



European Economic and Social Committee

SOC/146

**Programme to promote bodies
active in the field of education**

Brussels, 29 October 2003

OPINION

of the European Economic and Social Committee

on the

**Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision establishing a Community action
programme to promote bodies active at European level and support specific activities in the
field of education and training**

COM(2003) 273 final - 2003/0114 (COD)

On 27 June 2003 the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, on the

Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision establishing a Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level and support specific activities in the field of education and training
(COM(2003) 273 final – 2003/0114(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 6 October 2003. The rapporteur was **Mr Panero Flórez**.

At its 403rd plenary session of 29 and 30 October (meeting of 29 October) the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 124 votes to one with two abstentions.

1. Introduction

1.1 For several years now, the European Commission has co-financed a variety of bodies active in the field of education and training via a series of agreements signed with the following institutions:

- College of Europe
- European University Institute, Florence
- European Law Academy, Trier
- European Institute of Public Administration, Maastricht
- European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation
- International Centre for European Training
- European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

1.2 Similarly, the Commission has funded Community operations in the field of education and training, including:

- preparatory measures in connection with the follow-up of the concrete future objectives of education and training systems;
- activities seeking to disseminate information on European integration in higher education circles, in particular by means of the Jean Monnet Project.

1.3 The common denominator for all of these projects in financial terms is that to date they have been implemented without any legal basis to lend them budgetary support.

1.4 Following the adoption of Council Regulation No. 1605/2002¹ approving the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities and the subsequent Declaration of 13 June 2002, the Commission undertook to submit a proposal for a regulation specifying overall criteria regarding selection and the awarding of grants for the functioning of the bodies provided for in Article 108(1)(b) of the aforementioned Regulation.

1.5 This undertaking is linked to the requirement outlined in the Financial Regulation to classify Commission expenditure for the budget year 2004 according to use. This in turn makes it necessary to draw up acts providing a basis for subsidies such as those described above.

1.6 Similarly, the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe, adopted by the Council on 14 June 2002², sets out a programme of activity that requires support at Community level and which ties in with the perspectives of the proposal for a decision.

1.7 A further argument in favour of this proposal for a decision is the Laeken Declaration annexed to the conclusions of the European Council of 14 and 15 December 2001 and which asserts that one of the basic challenges to be resolved by the European Union is to bring citizens closer to the European design and the European institutions.

1.8 Lastly, and once again in support of the proposal, the document submitted to the Committee for debate outlines the need to train national judges in the application of Community law, fundamentally the legal interpretation of Regulation 1/2003³ on the implementation of the rules on competition laid down in Articles 81 and 82 of the Treaty. A budgetary heading currently exists for this area, which will require the same legal basis as the others from the next budget year onwards.

1.9 The legal basis applicable to the proposal for a decision corresponds to Articles 149 and 150 of the EC Treaty governing Community initiatives in the field of education and training. In accordance with the provisions of these articles, the European Economic and Social Committee is required to issue a report on the proposal for a decision submitted to it.

2. Summary of the proposal for a decision

2.1 Objective of the proposal

2.1.1 The proposal's explanatory memorandum states that the objective is to establish a basis for grants to promote bodies active at European level and to support specific activities in the field of education and training.

¹ OJ L 248, 16.9.2002

² OJ C 142, 14.6.2002

³ OJ L 1, 4.1.2003

2.1.2 Article one of the proposal states that the general objective of the programme is to support the activities of bodies in the field of education and training.

2.1.3 Point 5.1.1. of the financial statement indicates that the proposal is primarily informed by the technical need to place on a solid legal footing operating grants hitherto awarded under part A of the budget and to provide a response to the joint declaration of the three European institutions of their intention to adopt a new financial framework.

2.2 **Actions envisaged**

The activities which may be carried out by the bodies eligible for Community funding under the programme are as follows:

Action 1: Support for specified institutions active in the field of education. These are the seven institutions listed in the introduction to this opinion.

