the programme's strands (with the exception of the European Capitals of Culture, which are covered by separate evaluations³) and its entire geographical scope during the first three years of the programme's implementation.

3. THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

3.1. Terms and purpose of the evaluation

ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd was selected to carry out the external independent evaluation. The 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 to the objectives specified in the Decision and to the overall objectives of EU action in the field of culture as provided for in Article 167 of the Treaty on the functioning of the EU, and to provide input for the preparation and implementation of any future programme in the field of culture as a follow up to the current one.

3.2. Methodology

The methodology used by the external evaluator is based on a series of evaluation questions using the key criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. The analysis methods employed included desk research (including review of programme data); a review of a sample of files relating to funded projects; 78 interviews with beneficiaries, programme implementation bodies and other stakeholders; a specific focus group; an exchange of information with the Culture programme Management Committee; and 11 project case studies. Two online surveys were completed: a survey of organisations supported by the programme and a survey of publishing houses which received support for literary translations. Response rates for the two surveys were good, at 50% and 40% respectively, with respondents located in 34 countries.

3.3. Findings

1. Relevance

³ The complementarities between the European Capitals of Culture and the rest of the programme have, however, been covered by this evaluation

The evaluation concludes that the Culture Programme plays a unique role in stimulating cross-border cooperation, promoting peer learning and the professionalization of the sector and increasing the access of European citizens to non-national European works. Indirectly it contributes to the development of content which is essential for sustainable growth and jobs, and stimulates new, creative and innovative developments.

The report underlines that the programme plays a crucial role in respecting Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity and ensuring the safeguarding and enhancing of the EU's cultural heritage as stipulated in Article 3.3 of the consolidated version of the Treaty on the EU and Article 167 of the Treaty on the functioning of the EU, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (in particular Article 22) and the EU's obligations as a party to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

The programme objectives have contributed to the aims set out in Article 167, whereby the action of the Union shall support and supplement the action of Member States in improving the knowledge and dissemination of cultural heritage of European significance, conserving and safeguarding cultural heritage of European significance, non-commercial cultural exchanges, and artistic and literary creation.

Although the programme pre-dates the new European Agenda for Culture, there are strong links between the two. Some forms of support are directly linked to those policy processes (the civil society platforms, policy analysis groupings and studies), whereas other forms are not directly linked but have the potential to generate good practice examples and lessons from experience that can inform policy processes (cooperation projects, special actions and literary translation projects).

With regard to the cooperation projects (in all their forms), which account for the majority of funding under the programme, and support for EU-wide organisations, these are strongly relevant to all three specific objectives. In particular they offer the potential to directly support periods of mobility, as well as activities involving the circulation of works. The transnational requirement for partnerships ensures that a degree of intercultural dialogue is inherent in their activities, as a consequence of bringing together people from different cultural backgrounds. However, although most projects stimulate intercultural dialogue, the type of specific activities required to achieve this objective are not always as evident compared to the other two objectives. Intercultural dialogue is therefore generally (but not always) a by-product of projects rather than their primary aim. Literary translations make a very tangible contribution to the transnational circulation objective and indirectly to intercultural dialogue.

The evaluation recommends that it would naturally be important to revise the programme's objectives in the future in order to take into account recent developments both in terms of EU policies (for example the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Agenda for Culture), as well as the conditions affecting the cultural sector and its needs over the coming period (such as the impact of globalisation and the digital shift).

2. Effectiveness

Evidence from the project document review and the surveys indicates that the programme was generally successful in achieving its results and impact, with a significant leverage effect. This is demonstrated by the following figures. More than 700 grants were awarded to cultural operators from the programme for the 2007-2009 period, reaching some 3.000 organisations in total if the co-organisers are included, and with total grant payments in excess of 120 Mio EUR. The co-funding requirement naturally stimulated the mobilisation of other funds at the

national level. The activities supported reach the wider public and are increasing access to European culture. The support for literary translation has helped the translation of over 1,600 books during the 3 year period, giving some 1.4 million readers access to (new) European literature.

The European Capitals of Culture regularly attract millions of people and involve thousands of volunteers, with 10 million visitors to Liverpool during 2008. The European Heritage Days 2009 attracted 25 million visitors across Europe and the European Boarder Breakers Awards reached hundreds of thousands of Europeans through broadcasts on 12 television stations, 24 radio stations in 24 different countries and the internet.

