

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0005/03
pursuant to Rule 42 of the Rules of Procedure
by Geneviève Fraisse, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group
to the Commission

Subject: The creation of an international instrument governing cultural diversity

The increasing liberalisation of trade and the impact of technological convergence are posing a threat to the pluralism of artistic and cultural expression. At first, in the 1990s, culture and the audiovisual sphere were the subject of a legally binding derogation, i.e. they were excluded from the scope of trade negotiations. That derogation is being called into question in the WTO. Between now and 31 March 2003, the WTO member countries will table their initial liberalisation offers. In Europe, the first voices calling for the liberalisation of the cultural sector are now making themselves heard.

Today, the debate focuses not just on cultural diversity as a political objective, but also on the use of legal instruments to safeguard cultural diversity. Governmental working parties have been set up (Franco-Québécois Working Party on cultural diversity, International Network of Ministers on cultural policy). A series of declarations in support of cultural diversity and one international instrument have been adopted (Council of Europe in 2000, UNESCO in 2001, ministers attending the Summits of French-speaking nations in Cotonou in 2001 and Beirut in 2002). Professionals from the cultural sector have formed groupings (Watchdog Committee, Canadian Coalition for Cultural Diversity, International Network for Cultural Diversity) to defend the right of States to implement independent cultural policies. The European Union reiterated its determination to safeguard the cultural policies of its Member States during the multilateral WTO negotiations held in 1994 and 1999.

In the light of the above, can the Commission state:

1. How it intends to take part in the current debate on the establishment of an international instrument governing cultural diversity, the aim of which would be to recognise the right of States freely to draw up their own cultural policies and to adopt measures to support artistic creativity and diversity?
2. Does it plan to carry out a legal study into the status of such an international instrument, which might be autonomous, i.e. independent of any international body, and which might be endowed with binding legal force (management body, follow-up and dispute settlement mechanism)?
3. How can the work of such an international instrument be coordinated with that of the WTO?

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Deadline for reply: 10.02.2003