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Copyright: Vote in Legal Affairs Committee postponed

At their meeting on 8 December 1998, the Legal Affairs Committee (LAC), that was scheduled to vote on all 300+ amendments from all committees involved, decided to postpone the vote until 20 January 1999 with the vote in the European Parliament's plenary session to take place in February 1999.

Although a further delay in the procedure is generally speaking not something anybody can be particularly happy about, there are good reasons for that delay. EFPICC and EBLIDA have been in contact with some MEPs to point out the normal rules of voting procedure. At their committee meeting, several MEPs underlined the irregularities of the internal voting order that was prepared by the LAC secretariat in cooperation with Mr Barzanti. It placed Mr Barzanti's own amendments on top of all other amendments to each specific article or recital. This would in most cases mean that all following amendments by other MEPs or Committees on a specific article would automatically be rejected. The normal procedure for a vote is that the amendment that is furthest away from the original Commission text is placed on top and voted first, followed by other amendments using the same criteria. This procedure is certainly more favourable for amendments taking up the concerns of user representatives.

Finnish MEP Astrid Thors had tabled a written request to the LAC Chairman to postpone the vote on the grounds that Mr Barzanti has tabled additional seven "compromise amendments" which were only received by other members of the LAC on Friday or even Monday, the day before the vote, and the unacceptable order of the voting list.

Although members of LAC voted first against postponing the vote (with 6 in favour, 6 against and 1 abstention from the chairperson, which means that the proposal is not adopted), the following discussion revealed that MEPs saw major problems to vote on the basis of the prepared voting list. Next day, following a meeting of the political co-ordinators the evening before, also Mr Barzanti reluctantly offered to reconsider amendments and the voting list if necessary. In addition, the voting list gives in some cases wrong numbering and inconsistencies.
which could only add to the confusion in the expected complicated and long voting procedure.

It was finally decided to postpone the vote. Some MEPs raised also concern about the integrated versions containing all amendments only being available in English and French and not in all EU languages. The Committee agreed to forward their criticism on the voting list to the LAC secretariat which is to prepare a revised list by 18 December. Mr Barzanti was asked to clarify the relation between his "compromise amendments" and the text of the amendments on articles and define their position in the voting list.

On 7 December, EBLIDA and some EFPICC members had a meeting with Mr Whitehead, rapporteur of the Consumer Committee, who is very concerned to keep broad exceptions in the public interest. He agreed to attend LAC meetings to urge members to vote in favour of his committee's amendments. Mr Cassidy, rapporteur of EMAC, a committee also in favour of keeping reasonable exceptions, is also a regular member of LAC and can thus ensure that his committee's amendments are given due consideration.

Electronic signatures: no agreement in Council of Ministers on proposed Directive

On 27 November the Council of Telecommunications Ministers had a lengthy discussion on the proposed Directive concerning a common framework for electronic signatures. As no overall agreement on the Directive could be reached at this stage, the Council mandated the Permanent Representatives Committee to continue its work with a view to reaching a decision at the next Telecommunications Council, after the European Parliament has given its opinion.

The proposed Directive is intended to remove one of the main remaining obstacles to cross-border electronic commerce. It aims at facilitating the use of electronic signatures as well as contributing to their legal recognition. It would establish a legal framework for electronic signatures and certain certification services. Further objectives are to promote the interoperability of electronic signature products and to build trust in electronic signatures. In order to achieve this, the draft Directive provides that certain essential requirements must be met. Discussion in the Council of Ministers focused on the question whether or not there should be mandatory requirements concerning encryption and decryption software used for electronic signatures.

Culture: Call for applications under the Kaleidoscope programme

Kaleidoscope, the European programme for artistic and cultural creation, is presently under debate regarding its extension to 1999. Extension can be taken for granted as to ensure its smooth way into the Culture 2000 programme (2000-2004). Pending the decision on extension, the European Commission published in the Official Journal C 369 of 28 November 1998 a call for applications for 1999 projects, to allow enough time to prepare applications before the deadline of 2 March 1999.

The programme has two action lines under which applications for funding can be submitted:

- Support for events and cultural projects carried out in partnerships or through networks;
- Large-scale European cooperation actions.
The areas covered by Kaleidoscope are the performing arts (e.g. dance, music, theatre, opera), visual or spatial arts (e.g. painting, sculpture, carving, engraving), the applied arts (e.g. architecture, photography and design) and projects involving multimedia as form of artistic expression. The projects should involve organisations from at least three Member States. For further information, please check the on-line version of the Official Journal at EURO-LEX: http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/index.html, or contact: European Commission, Kaleidoscope programme, DG X/C.5 - Culture Unit, Room 5/51, rue des Trèves 120, B-1049 Brussels.

**Fifth Framework Programme: European Parliament welcomed conciliation agreement**

On 15 December, the conciliation agreement concerning the Fifth Framework programme for research and technological development was approved by the plenary session of the European Parliament. The rapporteur for the Parliament, MEP Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl (Germany), expressed satisfaction with the budgeting of the programme, which at ECU 14.960 million represents a slight increase in real terms on the Fourth Framework programme. She also highlighted the fact that MEP's had managed to persuade the Council of Ministers of the need to show flexibility when allocating resources in the years ahead to take account of new scientific and technical needs in the future.

