

Mr Trzuszczński Director-General for Education and Culture, European Commission

Conference "Culture and the policies of change"

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1. Introduction

I am very glad to be here today to share with you the European Commission's perspective on the topical issue of "culture and the policies of change".

We live indeed in challenging times. The crisis continues to make itself felt in all aspects of our lives. But beyond economic issues and the pressures of global competition, we are also confronted with climate change, with the persistence of poverty and social exclusion, and with the need to build constructive partnerships with the countries beyond EU borders.

All of this calls for creative thinking and a willingness to look for new and better ways of living and working together. I know that this creative thinking has been at the heart of your discussions during this conference. At EU level, the Europe 2020 strategy is the overarching EU framework in which we look to the future, identifying ways in which the Union can

achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, while promoting stability, mutual understanding and cooperation worldwide.

And this is precisely where we need to explore the role of culture policy. Culture is the anchor on which the European Union's "unity in diversity" is founded. The combination of respect for cultural diversity and the ability to unite around shared values has guaranteed the peace, prosperity and solidarity which the EU enjoys.

Faced with the challenges I have mentioned, how can we make the most of the contribution of culture policy to the sort of innovative thinking and actions we need to encourage?

2. Achievements since adoption of the European Agenda for Culture

Let me first of all recall one milestone of recent years, the adoption in 2007 of the European Agenda for Culture. The Agenda has opened a new chapter of cooperation on culture policy in the European Union. For the first time, all partners – European institutions, Member States and culture civil society – were invited to pool their efforts on explicitly defined shared goals.

The broad objectives of the Agenda remain the bedrock of our efforts: promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; unlocking the potential of culture to catalyse creativity and innovation; and making the most of culture as a vital element in international relations.

But after three years, what conclusions can we draw?

2.1 Progress towards the Agenda objectives

Allow me to give you a flavour of some of the European initiatives since the Agenda was adopted.

Improving the conditions for the **mobility of artists** is one high priority. A group of national experts has been examining obstacles to mobility of artists and other culture professionals and how to tackle them. A pilot project is developing and testing new ideas on mobility support. All of this is feeding into work on a Commission proposal, scheduled for early next year, for a Council Recommendation on mobility information systems for artists and culture professionals.

The Commission has proposed a **European Heritage Label** to build on the current intergovernmental initiative. The Label should highlight sites that celebrate and symbolise European integration, ideals and history and its award would depend in

part on the educational dimension of sites, especially for young people. The proposal is now being discussed by Council and Parliament.

Cultural and Creative Industries have been a particular focus of attention. Our recent Green Paper on unlocking the potential of these industries has sparked a debate on how to create an environment in which the sector can fulfil its potential to contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Over three hundred and fifty responses have so far been received. We are still looking closely into the feedback received, but I can say that among the possible follow-up initiatives there could be improved guarantee schemes for easier access to finance, skills development to match emerging needs, targeted support for clustering and networking, and for creative partnerships between the culture sector and others to make the most of "creative spillovers".

And then there are our **External relations**. Since the adoption of the Agenda, it is fair to say that a wholly new strategic framework for culture in the EU's external relations has been emerging. In this framework culture is increasingly perceived as a strategic factor of political, social and economic development. I am thinking of the new **Eastern Partnership**, for example, but also of the **Union for the**

Mediterranean, where a new Euromed strategy on culture is underway. A new initiative for regional and inter-regional cooperation in the **European Neighbourhood** will be launched next year. **Bilateral partnerships** have started with developed or emerging partner countries such as China, Brazil and Russia. And the role of culture in successful **development policies** is also increasingly recognised.

And if we want to put a figure on all this, since 2007 more than 100 million euro have been earmarked for culture in third countries and regional cooperation.

Finally, this year's 5th anniversary of the Unesco Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions invites us to take stock of progress and look ahead to new challenges. The Ministerial conference organised by the Commission on 8 December here in Brussels will be the occasion to do exactly that.

2.2 Working methods and partnerships

The progress achieved is in no small part due to the reinforced cooperation between various stakeholders which the Agenda supports.

The first experiences of the Open Method of Coordination have been quite positive. Thematic working groups have proven to be a good framework for networking and mutual learning between the Member States.

The Agenda also sought to strengthen the voice of the culture sector in policy debate by introducing a more "structured dialogue". Thematic platforms have brought together bodies active at European level, helping players in this very heterogeneous sector to search for common ground. The European Culture Forum is another element of this structured dialogue: in its 2009 edition it gathered around one thousand policy makers and practitioners.

Discussions on the next Council Workplan on Culture have already started. The wish to build on the good results is clear, and shared. It is too early to talk in detail about the next priorities, but the overarching objectives remain those of the European Agenda for Culture and, of course, the Europe 2020 strategy to which I would like now to turn.

3. Europe 2020 – the contribution of culture

Looking now to the future, the challenge is to ensure that culture can make its full contribution to a socially inclusive and economically strong European Union.

"Mainstreaming" is the key word and the coming months – and indeed years – call for our full commitment to a whole range of initiatives.

Just think of the fundamental importance of digital services to culture and its associated creative industries. New technologies mean a sea change both for accessing and creating culture. But on the other hand it is creative content that drives the take-up of these new technologies by the user. Our initiatives to enable cultural and creative industries to flourish, to advance cinema digitalisation and to develop media literacy will all feed into the **Digital Agenda**.

In the complex field of copyright, the new services emerging in the digital age should be able to fully exploit the Single Market. The Commission is committed to finding the right balance between wider access to culture, and the fair remuneration for artists that is vital for cultural diversity. We are working in close collaboration with the other services to explore all options.

The **Innovation Union** flagship initiative will be adopted very shortly, aiming to refocus R&D and innovation policy on the challenges facing our societies. The contribution of culture to

stimulating creativity and innovation is clear but the positive "spillover" effects from culture to other sectors can be further encouraged. SMES, micro-enterprises and the self-employed have a special role to play, as the guarantors of cultural diversity and the drivers of innovation in the cultural sector. A seminar later this week jointly organised by the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Commission will explore precisely these issues.

A vibrant culture sector can be a major element of a region's attractiveness and part of its strategic vision for economic and social development. 6 billion euros of cohesion funding have been allocated to culture for 2007-2013 covering protection and preservation of cultural heritage, development of cultural infrastructure, and support for cultural services.

Future cohesion policy will need to draw on experience to design instruments which release the full potential of the cultural sphere, and particularly that of the creative industries. To do so, the Commission is supporting research into successful practices and policies and is preparing a practical tool to assist local policy makers and cultural operators with mainstreaming culture and creativity in their development strategies.

4. Conclusion

From this brief overview, I hope that at least one fundamental message is clear; the effective integration of culture in other policies is both essential and achievable. Progress depends on building partnerships, not only across borders but also across sectors. We need to pool our experience and look for creative ways of tackling the challenges we are facing. This conference has been one opportunity to do so, and I thank you for your commitment and count on continued strong cooperation.