European Heritage Label

2010/0044(COD) - 09/03/2010 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to establish a European Union action entitled ‘European Heritage Label’.

PROPOSED ACT: Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council.

BACKGROUND: the original concept of the European Heritage Label emerged in 2005 as one of the responses to the gap between the EU and its citizens. The scheme was initially launched by several European states in April 2006 on an intergovernmental basis. Its aim was to promote a sense of European identity by improving knowledge of Europe’s shared history and heritage, especially among young people. To date, a total of 64 sites located in 17 EU Member States as well as in Switzerland have been awarded the label.

However, the practical arrangements for the initiative have shown some weaknesses and it has not therefore managed to fulfil its potential. This is why, following the example of the European Capitals of Culture, Member States asked the European Commission in the Council conclusions of November 2008 to transform the current intergovernmental European Heritage label into a **formal action of the EU** in order to improve its functioning and ensure its long-term success.

The European Parliament supported the development of the European Heritage Label, first in its resolution in 2007 on a Renewed European Union Tourism Policy: Towards a stronger partnership for European Tourism (2006/2129(INI)) and subsequently in its resolution of 2008 on a European agenda for culture in a globalising world (2007/2211(INI)). The current proposal responds to these various needs.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: the impact assessment examined three scenarios :

- **Option 1**: to continue the label as an intergovernmental initiative without any European Union action;
- **Option 2:** to continue the label as an intergovernmental initiative, but with financial support from the European Union budget;
- **Option 3**: to transform the label into a European Union initiative through a Decision of the European Parliament and the Council following the example of the European Capitals of Culture in 1999.

A comparison of the scenarios showed that **Option 3** would bring clear added value and produce benefits that could not be achieved by Member States acting alone, even with financial support from the European Union. It also demonstrated that the preferable selection procedure for awarding the label was the combined national and European level selection.

LEGAL BASIS: Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. This proposal is in keeping with the principle of subsidiarity. The participation of Member States will be on a voluntary basis and EU involvement in the European Heritage Label will aim to strengthen coordination between Member States and to support their action by contributing to the development and correct application of common and transparent selection criteria, as well as new selection and monitoring procedures.

CONTENT: the proposal aims to establish a EU action entitled ‘European Heritage Label’.

Objectives: the Commission proposes three levels of objectives for the renewed European Heritage Label.

The **general objectives** of the action are to contribute to:

- strengthen European citizens' sense of belonging to the EU, based on shared elements of history and cultural heritage, as well as an appreciation of diversity;
- strengthen intercultural dialogue.

The **intermediate objectives** of the action are to:

- enhance the value and profile of sites which have played a key role in the history and the building of the EU;
- increase European citizens' understanding of the building of Europe, and of their common yet diverse cultural heritage, especially related to democratic values and human rights that underpin the process of European integration.

The **specific objectives** of the action are as follows:

- develop sites' European significance;
- raise young people's awareness of their common cultural heritage;
- facilitate sharing of experiences and exchanges of best practices across Europe;
- increase access to heritage sites for all members of the public, especially young people;
- increase intercultural dialogue, especially among young people, through artistic, cultural and historical education;
- foster synergies between cultural heritage and contemporary creation and creativity;
- contribute to the attractiveness and the sustainable development of the regions.

Participation: Member States' participation will be on a voluntary basis.

Selection procedure: the impact assessment for the European Heritage Label showed that one of the main weaknesses of the current intergovernmental initiative is that the sites are selected independently by participating countries with no overseeing body at European level. This procedure leaves too much room for diverging interpretations and, as a result, the criteria have not been applied evenly by the countries, thereby hindering the overall coherence and quality of the label so far. A new selection procedure is therefore needed which combines the national and European levels. The Commission proposes that in the first stage, **pre-selection** of the sites should take place at Member State level, and then in the second stage, the **final selection** should take place at EU level with the help of a panel of independent experts. This would ensure both a robust application of criteria and appropriate prominence for the European dimension, whilst also preserving an equitable distribution of sites across the EU. The panel of **independent experts** should be composed of 12 members nominated by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission following the example of the selection panel for the European Capitals of Culture. These experts should have substantial experience and expertise in the field of culture, heritage, European history, or other fields relevant to the objectives of the European Heritage Label. The Commission proposes to give each Member State the possibility of pre-selecting up to a maximum of two sites in every year in which a selection is made. This should help to keep the number of sites reasonable and, at the same time, retains some flexibility for Member States given that some have a greater pool of potential sites than others.

The panel of independent experts should in turn have the possibility of choosing between the pre-selected sites, selecting a maximum of one site per Member State in every year in which a selection is made. It is proposed to give special priority to sites with a strong **transnational dimension**. This should keep a certain element of competition between the sites at EU level, helping to ensure the general quality of the sites and thereby also the credibility and prestige of the initiative.

Lastly, the Commission proposes that after three successive years dedicated to the selection of new sites, each fourth year should be reserved for the monitoring procedure. This should help to keep the administrative burden reasonable both for Member States and Commission. The calendar in the Annex illustrates the proposed procedure.

Monitoring and withdrawal of the Label: the Label should be attributed in principle on a permanent basis because the symbolic value of the selected sites will not diminish over time and in order to encourage sites to take a long-term approach and invest in their development. However, in order to maintain quality and credibility in the long term, a strong monitoring system is needed to ensure that labelled sites have met the obligations undertaken at the application stage. The Commission proposes that this monitoring should be under the responsibility of Member States, who should report to the European panel every 4 years. In the event that specific sites no longer meet their obligations, it will be possible to withdraw the Label.

Practical arrangements: the Commission should support the action in order to ensure greater stability than is possible under current arrangements and to enable expertise to be built up. This would make it possible to draw on existing experience such as that of the European Capitals for Culture or the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Awards. It would, however, demand additional resources which need to be made available (one administrator and one assistant). In order to keep the practical arrangements as light and flexible as possible, certain administrative tasks could be outsourced through tendering procedures.

Evaluation: regular evaluation of the European Heritage Label action is crucial to ensure the effectiveness and credibility of the initiative. This evaluation would need to examine both the processes involved in running the action and the actual cumulative impact of the European Heritage Label as a whole. The aim should be to identify in which respects the action is working well, whether it should be continued, where there is room for improvement and, crucially, how this improvement might best be achieved in the future. The monitoring of the labelled sites mentioned above would feed into this evaluation. The evaluation would be the responsibility of the Commission and would take the form of an external evaluation every 6 years.

Transitional provisions: transitional measures need to be taken to define the status of the sites already awarded the European Heritage Label under the intergovernmental initiative. To ensure the overall coherence of the initiative, these sites would need to be re-assessed against the new criteria. For reasons of equal treatment between all Member States, the Commission proposes to give those which did not participate in the intergovernmental initiative the opportunity to propose a first set of sites before the regular selection procedure begins.

BUDGETARY IMPLICATION: The proposal will have an impact on the EU budget from 01.01.2011 to 31.12. 2013. The funding will cover the following expenditure: the costs of a European panel of independent experts, visibility of the initiative at European level, certain activities relating to the networking of labelled sites and human resources necessary for the Commission to provide support to this action. The financial envelope for the implementation of the action during that period is set at EUR 1 350 000. The annual appropriations will be authorised by the budgetary authority within the limits of the multiannual financial framework.