**Fifth Framework Programme: IST programme presented**

At the IST'98 conference, which was held in Vienna on 30 November to 2 December 1998, the Information Society Technologies (IST) programme was presented. The IST programme is expected to have a budget of ECU 3.600 million. This will be broken down among the following key actions:

- systems and services for the citizen: ECU 612 million
- multimedia content and tools: ECU 612 million
- new methods of working and electronic commerce: ECU 612 million
- essential technologies and infrastructure: ECU 1.296 million
- future and emerging technologies: ECU 360 million
- research networking: ECU 108 million

The key actions in the IST programme define the research priorities. For each priority the Commission has drafted two or three action lines, which will be described in detail in the work programme of the IST programme. The key action 'multimedia content and tools' covers five research priorities: electronic publishing, cultural heritage, education and training, language technologies, and information access and handling. These have draft action lines for:

- social and business models for multimedia content
- authoring and design systems
- content management and personalisation
- access to scientific and cultural heritage
- digital preservation of cultural heritage
- open platforms and tools for personalised learning
- the flexible university
- advanced training systems
multilinguality in digital content and services
natural interactivity
multisensory forms of content

On 15 December the European Parliament adopted the Commission draft proposal for the IST programme with a few amendments. The work programme for 1999 and the definite timetable for calls next year will be available in January 1999. It is envisaged to have a first call for proposals on 16 February 1999 (deadline for submission of proposals 18 May 1999) and a second call on 16 March 1999 (deadline 15 June 1999). To take account of the developments in new technologies, the IST work programme will be revised every year, although it will still contain long-term visions. Details about the contents of the calls are not yet available. Further information on the IST programme is available at: http://www.cordis.lu/ist/home.html

Research: Launch of ITC cooperation programme between EU and Asia

A cooperation programme between the European Union and Asia in the field of information technology and communications (EU-Asia IT&C) was launched at the IST conference in Vienna on 1 December 1998. Its aim is to stimulate the use of European information and communication technologies in Asia, that are of particular relevance to Asian societies and countries in order to speed up their integration into the global Information Society. The programme aims at improving the flow of technology and information, and at encouraging cooperation between European and Asian organisations, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, governments, non-governmental organisations, private enterprise, and education and research organisations. The main activities under the programme will be:

- task forces to identify and initiate Information Society projects;
- practical projects to demonstrate technology;
- Information Society interconnectivity projects and initiatives;
- liaison between Asian and European ICT programmes;
- improving comprehension of Asian and European legislative requirements;
- identifying and initiating education and joint R&D programmes.

The programme is to run for a period of five years, beginning in 1999. Asian participants include India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. For further information please contact: European Commission, Mr Johan Cauwenbergh, fax: +32-2-296 7241; email: Johan.Cauwenbergh@cec.be; http://www.cordis.lu/ist98/asia.htm

Education: 1999 call for proposals under Socrates programme

On 1 December the European Commission published the 1999 call for proposals under the Socrates programme in the field of education. The Socrates programme provides for the promotion of cooperation in six fields:

- higher education (Erasmus). Under the 1999 call the Commission will give support to universities to enhance the European dimension of studies, and grants to promote student mobility;
- school education (Comenius). Grants are envisaged for school partnerships/European education projects, education of the children of migrant workers and travellers,
intercultural education, and in-service training for educational staff;
- promotion of language training (Lingua);
- support for European cooperation in open and distance learning (ODL) and the use of new information and communication technologies in the educational field;
- adult education;
- exchange of information and experience on education systems and policies, including: analysis of questions of common educational policy interest and an information network on education in Europe.

In addition to these six sectors, grants are available for complementary measures which are not eligible for funding under any specific action, but which help the programme achieve its objectives. Deadlines for submitting proposals vary between the different action lines. For further information please contact: Socrates and Youth Technical Assistance Office (TAO), rue Montoyer 70, B-1000 Brussels; Tel: +32 2 233 0111; fax: +32 2 233 0150; email: info@socrates-youth.be; http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg22/socrates.html

**Education: call for proposals under Leonardo da Vinci programme**

On 8 December the European Commission published a call for proposals under the Leonardo da Vinci programme in the field of vocational training. The deadline for submitting proposals is 23 March 1999. The call is restricted to pilot projects and placement and exchange programmes. As it is the final call for proposals under the Leonardo da Vinci programme, it mainly focuses on dissemination and transfer of the results of earlier projects. The call has five priorities:

- acquisition of new skills;
- forging closer links between educational or training establishments and enterprises;
- combating exclusion;
- promoting investment in human resources;
- generalising access to skills and promoting the development of vocational skills through Information Society tools in the context of lifelong learning.


