

Is there a European cultural policy?

The European Union, and especially the Commission, is often regarded as a mindless regulatory machine for standardising the curves of cucumbers, the make-up of apple wine or the size of coffee packaging. Even if many of these unnecessary directives have now been withdrawn, the bad reputation remains – the EU meddles in matters that are none of its business.

Given this, how can the EU promote a European cultural policy following the principle of subsidiarity and is thus a core competency of Member States? In federal systems such as Germany or Austria culture is a matter of the federal land. Can and should there even be a European cultural policy at all?

In the search for a European identity, culture is often referred to as a connecting factor; more precisely, it is said that Europe's cultural diversity is a connecting factor, in accordance with the EU motto 'united in diversity'. The President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, also promotes culture's important role for Europe: In his opening speech at the first Berlin Conference he said that "the EU has reached a stage in its history where its cultural dimension can no longer be ignored."

Article 151 of the Amsterdam Treaty enshrines culture as a European Union activity: "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 EU Commission now even has its own cultural promotion programme and, in Barroso, a president who is an advocate for the arts and culture. Yet, it was only in May 2007 that the first strategy for a European cultural policy was adopted by the European Commission in its Communication entitled: A European agenda for culture in a globalising world. Although the Communication avoids the words 'cultural policy', this is its central concern: What can, and should, a European cultural policy look like?

The three major objectives that a European cultural agenda should encompass are:

- The promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue
- The promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy
- The promotion of culture as a vital element in the Union's international relations

When the Resolution was adopted by the Council of the European Union (Council of Ministers) in November 2007, the Council agreed on a three-year work plan for implementing the agenda. The following specific objectives were put forward for the period from 2008 to 2010:

- Improving the conditions for the mobility of artists and other professionals in the cultural field;
- Promoting access to culture, in particular through the promotion of cultural heritage, multilingualism, digitisation, cultural tourism, synergies with education, especially art 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 SMEs;
- Promoting and implementing the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

At its last sitting on 20. November 2008, the Council of Ministers adopted conclusions on the "promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in the external relations of the Union and its Member States". In these conclusions, the Council appeals to Member States to strengthen the role of culture within the framework of foreign policy. Cooperation with third countries in the field of culture should also be promoted and strengthened, as should collaboration with UNESCO and the European Council – international organisations with cultural core competencies.

The Council refers explicitly to the 2005 UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity, whose ratification and implementation continue to be a central concern. What should especially be underlined is the appeal to Member States to recognise the specific character of culture – cultural activities, goods and services always have a dual nature, economic and cultural. This is especially significant in bi- or multilateral agreements, in which the special character of culture is to be protected, as opposed to in the GATS framework, where culture can be considered as a conventional commodity. Only those who promote and protect their own cultural heritage can preserve its cultural diversity. In these conclusions, the European Council also highlights the fact that culture can be a driving force in development work. To promote the implementation of the Agenda, the Council proposes that the following activities be strengthened:

- Cooperative cultural activities undertaken with third countries;
- The international promotion of European cultural activities, goods and services (the audiovisual sector and the mobility of European artists and cultural professionals outside the Union are highlighted);
- Multilingualism (language learning, translation and intercultural skills)
- the mobility of young people (cultural and artistic education, access to artistic expressions in all their diversity);
- The protection of copyright and related rights and the prevention of and the fight against counterfeiting and piracy at an international level;
- The protection, preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible.

Furthermore, different working methods and instruments are to be further developed. What is especially welcome is that artists, cultural professionals and civil society are to be explicitly involved in the development of an external cultural policy. Potential funding instruments are also expected to gear themselves to the conditions of the cultural sector, proposal procedures are to be made easier and long-term support is to be made possible. The Council wants to make use of the experience of the Member States, especially in terms of synergy formation.

One instrument to implement the European Agenda for Culture is the 'structured dialogue' with the culture sector. Inspired by the Rainbow Platform for Intercultural Dialogue (started in 2006 by the European Cultural Foundation and EFAH), the European Commission has initiated two more platforms (Access to Culture and Potential of the Culture and Creative Industries) to enhance the structured dialogue between the culture sector and the political field (EU institutions and member states).

The European Music Council takes part in all three platforms; one of the main tasks of the platforms is to formulate recommendations addressing the political institutions.

Parallel to the culture sector platforms, the member states have installed working groups on "mobility of artists", "mobility of collections", "potential of creative industries" and "synergies between culture and education".

The recommendations of the platforms will be presented at the "Culture Forum 2009" taking place from 28 to 30 September in Brussels. At this occasion the dialogue between the sector and the political field shall be put into practice.

Within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy, culture is given a high status in the whole political process both in and outside of the EU. This is also clear from the expression culture mainstreaming that promotes the consistent involvement of culture in other political areas.

A European cultural policy that is developed in close coordination with Member States and in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity is essential if Europe is to preserve its cultural wealth. This should not be the task of the Member States alone but should be a common, complementary and collaborative undertaking. The European Union was first founded as an economic community but Europe is above all a cultural community. To quote one of the founding fathers of the EU, Jean Monnet: "If I could seize a fresh opportunity for the political integration of Europe, I would start from culture and not from the economy."

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Council of the European Union / EU Council of Ministers: The EU Council of Ministers is composed of representatives from Member States at ministerial level, who meet regularly and therefore it is the principle decision-making institution in the EU.

Lisbon Strategy: The aim is to make the European Union one of the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economic areas in the world by 2010.

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