

**Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a programme of Community action to encourage cooperation between Member States to combat social exclusion**

(2000/C 337 E/17)

(Text with EEA relevance)

COM(2000) 368 final — 2000/0157(COD)

(Submitted by the Commission on 16 June 2000)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 137, paragraph 2, subparagraphs 2 and 3 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty,

Whereas:

- (1) Pursuant to Article 2 of the Treaty, the Community shall have as one of its tasks to promote the raising of the standard of living and quality of life throughout the Community.
- (2) Pursuant to Article 136 of the Treaty, the Community and the Member States, having in mind fundamental social rights such as those set out in the European Social Charter signed at Turin on 18 October 1961 and in the 1989 Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers, shall have as an objective the combating of exclusion.
- (3) The European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions have all urged the Community to strengthen its contribution to efforts in Member States to prevent and to combat social exclusion.
- (4) The Commission communication of 1 March 2000, 'Building an inclusive Europe' <sup>(1)</sup>, described the challenge of social exclusion and the existing policy responses in Member States and at Community level, and proposed on this basis to give a new impetus to the EU cooperation to combat social exclusion.
- (5) The Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000 incorporated the promotion of social inclusion as intrinsic

to the overall strategy of the Union to achieve its strategic goal for the next decade of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

- (6) The Lisbon European Council further acknowledged that the new knowledge-based society offers both the potential for reducing social exclusion by creating the economic conditions for greater prosperity through higher levels of growth and employment and by opening up new ways of participating in society and the risk of an ever-widening gap between those who have access to the new knowledge, and those who are excluded — and that policies should be directed towards avoiding this risk and maximising this new potential.
- (7) The European Council further agreed that policies for combating social exclusion should be based on an open method of coordination combining national action plans and a Commission initiative for cooperation.
- (8) This Commission initiative which consists in a proposal for a multiannual action programme designed to encourage cooperation between Member States should aim at improving knowledge, developing exchanges of information and best practices, and evaluating experiences in order to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of policies to combat exclusion.
- (9) Many non-governmental organisations at the European level have experience and expertise in fighting social exclusion, as well as acting at European level as the advocates of people who are exposed to social exclusion; they can therefore make an important contribution to understanding the diverse forms and effects of social exclusion and to ensuring that the design, implementation and follow-up of the programme take account of the experience of people exposed to social exclusion.
- (10) In compliance with Article 2 of Council Decision 1999/468/EC of 28 June 1999 laying down the procedures for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission <sup>(2)</sup>, measures for the implementation of this Decision should be adopted by use of the advisory procedure provided for in Article 3 of that Decision.

<sup>(1)</sup> COM(2000) 79 final.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ L 184, 17.7.1999, p. 23.

(11) It is necessary, in order to reinforce the added value of Community action, that the Commission, in cooperation with the Member States, should ensure, at all levels, the coherence and complementarity of actions implemented in the framework of this Decision and other relevant Community policies, instruments and actions, in particular those under the European Social Fund.

(12) The Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA Agreement) provides for greater cooperation in the social field between the European Community and its Member States, on the one hand, and the countries of the European Free Trade Association participating in the European Economic Area (EFTA/EEA), on the other; provision should be made to open up this programme to participation by the candidate countries of central and eastern Europe, in accordance with the conditions established in the Europe Agreements, in their additional protocols and in the decisions of the respective Association Councils, to Cyprus and Malta, funded by additional appropriations in accordance with the procedures to be agreed with those countries, as well as to Turkey, funded by additional appropriations in accordance with the procedures to be agreed with that country.

(13) A financial reference amount, within the meaning of point 33 of the Interinstitutional Agreement of 6 May 1999 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission is included in this decision.

(14) Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty respectively set as a task of the Community the promotion of equality between men and women and provide that in all its activities the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality between men and women; gender is a crucial cross-cutting issue which interacts to an important extent with the effects and causes of exclusion.

(15) It is essential to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the programme to ensure that it achieves its objectives.

(16) In accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality as defined in Article 5 of the Treaty, the objectives of the proposed action concerning the contribution of the Community to combating social exclusion cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States for reasons including the need for multilateral partnerships, the transnational exchange of information and the Community-wide dissemination of good practice; this Decision does not go beyond what is necessary to achieve those objectives,

HAVE DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

#### Article 1

##### Establishment of the programme

A programme of Community action to encourage cooperation between Member States in order to combat social exclusion,

hereinafter referred to as 'the programme', is adopted for the period 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2005.

#### Article 2

##### Principles

1. This programme shall be part of an open method of coordination between Member States to combat social exclusion, and shall be combined with national action plans.

2. The programme and the national action plans shall contribute to a better understanding of social exclusion, the mainstreaming of the combating of exclusion in Member States and Community policies and measures, and the development of priority actions chosen by Member States in accordance with their particular situation.

