A EUROPEAN AGENDA FOR CULTURE 
IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD – MORE THAN RHETORIC?

In November 2007 the European ministers of Culture (Culture Council) agreed on a “European Agenda for culture” based on the Communication on a “European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World” which was published by the European Commission in May 2007.

The European Music Council (EMC) actively took part in the consultation process prior to the Communication. This process already underlined the important role of civil society, enforced by the Culture Council by inviting different stakeholders to establish a structured dialogue between themselves. The EMC warmly welcomes the new “Agenda for Culture” and looks forward to participating in the structured dialogue.

Background – the Communication

With the Treaty of Amsterdam, culture was recognised as one of the areas of activity of the European Union. Article 151 states that “The Community shall take cultural aspects into account in its action […] in particular in order to respect and to promote the diversity of its cultures.”

The adoption of the “European Agenda for Culture” by the Culture Council and the intention to strengthen culture in all political fields of the EU and the EU member states in the sense of a “culture mainstreaming” is highly welcomed by the European Music Council.

The Council decided that the European Agenda for Culture will avoid the danger of being mere rhetoric. The EU Commission’s first step towards interfering with national politics and as over-bureaucratic. No wonder then that the OMC has been a contentious point for the Culture Council in adopting the “European Agenda for Culture”. As a consequence, the OMC will be applied with the constraint of being “specifically adapted”, i.e. a flexible and non-binding framework where the participation of Member States in the actions and procedures concerned will be voluntary.

Future priorities 2008–2010

The Council decided that the European Agenda for Culture will be implemented through triennial work plans covering a limited number of priority areas. For the period of 2008 to 2010 those priority areas are:

- Improving conditions for the mobility of artists and other professionals in the cultural field
- Promoting access to culture, especially by promoting cultural heritage, cultural tourism, multilingualism, digitisation, synergies with education (in particular arts education) and greater mobility of collections
- Developing data, statistics and methodologies in the cultural sector and improve their comparability
- Maximising the potential of cultural and creative industries, in particular that of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME)
- Promoting and implementing the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

Setting priorities for a given time-frame surely is a pragmatic approach, but isn’t the mobility issue always important when it comes to the exchange of culture? It is highly welcomed that art education is one of the first priorities which of course should not end after 2010. Using the momentum to expedite the promotion and implementation of the UNESCO Convention is highly appreciated and the European Music Council is actively working on the implementation process with one of its Working Groups.

The adoption of the European Agenda on Culture by the Culture Council is a very positive sign for all cultural actors and enthusiasts. What is important now is to start seriously the dialogue between all actors involved – a dialogue that will truly be at eye level and with reciprocal interest. Respecting cultural sovereignty of the member states and involving all levels in the debate is a prerequisite for a successful promotion of culture in Europe. The preparedness of the Culture Council to get involved with the field of culture shall be taken at its word; flexibility and voluntariness shall not proof to be excuses for hollow promises.

The first steps in implementing the “European Agenda for Culture” are very promising, the enthusiasm should not stop so that further concrete actions will follow – this way, the European Agenda for Culture will avoid the danger of being mere rhetoric.