

## **The European Agenda for Culture** **Background note prepared by Culture Action Europe**

### **1. Background information**

From early on in 2006, the European Commission (EC) had indicated a desire for an ambitious *European agenda for culture*, which would build on the result of a commissioned report on the 'Economy of Culture'<sup>1</sup> and on the added profile for cultural actions that the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 was expected to bring.

In September 2006 the Commission launched an online consultation to gather the sector's expectations for a future *European agenda for culture*. Over 200 organisations and individuals responded, but the consultation showed a clear predominance of contributors from the older Member States.

On 4 December 2006, as the second step of its consultation on the future Communication, Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) held a public hearing entitled *Culture: a sound investment for Europe*. In addition to revealing some of the objectives to be pursued by the Communication, the meeting proved to be a public platform where the European Commission demonstrated its political commitment to push forward, during the German and Portuguese presidencies, an ambitious political paper. Both President Barroso and Commissioner Figel' made very strong speeches in favour of an enhanced place for culture in the EU and Director General Odile Quintin committed herself to support the development of a representative consultative body of the civil society named, at the time, European cultural agora.

Early 2007, as a final step before publication, DG EAC led an interservice consultation during which all Directorates General (DGs) of the Commission could comment and input in the final document. This exercise proved to be very successful in raising the DGs' interest in cultural matters. However, in order to reach a consensus between the different DGs, it has also lowered the initial ambitions of the document.

The *Communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalising world* was published by the EC on the 10th of May 2007 after having been approved by the college of Commissioners on the same day. One of the strongest proposals of the EC in its Communication is to set up an Open Method of Coordination in the field of culture. This flexible soft law mechanism, to be embedded in the European Council work plan, has already been used in other fields of weak or complementary EU competence like education, youth or social affairs.

<sup>1</sup> *The Economy of Culture in Europe*, study prepared for the European Commission (DG EAC) by KEA European Affairs, October 2006

Another important strand of the Communication is devoted to improving dialogue with European civil society.

On the 26th and 27th of September 2007, 400 participants took part in the first *Cultural Forum for Europe*, an initiative which results directly from the Communication on Culture's proposals to implement a 'structured dialogue' with civil society. Organised by the Portuguese presidency, the event took place just before an Informal meeting of the EU Ministries of Culture. During their November 2007 meeting, the same Ministers adopted the objectives and instruments proposed by the EC. The Council resolution on the *European agenda for culture* brings to a close the long negotiation and consultation process launched by the Commission early 2006.

### **2. The EC's Communication on Culture**

#### General objectives:

1. *Promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue;*
2. *Promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs;*
3. *Promotion of culture as a vital element in the EU's international relations.*

#### Responsibilities of the different actors:

1. *Member States and their regions:* developing their policies and joint activities through the Open Method of Coordination, explore existing opportunities in EU funding;
2. *Civil society:* engaging in a dialogue with EU institutions and supporting the development of new EU policies and actions, developing a dialogue amongst civil society actors;
3. *European Commission:* mobilising internal and external policies as well as Community funding programmes, playing a role of animation and establishing a dialogue with the different actors.

#### Proposed actions and instruments:

1. *Dialogue with the sector*
2. *The Open Method of Coordination*
3. *Mainstreaming culture in all relevant policies*

### 3. The Open Method of Coordination

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) is becoming increasingly important as a new mode of governance in the European Union. It is used in policy areas, where the EU has no or few legislative competences, but where coordination between Member States is nevertheless seen as essential.

The Open Method rests on soft law mechanisms such as guidelines and indicators, benchmarking and sharing of best practice. The method's effectiveness relies on peer pressure ('naming and shaming').

The OMC generally works in stages:

- First, the Council of Ministers agrees on (often very broad) policy goals.
- Member States then transpose guidelines into national and regional policies.
- Thirdly, specific benchmarks and indicators to measure best practice are agreed upon.
- Finally, results are monitored and evaluated. However, depending on the policy area, shorter or longer reporting periods are set and enforcement mechanisms may be harder or softer

The OMC is intergovernmental in nature in opposition to the so-called Community method. Consequently the involvement of the European Parliament and of the European Court of Justice in the OMC processes is very weak.

Application in both Educational and Social policy areas has shown that the OMC can be effective in raising awareness of the need for action, and can mobilise national politicians. In a policy area with no legislative opportunities, such as in Culture—there are few alternatives to the OMC.

The key weakness of the OMC is in the non-binding nature of the process, with no penalties for those countries that do not progress on an agreed path. There is also no agreed protocol for the transparency or participation of the process, making it possibly difficult and time-consuming for NGOs to follow and make a contribution.

Following the Culture Council work plan, OMC experts working groups will focus on the following topics:

1. the mobility of artists and other professionals
2. the mobility of collections
3. stronger synergies between culture and education
4. EUROSTAT statistical working group on culture
5. cultural and creative industries

Each group will have to provide a mid-term report by July 2009 and a final report in 2010.

### 4. A structured dialogue with civil society

To implement their *European Agenda for Culture*, EU Member States and the European Commission have recognised the importance of a continuous structured dialogue with civil society. They have also acknowledged the role of a number of representative networks and platforms at European level, such as Culture Action Europe, and of their capacity to bridge to the wider sector by ways of information and mobilisation.

In parallel to the Member States nominating experts for a range of thematic intergovernmental working groups, cultural organisations are to group together in three Platforms. Drawing on the experience of the Culture Action Europe/ECF initiated Platform for Intercultural Europe (the Rainbow Platform), a second platform around the topic 'access to culture' and a third on cultural industries were set up with basic Commission sponsorship. Even if this Commission's initiative has been recognized by the cultural sector as an opportunity to improve its standing in the EU, the concrete proposal took many by surprise and raised questions of sustainability, accessibility and transparency.

A call for expression of interest to participate in the two new platforms (access to culture and creative industries) was launched and the Commission received over 200 contributions. They selected around 30 organisations to take part in each platform and the platforms met for the first time in Brussels beginning of June.

The new platforms decided to organise their work in thematic sub groups.

The 'Access to Culture' Platform has three sub-groups:

- Creation/production
- Participation/audience
- Education/learning

The 'Cultural and Creative Industries' Platform has five sub groups:

- Regulatory environment
- Support for Small Medium-sized Enterprises development
- Exchange/export
- Circulation of works and artists
- The interface between artistic creation and the cultural industries

The Platforms are to prepare a first draft of policy recommendations to be presented to a broader civil society audience at the next Cultural Forum in the autumn 2009.