

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA
STANDING COMMITTEE
OF THE EFTA STATES

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WORKING GROUP ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS

**Comments by the EFTA Working Group¹ on a First Commission Report on the
Consideration of Cultural Aspects in European Community Action**

I INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission adopted on 17 April 1996 a First Report on the Consideration of Cultural Aspects in European Community Action, COM (96) 160 (hereafter referred to as "the Report"). The Report examines the ways and means of taking cultural aspects into account when drawing up texts defining and implementing policies of the Community which may have an impact on the cultural field.

2. Part VI, Articles 78 to 80, of the EEA Agreement provides for EFTA EU co-operation outside the four freedoms. EFTA EU co-operation with regard to culture is also referred to in Article 13, of Protocol 31 to the EEA Agreement aiming at "strengthening the co-operation in the field of culture in the framework of the activities and programmes of the Community in that area." The aforementioned Article was incorporated into the EEA Agreement through EEA Joint Committee Decision 36/95 of 19 May 1995.

3. Since 1 January 1996 the EFTA EEA States have participated fully in the Kaleidoscope Programme as well as in the Ariane and Raphael pilot projects. To this end various projects were forwarded under the calls for proposals in the framework of these three cultural activities. Representatives from EFTA EEA States took part in all the meetings of the Management Committee for the Kaleidoscope Programme as well as in the Expert Groups for the selection of the relevant projects. EFTA EEA experts also participated in the Expert Group for the selection of projects under the Ariane pilot scheme.

4. Through participation in the Kaleidoscope Programme as well as in Ariane and Raphael pilot schemes EFTA EEA countries have contributed to the relevant EU budget lines in 1996 and posted a national expert to the Cultural Action Unit in DG X in September 1996.

¹ Comprising the Delegations of the three EFTA EEA States Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

II GENERAL REMARKS

5. The EFTA Working Group on Cultural Affairs so far draws a positive conclusion from the co-operation with the Community under the Kaleidoscope Programme as well as the Ariane and Raphael pilot schemes. The Group, therefore, welcomes the report as a valuable and extremely informative contribution in defining the areas in which Community action has an impact on the cultural sector and where cultural policy has an effect on other policy fields. The EFTA Working Group on Cultural Affairs has noted with interest that the report recommends increased incorporation of the cultural dimension into other Community policies and that more co-ordination at administrative level is needed to this end. The Group would, therefore, like to point out that some EFTA EEA States are currently undertaking efforts to integrate cultural aspects into other policies. Against this background, and in the spirit of the information and consultation procedure provided for in the EEA Agreement, the EFTA Working Group on Cultural Affairs is pleased to forward these first comments on the report. The Group will closely follow the further debate on the report and looks forward to a continuing dialogue on this matter.

6. Given the importance the EFTA EEA countries attach to **the preservation and enrichment of the cultural and linguistic diversity** the EFTA Working Group on Cultural Affairs is pleased to see that the report puts great emphasis on this matter. In this context, the Group would like to point out the following: The issue of preservation and enrichment of cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe is crucial, especially, to small and medium-sized countries. As a *conditio sine qua non* any successful cultural policy, be it at regional, national or international level, must, therefore, build on two main pillars: Cultural roots and traditions on the one hand and openness to developments in modern society, such as technological and economic progress, on the other hand.

III CULTURAL ASPECTS OF EUROPEAN COMMUNITY ACTION AS LISTED IN THE REPORT

7. The EFTA Working Group on Cultural Affairs has noted with interest the five parts of the report addressing the cultural dimension of European Community action in the field of the single market, internal policies, audio-visual policy and foreign relations, as well as the conclusions drawn from this exercise.

8. With regard to **culture and the single market** the EFTA Working Group on Cultural Affairs would like to point out that in its view it is essential that the four freedoms of the common market are realised in the field of culture. Especially, as regards the free movement of persons in the field of culture, the Group would like to underline that obstacles related to mutual recognition of diplomas as well as professional qualifications should be eliminated as soon as possible.

9. Concerning **culture and the Community's internal policies**, the EFTA Working Group on Cultural Affairs would like to highlight the following: The vast majority of the Community's internal policies have a cultural dimension or have an impact on the cultural sector. The Group, therefore, welcomes the fact that the report places great importance on the cultural aspects of other policies which are often unknown to both the public as well as government authorities and encourages efforts to raise awareness in this respect. In this context the Group is of the opinion that in the framework of regional policy special attention should be given to the integration of environmental, touristic and cultural aspects in order to support sustainable development.

10. The EFTA Working Group on Cultural Affairs would also like to point out that the cultural sector has an outstanding growth potential as far as **job creation** is concerned. It seems worth mentioning in this context that culture has a high impact on the local economy, where most of the wealth and the employment in culture is created and is therefore of crucial importance especially for women, young people and populations in rural and less developed areas. Furthermore, new jobs in the field of culture can be created rapidly and at a relatively low cost. The EFTA Working Group on Cultural Affairs notes with regret that this outstanding potential has up to now not received adequate attention from government authorities or the public and, therefore, welcomes the Commission's effort to put the issue of culture and employment high on the political agenda. The Group in this context also highly welcomes the Council Resolution of 20 November 1995 on the promotion of statistics on culture and economic growth, as well as the Communication from the Commission of 20 November 1996 on Cohesion Policy and Culture, as useful initiatives to further investigate and assess the job creation potential of the culture sector.

11. As regards **culture in Community foreign relations**, the EFTA Working Group on Cultural Affairs would like to underline that in its opinion co-operation with other international organisations where all EFTA States are active members, such as the Council of Europe and UNESCO, could be of great value. The Group strongly recommends taking into account the work already carried out in the framework of the Council of Europe, especially in the field of "cultural democracy", "the role of cultural aims in development", "the common heritage" and "the cultural identity and diversity". The Group is convinced that these considerations will lead to a more global approach of cultural policy.

IV CONCLUSIONS

12. In the light of the EEA Agreement and the co-operation with the European Union, the EFTA Working Group on Cultural Affairs would like to underline that efforts to integrate cultural aspects into European Community action and efforts to co-ordinate Community activities affecting the culture sector should be continued, taking into account the experience gained in the environment field, and that the publication of an annual report by the Commission would be useful exercise.

13. The EFTA Working Group on Cultural Affairs would like to take this opportunity to highlight a few issues of special importance to the cultural policy of the EFTA EEA States: **Cultural policy for children** is a political priority in some EFTA EEA countries. The Group, therefore, noted with great interest the Opinion from the Economic and Social Committee of the European Community published on this same issue on 28 / 29 February 1996 and fully supports the measures proposed in the document, such as the extension of all Community Programmes in the field of culture to the special needs of children and the encouragement for quality production for children's entertainment, as an excellent tool to avoid fanaticism and extremism among young people.

14. A similarly important issue to the EFTA EEA countries is the **access to culture for all** in order to contribute to a balanced development of the society. The Group would, therefore, like to express its support for the initiatives proposed in Council Resolution of 25 July 1996 on this same matter. On the related issue of **quality in the culture sector** the EFTA Working Group on Cultural Affairs would like to underline that emphasis should be put on ensuring an overall high quality of cultural goods and services provided for the general public and that any tendency to create an exclusive and elitist culture should be avoided.

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