Most project promoters felt that they had been successful in the activities that they had undertaken in pursuit of those objectives.

Neither the Decision establishing the programme nor the current Programme Guide set out explicitly what the nature, form and content of supported cultural activities should be. In this respect the programme's flexibility enables cultural operators to adopt tailored approaches suited to their needs.

In addition to the explicit objectives of the programme, projects also tend to pursue various other aims. Two broad types of activities are typically undertaken: cultural activities (including artistic exchanges, joint cultural creation, co-productions, tours and festivals, and exchanges of artefacts); and support activities (exchanges of experience and networking, provision of information and practical support for operators, education, training and research).

They are implemented through a wide range of actions. The mobility of cultural operators and the circulation of works have usually been carried out as integrated activities, for example, performing arts organisations that travel in order to perform new works, or artists that create and exhibit new works during a period of mobility. The broader public is reached through performances in front of audiences, exhibitions, sometimes through television and radio and of course the internet.

The survey indicates that cost is the greatest obstacle to transnational cooperation and as a consequence projects tend not to endure beyond the lifespan of the grant, largely due to the added costs entailed by working across borders. Nevertheless, long-term benefits include the role played by the programme in:

- fostering the skills and careers of artists through mobility experiences,
- peer learning through transnational exchanges, networking and experimentation, often in areas and specialisations where the skills and knowhow in Europe are geographically dispersed, thereby economies of scale and fostering the professionalization of the sector particularly with a view to operating in a global environment,
- helping to address geographical imbalances by supporting artists in countries with weaker capacity through the cooperation dynamic of the programme,
- helping the circulation of non-national or co-produced European works and increasing the public's access to this work,
- promoting a more outward, international outlook among the individuals and organisations.

The main imbalance in the programmes concerns literary translation. Although the support made a significant contribution to promoting the circulation of literary works, thereby increasing access to non-national European literature, English and French are the predominant source languages (more than four in ten translations) and five languages account for over half of translations in terms of the target language (Italian, Hungarian, Slovene, Bulgarian and Greek) There is therefore an untapped potential in terms of promoting cultural diversity by increasing translations into some of the large European world languages, which can serve as pivot languages for further translations into other languages.

The evaluation therefore concludes that the programme has been effective in promoting cross-border cultural cooperation, supporting artistic and literary creation and improving the circulation of cultural expressions. In this way, it has made an important contribution to the overall aim of the Treaty to promote cultural diversity across Europe, while bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore.

3. Efficiency

There has been high demand relative to the funding available: only around one in four applications to the cooperation project strands has been funded and only around one in three applications from organisations active at European level. The acceptance rate for literary translation applications was higher, with approximately half receiving funding, but this level of expressed demand does not reflect the identified need for more translations into certain dominant languages (most notably English). It should be noted that there is also a latent demand more generally, which is not reflected in the number of submitted applications, as in some cases, an actual need for funding may not result in an application (for example, due to difficulties in acquiring the matching funding).

Expenditure to date is generally in line with expectations, as is the allocation between strands. However, it is questionable whether the relatively limited number of third country projects that could be supported within the budget is likely to result in any significant "critical mass" with respect to the countries targeted.

The efficiency of the application process and the management of the programme have been considerably improved in comparison to its predecessor, the Culture 2000 programme. Procedural modifications, including the modifications made by Decision 1352/2008/EC of the comitology requirements of the Decision's Article 9 , have made the application process clearer and shorter than in the past (between 52 and 140 days shorter, depending on the strand). Various simplification measures by the Commission and EACEA have simplified the administrative requirements for applicants. Participants in the programme are generally satisfied with these modifications and with the Programme Guide which was introduced to give applicants detailed and more stable information on applying for funding.

Cultural Contact Points (CCPs) continue to provide a satisfactory service and, although still at an early stage, recent changes made to their working arrangements are progressing satisfactorily, including helping to strengthen the working relationship between CCPs and the EACEA. The visibility of the Culture Programme and the Commission's dissemination activities are generally rated satisfactory by beneficiaries, but the evidence also suggests more could be achieved, in particular by carrying out more dissemination activities at EU level – though it is emphasised these have also greatly improved since the Culture 2000 programme.

