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PROGRESS REPORT

from: Presidency

to: Council

No. Cion prop.: 8031/10 CULT 24 CODEC 335

Subject: Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council
establishing a European Union action for the European Heritage Label
- *Progress report*

I. INTRODUCTION

In its conclusions of 20 November 2008, the Council invited the Commission to submit to it an appropriate proposal for the creation of a European heritage label. The Commission, in the light of this initiative, adopted a proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a European Union action for the European Heritage Label (EHL) on 9 March 2010. Following its transmission to the Council, the Commission proposal has been examined at the Working Party level.

II. COMMISSION PROPOSAL

The proposed Decision aims at establishing an EU-wide European Heritage Label. The aim of the Label is to highlight sites that celebrate and symbolise European integration, ideas and history.

The Commission's proposal builds on a 2006 intergovernmental project involving 17 Member States, as well as Switzerland¹. Expanding the EHL into an initiative of the European Union is intended to give it greater credibility, visibility and prestige.

Sixty-four sites have received the label under the existing scheme, based on selections by individual Member States. Under the proposed new scheme, each of the 27 Member States would be able to nominate up to two sites per year to receive the new EHL. A panel composed of independent experts would assess the nominations and choose up to a maximum of one site per year in each country to receive the designation. Participation in the scheme would be voluntary.

The proposed EHL differs from other cultural heritage initiatives such as the UNESCO World Heritage List or the Council of Europe's 'European Cultural Routes' as the proposed Decision aims at designating sites which have played a key role in the history of the European Union. It envisages choosing sites on the basis of their European symbolic value rather than for their beauty or architectural quality. In addition, the proposed Decision would stress the educational dimension, focusing especially on young people and providing them new opportunities to learn about Europe's rich cultural heritage and the democratic values underpinning European history and integration.

¹ To date a total of 64 sites in the EU and Switzerland have been awarded the label.

III. CURRENT STATE OF WORK WITHIN THE COUNCIL

The Spanish Presidency scheduled three meetings of the Cultural Affairs Committee² in order to hear delegations' initial reactions to the Commission's proposal. An additional meeting of the Cultural Affairs Committee is scheduled for late May in order to guarantee smooth transition of this dossier to the incoming Belgian presidency.

IV. DELEGATIONS' MAIN REACTIONS

The Commission's proposal received a generally positive reaction in the Cultural Affairs Committee. All Member States have shown themselves to be in favour of establishing a high quality and fully credible heritage label system which is based on voluntary participation.

On the detailed content of the proposal, many delegations are still in the process of formulating a definitive position. Discussions in the CAC have, however, highlighted the following main issues :

i) Participation (Article 4)

The Commission proposed that the EHL initiative be open to the participation of the Member States of the EU only at this stage, whilst recognising that wider participation in the future is not excluded. Whilst the Commission's approach received considerable support, several Member States were of the opinion that a wider participation should be envisaged immediately.

² 16 and 24 March, as well as 9 April.

ii) Number of sites (Articles 10 and 18)

The Commission has proposed that each Member State have the possibility to pre-select up to a maximum of two sites every year. At EU level a maximum of one site per Member State would be finally selected. However, Member States which did not participate in the intergovernmental initiative would have a possibility to propose up to a maximum of four sites before the regular selection procedure began.

A number of Member States expressed the concern that under the Commission's proposal the EHL scheme could grow too quickly and that this could have negative consequences on the prestige, credibility and manageability of the proposed scheme. An alternative "rotation" approach under which each Member State could select sites only every three years was suggested.

However, several other delegations were of the opinion that the Commission's proposal was reasonable in order to ensure a critical mass of quality sites and guarantee geographical spread needed for an EU scheme.

In addition, certain delegations suggested that the number of sites should be determined using weighting (i.e. size/population of the Member States), whereas certain other delegations emphasised the need for quality rather than quantity in the selection process.

iii) Final designation (Article 13)

According to the Commission proposal, Member States have the possibility to pre-select up to a maximum of two sites per year. On the basis of the recommendation from a panel of independent experts, the Commission will officially designate the sites to be awarded the EHL. The Commission would also have the power to withdraw the label from a site where the criteria are no longer fulfilled.

A large number of delegations expressed the view that since the Council is the principal decision-making body in the EU, it should have the power to designate the sites to be awarded the EHL on the basis of the panel's recommendation and the Commission's proposal. However, certain delegations and the Commission felt that the final decision should be left to the Commission. As to the panel; certain delegations were of the opinion that the role of the panel of independent experts needs to be strengthened by giving it concrete powers to take decisions.

iv) Transitional measures (Article 18)

The Commission proposal aims at establishing an EU-wide EHL which sets out uniform selection criteria, evaluation and monitoring processes as well as a new logo.

Transitional measures are set out in the proposal in order to define the status of the sites that have already been awarded the EHL under the intergovernmental initiative. The Commission proposes that to ensure the overall coherence of the EHL initiative and equal treatment of Member States, the existing intergovernmental sites would need to be re-assessed during the first year of the EHL scheme against the new criteria.

A number of delegations were of the opinion that the provisions dealing with this issue be clarified, with some delegations expressing the view that existing sites should be subject to an easier evaluation and selection process. However, some other delegations supported the Commission's approach that the old and new sites be subject to the same selected criteria.

v) Transnational sites (Article 12)

The Commission proposal includes the idea of "transnational sites", i.e. sites located in different Member States but which gather around one specific theme. Such sites would have to be located in at least two different Member States and they would need to be pre-selected by one of the Member States concerned.

Delegations in general welcomed the idea of transnational sites but called for more clarification of the concept of transnational sites. In addition, certain delegations expressed the concern that this might mean in practice that the nominating Member State would be penalised in selection process and consequently called for a separate quota for transnational sites.

In addition, delegations have raised the following more technical issues :

- the necessity to have good and precise definitions (Article 2) and clear objectives (Article 3);
- the need to stress European identity and values rather than those of the European Union (Articles 2 and 7);
- the relationship between the European Heritage Label initiative and other similar initiatives such as UNESCO World Heritage List and Council of Europe European Cultural Roads in order to avoid duplication and overlap (Article 5);
- the selection criteria for the attribution of the European Heritage Label (Article 7);
- the nomination process and number of independent experts in the selection panel, with several Member States expressing the view that the members of the panel should have experience and expertise in diverse fields including education. As to the number of experts, several Member States preferred an odd number of experts, with the casting/decisive vote given for the Chair of the panel (Article 8);
- the need to be transparent in all stages of the selection process, with some Member States calling for reasons and justification to be given where a site is rejected (Articles 10 and 11);
- the implications of the monitoring process and withdrawal of the label (Articles 14 and 15);

- the practical consequences and resource implications for sites awarded the EHL, with some Member States wishing to clarify communication and educational requirements of the sites as they might be more difficult and cumbersome for smaller sites and smaller Member States (Articles 7 and 14);
- the role of young people, in particular educational aspects, in this initiative;
- a greater emphasis on the use of ICT tools and digitisation; and
- the practical consequences of the entry into force of the EHL decision for the selection, monitoring and evaluation timetable.
