Life long learning: integrated action programme comprising Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig programmes and the Jean Monnet programme

2004/0153(COD) - 24/05/2006 - Modified legislative proposal

The Commission's revised proposal integrates the European Parliament amendments presented at 1st reading, new measures following the Council's partial political agreement as well as budgetary amendments following the Interinstitutional Agreement (IIA) of 17 May 2006 on the financial framework 2007-2013.

1) European Parliament amendments accepted in the revised proposal

The revised proposal incorporates either verbatim or in substance 42 of the 71 amendments voted by the European Parliament at First Reading. The great majority of these amendments improve the drafting of the draft Decision, by incorporating references to relevant policies or processes.

The following accepted amendments make more substantial changes relating directly to the content or implementation of the programme:

- introduce the new "Comenius-Regio" action;
- introduces the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education into the list of designated institutions to receive operating grants. This agency fulfils the criteria adopted by the Commission for the construction of the list: institutions in the field of the programme which have intergovernmental systems of governance and/or funding;
- interpreting the Financial Regulation to permit simpler and more flexible programme implementation arrangements than are possible under the existing generation of Community programmes in particular as suggested by the Commission at the time of its original proposal.

2) Council amendments following its partial political agreement: the Commission proposal contains two substantive amendments included in the Council's text:

§ the re-introduction in Article 9 of **consultation of the programme committee** on individual selection decisions for projects and networks where the grant proposed exceeds EUR 1 million, and for the "Policy Development" Key Activity of the Transversal Programme;

§ the extension of a **decentralised project approach** from Leonardo da Vinci pilot projects, to Comenius, Erasmus and Grundtvig.

In line with the Council's text, the Commission's revised proposal replaces the term "integrated programme" with "Lifelong Learning Programme" throughout, and replaces the term "specific programmes" with "sub-programmes" to refer to the component programmes within it. Following the Council's text, it also makes a number of structural changes which clarify the architecture of the Decision:

- former Article 3 “Definitions” (new Article 2) is moved to come before former Article 2 “Specific Programmes” (now Article 3 “Sub-Programmes”);

- the specific objectives relating to each sub-programme are moved from former Article 2 to the respective “Objectives” Articles of each sub-programme, where they precede the operational objectives;

- Article 9 covers the “implementing measures” for the entire programme and its sub-programmes, regrouping material previously included in additional “implementing measures” Articles under each sub-programme, which have consequently been removed;

- former Article 13 “Joint Actions” has been deleted, and replaced by specific reference in new Article 13 to complementarity with relevant Community policies.

The Commission’s revised proposal follows the text of the Council’s Partial Political Agreement, except:

- for provisions referring directly or indirectly to the programme budget envelope. These were excluded from the Council’s text pending agreement on the financial framework for the EU budget;

- for EP amendments, accepted by the Commission, which introduce the Comenius-Regio action and the Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

3) New budgetary approach following the IIA on the financial framework 2007-2013

3.1 Main budgetary amendments: the original budget proposed was EUR 13.6 billion (EUR 12.0 billion in 2004 prices). Following the Interinstitutional Agreement on the financial framework 2007-2013, the programme budget has been **considerably reduced toEUR 6.97 billion** (EUR 6.2 billion in 2004 prices). The quantified targets set out in the Decision have been amended accordingly.

The Commission is of the opinion that the funds available are insufficient to permit many new activities included in the Commission proposal to be introduced, with the exception of mobility for upper secondary pupils in Comenius, which is planned to be launched on a relatively small scale during the lifetime of the new programme, and the assistantships and adult learner mobility actions in Grundtvig. As a complement to this, the Commission proposes also to introduce the “Comenius-Regio” scheme proposed by the European Parliament, another relatively small-scale action aimed at reinforcing cross-border teacher cooperation in frontier regions. The Commission has, however, retained references in the programme Decision to all the new activities originally proposed, although without any corresponding budget allocation at this stage, to leave open the possibility for them to be introduced before 2013 should funds be available, either through re-allocations of the existing programme budget, or following a revision of the overall financial framework.

The minimum allocations set out in Point B.10 of the Annex to the Decision for each of the four sectoral programmes have also had to be revised to reflect the reduction in the budget envelope.

3.2 Commission amendments

- the Commission has introduced a new Recital (Recital 19), which refers to a new and significantly simpler system for supporting National Agency operating costs, through **lump sum funding** included in the agreement distributing the decentralised funds, rather than as a series of separate operating grant agreements;

- § following the partial agreement by the Council, the operation of a fully decentralised project management system in the four sectoral sub-programmes would require a budget increase of at least an additional EUR 500 million, because each Member State would need to receive a budget allocation that made it worthwhile organising a call for proposals and selection – i.e. they would need to have enough money to be able to fund a reasonable number of projects at the end of the process. Given the substantial budget reduction, this level of funding is available only in Leonardo, so it is unavoidable that the project management approach has to be amended. The Commission has therefore revised the "**National Agency 2**" procedure set out in Point A.1.2 of the Annex, whereby the application and selection process is managed centrally, with involvement of Member State experts at the quality evaluation stage, and the funds are then devolved to the National Agencies of the selected project coordinators, who manage the remainder of the process;

- § the Commission has introduced a new Point B.5 into the Annex, permitting the use of partnership grant agreements, which could be selected and funded for a four-year period, subject to a lightweight renewal procedure.