

European Capitals of Culture

At last, the much expected decision has been taken and the new members will be able to take part in this highly popular community cultural action. On 26 January, at the meeting of the Committee on culture, youth, education, the media and sport of the European Parliament a document was submitted by the Commission. The document proposed to amend the Council decision 1419/1999/EC and extend the programme to the countries that join the Union on 1 May. It also referred to a later amendment to include Bulgaria and Romania.

The essence of the change is in the annex of the Council decision, which will look like this:

2005

Ireland
(Cork)

2006

Greece
(Patras)

2007

Luxembourg

Romania
(Sibiu)

2008

United
Kingdom (Liverpool)

Norway
(Stavanger)

2009

Austria

Lithuania

2010

Germany

Hungary

2011

Finland

Estonia

2012

Portugal

Slovenia

2013

France

Slovakia

2014

Sweden

Latvia

2015

Belgium

Czech
Republic

2016

Spain

Poland

2017

Denmark

Cyprus

2018

Netherlands

Malta

2019

Italy

Note:
The information on 2007-2008 was added after the Council
meeting at the end of May.

A few

months earlier we put on the web a writing on the theme, sour about east and central Europe being left out. (The inclusion of Cracow and Prague in 2000 was not exactly the same thing.) One subtitle asked Wroclaw, cultural capital in 2008? As we see in the table, our expectation was one year too early. From point of view of principle it does not matter that the first title goes to neighbour Lithuania. BO feels satisfaction.

The document recalls the very appropriate recommendation in the original 1999 decision whereby "a linkage between the programmes of the designated cities of the same year should be made".

It must be noted that for long (and maybe even today) the decision is formally not yet taken. BO first learned from kind rumours about the developments that the document describes the following way: "This proposed amendment was prepared with the full cooperation of the Member States and the accession countries, which were able to express their preferences during an informal consultation exercise launched by the Commission among the new States during 2003." Although the proposal dates from 17 November, we could first read it by way of the ENCATC newsletter. Unless you know the exact source you will have a hell of a time before you find it on the Europa site.

No conspiracy here, just the normal dreadfulness of the functioning of the huge and complex EU bureaucracy.

{mospagebreak title=On Cultural Capitals: a glimpse behind the scene}

On Cultural Capitals:
a glimpse behind the scene

(Originally an EU
Observer article, dated 27 June 2003)

The
facts

The European City of Culture was the result of an initiative by the Greek Minister of Culture, Melina Mercouri. It was launched at intergovernmental level in 1985 by the Council of Ministers, which has designated at least one European City of Culture each year since then. This year's title-holder is the Austrian city of Graz. The title will pass to Genoa and Lille in 2004.

During the German Presidency the event was integrated into the Community framework and a new selection procedure was introduced. At the same time, the European City of Culture was renamed the Cultural Capital of Europe. This Council decision 1419 of 25 May 1999 will enter into force as of 2005.

Behind
the facts

Taking

a look at the list

of past Cultural Capitals, it is obvious that the old selection procedure was working well. That is, until the choice had to be made about year 2000. Holding the title of Cultural Capital is a matter of great importance; holding it at the turn of the century is something very special. The Member states couldn't reach an agreement on the ground of the old regulation, and the EU had no less than nine Cultural Capitals that year: Avignon, Bergen, Bologna, Brussels, Krakow, Helsinki, Prague, Reykjavik and Santiago de Compostela. (Note that four of them were outside of the Union, two from east-central Europe!) This defied the whole point, "inflating" the reputation of the title: anyone could have a Capital. In the given situation the Council has done the only right thing, reforming the selection procedure.

The

new procedure is based on a rotation principle, with individual EU member states able to suggest one or more Cultural Capitals for a particular year, possibly stating preferences. An independent international, seven-member Selection Panel examines the candidacies collated each year by the European Commission. The panel consists of two members of the European Parliament, two members of the Council, two members of the Commission and one member of the Committee of the Regions. The panel makes a recommendation to the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission. Within a period of three months after receipt of this report, the European Parliament may forward an opinion on the nominations. The Commission then submits its recommendation to the Council.

A

watertight procedure, however, it misses one important point: the new Member States. The list is filled up until 2019 with existing Member States only. Now, considering that promotion of cultural diversity and integration of new Members is a declared goal of the European Union, it's difficult to come to terms with the situation. An east-central European country is probably more in the need of showing its cultural values to the Community than the third or fourth Greek or French city does. There are already voices in the Parliament and the Council that express this opinion and urge the rediscussion of the decision. The excuse is there in Decision 1419: "The Commission may also make any proposals for revision of this Decision which it judges necessary for the smooth operation of this action and, in particular, with a view to the future enlargement of the Union."

Wroclaw, cultural capital in 2008?

Sounds

nice, doesn't it? Or Tartu, Maribor, Brno, Varna, Kaunas? Debrecen or Arad? The actual rules of the game allow this as a second option only, in tandem with Liverpool. News came about this city winning over other UK rivals for 2008, when that country has the right to nominate. A little while ago we had the honour to report about the decision of the Council to approve the nomination of Patras, Greece, although according to the annex to Decision 1419, the Netherlands was entitled to choose for 2006. It was originally intended that the Netherlands should propose its applicant city/cities in 2006, but, in agreement with Greece (with its turn in 2018), these two countries swapped places

in the rotation. There is another indication in the same Decision 1419 that the annex is not the full truth, namely because non-member countries are also allowed to nominate.