

Speaking Points Rhodes 11 May 2007
A first evaluation of the new management of the programme

Happy to provide a first evaluation of the management of the new programme. Mrs Boon-Falleur has explained the objectives of the programme. It is clear that town twinning fits perfectly to achieve those objectives. Town twinning is a tool to create lasting friendships and solidarity among European citizens, and that is exactly what the European Union is about.

Before I go into detail on some of the new management elements of the programme, let me first show you some general facts and figures. In Europe we have some 30.000 twinning relations, which is a significant number. The European Union financially supports their twinning meetings, but given their great number it is clear that she can not financially support them all.

With a budget of some 11 to 13 Million Euro we can do a lot but not everything. If we look at 2006 figures, I believe however that the impact is important. Last year, according to the organisers of selected projects, some half a million European citizens participated. That means invited guests and participants from the organising towns. Now 500.000 citizens on a total of 500 million European citizens is of course still small, but over a period of say 10 years the theoretical number of 5 million becomes impressive. A number of Member States have populations much lower than that.

If I take again the example of last year, we had some 2500 applications but were only able to support 50%. One could not say that the 50% which were not selected were bad. Not at all! But with the limited budget there simply was no more room for them. We would like to be able to increase the success rate. The question is how. An increase in the budget would be the most obvious, but I don't see that happening in the near future.

With the minimum number of invited persons as low as 10, participation at the twinning events, that have received a grant, varies between some 20 participants and several hundreds¹. The grant which we provide varies as a consequence between as little as 1000 Euro and as high as 20.000 euro.

If we want to increase the success rate may be should focus at the European level more at the twinning meetings with a larger participation. Incidentally, these twinning meetings are also more in need of additional European support than a twinning where our contribution is only 1000 or 2000 Euros. In the latter case local authorities can much easier find those amounts in their own budget.

Now the European support, be it big or small, will only be helpful if it is provided through simple procedures. For the new programme the Agency, together with the Commission, has introduced a number of measures which should simplify and speed up the procedures. I would like to mention just a few:

- a programme guide which establishes the deadlines for applications up to the end of the programme in 2013;
- a grant decision instead of a contract which speeds up the procedure with an average of 1 month²;
- all grants based on lump sums. I.e. payments based on the number of participants instead of detailed budgets. Time gained again on average a month. And
- we hope to have by the summer an online application ready. For those who want that, they can send in their application electronically. We are working on a form which should automatically calculate the level of the grant and thus reduce the risks of error. Again here, time saved will be on average a month.

The result of these measures will be that we can quicker inform the applicants whether their project has been selected and quicker ensure the payment. Also as a result of these simplifications we will for the first time be able to cover the full year. In November this year we will

¹ Bilateral meeting between Le Plessis Bouchard (Ile de France) and Niederstetten (Baden Wurtemberg) 550 participants of which 200 invited.

² 763 contracts sent after the event.

select the twinning meetings taking place between 1 January 2008 and 31 March 2008 (up to now this period was never covered).

As regards the applications, we note that still a lot of mistakes are made with some of the formal information necessary, and in particular the bank details of the organisor and the legal identity forms. Both documents are crucial for receiving a grant. If they are not there, or not properly filled out, the central financial services refuse the grant.

If we had followed the rules for our first selection this year, 200 out of 800 applications would not have been eligible, because of wrong information on these two elements. We have been flexible and contacted all 200 organisers asking to correct their forms. This has taken my team 3 weeks, delaying the selection to the detriment of others who filled everything out properly. We are working on model forms for both, the bank account form and legal identity, to help organisers in the filling out of these forms. In return we will ask for understanding that we will apply in the future the rules as they are. That means those who make a mistake are unfortunately out.

To conclude: the overall result - half a million participants - looks promising. And, with the new measures, we hope that we will further simplify the procedure for beneficiaries, to ensure an easy support for a great European action. (At the same time we need to reflect how best to use the limited European resources.)

I thank you,

MJ