COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

pursuant to the second subparagraph of Article 251 (2) of the EC Treaty

concerning the

common position of the Council on the adoption of a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through co-operation with third countries (Erasmus Mundus) (2004-2008)

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1. BACKGROUND

Date of transmission of the proposal to the EP and the Council (document COM(2002) 401 final – 2002/0165 COD):	18 July 2002
Date of the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee:	26 February 2003
Date of the opinion of the Committee of Regions:	9 April 2003
Date of the opinion of the European Parliament, first reading:	8 April 2003
Date of transmission of the amended proposal:	29 April 2003
Date of Council political agreement (by unanimity):	5 May 2003
Date of adoption of the common position:	16 June 2003

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE COMMISSION PROPOSAL

Based on article 149, the proposal seeks to establish a Community programme to enhance quality education by improving the perception of European higher education world-wide and by fostering co-operation with third countries. This future programme will improve the development of human resources and promote dialogue and understanding between peoples and cultures. As such, it will be a means to respond to the challenges faced by European higher education today, in particular the need to stimulate the process of convergence of degree structure and enhance attractiveness world wide. These are themes central to the Sorbonne/Bologna/Prague process and to national reform in higher education in several Member States.

3. COMMENTS ON THE COMMON POSITION

3.1. General remarks

The text of the common position is broadly acceptable to the Commission as it largely respects the substance of the Commission's original proposal.

– *Article 7 and the section on Selection Procedures in the Annex*

Article 7 of the common position enlarges the scope of measures to be adopted through the management procedure and includes the results of selections of all actions, other than Action 1, among those to be adopted through the advisory procedure.

In general, the Commission considers that the involvement of the Committee in the adoption of decisions concerning selection results does not necessarily add greater transparency to the management of the programme; it will solely make it more bureaucratic. Experience of project selection in other education programmes (such as Socrates) suggests that the impact of the management procedure on the outcome of selections would be negligible whilst at the same time adding significantly to the length of the procedure and the workload involved.

As indicated under 3.1 above, the main drawback of the common position in this regard is the inclusion of Action 1 - Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses - among the measures to be adopted through the management procedure.

Action 1 is based on the absolute respect of the competence of Member States on education matters. The Commission considers that the transparency of the selection process can be guaranteed and the opinions of Member States and their competent bodies be taken into account in that process without having recourse to the management procedure. This heavy procedure is not justified by the potential risks linked to the content of Action 1 nor by its prospective financial significance. The management procedure is likely to cause unnecessary delays in the implementation of the programme.

The section on Selection Procedures in the Annex, to which Article 7 refers, is more detailed in the common position than in the amended proposal. However, the Commission can accept this text as it is largely based on the explanatory memorandum accompanying its original proposal.

– *Action 4 - Enhancing Attractiveness*

The common position considerably simplifies the description of Action 4. This simplification does not alter the nature of the Action and makes the text clearer.

The Commission accepted a number of amendments from the Parliament concerning sections of the text under Action 4 that the common position suppresses. From the Commission's point of view, this is not a significant problem because the substance of these amendments can be adequately taken on board during the implementation phase. The Commission can therefore accept the text of the common position regarding Action 4.

4. CONCLUSION

The Commission considers that the text of the common position is a good basis for a European Parliament and Council decision, with the exception of the budget and the issue of committee procedures applicable to Action 1.