

First-ever Common European Strategy for Culture in the EU.

by Brenda Azzopardi

During the 2898th meeting of the Council of Ministers on Education Youth and Culture held on 16th November 2007, a European Agenda for Culture was endorsed. This follows the adoption by the European Commission last May of a Communication called 'European Agenda for Culture in a Globalised World'. Although this is not the first Communication on culture, the Council now adopts this Communication with respect to a common European strategy for culture in the EU. The European Commissioner responsible for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, Jan Figel, said that Member States, along with the EU institutions and cultural stakeholders, are now in a better position to join forces and work together on a number of challenges that they have been facing in the cultural sector, and create a more structured system of cooperation.

On the basis of Article 151 EC, by virtue of which action at EU level in this field shall support and supplement the actions of Member States, the promotion of common cultural tools is being used to comprise and strongly converge efforts at all levels. The Council's three main objectives for a common cultural strategy focus on:(i) the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; (ii) the promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy; and (iii) the promotion of culture as a vital element in the Union's international relations. In addition, the European Commission proposed the adoption of a set of working methods.

Over the years, the EU has contributed to a significant amount of cultural activities in Europe through a number of programmes, one of them being The Culture Programme which encourages cooperation. As for the programmes which have left a good impact on culture, one can mention the Lifelong Learning Programme, Youth in Action and the Structural Funds. Moreover, the framework of the Lisbon Strategy, has directly and indirectly had an impact on the economic potential of the cultural and creative sectors.

The mechanism used to structure this new common strategy is based on the open method of coordination (OMC), an intergovernmental framework for cooperation, which will be used as an adaptable approach for the cultural field. The Commission and Member States will also review their progress every three years. Eventually, a new Cultural Forum will also be set up to serve as a bridge between cultural stakeholders at all levels and to involve them more closely in European affairs.

For the period between 2008 and 2010, the Commission will work on five specific priority areas, namely: to better the conditions for the mobility of artists and other professionals in the cultural field; to contribute to the progress of cultural heritage, cultural tourism, multilingualism, digitisation, synergies with education and greater mobility of collections; and to promote and implement the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

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