The evaluator's general conclusion on efficiency is that the programme has mostly met expectations in terms of participation by type of organisation and geographical balance. It has

also enabled a wide range of non-profit cultural organisations and small and medium-sized organisations to participate. More than half of participants in the programme are from the performing arts, but there is also a relatively high proportion of “interdisciplinary” actors, reflecting the cross-disciplinary nature of many contemporary cultural activities. In terms of application rates (though not necessarily reflected on a proportional basis in the success rate), the pattern generally shows a satisfactory correlation between participation and country size, with the notable exception of literary translation.

4. Sustainability

In terms of the sustainability, many cooperation projects have generated follow-on activities, building solid foundations for future activity, fostering long-term benefits and forming partnerships that are strong enough to endure. However, their ongoing co-operation activities greatly depend on an organisations' capacity to continue their work on international scale after the project funding ends. In many cases the costs entailed by transnational cooperation meant that projects were unable to continue beyond the duration of the project, or only on a reduced scale. According to the report, the cultural and linguistic fragmentation in Europe and current economic developments - and their effect on public spending on culture and the arts – present challenges for continued mobility and circulation, the building of capacity and thus for sustainable developments in this sector.

Regarding organisations active at a European level which are supported under strand 2, the evidence suggests that a number of these organisations would continue in some form without an EU grant, albeit on a reduced scale.

The European Capitals of Culture title has often left an enduring legacy for the cities concerned in the form of new cultural infrastructure and activities, greater capacity within the local cultural sector and cultural governance, a more vibrant cultural scene and a genuinely improved image.

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

Based on the findings, the evaluator issued 17 recommendations. They are presented in italics (while the Commission's position is in standard fonts) and are grouped into two main categories according to whether they relate to the continued implementation of the current Culture programme until 2013 or the design of the new programme (post 2013).

1. Current programme

Recommendation n° 1

The Commission should continue to review the level of grants provided for literary translations to ensure they are consistent with prevailing market rates in each country.

Recommendation n° 2

There is no direct advantage to continuing support for festivals as a discrete sub-strand within strand 2. Such support has been changed in the new Programme Guide published in May 2010, with a specific sub-strand created under strand 1, so that they can be supported as projects rather than via operating grants. Festivals can also continue to apply for co-

operation projects provided they meet the relevant criteria, e.g. are based on a co-operation agreement.

Recommendation n° 3

The introduction of changes to the working arrangements of CCPs should be completed, making any adjustments as necessary as the process advances, to ensure continuous improvement, with a view to ensuring the best possible service to cultural operators.

Recommendation n° 4

Annual visits to projects by the Commission/EACEA should be continued in order to assist beneficiaries and ensure Commission's/EACEA's familiarity with the content of projects.

Recommendation n° 5

Final reports should require co-operation projects and organisations active at the European level to state the numbers of individuals benefitting from periods of mobility.

Recommendation n° 6

Current efforts to promote project results through annual conferences and publications should be continued and, if resources permit, further activities of this nature should be considered. CCPs could invite project beneficiaries to share their experience at local 'info-days'.

Commission's position

The Commission generally agrees with these recommendations. In 2007 it began a wide-ranging simplification process that led to significant improvements in the management and implementation of the current programme, including many of the aspects addressed by the evaluator's report, and these have been widely appreciated by stakeholders.

More specifically, since 2010 festivals are supported in the form of projects rather than through operating grants. As mentioned in the report, recommendation n° 2 has therefore already been implemented. Concerning recommendations n° 1 (flat rates for literary translations are reviewed every two years: as this was done at the beginning of 2010, the next review is scheduled in 2012); n° 3 (CCPs' working arrangements with a view to improving the service delivered are fully implemented as of 2010 and can now – under the present conditions – be considered as stable for the duration of the current programme); and n° 4 (the increasing number of visited projects, mainly from EACEA, enables the Commission/EACEA to have a much better insight in supported activities with a view to better monitoring and promotion) the Commission has already made the necessary changes in the current programme's structure. It would be interesting to further elaborate on the number of individuals involved or benefitting from mobility, as a result of recommendation n° 5. As this would imply a slight change in EACEA's templates for projects' final reports, the best moment to implement this possible change needs to be assessed.

Regarding activities aiming to promote project results (recommendation n° 6), the practice of annual conferences and publications will continue and the Commission will explore what further possibilities are viable with the resources at its disposal. As far as local info-days organised by CCPs are concerned, since 2010 many of them are already more focused on

sharing experiences from supported projects and include representatives from the Commission/EACEA whenever necessary and possible.