3. The overall aim of the programme shall be to encourage cooperation which enables the Union and the Member States to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion as measured by targets agreed by the Council.

4. In designing, implementing and following up the activities under the programme account will be taken of the experience in the Member States at all relevant levels and of people exposed to poverty and social exclusion, as well as of social partners, non-governmental and voluntary organisations and other actors of the society involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

#### Article 3

##### Objectives

The programme shall support cooperation which enables the Union and the Member States to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of policies to combat social exclusion by:

- improving the understanding of social exclusion;
- organising policy cooperation and mutual learning in the context of the national action plans; and,
- developing the capacity of actors to address social exclusion effectively, in particular through networking at EU level.

#### Article 4

##### Community actions

1. With a view to achieving the objectives set out in Article 3, the following actions may be implemented within a transnational framework:

- analysis of characteristics, causes, processes and trends in social exclusion, including the collection of comparable statistics, the development of common methodologies and thematic studies;
  - policy cooperation and exchange of information and best practices on the basis of the development of quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks and through periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review;
  - promotion of dialogue involving the various stakeholders and support to networking at European level between non-governmental organisations active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.
2. Arrangements for the implementation of the Community actions described in paragraph 1 are set out in annex.

#### Article 5

##### Implementation

1. The Commission shall:
- ensure the implementation of the Community actions covered by this programme;
  - have a regular exchange of views with representatives of non-governmental organisations and the social partners at European level on the design, implementation and follow-up of the programme and on related policy orientations. The Commission shall inform the Committee established under Article 7 of their opinions;
  - promote active partnership and dialogue between all the partners involved in the programme to encourage an integrated and coordinated approach to the fight against social exclusion.
2. The Commission, in cooperation with the Member States, shall take the necessary steps to:
- promote the involvement in the programme of all the parties concerned;
  - ensure the dissemination of the results of the actions undertaken within the framework of this programme;
  - provide appropriate information, publicity and follow-up with regard to actions supported by this programme.

#### Article 6

##### Financing

1. The financial reference amount for implementing the programme for the period referred to in Article 1 shall be EUR 70 million.

2. The annual appropriations shall be authorised by the budgetary authority within the limits of the financial perspective.

#### Article 7

##### Committee

1. The Commission shall be assisted by an advisory committee composed of the representatives of the Member States and chaired by the representative of the Commission (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee').
2. Where reference is made to this paragraph, the advisory procedure laid down in Article 3 of Council Decision 1999/468/EC shall apply, in respect of Article 7, paragraph 3 and Article 8.
3. The representative of the Commission shall in particular consult the Committee on:
- the general guidelines for the implementation of the programme;
  - the annual budgets and the distribution of funding between measures;
  - the annual plan of work for the implementation of the programme's actions, and the Commission proposals for selection criteria for financial support;
4. To ensure the consistency and complementarity of this programme with other measures referred to in Article 8, the Commission shall keep the Committee regularly informed about other Community action contributing to combating social exclusion. Where appropriate, the Commission shall establish regular and structured cooperation between this Committee and the monitoring committees established for other relevant policies, instruments and actions.

#### Article 8

##### Consistency and complementarity

1. The Commission shall, in cooperation with the Member States, ensure overall consistency with other Community policies, instruments and actions, in particular by establishing appropriate mechanisms to coordinate the activities of this programme with relevant activities relating to research, employment, non-discrimination, equality between women and men, social protection, education, training and youth policy, health and in the field of the Community's external relations.
2. The Member States shall make all possible efforts to ensure consistency and complementarity between activities under this programme and those carried out at national, regional and local levels.
3. The Commission and the Member States shall ensure consistency and complementarity between action undertaken under this programme and Community action under the structural funds, in particular the Community initiative EQUAL.

*Article 9***Participation of the EFTA/EEA countries, the associated countries of central and eastern Europe, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey**

This programme shall be open to the participation of:

- the EFTA/EEA countries in accordance with the conditions established in the EEA Agreement;
- the associated central and eastern European countries in accordance with the conditions established in the Europe Agreements, in their additional protocols and in the decisions of the respective Association Councils;
- Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, funded by additional appropriations in accordance with procedures to be agreed with each country.

*Article 10***Monitoring and evaluation**

1. The Commission shall regularly monitor this programme in cooperation with the Member States in accordance with the procedure set out in Article 7.

2. The programme shall be evaluated by the Commission by the end of the third year and at the end of the programme with the assistance of independent experts. This evaluation will assess the relevance and effectiveness of actions implemented with regard to the objectives referred to in Article 3. It will also examine the impact of the programme as a whole. The evaluation will also examine the complementarity between action under this programme and that pursued under other relevant Community policies, instruments and actions.

3. The Commission shall submit to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions a final report on the implementation of the programme by 31 December 2006.

*Article 11***Entry into force**

This Decision shall enter into force on the day of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*.

