

## **“Culture and the Policies of Change”**

**Brussels, 6-7 September 2010**

**Opening remarks by Gabriella BATTAINI-DRAGONI  
Director General of Education, Culture & Heritage, Youth & Sport**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A new policy for culture or a new cultural policy? A change of culture or a new culture? A culture that is marked by change? It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2<sup>nd</sup> CultureWatchEurope Conference on “Culture and the Policies of Change” where we will spend two days exploring this evolving dynamic.

The Council of Europe’s CultureWatchEurope initiative promotes culture as “the soul of democracy”. It is devised to pinpoint developments, difficulties, and good practices so that cultural governance and policy making can be enhanced Europe-wide, from a human rights perspective, and in co-operation with civil society.

My Organization has begun a series of reflective and forward-looking events on culture, with a conference in June 2009 in Cracow, Poland, analyzing cultural development in Europe twenty years after the fall of communism. This year’s event –that has been made possible thanks to the dedicated collaboration of an outstanding group of conference partners– will look at the future. Our joint future!

As Director General for Education, Culture, Heritage, Youth and Sport of an Intergovernmental Organization that brings 47 member states together under its roof and stands for 800 Million Europeans, I feel very strongly about our joint future. In Europe, but also globally, at world level – since the dividing lines become somewhat blurred when looked at through the issues of this conference.

It is a future that is exposed to many insecurities and threats: the ones visible in our immediate surroundings and daily experiences such as the challenges of ever-increasing diversity, the difficult and demanding act of meaningful intercultural dialogue, the lack of social cohesion, the dangers of growing intolerance, discrimination, racism and cultural conflict. But there are also the threats at a more intermediate level, not always instantly noticeable: the degradation of our natural environment, the tremendous ecological issues we are faced with, the question of a sustainable, equitable and inclusive development....

All this is overshadowed by the recent financial and economic crisis that has left its mark, materially speaking, but also as regards our genuine confidence in being able to create, master and control the parameters that will shape our future.

What does this mean for the CoE's mission and for its governments, politics, and decision-makers in the fields of education, culture and youth? What does it imply for all those involved in the complex processes of enhancing dialogue and fighting discrimination? Specifically, what about cultural policy and policy makers? And where to start? Well, I have no firm answers, but some suspicions.

First, I believe we need to accept that this is a new situation and combination of challenges. We must be courageous enough to accept a certain vulnerability, from which insight and eventually, remedies might grow. We must be courageous in re-thinking current methods and practices, taking into account world-wide developments. Second, we need to be true to our values: Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law. Based on these, we must cultivate the power of dialogue, education and a cultural citizenship approach that goes beyond a limited narrative of a nation state or European space and targets world citizenry, thus realizing a new global ethic - by all those who care. Thirdly, this is not only about addressing governments. Clearly, they are a major player. But it is as much for civil society and private actors to take action. That is why I am happy to see CultureWatchEurope as a multi-stakeholder initiative successfully gathering so many partners, key organisations and personalities to work together here at this conference in Brussels.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Culture and cultural policies have always been at the avant-garde, where new thinking and approaches have been generated and tested. Some say, it is only through culture and cultural policies that we will find responses to today's challenges. I truly look forward to our collective work and wisdom, the deliberations and insights of the next two days; your priorities and recommendations. I will be happy to bring them back to our governmental partners and policy makers and co-operate with you intensively in the follow-up to this succinct event.