Action 2: Support for European associations active in the field of education or training. Such associations must have members in at least twelve of the Member States of the European Union and pursue an aim of general European interest in the field of education or training.

Action 3A: Support for activities in the field of higher education concerning European integration, including Jean Monnet chairs. Fundamentally, this category comprises the implementation of European integration studies in universities, the creation and support of associations of teachers specialised in this subject and the promotion of reflection and discussion on the process of integration, etc.

Action 3B: Support for activities contributing to the achievement of the future objectives of education and training systems in Europe. This action is tied to the detailed work programme on the follow-up of these objectives.

Action 3C: Support for training of national judges in the field of European law and for organisations for judicial cooperation. This action aims to support organisations for judicial cooperation and actions designed to promote training in European law, notably for national judges.

2.3 **Budget allocation**

The budget established for the programme period is €129.62 million and is to be distributed amongst the different actions according to the following percentages:

Action 1: between 58 and 65% of the overall budget

Action 2: up to 4% of the programme budget

Action 3A: between 20 and 24% of the budget

Action 3B: between 7 and 11% of the budget
Action 3C: up to 4% of the programme budget

2.4 Programme duration

The programme will start on 1 January 2004 and end on 31 December 2008. It may be continued by means of a new decision from 1 January 2009 depending on the results of the external evaluation by the Commission.

3. Comments on the proposal for a decision

3.1 The Committee has considered this proposal for a decision and notes that the programme outlined therein comprises a series of different activities which are all based on the need to provide a legal basis for specific types of grant which were awarded without any legal basis, before the new financial regulation was adopted.

These grants are listed in the proposal for a decision from the viewpoint of different reference sources, such as:

- the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe;
- the Laeken Declaration on the future of the European Union;
- Regulation 1/2003 on the implementation of the rules on competition laid down in Articles 81 and 82 of the Treaty.

3.2 The Committee also observes that a variety of aims are mixed together in this one programme: the need to provide a legal basis for specific types of grant, support for action undertaken in the field of education and training and ongoing training activities for national judges in the Member States.

The Committee feels that in light of the above, the programme detailed in the proposal for a decision is more a set of several different programmes linked by a common element determined by the application of the financial regulation as of 2004.

3.3 Analysis of the proposal for a decision clearly shows that the majority of the actions outlined under the programme concerned are largely already in place. In short, although the programme does not yet exist as such, it has effectively been underway for several years now.

The Committee therefore welcomes the proposal's commitment to create an executive agency to take on the task of managing the programme, either in whole or in part, if the agency results

from a unification of the present technical offices of Socrates and Leonardo and does not imply an increase in the management costs to be deducted from the meagre funds awarded to this programme.

3.4 Nonetheless, the Committee strongly endorses the support and assistance granted to the bodies mentioned above and partly funded by the European Union. The activities carried out by these bodies and the benefits they bring, each in their own field, merit special recognition by the Committee, which is favourably disposed to the continuation and reinforcement thereof for the purposes of stability and continuity.

3.5 The proposal for a decision establishes a programme of Community action in the field of education and training, with as its legal basis Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty, which provide a detailed definition of the role to be played by the Community in these two areas.

The comprehensive information provided in the annex to the proposal as well as the detailed information on the initiatives planned make it clear that the majority of the actions described, apart from that outlined under 3B, fall into the field of education, higher especially, and not vocational training, taking account of the concept to be applied to each in accordance with the aforementioned Articles of the Treaty.

Similarly the Committee notes that in the proposed decision only Action 3C contains a measure which could be described as life-long learning. The Committee considers that life-long learning should cover measures in both the educational and training spheres; such actions should be promoted as a means of achieving the Lisbon objectives.

3.6 Irrespective of the intended financial neutrality of the proposal, the Committee considers that the funding is inadequate, also in view of the imminent enlargement of the European Union, and feels that it should be increased accordingly.

