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FROM THESPIANS TO DEATH RAYS: FUNDING SURPRISES FROM THE EU GRANTS LIST

By Dr Lee Rotherham

There is very little information in the public domain about who receives EU grants. The European Commission has historically been extremely unwilling to make that information available. That has changed recently with the publication of a basic list of organisations receiving EU grants, although getting the full details still requires a formal request to the Commission.

Many examples of absurd EU spending are given in the new book *The Great European Rip-Off* by Matthew Elliott and David Craig. This report serves to highlight some of the more bizarre ways in which British taxpayers' money has been spent.

In 2007, Britain paid £9 billion to the EU Treasury¹; it received £4.3 billion back in grants.² As this report details, some of this has been spent on projects of questionable value, calling into question once again the net value of EU membership.

Key points

- £137,000 (€200,000) was spent on a carnival³
- Over £68,000 (€100,000) was spent on promotional free gifts in connection with EU PR campaigns
- £460,000 (€670,000) went on training in spin for EU officials
- £1.4 million (€2 million) is going on a programme to define God

¹ Including the Fountainebleau Rebate

² <http://www.global-vision.net/perspectives11.asp>

³ All € to £ conversions are based on an average 2007 exchange rate of 0.68493



Dr Lee Rotherham, TPA EU Policy Analyst, said:

"Taxpayers' money should not be spent on EU propaganda or on bizarre things like defining God. We need far greater clarity and openness about how our money is spent. If the public could see the full details, it would be far harder for Brussels to sign off on wild schemes, or fund pet projects."

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Introduction

In a commendable display of openness, the EU has started to reveal some details on where a number of its grants are awarded.⁴

The list is partial and does not represent complete transparency. It does allow for a better understanding of EU grants than was possible before, though. The entries for some grants raise more questions than they answer. For instance, it is unclear why the Joint Research Centre spent £4,000 to buy insulation boxes and labels for packaging, so it could ship "non-nuclear reference materials" under cooled conditions.

The following list identifies a number of case studies of the more bizarre and frivolous grants, along with many that attempt to buy support for EU integration with taxpayers' money.

The Grants

Case Number 1	The International Federation of Actors
£103,072 (€150,485)	Changing gender portrayal: promoting employment opportunities for women in the performing arts

The International Federation of Actors (FIA) is a stage door trade union. Between September 2007 and December 2008, a large amount of public money was provided by the Commission in the context of the *European Year of Equal Opportunities for All*:

*"For this project, it was decided to address the discrimination issue from the perspective of older female performers, whose employment opportunities are limited because of their gender and age. The European Commission acknowledged that these are grounds for discrimination that should be addressed at European level. Performers' trade unions have a crucial role in combating gender stereotypes, through close and on-going cooperation with all media and entertainment institutions. The results of such cooperation should contribute to presenting a realistic picture of the skills and potential of women in modern society and avoid further portrayal of women in a degrading, offensive or non-realistic manner, in theatre and television, which are all medias with powerful educational vocation."*⁵

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/beneficiaries/fts/index_en.htm

⁵ <http://www.fia-actors.com/en/projects.html>

Funding went towards more research, and a conference. One of the key speakers was Carol Tongue, Chairman of the UK Coalition for Cultural Diversity, but also a long-serving former MEP.

Given that the EU also funds church bodies such as COMECE, this suggests that the Commission is interested in both the actress and the bishop.

Case Number 2	The BBC World Service Trust
£626,240 (€914,313)	Mobilising the Media in Support of Women's and Children's Rights in Central Asia
£465,612 (€679,796)	Support for Palestinian media sector with focus on building sustainable mechanisms for professional development of journalists and media professionals
£239,065 (€349,036)	Strengthening disaster prevention and resilience: Developing media and NGO capacity to increase

The BBC World Service Trust is a recipient of EU funds. While it may use those funds to support worthy causes, donations to an organisation linked to the BBC raise concerns about what safeguards are in place to ensure that EU backing for this corporate charity does not influence how employees of the BBC view, and portray, the European Commission.

Case Number 3	The Centerprise Trust
£136,678 (€199,550)	FREEDOM

The Centerprise Trust was part of a consortium that was awarded a large sum of money "to use the carnival and celebration to enable European citizens to better access and understand the history and creativity of people of African descent, and will thus foster intercultural dialogue through enjoyment". Its Danish partner runs the Aalborg carnival.

