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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Communication on the implementation of the multiannual Community Programme to
make digital content in Europe more accessible, usable and exploitable
(The eContentplus Programme)**

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(Text with EEA relevance)

1. INTRODUCTION

This Communication has been established in response to a requirement laid down in Art. 5(3) of the “Decision n° 456/2005/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2005 establishing a multiannual Community programme to make digital content in Europe more accessible, usable and exploitable” (eContentplus programme) which states that the “Commission shall report on the implementation of the lines of action referred to in Article 1(2) to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions by mid-2006 at the latest. In this context, the Commission shall report on the consistency of the amount for 2007 to 2008 with the financial perspective.”

The Decision defines the financial framework for the programme in the following way (Article 6):

- The financial framework for the period from 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2008 is set at 149 M€.
- 55.6 M€ is provided for the period until 31 December 2006 (par. 1).
- For the period following 31 December 2006, the amount shall be deemed to be confirmed if it is consistent for this phase with the financial perspective in force for the period commencing in 2007 (par.2).

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE ECONTENTPLUS PROGRAMME

Europe's content sector plays a major role in the evolution towards an information and knowledge-based society and economy. The eContentplus programme will make digital content more accessible, usable and exploitable recognizing the large potential which the already existing digital content in Europe offers. It will facilitate the creation and diffusion of information at Community level. The programme contributes to the objectives of the Commission's policy announced in “i2010 – A European Information Society for growth and employment”, especially to the emergence of “high bandwidth communications, rich and diverse content and digital services”.

Three specific areas of public interest have been chosen in the programme for this purpose. A particularly large amount of data is available there, overall in the public sector. These areas are geographic information, educational content and cultural, scientific and scholarly content.

Geographic or spatial information offer a large potential for applications which affect every day's life; such data enable for example navigation systems, facilitate public transport management systems and allow better territory management. The situation on spatial information in Europe is characterised by fragmentation of datasets and sources, gaps in availability, lack of harmonisation and compatibility between datasets at different geographical scales and duplication of information collection. The programme has an enabling role in this respect as it will create better conditions for accessing, reusing and exploiting the digital material, based on which it will be possible to build added-value products and services across Europe.

Educational digital content already abounds in multiple formats on the web and in repositories. However, multiple barriers hamper an efficient re-use of such content for advanced educational purposes. For example, there is an incoherent use of technological solutions, or the organisational and pedagogical frameworks are often inadequate to support multilingual and multicultural access to, and use of digital content for learning. eContentplus will fund activities which make it easier for schools, universities, students, teachers and any other actors involved in the educational process to access and use educational content that fits their needs, languages and cultures. It will strive to create the necessary structures and conditions for the emergence of pan-European learning services, built on multilingual access and open for different educational and academic contexts.

In the area of cultural, scientific and scholarly content, the eContentplus programme can make a substantial contribution to the i2010 flagship initiative on Digital Libraries, which addresses the digitisation, online accessibility and preservation of Europe's cultural and scientific heritage. The Commission has announced that by 2010 at least 6 million digital objects will be made accessible and searchable through a single European access point. The eContentplus programme will co-fund projects which fit within the vision of the digital libraries initiative to give integrated access to cultural and scientific content and make it easier to use in the online environment. The projects will have a substantial European added-value and scope, addressing issues such as the interoperability between digitised collections in European cultural heritage institutions, and multilingual access to the relevant collections.

The programme is developing its activities in two phases in agreement with the financial framework specified in the programme decision. In the first two-year period a set of aggregated and enriched collections on a cross-country level will be created. In the second two-year period this basis will have to be expanded and systematized which will require a larger budget.

3. STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

eContentplus is implemented by the European Commission. The Member States are represented through the eContentplus Management Committee. Financial support is provided through grants and procurement actions.

3.1. Response to the 2005 call for proposals

A call for proposals was published on 10 September 2005. The response was very strong: 238 proposals were received (see the attached Annex). The total requested funding was 370 M€.

The evaluators ranked 28 proposals as excellent or very good. These 28 proposals requested a total funding of € 49,131,000. The available budget is € 27,900,000. It was therefore only possible to fund 19 of those proposals.

The proposals were evaluated according to the award criteria "Contribution to the aims of the action for the specific target area", "Approach and working arrangements", "Quality of the resources" and "Multilingual and multicultural aspects".

In the area of **geographic information** 3 projects were selected for funding. One of these projects is EuroGeoNames (EGN). It aims at developing an interoperable service that will link official geographic names information into an integrated, multilingual European application. The proposal fully addresses the objectives of the work programme as it aggregates on cross-border level geographic information held in national databases. A strong consortium with highly recognised expertise and experience has proved its capacity to ensure high quality working arrangements in a multilingual and multicultural context.

