

EFAH Briefing

Communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world

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1. Background information

The *Communication on Culture* was published by the European Commission (EC) on the 10th of May 2007 after having been approved by the college of Commissioners on the same day.

Entitled ***Communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world***, it is an important document, which could open the way to more and better cultural actions at EU level.

From early on in 2006, newly appointed Director General for Education and Culture (DG EAC), Odile Quintin, had indicated a desire for an ambitious *European agenda for culture*. The Commission workplan had already included a planned report on the 'Economy of Culture' (published in November 2006). The added profile for cultural actions that the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 was expected to bring as well as Mrs Quintin's desire to capitalize on Mr Barroso's strong support to cultural issues, led however to a Communication agenda with a broader scope.

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 to the consultation, but showed a clear predominance of Western respondents.

On **4 December 2006**, as the second step of its consultation on the future Communication, Directorate General for Education and Culture 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, a *European agenda for culture*. Both President Barroso and Commissioner Figel' made very strong speeches in favour of an enhanced place for culture in the EU and Odile Quintin committed herself to support the development of a representative consultative body of the civil society: a *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.

2. Summary of the EC's *Communication on Culture*

General objectives:

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

Responsibilities of the different actors:

- *Member States and their regions*: developing their policies and joint activities through the open method of coordination, explore existing opportunities in EU funding;
- *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;
- *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.

Specific objectives:

1. Cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue

- Promote the mobility of artists and professionals in the cultural field and the circulation of all artistic expressions beyond national borders;
- Promote and strengthen intercultural competences and dialogue.

2. Culture as a catalyst for creativity in the context of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs

- Promote creativity in education by evolving the cultural sector (life-long learning, informal and formal education);
- Promote capacity building in the cultural sector (e.g. managerial competences, entrepreneurship, etc.) and promote innovative sources of funding;
- Develop creative partnerships between the cultural sector and other sectors (Information and Communication technologies, research, tourism, social partners).

3. Culture as a vital element in international relations

Twin-track approach: systematic integration of the cultural dimension in all programmes and actions and support for specific cultural actions and events.

- Further develop political dialogue in the field of culture and promote cultural exchanges;
- Promote market access for cultural good and services from developing countries;
- Protect and promote cultural diversity through financial and technical support;
- Taking full account of local culture when developing cooperation programmes and projects;
- Active involvement in international organisations' initiatives.

Proposed actions and instruments

1. Dialogue with the sector

- A bi-annual 'Cultural Forum' (framework for regular exchange of views, opportunities to input into policy-making process, follow-up and evaluation); *In parallel, the sector should continue organizing itself to see the emergence of representative organizations and cooperation structures.*
- A mapping of the sector;

- The expression of representative views by individual artists and an on-line virtual European Forum;
- Further development of the autonomous social dialogue of social partners in the cultural sector;
- Cultural dimension to European public debates using the EC's representations.

2. The Open Method of Coordination (OMC)

- The Council endorses the Communication's objectives, sets priorities and agrees on a biennial follow-up exercise;
- The Commission drafts biennial joint reports with high level representatives of Member States;
- Member States fully associate local and regional authorities as well as national stakeholders;
- The EC involves European stakeholders by organizing a Cultural Forum in the year preceding the publication of the report
- The European Parliament is involved in the process.
- Foreign Affairs Ministers are involved in pursuing the objectives of external relations.

3. Mainstreaming culture in all relevant policies

- The EC strengthen its internal inter-service coordination.
- The EC deepens its analysis of the interface between cultural diversity and other Community policies.
- Examples in the field of external relations and development policies

3. Introduction to the Open Method of Coordination

The main proposal of the *Communication on Culture* is the use of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the cultural field. The 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.

Pros of the OMC: 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 who 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.

4. The Communication on Culture: a unique opportunity to advance the framework for cultural action at EU level

The EC's *Communication on Culture* is an important document for its consideration of **new processes and structures** through which cultural issues can be raised and debated at the European level.

In addition to proposing the use of the **Open method of Coordination** in the cultural field, the Communication underlines the need to develop proper **consultation structures with the cultural operators across Europe**. The Communication also addresses the important topic of **cultural mainstreaming** (article 151.4 of the EU Treaty), which will demand further creative thinking and commitment from the European Commission for an efficient implementation.

Much will depend now on the Member states' endorsement of the objectives put forward in the Communication and of their commitment to using the Open method of Coordination in the field of culture. Little is known about which concrete objectives Member States will agree to cooperate on in such a specific framework. As the Culture Council adopted conclusions '*on the contribution of the cultural and creative sectors to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives*' on the 24th of May, it can be expected that Member States will be ready to use the Open Method to advance the 'economy of culture' dossier. Member States still have to be convinced that the other objectives (intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity or mobility) also demand strong national coordinated actions at EU level.

The Communication's proposal to improve dialogue with European civil society should be welcomed and supported. A regular and structured dialogue with civil society actors is crucial to ensure that EU policies genuinely reflect the needs of the cultural practitioners around Europe. The instruments to structure this dialogue proposed in the document are a good starting point. Further attention to the modes of consultation and a more frequent event than the 'biannual European Cultural Forum' will be needed, to make sure that the civil society actors' voice is heard and their expertise taken into account.

To support the emergence of civil society representative bodies or alliances, the EC will also have to renew its commitment to support the European actors who struggle to develop long-term strategies in a very insecure financial environment.

5. Institutional calendar – the next steps

If the European Commission and Portuguese presidency's schedule is respected, the Communication's recommendations should be adopted by the **November Culture Council of Ministers**.

Such adoption would mean that the Open method of Coordination could start being implemented in 2008 on a number of agreed objectives, which should also constitute the backbone of the renewed Culture Council work plan.

Before November, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament should have submitted their opinions, and the sector will have been consulted during the **Lisbon Cultural Forum (26-27 September)**.

As usual in the context of EU policymaking, timing is crucial if civil society actors want to make their voice heard. To have some impact on decisions which might heavily influence EU cultural policy in the years to come, cultural actors have to mobilise NOW by questioning their national ministers and by taking part in the debates.

For additional information, assistance or advice, do not hesitate to contact the EFAH office (efah@efah.org, tel: 00 32 2 534 40 02).