

## **BACKGROUND**

The purpose of the Communication is to examine the role of culture in Europe and how the European Union can add value to this role. The Communication reiterates the basis for cultural activities in the European Union (Article 151 of the Treaty) while making clear that "Culture is and will therefore primarily remain a responsibility of Member States".

The Communication is innovative in that it looks beyond the EU programmes that specifically promote cultural initiatives to the role that other EU policies and programmes can play. It also contains a new focus on strengthening the cultural focus of the external programmes (including development programmes) of the EU. (A detailed analysis of these, referred to in the second footnote on page 3, is in the Annex (paper 9496/07 ADD 1) appended to this Communication. This paper is attached.) It seeks to do this by reinforcing the use of Article 151.4 which calls on the Community to take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of the Treaty. (This is something the UK has always supported.)

The Communication also looks at new working methods to deliver the new agenda. This includes a proposal to establish an open method of co-ordination for culture. This would allow detailed discussion of cultural matters, involving experts from the cultural sector, outside the current framework for discussion in the Cultural Affairs Committee. Your opinion on this specific proposal would be of particular interest.

The Communication calls for a greater awareness of culture as an economic generator (in accordance with the Lisbon Agenda), a subject already agreed at the last Ministerial Council in a set of Conclusions on the Economy of Culture. This is an issue on which the UK already plays an important leading role. The Communication contains possible measures for "support for specific cultural actions" or the establishment of a "Cultural Forum" among others. Before any of these could be taken forward they would probably require further detailed discussions at working group level.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The Communication is to be the main item for the cultural agenda of the Portuguese Presidency (1 July – 31 December 2007).

There is to be an informal meeting of Ministers of Culture in Lisbon on 26 September 2007 at which Conclusions based on the Communication will be discussed, with a view to agreement at the November Education, Youth and Culture Council. The main aim will be to decide which (if any) of the proposals in the Communication might be taken forward. It is on these proposals that your views are being sought in this consultation.

## **SOME INITIAL GOVERNMENT OBSERVATIONS**

The main purpose of this consultation is to solicit views from civil society. But Whitehall Departments and the Devolved Administrations are also being consulted. The following points are set out not to prejudice your views in any way, but rather to give a general idea of some of the issues raised by the Communication.

The Communication paves the way for further activity from the Commission which may have policy implications for the UK (and other EU Member States). The Communication makes several proposals for the way this might be achieved. Section 3 sets out the broad objectives, already agreed as the underlying objectives of the current EU cultural programmes. These are i) the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; ii) the promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs; and iii) the promotion of culture as a vital element in the Union's international relations. The DCMS supports these broad objectives and plays a leading role in the second of these.

Article 4 then sets out certain practical measures by which the proposals in the Communication might be put into practice. These include the mapping of the cultural sectors (very much following the UK approach); establishing a "cultural forum" (presumably acting like the current national Cultural Contact Points which operate the EU programmes in the Member States – a well-developed system in the UK); the further development of on-line access to cultural programmes and colleagues. None of these has been discussed in any detail, and any of the proposals that are taken forward will need to be. They will also need to be subject to consultation, scrutiny and agreement at Council. However, the DCMS is broadly in favour of the proposals, especially those where the ideas seem to have been taken from work that has already been undertaken here.

The Communication proposes that decisions on proposals to be taken forward are taken by the Open Method of Coordination. This method of working, if agreed, will be new in the field of culture. I attach a link to the EU website which explains this: [http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/open\\_method\\_coordination\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/open_method_coordination_en.htm). But, briefly, this is a way of increasing the involvement of stakeholders over a sustained period, and measuring the achievements of Member States against the agreed objectives of programmes. A possible disadvantage of this method of working is that it risks becoming complicated and bureaucratic.

We would need to examine carefully possible financial implications imposed by any of these proposals should they be taken forward.