The response to the call shows great demand in the area of **educational content**; 3 projects will be funded. These proposals have the potential to contribute to the emergence of pan-European learning services enabling multilingual and multicultural use and re-use of better accessible digital content for learning. For example, the CITER project (Creation of a European History Textbook Repository) aims at the creation of a digital European history textbook base, with the focus on secondary education. The proposal shows a very strong European dimension as it can have significant impact on the way in which history is understood and taught. It can help to overcome conceptions built on national perspectives and could support the promotion of the European dimension of shared experiences in education. The work plan is well structured and shows a clear conception of the tasks to be implemented. The partnership relies on excellent expertise and resources. Multilingual and multicultural aspects are in the focus of this proposal.

The largest number of proposals was received in the area of **cultural and scientific/scholarly content**; 8 proposals were selected for funding. The "European Digital Library" project (EDL), which has been selected, is the backbone for developing the i2010 flagship initiative on Digital Libraries as it extends the infrastructure for co-operation of European national libraries by adding new partners and by aggregating more library resources to the existing web portal ("The European Library"). EDL will have considerable Europe-wide impact as it will increase cross-border re-use of the national libraries' holdings. An excellent consortium assembles the required expertise.

Another example is the DISMARC project (DIScovering Music ARChives) whose aim is to enable users to identify the audio recordings held by major European broadcasting corporations, archives and institutes which store a large quantity of the European music audio heritage. Information on these recordings is currently hardly publicly accessible. The Consortium presents a very well balanced composition of competences; management processes and working arrangements are clearly depicted. The proposal has a very strong multicultural dimension.

5 **thematic networks** were also selected for funding. They will have clear roles in raising awareness on the benefits of using already existing standards by promoting best practices; they bring together key experts in the respective areas (educational and cultural content and Public Sector Information).

The eContentplus programme has raised significant attention of the eContent stakeholders – public administration, cultural institutions such as museums, institutes, libraries and academia, universities and schools, private companies, publishers, ICT providers, associations and networks of organizations – throughout Europe.

This interest and involvement will grow yet further as the programme is implemented, through the contacts between the Commission and stakeholders, the activities of funded projects and the setting up of thematic networks which will bring distinct stakeholders together.

3.2. Implementing the experience gained in the 2005 call for proposals

The call 2006 builds on the experience of the year 2005. In view of the available budget, the aim is to receive a much smaller number of proposals of very high quality.

The requirements for the proposals have been targeted at this objective. Further clarification has been given of what is needed to make a high quality project: including content providers in the consortium, ensuring the availability of a critical mass of content, identifying user needs and making project results usable on a wide scale.

The range of actions has also been defined bearing in mind the priorities following the first evaluation exercise. Educational content focuses on content used for face-to-face and distance learning in the formal education system; cultural and scientific/scholarly content focuses on the development of interoperable digital libraries, linking up different types of content held by libraries, museums and archives.

4. FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE

Following the Interinstitutional agreement on the new financial framework signed on 17 May, the Commission has presented its "revised package", adapting existing and proposed legislation where necessary to give effect to the agreement. The amount foreseen in this package for eContentplus for the period 2005 – 2008 is 149 M€, exactly the amount provided for in the decision.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The response to the 2005 call for proposals, both in terms of quantity and quality, shows that there is substantial unmet demand from digital content stakeholders.

The amount provided for in the programme decision for the period 2007 – 2008 is necessary in order to further build up the actions started in 2005 and to achieve the full impact of the programme (notably in the field of digital libraries).

The amount of the financial provision set out in the programme decision for the period from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2008 – 93.4 M€ - is consistent for this phase with the financial perspective in force for the period commencing in 2007.

Annex:
Summary of proposals evaluated

Target Area / Action	Proposals evaluated¹
Geographic information	
3.1.1 Promoting the enabling infrastructure - Targeted Projects	29
3.2.2 Stimulating geographic content enrichment - A Thematic Network	4
Educational content	
4.2.1 Stimulating educational content enrichment - Content Enrichment Projects	56
4.2.2 Stimulating educational content enrichment - Thematic Networks	8
Cultural and scientific/scholarly content	
5.1.1 Promoting the enabling infrastructure - Targeted Projects	58
5.2.1 Stimulating cultural and scientific/scholarly content enrichment - Content Enrichment Projects	61
5.2.2 Stimulating cultural and scientific/scholarly content enrichment - Thematic Networks	16
Reinforcing cooperation between digital content stakeholders	
6.1.1 Public Sector Information - A Thematic Network	3
TOTAL	235

¹ 3 Proposals were non-eligible and therefore not included in the evaluation process.