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## ANNEX

## INDICATIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

## 1. Action strands

With a view to achieving the objectives set out in Article 3 and implement the Community actions set out in Article 4 the following measures may be implemented within a transnational framework:

*Strand 1: Analysis of characteristics, processes, causes and trends in social exclusion*

The importance of this strand is linked to the conclusion of the Lisbon European Council to develop national action plans and a new open method of coordination to combat social exclusion and the need in this context to identify appropriate quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks which will make it possible to promote periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review. This requires special cooperation efforts to improve statistics, methodologies and understanding of social exclusion as well as of policies which can help to prevent and combat exclusion. Particular effort is proposed with regard to statistical work in cooperation with national statistical offices.

In order to promote this, the following measures may be supported:

- 1.1. Studies and meetings on the development of common methodologies to measure poverty and social exclusion, their extent, characteristics, processes, causes and trends;
- 1.2. The collection and dissemination of comparable statistics in Member States and at Community level. This measure should support cooperation between national statistical offices and the Commission and improve the statistical reference sources at Community level and their contribution to the analysis of poverty and social exclusion;
- 1.3. The development of thematic studies to contribute to the understanding of social exclusion, to address common issues in connection with policy developments in Member States, including emerging issues in relation to the knowledge based society.

*Strand 2: Policy cooperation and exchange of information and best practices*

In order to promote policy cooperation and mutual learning in the context of the national action plan, the following transnational activities may be supported:

- 2.1. Transnational exchange actions aimed at transferring information and good practices and developing peer review in the context of the national action plans, by means of policy meetings/workshops/seminars on benchmarks or on policies and practices, or other forms of exchange such as joint development of strategies and common dissemination of information, etc., organised at the initiative of European organisations of Member States and/or of other key actors with the active involvement of Member States.
- 2.2. Expert work and specific studies in connection with the development of indicators and benchmarks, including in relation to the knowledge-based society.
- 2.3. Annual EU Report on social exclusion, which would present the state of play on the different national action plans as well as actions conducted at European level in the main policies and fields where the fight against poverty and social exclusion is at stake.

Keeping in mind that social exclusion is a multidimensional phenomenon, particular attention shall be paid to relevant policy developments on social protection, employment, education and training, health and housing policies.

*Strand 3: Participation of the various stakeholders and support to networking at EU level*

In order to actively involve public authorities as well as the social partners and the civil society, the following measures may be supported:

- 3.1. Core funding for relevant key European networks involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.
- 3.2. An annual EU Round Table Conference on social exclusion. The conference would be organised in close collaboration with the EU Presidency.

## 2. General considerations

The programme shall take into account the results of preparatory actions and activities under other Community policies, instruments and actions.

In designing, implementing and following up the activities under the programme account will be taken of the experience of people exposed to poverty and social exclusion, as well as social partners, non-governmental organisations and other actors of the society involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. In all its activities, the programme will respect the principle of gender mainstreaming. The programme activities can be adapted or supplemented in accordance with the procedure established under Article 7, on the basis of an annual review.

The implementation of the programme may require technical and administrative assistance to the mutual benefit of the Commission and of the beneficiaries and/or support expenditure.

## 3. Method of presenting applications for support

*Strand 1:* This strand will be mainly implemented through calls for tenders. For cooperation with national statistical offices the Eurostat procedures will apply.

*Strand 2:* Actions 2.1 will be mainly implemented in response to annual calls for proposals (some policy meetings/seminars might be organised directly by the Commission). Proposals will have to involve actors from at least four Member States and may be submitted to the Commission by European organisations and by Member States (or by organisations with the involvement of Member States). Actions 2.2 and 2.3 will require specific call for tenders.

*Strand 3:* Under action 3.1 support may be provided to European networks satisfying criteria established by the Commission in consultation with the Committee in accordance with Article 7. Action 3.2 may be supported in response to requests for subsidies from Member States.

## 4. Carrying out the actions

The actions to be taken may be funded by service contracts following calls for tender or by subsidies for joint financing with other sources. In the latter case, the level of financial assistance by the Commission may not exceed, as a general rule, 80 % of the expenditure actually incurred by the recipient.

In carrying out the programme, the Commission may require additional resources, including recourse to experts. These requirements will be decided in the context of the Commission's ongoing assessment of resource allocation.

In carrying out the programme the Commission may have recourse to technical and/or administrative assistance, to the mutual benefit of the Commission and of the beneficiaries, related to identification, preparation, management, monitoring, audit and control.

The Commission may also undertake information, publication and dissemination actions. It may also undertake evaluation studies and organise seminars, colloquia or other meetings of experts.

The Commission will prepare annual work plans setting out the priorities and actions to be undertaken. Moreover, it will also specify the arrangements and criteria to be applied in selecting and financing actions under this programme. In so doing, it will seek the opinion of the Committee mentioned in Article 7.

Actions undertaken will fully respect the principles of data protection.

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