

Community action programme promoting non-governmental organisations primarily active in the field of environmental protection (2002-2006)

2001/0139(COD) - 06/12/2001 - Council position

The Council made a number of changes to the Commission's proposal; the majority of these were made to clarify the terms of the proposal and to increase the transparency of management of the programme and the accountability of the Commission and the beneficiaries. In particular the Commission is now required to prepare an annual report for the Member States and the European Parliament. The report will detail the grant allocation process for the current year and the outcomes from the grants made in the previous year and the Commission will also convene an annual meeting of stakeholders to discuss the report. This will enhance both ex-post and ex-ante evaluation. For general clarification purposes the Council has also moved the objectives of the programme from an Annex to an Article; and has clarified the selection criteria and eligible expenses. The main changes of substance to the programme relate to the definition of an applicant NGO and to encouraging the inclusion of smaller NGOs in the programme. In its Plenary vote on 23 October, the European Parliament adopted 24 amendments to the proposal. Twenty-two of these have already been incorporated, either verbatim or in spirit, into the Council's common position. The two amendments which have not been incorporated proposed that contributions in kind made to NGOs should be included in their annual expenses. Given the structure of the new proposal (which includes a grant ceiling) and difficulties that were encountered during the previous programme in evaluation contributions in kind these amendments cannot be accepted. The amendments, which Council has incorporated into its common position are as follows: - a new recital making reference to the annual budgetary procedure; - to extend the scope to include NGOs active in the field of animal protection; - alteration of the definition of an applicant NGO, which expressly refers to associations of NGOs is a consequential change allowing grants to be disbursed to partner or member organisations; - introducing three new criteria for applicant NGOs which have been included in B of the Annex; - to add a new Article to ensure that the programme priorities appear in the articles. The text was originally placed in the Annex; - details further information that the Commission must make available in its call for proposals; - addition made to Article 4(3) which requires the Commission to make immediate payment; - deletes the requirement in Article 6.1 to take account of the size of the NGO applicant; - introduces a new requirement on the Commission to provide unsuccessful applicants with reasons for their failure; - clarifies Article 8 in relation to accountability of partner organisations and financial accountability; - stresses the relevance of capacity building and promotion of sustainable development also at local and regional level; - clarifies that the distribution of funds will be made in such a way that beneficiaries with smaller "volumes of relevant activities" will receive a relatively higher rate of support (grant distribution on a non-linear basis). With regard to the most important innovations introduced by the Council, several Member States were of the view that the requirement that applicant NGOs must be active in at least three countries was a requirement which would disqualify a large number of smaller NGOs in particular in the more peripheral Member States. To address this concern several amendments were made to Article 2 of the proposal, as follows: - it is now clearly stated that an applicant NGO may be a single NGO or "several co-ordinated associations" of NGOs; and - provided that the primary objective of the activities of the applicant NGO is to support the development and implementation of community environmental policy as detailed in the objectives of the programme, then coverage of two, rather than three countries is acceptable. Lastly, a Commission statement has been included in the Annex which states that "The Commission may consider as an "exceptional circumstance" the creation of a new network by experienced NGOs, provided that their annual statement of accounts is certified by a registered auditor".