

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE EFTA STATES

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SUBCOMMITTEE IV ON FLANKING AND HORIZONTAL POLICIES

EEA EFTA COMMENT ON THE CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE EUROPEAN UNION CULTURE PROGRAMME

GENERAL REMARKS

1. The EEA EFTA States welcome the consultation on a future EU Programme for culture and the opportunity to express their views on a new Culture Programme early in the process and prior to the Commission draft. We remind the Commission that the EEA EFTA States have taken part in all the previous EU Programmes on Culture, and express our support to the idea of a new programme following the Culture Programme. The EEA EFTA countries would like to endorse the overall principles for cultural policy as outlined in the European Agenda for Culture, and in particular the principle of diversity as a basic principle for cultural activity.
2. A new EU Culture Programme will be developed within the context of the EU and other international policy documents in the field of culture. In particular, we would like to point to the UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions which has been ratified in Norway and Iceland. Further, we would like to underscore that the European Agenda for culture is in line with the paramount objectives of the cultural policies of all three EEA EFTA countries. It is our view that a programme developed in this context would be of importance with regards to the realisation of the agreed cultural policy principles across national boundaries and in transnational cooperation at a European level.
3. Through the EEA Grants the EEA EFTA States contribute to reducing economic and social disparities in the European Economic Area. Over the last five year period, the European cultural heritage sector has received substantial support through these grants. Also, for the five year period which started in 2009, cultural heritage is a priority. By means of the EEA financial mechanisms, and taking into account the importance of cultural diversity, the EEA EFTA States aim at contributing to increased intercultural dialogue and enhancing cultural diversity in Europe. We believe that the EEA grants for cultural heritage and the financial support in a future EU Programme for culture will be complementary and together contribute to substantial progress in this area over the coming years.

4. The information note on the consultation on the future EU Culture Programme also focuses on the challenges facing the cultural and creative industries. This is in line with the second main objective of the European Agenda for Culture, which emphasises culture as a catalyst for creativity, growth and jobs. Operators of the EEA EFTA States and the EU share many of the same perspectives and challenges in this field. The Ministries of Culture together with other ministries in the EEA EFTA States are actively working to meet these challenges. In this context, we would like to remind the Commission of the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC) initiative, in which Iceland, Norway and Russia work together with the EU in order to facilitate networking across the whole spectrum of the cultural and creative industries. The aim is to support the emergence of cooperation projects that could be developed into flagship projects within the scope of the Northern Dimension. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in May 2010 and in October 2010 an action plan for the years 2011-2013 was adopted. We strongly urge that the future EU Culture Programme take the NDPC action plan into account and further develop the efforts in the cultural and creative industries' area.
5. International exchange has always been a vital part of cultural activity. Culture is also an important part of all our countries' bilateral relations with third countries. In our view, it should be considered how a future EU Culture Programme could reflect this and contribute to international cultural cooperation. This is perhaps particularly important with regard to the European neighbourhood countries. There are several ongoing initiatives in this area. In addition to the NDPC, we would in particular like to remind the Commission of the long lasting and highly successful cooperation on cultural heritage in the Baltic Sea States, initiated by the respective ministers of culture including Norway, Iceland and Russia as well as the EU States surrounding the Baltic Sea. Including cooperation with cultural actors outside Europe could in the EEA EFTA States' view be an asset for the development of the European cultural sector in the age of globalisation.
6. In the information note, the particular challenges for the cultural sector given the digital shift are mentioned. We would like to point out that it is crucial that the cultural sector finds good solutions in this area. We strongly support the EU commitment to supporting the promotion of digital cultural heritage in the CIP Programme, and we call upon the Commission to ensure a solid cooperation between the different responsible policy makers in this field.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

7. In the information note on the consultation on the future EU Culture Programme, the European Commission mentions the challenges European cultural operators and practitioners face due to the small size of European countries and cultural markets. In our view, it is desirable to launch big and widely visible European cultural projects. However, experience shows that particularly innovative and experimental projects often come from small cultural organisations. The EEA EFTA States therefore strongly recommend that the role of smaller cultural operators is strengthened compared to the existing EU Culture Programme. It is important that the threshold of

starting a European partnership within the cultural field is manageable also for the smaller organisations.

8. One particular challenge relates to organizations with little or none experience with cooperation across borders. For these institutions, a small scale grant scheme with simple application and reporting procedures would be of crucial importance. We suggest that the Commission in a possible new Culture Programme considers the possibility of introducing new actions in line with actions already introduced in other EU Programmes, for instance the mobility schemes in the Life Long Learning/Grundtvig Programme.
9. The EEA EFTA countries would also like to mention the important work being done by the Cultural Contact Points. The CCPs have formed an important network for the promotion of cultural cooperation in Europe, and a new programme should ascertain that the results of this cooperation are being included and strengthened.

CONCLUSION

The EEA EFTA States welcome the proposal for a new Programme on culture and look forward to seeing the Commission draft proposal.