Other funding was supplied to Brouhaha International for the "Triangular Stories" project. £95,890 (€139,999) was handed over to allow fifteen artists from nine European countries to gather in Liverpool for three weeks' worth of giving workshops for cultural organisations and community groups. The artists came from the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Turkey, Poland, Germany, France and Greece.⁶

⁶ http://www.brouhaha.uk.com/international_page.php?id=4

Case Number 4	Middlesex University
£55,716 (€81,345)	European Masters in Drug and Alcohol Studies

Middlesex University runs courses for a European Masters in Drug and Alcohol Studies.⁷ The course background explains;

"The use and misuse of drugs and alcohol has become a major concern for most European governments and has strengthened the call for a European approach as well as national responses to tackling the problems. There has been a considerable expansion of research and data gathering in many countries and European level action plans and strategies have been produced."

It continues,

"Comparative European research is an under-developed area and existing programmes at Masters level do not adopt a European perspective as their primary focus. The European scope is important: drug problems are not only a local or national issue any more but have European and international ramifications: issues include, drug trafficking across borders, mobility of drug users, spread of information, trends and fashions through the internet, etc. Although drug policy and laws are mainly within the national government remit, European cooperation at all levels assures a certain approximation of both national legislation and practice. The growth of scientific cooperation is a key element of these developments and the European perspective opens opportunities for collaboration between policy makers, practitioners, researchers and other stakeholders."

This suggests that EU funding is being spent on an area not because it is simply of academic merit, but because there is an ulterior political motive: taking more of a role in this policy area away from national governments.

⁷ http://www.mdx.ac.uk/schools/hssc/courses/emdas/emdas_home.asp

Case Number 5	Forward Ladies
£62,270 (€90,915)	Forward Ladies Ltd

Forward Ladies is a businesswomen's association. However, EU money funds Forward Ladies Europe. This aims at introducing key people from "the North's premier women's networking and business support group" to the EU. This includes (in addition to opportunities for straightforward business connections) visits to the Commission and European Parliament.

This might not be a concern if handled factually and with both sides of the debate being expressed. Unfortunately, the project website bluntly explains,

"In fact ladies, you will be our European Ambassadors, and if you agree, we will put information about you and your company on our website, and other ladies can ask you questions about the EU."⁸

This suggests that tax money is being used to bribe people to speak up in favour of the EU political project.

Case Number 6	How's the form?
£22,055 (€32,200)	Northern Ireland Women's European Platform

A similar case is the EU funding for this body, an Ulster women's lobby group. It has close links to the European Women's Lobby, and engages closely with the European Commission.⁹

⁸ <http://www.forwardladies.com/forward-ladies-europe>

⁹ <http://www.niwep.org.uk/>

Public money is also being spent on freebies designed to promote the EU.

Case Number 7	Promotional free gifts
£45,928 (€67,054) 4 payments	ANOKIMOBİ LTD
	No details are currently available from the Commission on this company (despite repeated requests for data), but it makes a large variety of freebie items.
£9,154 (€13,366) 3 payments	ONE STOP PROMOTIONS LIMITED
	Pin badges and banner display units for distribution in Northern Ireland and Scotland at public events. Pencils, rubbers and T shirts for students as part of the "Opportunity Europe 2007" programme of events in Belfast. Pencils, clocks, mousemats, keyfobs, stickers, tote bags, rulers for distribution when EU officials visit schools and colleges in Northern Ireland.
£8,498 (€12,407) 4 payments	OCCASIONAL GIFTS LIMITED
	Promotional key rings for teachers to hand out to students in the UK. Backpacks to be handed out by "Ambassadors" during visits to London schools. Purchase of conference folders and fridge magnets for distribution at public events where the EU will be present.
£3,751 (€5,477) 2 payments	SPOILT FOR CHOICE LTD
	Reception co-funded with the Goethe Institute to open an EU film festival. Reception co-funded with the organisers of the Spitalfields Festival as part of the Year of Intercultural Dialogue.
£3,698 (€5,399) 2 payments	AIMBRAND/ARMBAND MARKETING LTD¹⁰
	Promotional USB memory sticks for distribution at various events where the EU is visiting schools or schools are visiting the Representation in Ireland (Armband). Promotional pin badges for distribution in Wales, for instance the Eisteddfods (Aimbrand).
£1,613 (€2,355)	PI COMMUNICATION LIMITED
	Video podcast of a student EU Mock Council event in Belfast, organised with the British Council. Part of the annual series of EU Mock Councils.