Although the programme budget is based on those headings currently assigned to the activities planned under the different actions plus the percentage annual increase for each successive year, the Committee notes that funding for activities in the field of education can reach between 82% and 93% of the programme budget approximately, while funding for training activities remains at between 7% and 11% of the budget, approximately.

3.7 In view of the general comments made, the Committee feels that the Commission should consider giving a different name to the proposal for a decision, more in line with the actual content of the programme and the objectives it pursues.

3.8 Article 2 of the proposal for a decision outlines those bodies eligible for the programme grants. It does not determine how many bodies are able to take advantage of these grants.

Under Action 1, the annex to the proposal determines those bodies at whom the proposal is targeted. In concrete terms, these are institutions that may receive operational and

administrative support. The list provided in the annex is limited to those bodies mentioned in the introduction to this document.

Whilst maintaining its support for this initiative, in order to ensure the stability and continuity of the activities, the Committee feels that this list should not be restricted, so that other significant institutions and bodies might be added who also pursue an aim of general European interest, whether extensively or more specifically within one concrete area.

3.9 The Committee agrees that it is necessary to promote training for national judges pursuant to Regulation 1/2003 on the implementation of the rules on competition laid down in Articles 81 and 82 of the Treaty.

In view of its highly specific nature, this initiative can be defined as ongoing training for professionals, both because it is exclusively intended for a specific group and in view of its highly selective subject matter. With this in mind, the Committee finds it unusual for this issue to be included in the proposal for a decision under discussion here.

The Committee therefore feels that Action 3C should be removed from this proposal and included in another piece of legislation, unless it is broadened, in the sphere of lifelong learning, to cover other professions and sectors of the same European level of interest as those in this Action.

3.10 Action 3B, which covers support for activities contributing to the achievement of the future objectives of education and training systems in Europe, provides for awareness-raising activities in these fields, the promotion of initiatives of the European Union with respect to these systems, improving their quality, facilitating access for all and opening up European education and training systems to the wider world.

These various information and publication actions must, the Committee feels, take great care not to overlap with activities already up and running as part of the Socrates and Leonardo programmes. For this, effective coordination of all Commission services concerned and of the agencies entrusted with the management of the different programmes will be required.

3.11 In line with the general comments made above in relation to the need to create a management agency for the programme and in view of the fact that most of the activities concerned have to some extent been underway for some time already, the Committee would question the need for the agency's budget to include sums earmarked for studies, meetings of experts in charge of implementing the programme and information, publication and promotion initiatives, etc.

Given that this is not an 'ex novo' programme, the Committee believes that these amounts would be better used to fund those activities receiving the least support under the proposal as presented, i.e. those in the field of training.

4. Conclusions

4.1 With the exception of the above comments, the Committee fully supports all the various initiatives outlined in the proposal for a decision. The majority are already up and running and have been shown to be suitable for further continuation.

4.2 Actions intended to strengthen, improve and promote Europe's education and training systems, both inside and outside the Union, are always to be welcomed by the Committee. The Committee therefore believes, taking account of its comments on this aspect of the proposal, that actions of this type should be encouraged, achieving a better balance in the EU budget.

4.3 Those activities whose aim it is to support such prestigious bodies as those listed under Action 1 in the proposal for a decision, merit special mention by the Committee. These institutions carry out important work, each in their own specialist field, reflecting the most positive values that are closest to citizens and that are necessary to secure the success of the European integration process. The Committee therefore expresses its support for continuing the grants received by these bodies via the measures outlined in the proposal.

4.4 The Committee also feels it to be necessary to support training of national judges in such essential issues as Regulation 1/2003, mentioned above. In consequence, the Committee backs the initiatives outlined in the proposal for a decision, subject to the reservations expressed under point 3.9. of this working document.

4.5 The Committee calls to mind that this proposal for a decision is one of a set of seven proposals presented subsequent to the application of the Financial Regulation. The Committee would ask the Commission to adopt a coherent approach when drawing up this type of proposal, in particular with respect to the criteria governing access to funding.

Brussels, 29 October 2003.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Roger Briesch

Patrick Venturini