



*European Communities
Commission
Background Report*

20 Kensington Palace Gardens
London W8 4QQ
Telephone: 01-727 8090

March 16, 1978

A MOVE TO GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Proposals to set up a European Foundation

How can the Community make an impact on the ordinary citizen, not merely as the arbiter of the price of butter, but as a real community of peoples as the founding fathers desired? With no flag, no common currency and no, as yet, common passport, the Community has no physical focus to give people a sense of belonging.

To remedy this lack, Mr Leo Tindemans, in his report on European Union (1) two years ago, urged the setting up of a European Foundation, to be independent of existing Community institutions, and designed to promote 'greater understanding among our peoples'. 'The fact that our countries have a common destiny is not enough', he wrote; 'This fact must also be seen to exist'.

Towards the end of last year the Commission sent a report (2) to the Council of Ministers discussing the practical implications of Mr Tindeman's proposals. In early December the European Council of Heads of State and Governments approved the establishment of the Foundation, in principle in Dublin. The Commission has now followed this up with concrete proposals (3) for further consideration by the Council of Ministers.

Objectives

The Commission believes that the Foundation should start in a modest way, but with clearly defined objectives. To begin with its activities should be concentrated within the Community, and priority given to improving contact between groups and individuals not normally offered such opportunities. Such activities should be closely linked with improved language training although here, as in other programmes, the Foundation's role would be to initiate rather than manage them directly.

In practical terms this means that the Foundation would support schemes involving residential courses, summer schools, job-to-job exchanges, voluntary service in Community countries, and town twinning arrangements, with the prime object of developing greater appreciation of their common heritage.

The Commission envisages that the Foundation would also help journalists and others working in the media interested in its aims, with particular emphasis on the learning of Community languages.

-
- (1) EC Bulletin, Supplement 1/76
 - (2) EC Bulletin, Supplement 5/77
 - (3) Communication, COM(78) 51 final, 8 February 1978

.../

At first, however, the Foundation would concentrate on providing exchange opportunities for young people, particularly early school leavers and young workers, and the handicapped.

The Commission emphasises that the Foundation's work must not duplicate national programmes in the field, but considers there are many gaps in such programmes which the Foundation could usefully fill.

Structure

The Commission argues that to do its work properly the Foundation must have a high degree of autonomy, particularly as it envisages funding from both public and private sources. Thus, though the governing body or Council would obviously consist of members appointed by the member States and Community institutions, the Commission proposes that these members should be allowed to co-opt other individuals, chosen because of their special qualifications.

The Council would take the main decisions and draw up a multi-annual programme. It would appoint a President from among its members and an Executive Committee of at least 9 members, responsible for seeing that the programmes were carried out.

The Foundation would be financed from three sources: (i) from the Community Budget, starting (the Commission suggests) at 5 million European units of account (approximately £3.5m), and rising over two years to 20 meua (£13.5m); (ii) from government subsidies, and (iii) from private contributions. The latter might come from other foundations concerned nationally with similar work.

A modest beginning

The Commission recognises that to start with the Foundation will have to experiment and that its activities will be modest. As it pointed out in its report last year, however, there are many areas in the exchange of ideas where the Foundation could play a useful and stimulating role. Its establishment could, at least, contribute to the better understanding among peoples of the Community that Mr Tindeman called for.

+

+

+