

Intervention by Mr Horia-Roman Patapievici, President of EUNIC, President of the Romanian Cultural Institute, Romania

For the CultureWatchEurope Conference 2010

"Culture and the policies of change", Brussels, 7 September 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, allow me to express my joy at the opportunity of attending, in my capacity as EUNIC President, this extremely important conference organized by the Council of Europe and hosted by the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels, a conference dedicated to culture and the philosophy underlying the programmes designed to promote it.

Secondly, I'd like to put forth some reflections, provocative ones, I hope, on the topic of our conference – reflections triggered by the pertinent questions wisely posed by the organizers: What are the opportunities and dangers that the policy makers need to understand so that European culture can flourish and fulfil its potential in the next 20 years? And: What immediate steps should governments and public bodies take to protect the creativity, vitality and diversity of European cultural life in the immediate future?

Now here's the reflection I'd like to put forth to you:

Everyone examining the culture-related documents issued by European institutions and structures is bound to exult over them. The adoption of the European Agenda for Culture in 2007 opened a new chapter not only of cooperation on culture policy at European level, but also of the meaning of the word culture itself. The key partners of the process were largely and generously defined: European institutions, Member States and culture civil society. All were invited to pool their efforts on explicitly defined goals, which were proclaimed to be sharply endorsed by the Council, because they were conceived of as shared goals by the Member States and the culture civil society. Those goals are: promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity; and promotion of culture as a vital element in the EU's international relations.

I find it noteworthy that those three objectives are instrumentally defined. Culture is not regarded as a value in itself, but rather as a means to an end: the Council support culture because they can thus promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; they support culture because they can *use* it as a catalyst for creativity; *en fin*, they support it, because culture happens to be a vital element in the EU's international relations. As can be seen, the European institutions' view of culture is instrumental: culture is good because it can be somehow turned to account. The Commission report to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of the European Agenda for Culture, a Commission working document issued in July this year, stressed clearly what culture is: "Culture is not only a fundamental element of society and the lives of individuals, but is also a catalyst for European integration". Whenever culture can be used as a catalyst for European integration, UE institutions are bent on playing an increasing role in cultural policy and European cultural cooperation.

The framework of such declarations has been laid down in the Treaty of Lisbon. Article 167 is adamant that the Union should "contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States,

while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore". Essentially, this article stipulates that the Union shall take cultural aspects into account in its actions, that is, that culture should be mainstreamed into the Union's policies. What would be the fields? In the article it is stated that this should be carried out in the fields of external relations, cohesion policy, employment and many others. The commission report I quote here is full of comprehensive and rich programmes ranging from heritage to the audiovisual, from individual mobility to cultural statistics, from cultural and creative industries to matters of inclusion in today's society; from lifelong learning to active citizenship programmes; from communication programmes to cohesion policy; and so on.

Well, such programmes *are* most welcome, beneficial and – through their encouragement to a wide range of artists and cultural operators – extraordinary. As for the progress achieved by European institutions in their approach to the world of culture, it is indeed remarkable and worthy of appreciation. The programmes begun by European institutions since 2007, the year when the European Agenda for Culture was adopted, take an artistic as well as sociological view of culture, constantly endeavouring to address the way in which culture influences history, currents of thought and lifestyles, shaping the identities of individuals and communities as well as their sense of belonging.

Beyond their unquestionable qualities, worthy of acknowledgement, all these programmes share an underlying philosophy which can be concisely expressed in the following ideas: the idea that all culture is contemporary culture; the idea that the cultures of all member states share a joint set of values and every conflict of values is entirely the outcome of either ignorance or intolerance (and can be consequently solved by mutual knowledge and acceptance, by moral tolerance and social inclusion); finally, the idea that culture is inexhaustible and automatically generated by mechanisms akin to those turning out industrial products. Still, these three ideas are, at best, questionable and, at the very worst, downright inaccurate. I'm not going to pursue any further the philosophical analysis that may be applied to these ideas. Suffice it to suggest that such works as Isaiah Berlin's and Karl Popper's provide convincing philosophical analyses applicable to each of these three ideas, and their analyses are not at all encouraging for the philosophy underlying our programmes.

