NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Petition 0696/2010 by F.J.O.A (Spanish), on European funding for the 'Caras de Bélmez' Museum

1. Summary of petition

The petitioner indicates that an information centre regarding the 'Bélmez Faces' is to be set up in Bélmez de la Moraleda (Jaén). The municipality of Bélmez became famous throughout Spain when strange faces began to appear on the walls of a private house. This singular occurrence has been investigated by Spanish scientists from the CSIC (Spanish National Research Council), who concluded that the pictures were being produced by using pigments and oils, while others maintain that they are a supernatural phenomenon. The petitioner considers it an outrage that €587,000 in European funding has been earmarked for the museum under the Sierra Mágina local operational project.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 22 October 2010. Information requested from Commission under Rule 202(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 11 February 2011.

Following a request for information by the Commission, the managing authority of the ERDF Operational Programme Andalusia 2007-13 has confirmed that the project 'Centro de Interpretación de la Caras de Bélmez' has been selected for ERDF funding under priority axis 5 (urban and local sustainable development) of this programme. The ERDF assistance amounts to EUR 587,552 from a total cost of EUR 858,000.

The draft project has been prepared by the municipality of Bélmez de la Moraleda (1,835
inhabitants). Once approved, it will be managed by the Diputación de Jaén (provincial council). It is expected that the works will start around April 2011. Besides the exhibition hall or the museum itself, the projected infrastructure will include a conference room and a polyvalent area, as well as administrative services.

This project is part of a broader strategy implemented by the Diputación de Jaén aiming at developing this rural area in Andalucia by attracting sustainable and quality tourism and thus diversifying its economy, highly dependent on olive tree culture. Indeed, the so-called 'Proyecto Operativo Local Sierra Mágina' – included in the Sustainable Tourism Programme 'Mágina Mágica, Asómate' adopted by the Junta de Andalucía in 2007 – consists of 52 projects spread all over the area.

The project has been promoted by the town council with the unanimous support of all political parties. The construction of the interpretation centre itself is complemented by a tourist itinerary around the village.

As regards the socio-economic impact of the project, it has been estimated that the construction of the centre will create 12 jobs during 8 months and the tourist itinerary will create 10 jobs during 4 months. Once they are operational, the projects will create at least one direct job and several indirect jobs.