**Education: Ministers reached agreement on new Socrates, Leonardo and Tempus programmes**

On 4 December the Council of Education Ministers reached agreement on the second phase of the Socrates programme (for education), the second phase of the Leonardo da Vinci programme (vocational training) and the extension of the Tempus programme (for higher education in Central and Eastern Europe). The ministers adopted by qualified majority a budget of ECU 1.550 million over seven years for the Socrates programme, instead of ECU 1.400 million over five years as proposed by the European Commission. For the Leonardo da Vinci programme the Council approved a budget of ECU 1.150 million over seven years, whereas the Commission had suggested ECU 1.000 over five years. This would be an increase of 14 % for Leonardo and an increase of 20 % for Socrates compared to the current budget.
The Council of Ministers extended the two programmes from five to seven years to coincide with the duration of the European Union's overall financial perspectives for the period 2000-2006. The Commission however, believed that it would not be simple to finance seven-year programmes in an area like education, as it evolves constantly.

The Council also approved the extension of the Tempus programme to 2006. No budget was set, as Tempus is financed under the general support programmes for Central and Eastern Europe (Phare) and the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union (Tacis).

The positions of the Council of Ministers will be discussed in the European Parliament before a final decision is taken.

**CEEC: participation of CEEC's in European education and culture programmes approved**

The Council of Ministers have recently approved the terms and conditions for the participation of the Czech Republic in the European programmes in the fields of training (Leonardo da Vinci, education (Socrates) and youth (Youth for Europe). Furthermore, the Council has adopted the conditions for participation by Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania in the European programmes in the field of culture (Kaleidoscope, Ariane and Raphael).

**Enlargement: European institutions on accession negotiations**

According to the European Commission's Enlargement Task Force the screening of the first 19 chapters of the European legislation with the six candidate countries of the first group (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia), demonstrated that these countries have no major problems with accepting the European legislation, but they do have problems with implementing it. Therefore, a balance has to be found between the pace of the negotiations and the pace at which applicant countries are getting prepared to implement the around 80,000 pages of European legislation. With regard to the seven chapters on which negotiations are in progress, three have been provisionally closed (education, research, small and medium-sized enterprises) and work is continuing on the others (telecommunications, audio-visual policy, industrial policy and culture). The Enlargement Task Force is now waiting for the negotiating positions on a number of additional chapters of both the candidate countries and the European Union. The EU positions will be prepared after receiving the positions of the applicants, and are intended to be put on the negotiating table at the end of the first half year of 1999.

On 6 December the Council of Ministers for General Affairs discussed the European Commission's first progress reports on the accession process. The Council welcomed the substantial progress made by candidate countries in their preparations for membership, and encouraged them to continue with their efforts. Ministers noted that, although progress in the adoption of the European legislation varies considerably between countries and between sectors, the difference between the candidates of the first and second group has generally narrowed. They noted in particular the progress made by Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania, and encouraged all candidates to intensify their preparations for membership. The Council noted the Commission's intention to propose the opening of negotiations with Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia if progress in these countries is maintained. However, at this stage, the Council did not make any recommendations to extend the accession negotiations, as opinions of Member States differed on this issue.
The European Parliament has adopted reports on the five candidate countries that have not yet entered into accession negotiations (Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia). The vote and the preceding debate confirmed the differences of view between the European Commission and the Parliament. With regard to Latvia, the Parliament urged the Council and the Commission to open accession negotiations without further delay. Accession negotiations with Lithuania should begin in the short term and the situation in Slovakia should be reviewed so that the decision to start negotiations can be taken before the first half of 1999. Concerning Romania and Bulgaria, the Parliament believes it would be premature to open accession negotiations in 1999. In general, the Parliament pointed out that the enlargement process should remain open at all time to all applicants.

Northern Europe: Commission presented "Northern dimension" report

On 25 November the European Commission adopted a report in which it recommends a series of measures to enhance the European Union's Northern dimension. The EU's Northern dimension has increased considerably in the last few years. Since 1995, when Sweden and Finland joined, the EU has a shared 1.300 km border with Russia. The fact that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are candidates for accession to the EU increases the importance of this Northern dimension even further. The Commission report does not ask for any new bureaucratic structures or financial instruments. The activities that it recommends should all be achieved in the framework of already existing bilateral cooperation agreements (such as the Europe Agreements with Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and the Cooperation agreement with Russia), multilateral cooperation agreements (regional organisations such as the Council of Baltic States and the Barents Euro Arctic Council), and existing financial instruments (such as the Tacis, Phare and Interreg programmes). Among others, the report sets out recommendations in the fields of cross-border cooperation and telecommunications.

Budget 1999: Compromise between Council and Parliament

On 24 November the Council of Ministers responsible for the EU budget had adopted a common position on the EU budget for 1999. As this position differed widely from the European Parliament's position, the two institutions had to come to an agreement during conciliation meetings. The agreement that was now reached includes among others increased funding for the Ariane and Kaleidoscope programmes and support to promote lesser used languages. At the European Parliament's plenary session in December, the rapporteur for the Parliament, Ms Dührkop Dührkop (Spain), welcomed the agreement, although she was not convinced of the immediate capacity of the Central and Eastern European countries to absorb the extra funding foreseen by the Council for the Phare programme.