

Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033

2012/0199(COD) - 26/03/2014 - Council position

The Council's first reading position is the result of informal negotiations between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission.

The text builds upon the strong points of the previous European Capitals of Culture decision, such as the chronological order of the Member States entitled to host the action, a selection based on a one-year long cultural programme specifically created for the action, the possibility for cities to involve their surrounding regions and a two-stage selection process (consisting of pre-selection and selection). It also addresses the main weak points of the current action on aspects such as:

- stability of governance structure and budget,
- the need for better understanding of the European dimension,
- the need for greater embedding of the action in the long-term strategy for the development of cities.

Important changes have also been made to the composition of the expert panel which selects and monitors cities and to the **designation process**.

A number of important clarifications, including on access to the action, management criteria, criteria for obtaining the prize and the evaluation procedure, have also been made.

- **Amendments accepted:** the Council endorsed the majority of the changes proposed in the Commission's initial proposal. It agreed with a partial opening of the action to candidate countries and potential candidates and with making selection criteria as well as criteria for paying the pecuniary "Melina Mercouri" prize more stringent and specific. The Council supported the emphasis to be given to the long-term culture-led development strategies and to a cultural programme with a **strong European dimension**, when applications for the title are assessed.

The Council also agreed to **postpone the payment of the prize** after the start of the year of the title, albeit only by three months and not six months as proposed by the Commission.

- **Amendments rejected:** on the other hand, the Council was unable to support the Commission's change aiming at establishing a selection and monitoring panel composed solely of European experts, as opposed to national experts. Similarly, the **Council rejected the Commission's proposal for designation to be carried out by the Commission rather than by the Council** as it has been the case until now.

- **Structural changes:** the Council made a structural change to the Commission proposal. Provisions scattered in other articles which dealt with access to the action in general and specifically with the **access by candidate countries and potential candidates** have been placed in a **single article**, Article 3. That article was further restructured in order to clearly distinguish between three categories of eligible cities, i. e. cities from Member States, those from candidate countries and potential candidates and those from countries acceding to the Union after the entry into force of the proposed decision.

- **Substantive changes:** among the main substantive changes introduced by the Council are the following:

a) Expert panel (Article 6): the Council in its first reading position enabled the Member States which are entitled to host the title in a given year - according to the calendar annexed to the decision - to appoint a

maximum of two experts to the panel responsible for selection and monitoring procedures. Thus the panel will be composed of 10 experts appointed by the Union institutions and bodies (the European Parliament, the Commission, the Council and the Committee of the Regions), as proposed by the Commission, and up to two experts appointed by a Member State whose city is to be selected or monitored by the panel. The role of national experts is to offer the local expertise and knowledge to the panel. In addition, the first reading position makes the provisions on conflict of interests stricter: any expert who has a conflict of interest with a specific candidate city must resign.

b) Designation (Article 11): the first reading position gives the **designation power to the Member State which is entitled to host the title in a given year**. This is a change to the Commission's proposal in which the designation was proposed to be done by the Commission as well as to the current rules set out in Decision No 1622/2006/EC according to which the Council has been a designating body. The Commission will, however, be in charge of the designation of cities from candidate countries and potential candidates since the open competition in which those cities will be selected is entirely managed by the Commission, without the involvement of those countries. Within two months after the Member State concerned has designated a city, the Commission will publish the name of the city in the Official Journal of the EU.

c) Derogation measures for European Capitals of Culture in 2020 (Articles 7 and 11): due to the delay in the legislative procedures, the Council has introduced in its first reading position several derogation measures that provide 2020 European Capitals of Culture with more time. The deadlines were extended at the key stages of the selection procedure for convening of the panel for a pre-selection meeting and for designation.

d) Postponing the competition for candidate countries and potential candidates by one year (annex): lastly, the Council has postponed by one year the possibility for candidate countries and potential candidates to compete for the title (from 2020 to 2021). In this way, those countries will have sufficient time to sign the Memorandum of Understanding which is required for their participation in the Creative Europe Programme, from which the European Capitals of Culture.