2. Future programme

Recommendation n° 7

The general and specific objectives of the future programme should be revised to reflect developments since the last programme was designed, including changes affecting the cultural sector and policy developments such as the EU2020 Strategy, its flagship initiatives, and the European Agenda for Culture.

Recommendation n° 8

Consideration should be given to the appropriate level of maximum co-financing within the programme. A relatively low level of maximum co-financing permits a larger number of projects to be funded; however an excessively low level of co-financing may dissuade operators from applying and being able to carry out ambitious projects. Indeed, if the co-financing level does not reflect realities (e.g. severe cuts in public funding at the national level, an economic downturn making it more difficult to procure private sponsorship, etc), a large number of cultural operators could effectively find themselves excluded from applying under the programme and this could inadvertently prevent the programme from being able to achieve its objectives. The advantages and disadvantages of the co-financing rate should therefore be carefully assessed in the future programme in the light of its objectives and priorities and prevailing circumstances.

Recommendation n° 9

The interdisciplinary approach of the programme should be continued, reflecting the reality of developments in the cultural sector, including the impact of digitisation, in which boundaries between sectors are becoming more fluid and cross-sectoral experimentation is common.

Recommendation n° 10

Consideration should be given as to whether the distinction between multi-annual and two-year co-operation projects should be retained in the light of the fact that they pursue the same objectives.

Recommendation n° 11

Consideration should be given to the third country dimension as the current approach of selecting one or more countries for a specific year appears to have limited demonstrable long-term impact since it lacks critical mass.

Recommendation n° 12

Since many barriers to mobility and circulation continue to exist despite the single market and freedom of movement for workers, consideration should be given to including support for better information/intelligence and guidance for cultural operators needing to work in another EU country.

Recommendation n° 13

The Commission and the EACEA should consider ways in which more literary translations can be encouraged from under-represented languages (particularly those in new Member States) into more dominant ones such as English, French, German and Spanish, which often serve as pivot languages for further translations and would therefore make a valuable contribution to promoting cultural and linguistic diversity. Consideration should be given to other initiatives to help stimulate the translation of literature.

Recommendation n° 14

Consideration should be given to changing the category 'Advocacy networks' in favour of reverting to 'networks' as organisations do not necessarily have to have an advocacy role in order to bring substantial benefits to artist mobility, the circulation of works, etc.

Recommendation n° 15

The evaluation has shown the need for and the potential of the programme to stimulate new, creative and innovative developments and structures, but that the costs entailed by transnational co-operation can make it difficult to sustain structures or projects beyond the duration of the EU grant. For this reason, thought should be given as to how future award criteria can strike a balance between encouraging the emergence of new and innovative activities and structures, whilst ensuring that established structures that are playing a continued, fundamental role in promoting the objectives of the programme and with a clear European added value are not penalised.

Recommendation n° 16

Consideration should be given to the role, working arrangements and processes for the appointment of CCPs in any new programme. Where necessary, these should be revised to reflect the requirements of the new programme and in light of good practice in other EU programmes.

Recommendation n° 17

Management of the future programme should be as streamlined and light as possible, in the interests of applicants and beneficiaries within the possibilities offered by the Financial Regulations, building upon the progress made under the current programme.

Commission's position

The Commission generally agrees with these recommendations, and will take them into account as far as possible in preparing its proposal for the programme beyond 2013. This applies both to its content and its administration, which the Commission intends to keep as light and efficient as possible.

5. THE COMMISSION'S CONCLUSIONS

The Commission shares the evaluator's overall assessment that the programme plays a unique role in stimulating cross-border cultural cooperation, and fostering the benefits indicated in the section on findings. The programme has appropriately implemented EU action in the

cultural field as foreseen by article 167 of the Treaty and has met its objectives as set out in the Decision.

The evaluator's conclusions show that small improvements could be made in a limited number of specific areas and that, in general, participants are satisfied with the programme and recognise its unique European added value. The evaluation also underpins that demand from the cultural sector for this type of EU support may remain considerably high, if not further increase, over the coming few years and that the programme contributes to content and knowledge development which are essential for future sustainable growth and jobs and new, creative and innovative developments.

The Commission has, since 2007, 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.

As mentioned in section 4, various new features and improvements have already been integrated in the current Culture programme, thereby anticipating in some cases the evaluator's recommendations.

The Commission intends, therefore, to take the results of this evaluation into account chiefly with a view to preparing the new EU programme in the field of culture for the period after 2013.