

16/20

During the negotiations on European Political Union, the Netherlands government tabled a proposal for the text of a section on culture. The text adopted at the Maastricht Summit on 9 and 10 December 1991 was partly based on that proposal. It consists of two parts, one of which deals with the possibilities and limitations of an EC cultural policy. Paragraph 4 is of particular importance in that it specifies that the Community must take account of cultural aspects in the implementation of other Treaty provisions.

Furthermore, the proposal specifies, in an addition to Article 92, paragraph III of the EC Treaty, that the member states are to retain the right to pursue and finance a national cultural policy. Such financial measures may not, however, disturb internal Community relations to a degree that is detrimental to Community interests. It is clear from this that restrictions on national cultural policies may be imposed only on weighty grounds.

The thrust of the proposal is that the Community should contribute to the preservation and development of the cultures and languages of the individual states, taking due account of their national and regional diversity. This may be expected to bestow a more balanced quality on Community activities as a whole. The cultural activities undertaken by the Community are expected to remain on a modest scale, concentrated mainly on the exchange of knowledge and experience. Where it proceeds to the harmonisation of regulations and laws, this will be solely on the basis of Article 100A.

It was agreed that in the realisation of promotional measures, the European Parliament will have the right to be consulted in matters pertaining to the Community's cultural policy. Decisions on such matters will require unanimity in the Council of Ministers.

Social welfare

In the absence of a social welfare council, decisions on questions of this nature are mostly taken in the Education Council, the Social Council and the Health Council. The Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs takes an active part in the formulation of policy.

Over the past few years the Ministry has concerned itself with the effects of European integration in 1992. As it looks at the moment, it will have few immediate consequences for policy. One area in which the effects will be noticeable is the treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers. The relaxing of border controls and changes in residence rights will have a direct impact on national policy on these matters.

Indirectly, however, there are many points of contact with Community developments, such as youth work and the care of the elderly, family care, provisions for the handicapped, sport policy, EC poverty programmes and the policy on ethnic minorities.

The Netherlands' contribution to EC social policy contains three principal elements. First, it seeks to ensure that its relatively wide range of social welfare services remains intact. Second, in response to the increasing interest displayed by other member states in the relevant Dutch laws and regulations, the policies underlying them and the methods evolved to implement them, the Netherlands makes available its knowledge and experience in bilateral and EC contexts. Third, it