



European Economic and Social Committee

SOC/310
Action programme in the
field of lifelong learning

Brussels, 29 May 2008

OPINION

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on the

Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending
Decision no 1720/2006/EC establishing an Action programme in the field of lifelong learning
COM(2008) 61 final – 2008/0025 (COD)

On 6 March 2008 the European Commission 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 amending Decision no 1720/2006/EC establishing an Action programme in the field of lifelong learning
COM(2008) 61 final – 2008/0025 (COD).

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 7 May 2008. The rapporteur was Ms Le Nouail-Marlière.

At its 445th plenary session, held on 28-29 May 2008 (meeting of 29 May), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 80 votes to one with no abstentions.

*

* *

1. **Conclusions**

1.1 The EESC supports this step, endorses the present procedure and recommends that the Commission also undertake to inform the Programme Committee and the European Parliament immediately of any decisions it might take under amended Article 9.1 of Decision 1720/2006/EC.

2. **Simplification of the grant allocation procedures in the various multi-annual programmes**

2.1 This proposal is part of a series of four proposals aimed at making the rules more flexible on the allocation of grants involving small sums, which are set down in the following four multi-annual programmes for the 2007-2013 period:

- "Youth in action"
- "Culture"
- "Europe for citizens" and
- the current "Action programme in the field of lifelong learning".

2.2 In accordance with the rules on committee procedure set out in Article 202 of the TEC, the Council confers certain powers on the Commission, assisted by a Programme Committee – exclusively comprised of representatives from Member States and chaired by the Commission – for implementing the rules which the Council lays down in co-decision with the European

Parliament; the European Parliament is consulted on the implementation of legislative instruments adopted in co-decision. The Commission has noted that when the four programmes were being negotiated, the legislator intended only to submit i) decisions on the allocation of grants involving substantial sums (more than EUR 1 000 000 for projects and multi-lateral networks) and ii) politically sensitive decisions (on cooperation and political innovation) to the comitology procedure (*management* procedure with a qualified majority vote).

- 2.3 The Commission undertook to *inform* the Programme Committee and the European Parliament without delay of any selection decisions not subject to the *management* procedure. The Commission issued a declaration on this interinstitutional agreement, addressed to the Council and the European Parliament.
- 2.4 This intention of the legislator was not properly reflected in Decision 1720/2006/EC. All decisions on selection and on the allocation of grants involving small sums became subject to the *consultation* procedure stipulated under committee procedure arrangements.
- 2.5 Consultation of the Programme Committee and the European Parliament entails submitting the selection decision to the Programme Committee for examination, taking account of its opinion and informing the Parliament, which has to notify the Commission of its agreement. This procedure, involving consultation and the exchange of written responses, generates major delays in grant allocation and risks jeopardising numerous projects and considerably reducing the effectiveness of the annual programmes.
- 2.6 "Ad hoc arrangements" have been worked out to date between the Commission, Programme Committee and the European Parliament, with a view to cutting back the time involved in Commission selection decisions on grant allocation.
- 2.7 The Commission nevertheless feels that these temporary solutions cannot continue to be used and is proposing amending the rules laid down when these programmes were set up. This would entail i) doing away with the obligation to submit decisions on the allocation of grants involving small sums to the consultation procedure and ii) permitting the Commission to adopt decisions on grant allocation without the assistance of a Committee, replacing it with a simple information procedure.

3. General comments

- 3.1 These proposals should allow the four multi-annual programmes on education, youth and culture to function more smoothly.
- 3.2 In previous opinions, the EESC has encouraged the Commission: to simplify access to programmes and grants for any bodies submitting projects; to operate more closely alongside Member States so as to encourage them to consult other organisations when laying down

annual guidelines; to shorten the time involved in allocating grants and; not to jeopardise the implementation of projects, inter alia by allowing the selection decisions to take too long; these sometimes take so long that feasibility studies are out of date because they are carried out too far in advance of projects being implemented.

4. Specific comments

Given the comments made in points (9), (11), (15) and (17) of the explanatory memorandum of the decision in hand, the EESC recommends that, for the purposes of transparency, good governance and public information, the Commission reiterate its declared undertaking to inform the Programme Committee and the European Parliament immediately of any decisions it might take under amended Article 9.1 of Decision 1720/2006/EC.

The EESC recommends that the new Article 9.1(a) (see Article 1 of the proposed Decision) be amended as follows: "...it shall adopt these decisions without the assistance of a committee *and shall immediately inform the Programme Committee and European Parliament thereof.*"

The EESC notes that the Commission is not proposing this addition, because it feels that i) this would amend the proposal in such a way that it would no longer be in keeping with the committee procedure rules governed by Article 202 of the TEC and ii) the explanatory memorandum of the present decision is binding enough here.

Brussels, 29 May 2008.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Dimitris Dimitriadis

Patrick Venturini
