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Europe's regions have their say on Creative Europe

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As EU culture ministers prepare to travel to Brussels this week for a two-day session of the Education, Youth Culture and Sport Council, Europe's regions also have their say on the proposed Creative Europe framework programme from 2014.

In a draft opinion drawn up by the Committee of the Regions rapporteur Gábor Bihary of the Budapest General Assembly, he urged the Council and the European Parliament "to more strongly emphasise the key role of local and regional authorities in promoting and celebrating the culture of their communities and enhance the participation of regional and local authorities in the Programme."

While the framework programme is to be divided into three strands, Bihary pointed out that "the programme must be implemented in such a way as to ensure flexible transfers of funding between strands based on needs and experiences."

He added that "although Creative Europe is not a social programme, policies related to new services and new digital media, as well as creative content, must not be framed on the basis of economic criteria alone, but must take cultural and social factors into account."

The Committee of the Regions has 344 representatives from local and regional authorities across the EU, such as Councillor Robert Knight from Newport City Council, Jürgen Martens, State Minister in Saxony's State Ministry for Justice and Europe, Annelie Stark of the Västra Götaland Regional Council, and Vasile Sava, Mayor of Tanderei in Romania.

Meanwhile the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) composed of members from across the European Union has also submitted its opinion on Creative Europe.

The committee's rapporteur-general Dumitru Fornea voiced support for "the idea that the [Creative Europe] programme should encourage all operators in the cultural and creative sectors to aspire to economic independence. However, it seems that the programme is overly concerned with the general objective of competitiveness, while the goal of promoting European cultural and linguistic diversity is less visible."

It was recommended that the administrative procedures "should be simplified by developing faster online applications and procedures for monitoring and managing the programmes. The current process is considered quite onerous, as all documentation must be sent by post and there can be a 3-4 month wait for a reply."

Fornea indicated that the MEDIA strand envisaged in the new programme did not differ much from the current MEDIA 2007, but suggested that "the text of the new regulation could be more precise and include appendices detailing each individual action area along with the budget allocated thereto."

Turning to the challenges and shortcomings of the Creative Europe proposal, he pointed out that the intention to increase the budget was "good news", but argued that the following aspects should be taken into account:

- the number of beneficiary countries has increased;
- the funding is to cover an expanded remit;
- new needs have arisen from the digital shift;
- currency depreciation;
- the budget proposed in the regulation of some € 1.8 billion for the period 2014-2020, should be compared to the annual budgets allocated by France (€ 7.5 billion) and Germany (€ 1.1 billion) and should be seen in relation to the total EU budget."

With regard to the proposed new financial facility, Fornea said that there was „a risk that financial institutions will not be interested in participating, given the small amounts involved, a lack of awareness of the problems specific to the cultural sector, and the low profitability of some of the cultural projects concerned, which could not exist without the aid of public funds.“

He pointed out that operational monitoring and management of the guarantees by the financial facility are to be carried out by the European Investment Fund (EIF), yet this institution does not yet have specific expertise in the cultural sector.

“The experience of the MEDIA Production Guarantee Fund (...) shows that there is a need for a greater synergy between the new financial facility and existing organisations [such as IFCIC and Audiovisual SGR],” Fornea concluded.

Meanwhile, the EESC position paper indicated that the plan to merge the Cultural Contact Points and MEDIA Desks into a single Creative Europe Desk is “a good idea in theory”, but noted that “the core activities of the cultural and audiovisual sectors differ considerably, with different production and distribution networks, and the key players requiring different types of expertise.”

“From this perspective, it may be detrimental to assimilate the competences by imposing this centralisation. The savings achieved may be insignificant and thus not justify the proposed structural changes, “the paper argued, adding that there was “some wariness” about expanding the desks’ remit to include providing statistics or supporting the Commission in ensuring proper communication and disseminating the results and impact of the Creative Europe programme “without, however, the requisite funds being provided to do this work.”

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