¹⁰ It is not clear whether *Armbrand Marketing* and *Aimbrand Marketing* as listed by the Commission are different companies or a typo

Case Number 8	Free meals as part of the EU PR strategy
£588 (€858)	THE MUSTARD SEED (RESTAURANTS) LIMITED
£445 (€650) 2 payments	DINNERD (THE BROADWAY) LIMITED

Delegates on an EU fisheries jolly called *Mare Nostrum* dined in the Mustard Seed as part of a Brussels PR package for people from the (normally highly-critical) fishing industry. This appears to be part of the "Our European Seas" project, designed to encourage people to believe in the benefits of the Common Fisheries Policy and treating fish as shared resources rather than implementing national controls.

The lunches at the Dinnerd were for students attending a citizenship summer school, and for students from the LSE. These were organised as part of the Plan D process, charged with limiting fallout from the defeat of the EU constitution in referendums in a number of member states, but in fact providing political cover for resubmitting the texts.

Case Number 9	University of Oxford
£1,369,677 (€1,999,733)	Explaining Religion

In 2007 Oxford University received at total of £10,162,620 (€14,837,458) in EU grants.

Of this, a surprising £1.4 million went into the Explaining Religion programme (EXREL). The EXREL project is a three-year initiative that "seeks to understand both what is universal and cross-culturally variant in religious traditions as well as the cognitive mechanisms that undergird religious thinking and behaviour". It brings together the world's leading centres for psychological, biological, anthropological, and historical research on religion.¹¹

The project has four principal scientific objectives. These are:

1. To characterize precisely the main elements of the universal religious repertoire and the extent of its variation.
2. To establish the principal causes of the universal religious repertoire.
3. To account for variations in the degree of elaboration (and emphasis) of each element of the repertoire in different religious traditions, contemporaneously and historically.

¹¹ <http://www.icea.ox.ac.uk/cam/projects/exrel/>

4. To develop models for simulating future courses of transformation in specified religious systems.

In other words, The EU is funding Oxford University to the tune of £1.4 million to analyse religious trends. It is unclear how this fits with the EU's objectives, unless the EU intends to pursue the European Court of Justice's infamous ruling that 'Euroscepticism is akin to blasphemy'.

Case Number 10	Europe Direct
£16,438 (€24,000)	The London Press Club Limited

Europe Direct operates an adjunct of the European Commission's information network, a distribution server for its publications, and a service provider for pro-EU speakers.¹²

A number of its activities are directed at informing journalists. Some critics of EU integration are occasionally invited as speakers, but the balance is clearly in favour of pro-EU speakers.

Case Number 11	Political consultancy
£458,565 (€669,507) 4 grants	Consilia Ltd* Support in the Implementation of the Eures Information and Communications Strategy

Consilia is clearly European Commission's preferred consultancy in Britain. It is retained on a long-term contract to provide media training for senior Commission personnel.¹³

Consilia "also advises on the handling of complex and intractable communications issues, including crisis communication and information management", though whether it does so for the Commission is unclear.

Why such a large amount of money needs to be spent on PR training for senior management who never get interviewed about job mobility (the subject matter of the Eures programme) is difficult to explain. The implication is that the Eures budget line is being improperly used to support EU PR training in other fields.

Case Number 12	International affiliations
£5,353 (€7,815)	Membership to the International Lead & Zinc Study Group

¹² <http://www.europedirect-london.org.uk/events.html>

¹³ <http://www.consilia.co.uk/index.html>

The European Commission is a “member country” of this United Nations body,¹⁴ whereas Britain isn’t. This clearly demonstrates that the EU is developing a role in international diplomacy with a status similar to that of a country in its own right (see our forthcoming paper on EU diplomats).

Case Number 13	The Light Fantastic
£5,479 (€8,000)	Supply of Fast Light Pulser

Photek Ltd was given a grant for this device. Whether it was for an office disco, or for strapping onto the EU’s Galileo satellite system to be used by a bald man with a white cat, remains less than certain.

¹⁴ <http://www.ilzsg.org/static/home.aspx>