



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 13.3.2013
C(2013) 1316 final

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Bundesrat for its Opinion on the Commission's proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Union action for the "European Capitals of Culture" for the years 2019-2033 {COM(2012) 407 final}, and apologises for the delay in replying.

The Commission is very pleased to note that the Bundesrat welcomes and supports the continuation of this very successful initiative. Started in 1985, this initiative has indeed become one of the most prestigious and high-profile cultural events in Europe, and one which is very dear to the citizens of the European Union.

The Commission's proposal aims precisely to build on the many strengths of the current scheme, while bringing improvements in order to maximise the potential benefits for all cities bidding and/or holding the title as well as their citizens.

In response to the specific issues raised by the Bundesrat in its Opinion, The Commission would like to make the following comments:

First, concerning your suggestion to introduce flexibility in the chronological list of countries, this would in practice lead to uncertainty for cities as they would not be sure for which year exactly their country would be entitled to have a European Capital of Culture. It is not uncommon for cities to begin thinking about bidding as much as ten years earlier.

Second, regarding the designation of the cities, it is important to stress that this designation will be strictly based on the recommendation made by a panel of independent experts with the relevant expertise and experience. This will also ensure uniform conditions for the implementation of the Decision, and makes the designation procedure much lighter and shorter, to the benefit of cities recommended for the title. The same reasoning was followed by the Commission and approved by the European Parliament and the Council when discussing Decision No 1194/2011 establishing an EU action for the European Heritage Label (OJ L 303, 22.11.2011).

Third, regarding the pre-selection of a pool of experts following the organisation of a call for expression of interest, the Commission will act as a minimal "filter" and all applicants with the relevant experience will be pre-selected without restrictions. This is in order to ensure the highest quality experts who have a correct understanding of their role and who are able to make the time investment required. Public authorities from all territorial levels can encourage good experts from their geographical area to apply under the call.

*Mr Winfried KRETSCHMANN
President of the Bundesrat
Leipziger Straße 3 - 4
D - 10117 BERLIN*

Fourth, as regards the comments on the criteria to be used and the socio-economic dimension of the initiative, we agree that the "European Capitals of Culture" initiative is above all a cultural event, leading to huge cultural benefits for cities and their citizens, and highlighting the richness, diversity as well as common features of the cultures in Europe. That is precisely the reason why it is important for the bidding cities to be assessed also on the basis of the quality and artistic vision of their cultural programme for the year.

On the other hand, and as the Bundesrat's opinion rightly points out, over the years the initiative has also successfully contributed to the sustainable development of regions and cities. Long-term socio-economic development has in reality been one of the aims of all cities holding the title, and this aspect is all the more important at a time of economic crisis when public authorities pay an increased attention to return on investment. That is why it is crucial to have this dimension reflected in the criteria for assessing the applications. However The Commission would like to reassure the Bundesrat on a crucial point: it is – and will always be – the responsibility of each city to develop its own programme for the year building on its own identity. Cities have – and will keep – full scope to combine their cultural project and their mid-term development objectives with the criteria specified in the call.

Finally, the Commission would like to stress that the concept of "surrounding region" is not new. It has been used so far and has worked well (Article 3 of Decision No 1622/2006/EC, OJ L 304, 3.11.2006), without preventing the cities of Essen and Luxembourg from involving their wider region in their respective programmes for the year.

As you know, this proposal is now under negotiation, with the European Parliament and with the Council. The opinion of the Bundesrat is useful in that framework.

The Commission hopes these clarifications address the concerns raised by the Bundesrat in its Opinion and looks forward to continuing our dialogue on these important issues.

Yours faithfully,

*Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President*