Culture: grants to bodies active at European level, 2004-2006 action programme

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This report has been prepared by the Commission in accordance with provisions set out in Decision No 792/2004/EC and concerns the implementation of the Community's action programme to promote bodies active at a European level in the field of culture. It sets out the programme's main achievements as well as presenting some of the recommendations proposed by the final external evaluation of the programme.

The main aim of the programme was to strengthen Community intervention in culture by supporting European cultural bodies. In order to prepare the final evaluation Ernst & Young was chosen to carry out the evaluation following an open call for tender. The exercise focused on the period 2004-2006 (the period of the entire programme). In summary, the main findings of the evaluator are as follows:

Effectiveness: The evaluators concluded that drawing general conclusions of the programme's impact on culture was challenging. The programme did, however, promote bodies active at a European level in the field of culture. Objectives were reached largely by supporting networks which helped widen the professionalism of cultural bodies active at a European level. Further, those classified as "ambassadors" contributed to the promotion of culture in a symbolic manner.

Efficiency: Quantifying the overall efficiency of the programme was challenged by the lack of monitoring data. The evaluators did conclude though that the efficiency of actions varied both between and within the three different parts of the programme. Some beneficiaries and applicants, under part II of the programme, expressed the need for greater transparency in the application process – such as the selection criteria and the composition/appointment of the evaluation committee. Several respondents found that more quantifiable selection criteria would have given the selection process greater legitimacy. Of limited merit only was splitting the beneficiaries into ambassadors, European networks or bodies organising cultural events. An analysis of the activities showed that they were, in fact, very heterogeneous. Projects funded under Part III of the programme, on the other hand managed to produce concrete results, in spite of their small size and limited time frame. In other words, according to the evaluator small grants created concrete products.

Sustainability: Although difficult to generalise, the evaluators nevertheless suggest that projects benefiting from Community funding do last beyond the duration of any given project.

Main Recommendations:

The evaluator gives a set of recommendations for future actions. In short they are:

Effectiveness and efficiency:

- The Commission should strengthen links between the cultural sector and other policies. Structured cooperation with other DGs could be implemented for the monitoring of specific projects.
- The Commission should respect the deadlines for the selection procedure and ensure the publication of applicants' selection earlier.
- The Commission should improve assistance to beneficiaries through publishing a set of guidelines.
- The Commission should develop a data base for monitoring purposes.

Visibility of outputs and results:

- The Commission should introduce specific visibility criteria during the selection process.
- The Commission should prepare a booklet for each beneficiary setting out good practices.

Sustainability:

- The Commission should offer annual as well as multi-annual grants.
- The Commission should strengthen qualitative monitoring during a projects' implementation phase as well as improving resources dedicated to knowledge of the cultural sector.

To conclude, the Commission shares the views expressed by the external evaluators and agrees that the main objectives of the programme have been achieved. Indeed a number of cultural networks and organisations – choirs, museums, orchestras, theatres etc – have received support for the programme to implement activities and projects with a European dimension.