European Heritage Label

2010/0044(COD) - 29/07/2011 - Council position

The Council's first reading position is the result of informal contacts between the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council. Although the first reading position contains some changes to the Commission's initial proposal, both in structure and substance, the basic approach proposed by the Commission as well as all the main elements contained in its proposal such as:

- the two stage selection process (a pre-selection at national level followed by a selection at Union level);
- assessment by a European panel of independent experts;
- designation of sites by the Commission;
- introduction of measures to ensure transition from the intergovernmental initiative to a European Union action.

Changes made by Council relating to the European Parliament's amendments :

- **Definitions:** the first reading position extends the definition of sites contained in the Commission's initial proposal to cover three new types of sites: underwater, archaeological and industrial.
- **Geographical scope**: the position follows the basic approach of the Commission's proposal that during the evaluation process the widening of the geographical scope of the action should be examined together with other elements. The widening of the geographical scope should be examined during the first evaluation, i.e. 6 years after the entry into force of the decision, which would allow testing the functioning of the action first among Member States before opening it up, if appropriate, to the participation of non-EU countries.
- **European panel of independent experts**: the participation of the Committee of the Regions in the selection and monitoring procedures is important since cultural heritage sites are often managed by local or regional authorities. The first reading position reflects this by adding an expert appointed by the Committee of the Regions to the members of the European panel appointed by the Parliament, the Council and the Commission. The text underlines the need to ensure among the European institutions concerned that appointed experts have complementary expertise and that their geographical representation is balanced.
- **Frequency of selection**: the first reading position has changed the annual selection of sites, initially proposed by the Commission, to a selection organised every two years, the main reason being to avoid an uncontrolled rise in the number of sites which could undermine the label's prestige and quality. At the same time the biennial frequency will ensure that a critical mass of sites is reached in a reasonable time so the label becomes known to the public.
- **Strengthening information provision by the Commission**: the text has introduced an obligation for the Commission to inform the Parliament, the Council and the Committee of the Regions at each stage of the selection process of the following: pre-selection of sites by Member States, selection by the European panel, designation of the selected sites by the Commission, withdrawal of the label from a site and renunciation of the label by a site. By virtue of such a transparent procedure, all stakeholders will have the opportunity to bring to the attention of the Commission any observation that they might have regarding the candidate sites.
- **Transnational sites**: the first reading position supports this type of site as contained in the Commission's original proposal. However, it defines more specifically conditions that such a site will have to comply with, in particular the need for a coordinator and an obligation for sites participating in a transnational site to consult their national authorities.

- **National thematic sites**: the first reading position establishes 'national thematic sites' as a new type of site which allows the sites located in a given Member State that are linked by a common theme to put forward a joint application.
- **Renunciation:** the first reading position establishes a new procedure which allows a site that does not wish to participate in the action any longer to renounce the label. This provision is in line with the voluntary nature of the action.
- **Transitional provisions** : the first reading position follows the basic approach of the Commission's initial proposal of ensuring transition from the intergovernmental initiative to an action managed by the European Union by allowing Member States also to propose the sites, if any, that had previously been labelled under the intergovernmental initiative. All the sites proposed for the award of the label during the two selection years when transitional provisions apply will have to be assessed against the same criteria and follow the same procedures as sites nominated during the ordinary years. In order to ensure equal treatment of Member States whose sites have been awarded the intergovernmental label and those which do not have such sites, the first reading position text sets a maximum of four sites that any Member State can nominate in accordance with the transitional provisions.

Financial provisions: the amount of the financial envelope originally proposed by the Commission was based on the assumption that the first selection procedure will be organised in 2012. Given the fact that the new text adds one year for preparatory work, the budget of the European action was reduced to EUR 650 000 EUR for the 2012 - 2013 period.

Conclusions: the first reading position which is the result of informal negotiations between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission maintains the approach and the legal architecture proposed by the Commission. It establishes common, clear and transparent criteria and procedures for the European Heritage Label as well as a stronger coordination among the Member States. Important changes have been made to the frequency of selection, the European panel's composition, types of sites and information provision. A number of important clarifications, including on definitions, criteria, conditions for transnational and national thematic sites, renunciation and transitional provisions, have also been made.