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## Creative Europe comes in for criticism at public hearing in Brussels

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Experts express concern at European Commission's proposed programme

The European Commission's proposed Creative Europe framework programme came in for wide-sweeping criticism from four invited experts and MEPs at a public hearing hosted by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education in Brussels on Thursday (April 26).

Committee chairperson Doris Pack opened the hearing by noting that the MEPs "have problems with the term creative industries. You all know how small the budget [for Creative Europe] is and this is why we ask what can one achieve in the creative industries with such a small amount of money? There are many discussions going on in the member states and there are many fears – this hearing should serve to show where the discussions and fears are. And so we hope that a few of the fears can be dispelled by the Commission today."

One of the invited experts, Olaf Zimmermann, managing director of the German Cultural Council, declared that the planned Creative Europe programme was "weighted too much in favour of the cultural economy. A programme for the cultural economy should be undertaken through structural funding or a special economic programme."

"We cannot divine an advantage of merging the Culture and MEDIA Programmes and any special synergy effects are not evident," he added. "The only advantage we could perceive is that one has more steering opportunities for bringing a stronger cultural political line into the programmes. Moreover, the new financing instrument caused us a big headache because we are still not clear about how it would function."

Meanwhile, another expert, professor David Hesmondhalgh, head of communications studies at the UK's University of Leeds, suggested that critics of the proposed Creative Europe programme were "correct to worry about the status of the non-profit cultural sector within such a framework, in particular about the potential disparities between the opportunities available for the cultural sector on the one hand and the commercial creative sector on the other."

Turning to the proposed loan guarantee facility, Hesmondhalgh observed that "claims about leverage effects are difficult to assess" and pointed out that "another issue is whether the system might just create an industry of intermediaries often far removed from the world of actual cultural production."

While French MEP Jean-Marie Cavada said that he was "hugely disappointed" by the Commission's proposal for the framework programme and was concerned that "the provisions in the proposal are so woolly that there are no guarantees of how the programme would be rolled out," Doris Pack declared: "The fact of the matter is that we don't know how much of an unknown sum is to be assigned to what. We want a clear budget, how much is going to what and which percentages."

In his defence of the European Commission's proposal, Vladimir Sucha, director for culture and media at the Directorate General (DG) Education and Culture, responded to criticisms of a bias towards economic parameters by stressing: "The Creative Europe programme is not a Creative Industry Programme. We are talking about creativity and this is the political message from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European citizens that the EC understands the importance of the talent and creativity in Europe."

"Please understand what is behind Creative Europe is exactly softening the hearts and sharpening the minds – this is what culture and art is doing," Sucha argued. "The programme is answering the needs which were described by the EU 2020 Strategy. This political message cannot be sent through several legal bases or programmes - we need to create one entry point."

However, Sucha's comments did not mollify Pack who closed the hearing by saying: "You have not answered our fears, I don't think what we heard from you was precise. We don't want pacification with nice words, we need precision and, I repeat, we need a budget. We need a precise discussion about financing."

On the eve of the Brussels hearing, European cultural lobby organisations rallied their forces to once more spell out their demands for the future MEDIA and Culture strands under the Creative Europe umbrella.

The European Coalitions for Cultural Diversity (ECCD) pointed out that they did not find any of the guarantees promised in March 2011 by Commissioner Vassiliou and EC President Barroso regarding the autonomy and the funding of the audiovisual and cinema field.

The ECCD feared "that the vagueness of the proposal leads to a situation where the specificity/identity as well as the effectiveness of the MEDIA/MEDIA Mundus and Culture programmes will be challenged" and requested, among other things, that the autonomy of these strands be ensured "via a clear and detailed definition of each constitutive strand of Creative Europe".

Meanwhile, the Federation of European Film Directors (FERA) whose members include Istvan Szabo, Neil Jordan, Agnieszka Holland, Claire Denis and Alan Parker, called upon the European institutions, all EU member states and participating countries to support the proposed overall budget for Creative Europe even though it amounts to a "miniscule" 0.002% of the total EU budget for 2014-2020.

FERA asked that a way be found for "pragmatic solutions to the question of merging MEDIA Desks and Culture Contact Points so that the quality information service and specialised know-how of each is maintained, to the benefit of both sets of users" and seek acceptance for the proposal to open the Creative Europe programme to the European Neighbourhood countries such as the South Mediterranean or South Caucasus.

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