Culture is *not* inexhaustible and it cannot be generated at will. Cultures are rooted in some significant values that necessarily clash with other values, of equal importance. As a consequence, tolerance and inclusion are not the ultimate solutions in those cases. Eventually, culture is temporally multi-layered and its contemporary expression fails to muster the full potential at work in individuals in the form of lifestyles, mentalities or the sense of belonging. The greatest part of this potential hails back from a past contemporary culture ill-equipped to scrutinize. This is a past which, though active in the individuals' political and civic behaviour, is doomed to go largely unexplored.

This is a point of view I wanted to call your attention to. The second, and final one, concerns what we might call the cultural roots of diversity. Cultures are diverse as a consequence of certain communities transforming unique historical experiences – unrepeatable and different from one cultural community to the other – into generally-applicable human values. Obviously, cultures can hold on to their diversity only as long as they preserve the prerequisites of their uniqueness. Nevertheless, these prerequisites are, of necessity, constantly and irreversibly eroded by all the processes, in many ways both profitable and opportunate, pertaining to the integration of cultures into unique representative institutions, to their uniform promotion and to the inevitable standard-value-set screening the value-canon each culture has to undergo when carrying out what we like to call the intercultural dialogue. All these processes should be covered from the double angle of their human and political desirability and, at the same time, of

the unavoidable losses in cultural specificity. Such losses are all too often overlooked for the sake of desirability.

What I'm trying to point out here is an effect not unlike the one Marx and Engels described with remarkable sagacity in their 1848 Communist Manifesto, in the chapter bearing the title "Bourgeois and Proletarians". What they claim there is that the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the whole relations of society. "The bourgeoisie", they claim, "has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about."¹ What it specifically achieves is unifying the world through the market, urbanizing and deruralizing every human habitat, imposing a unique standard of civilization, industrially transforming nature and geography, subjecting all existence to the criteria of the universal exchange of goods, reducing all human relationships to a unique standard of communication (naked interest), stripping "of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe"² and converting former tradesmen in the liberal and spiritual fields into mere economic operators, transforming all spiritual products into common merchandise. The essence of these processes is weakening and tearing down all elements of stability and tradition built over the centuries by the old societies as a living tradition. Under the influence of the bourgeoisie, Marx and Engels go on, "all fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify."³

Few words need to be changed in the text of the two 19th-century authors in order to understand that their prophetic description fits to a tee the process of globalization we're witnessing for ourselves in the 21st century. This description has little to do with Marxism as an ideology, since Joseph Schumpeter, who was anything but a Marxist, adopted and expanded it in his book "Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy" under the name "creative destruction", in order to capture the phenomenon, which he considers essential, by which capitalist modernity conquers and levels the whole world, how? – by destroying specific community traditions and replacing them with the unique civilization of the contemporaneous originating in advanced states.

Therefore, if we change what needs to be changed, I wonder whether the way we're promoting diversity is not prone to be fatally affected by the mechanisms employed by globalization in order to level everything. Because the European institutions' view of culture is instrumental – an error, the way I see it – we, the ones charged with cultural responsibilities, endeavouring to promote diversity institutionally, are at the risk of doing it in ways that practically enforce uniformity in spite of ourselves. European programmes are not unlike huge infrastructures akin to supermarkets. Now, the supermarket system tends to eliminate completely small purveyors and small specific shops, which – despite the undeniable services provided to the customer by the supermarket – significantly impoverishes not only the range of products on offer and, more often than not, their very quality, but also the community relationships deriving from the existence of small purveyors and the selling of their merchandise in small corner shops. If globalization acts like capitalism did in Marx' view or like capitalist modernity acted according to Schumpeter's view, we may well ask ourselves whether the type of programmes we promote on a large institutional scale are not liable to have a comparative levelling effect upon the actual cultural diversity.

Here are a few questions. Here's an invitation to reflect.

¹ Marx/Engels Selected Works, Vol. One, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1969, p.16;
Translated: Samuel Moore in cooperation with Frederick Engels, 1888

² id.

³ ibid.

I do thank you for the opportunity you have granted me to join you in reflecting openly.