



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SEDEC-VI/017

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OPINION

Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- welcomes the Joint Communication "Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations" and the actions it contains and stresses that culture must lie at the heart of the EU's international relations;
- stresses that cultural diversity is an integral part of the EU's values and that the EU is firmly committed to promoting an international order based on peace, the rule of law, freedom of expression, mutual understanding and respect for fundamental rights;
- as a key partner of the United Nations (UN), the EU should continue to cooperate closely with UNESCO to protect the world's cultural heritage;
- underlines that local and regional authorities have important remits in promoting intercultural dialogue, as many intercultural initiatives are coordinated at local and/or regional level;
- the proposed EU strategy on international cultural relations needs to be targeted and thus to include provisions for specific objectives and a clear implementation deadline for its various policies;
- calls on the European Commission to prioritise the further development of cultural diplomacy with a view to introducing it into the EU's foreign policy;
- considers that there is an urgent need to step up cultural activities aimed at promoting better knowledge of artistic and cultural expression and of the cultural heritage that exists in Europe.

Rapporteur

Apostolos Tzitzikostas (EL/EPP), Governor of Central Macedonia

Reference

Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations, JOIN(2016) 29 final

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions –
Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations**

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

General comments

1. welcomes the Joint Communication "Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations"¹ and the actions it contains, considering it a valuable basis for building a comprehensive and integrated strategic approach to international cultural relations aimed at promoting cooperation with partner countries and enhancing the role of the European Union as a strong global player;
2. takes the view that it would have made a significant difference if the proposal had presented the final strategy rather than the steps leading up to this, as the issue under discussion is of key importance. The CoR therefore calls on the Member States to speed up the process of adopting the strategy;
3. stresses that culture must lie at the heart of the EU's international relations, not least because in today's globalised environment, international diplomacy has been enriched with new responsibilities and alternative forms and approaches have emerged. These include cultural diplomacy, something to which limited reference is made in the communication;
4. agrees with the emphasis placed on Member States' obligation to respect, protect and promote the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including artistic and cultural expression. The purpose of cultural policy is to ensure the potential of culture to be a free, independent and challenging force in society. This should form the basis of efforts to foster mutual respect and inter-cultural dialogue;
5. therefore calls on the European Commission to prioritise the further development of cultural diplomacy with a view to introducing it into the EU's foreign policy;
6. is appreciative of the fact that throughout the communication, culture and cultural heritage are recognised as instruments for regional and local development. Putting in place a comprehensive framework and consistent approach to enhancing cultural activities will on the one hand create strong European added value and, on the other, can encourage the design and development of programmes at regional and city level in the EU Member States and with third country partners, which will be of mutual benefit for all those involved;
7. stresses that cultural diversity is an integral part of the EU's values and that the EU is firmly committed to promoting an international order based on peace, the rule of law, freedom of expression, mutual understanding and respect for fundamental rights. Moreover, as a key partner

¹ JOIN(2016) 29 final.

of the United Nations (UN), the EU should continue to cooperate closely with UNESCO² to protect the world's cultural heritage. As a party to the 2005 UNESCO Convention³, the EU should also live up to its commitment to promote the diversity of cultural expression in its international cultural relations;

8. welcomes the acknowledgement of the role of culture in the EU's geographic framework for cooperation, including: a) enlargement policy, b) the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), c) development cooperation and d) the Cotonou Partnership Agreement signed in June 2000⁴;
9. European cultural diplomacy focuses on promoting Europe and its Member States, including educational and cultural exchanges. However, it also targets public opinion in third countries, with a clear interest in promoting a positive image of Europe and its Member States. The importance of cultural diplomacy also covers dialogue between countries, the promotion of peace and cultural diversity, and economic exchange;
10. The importance of cultural diplomacy has been demonstrated by its appearance in emerging and Eastern countries in recent years. It is important to develop cultural diplomacy in the European Union and thus to enable it to compete with the new emerging powers at all levels on the world stage, including at the cultural level;
11. recalls that one of the guiding principles for EU action in the field of international cultural relations is to "ensure respect for complementarity and subsidiarity"⁵. In the area of culture, the Union has competence to carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States⁶. The recent Council conclusions on culture in the EU's external relations highlighted the need for better coordination of efforts towards a strategic European approach⁷;
12. emphatically points to the need for stronger and deeper cooperation at local, regional and national level in initiating and developing strategies in support of international cultural relations and activities. The aim should be to consolidate their strategies as a means of creating a more distinctive, pluralist, European cultural identity that will be recognised both internationally and within the EU by the people of all the Member States;
13. believes that it is important for civil society, non-governmental organisations, clubs, groups, businesses, artists, associations and organisations to contribute in an even more active and coordinated manner to developing initiatives as part of the EU strategy for international cultural relations;

² The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

³ <http://en.unesco.org/creativity/convention/about/2005-convention-text>.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/acp/overview/cotonou-agreement/index_

⁵ JOIN(2016) 29 final.

⁶ Article 6 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

⁷ Council Conclusions on culture in the EU's external relations with a focus on culture in development cooperation, 24 November 2015.

Priorities

14. notes that the EU strategy for international cultural relations will have limited impact if it fails to produce consolidated actions and tangible benefits directly, or if these benefits are only felt in the distant future;
15. emphasises the intrinsic value of artistic and cultural production and stresses that culture should not be seen purely as a means to an end. Exchanges between culture professionals should therefore be a priority. Promoting the mobility of artists and of cultural content is an important task for the EU in the area of cultural policy, since it has a European added value;
16. is of the view that the proposed EU strategy on international cultural relations needs to be targeted in close coordination with the Member States, and thus to include provisions for:
a) specific operating and enforcement policy mechanisms, based on a common coordination framework involving all parties and b) specific objectives and a clear implementation deadline for its various policies. It is also desirable to be able to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the strategies that are implemented;
17. reiterates its previous positions on the cultural and creative sectors for growth and employment⁸, and its calls on the one hand for the cultural and creative sectors to be better incorporated into the Europe2020 strategy and, on the other, for the importance of the links between these sectors and other policy areas, such as industry, tourism, the environment, education and financing, to be recognised;
18. maintains that a priority for the EU Member States and EU partner countries must be to make cultural activities truly inclusive and accessible to all, irrespective of people's age, gender, disability, nationality, race, ethnic origin, religion, or socio-economic background. Encouraging greater involvement and participation of young people in the design and roll-out of inclusive cultural activities is key to social integration;
19. Cultural industries (cinema, art, literature, etc.) are one of the sectors with the greatest influence on cultural diplomacy and reach very diverse audiences due to the way in which they are disseminated. Cultural diplomacy should provide strong support for the dissemination of these industries abroad, with the aim of strengthening Europe's image in the world;
20. considers that one particular aspect of the EU strategy on international cultural relations is coordinating EU actions with those of its partner countries in the area of refugees and migrants. The recent crisis and increase in refugee flows into the EU pose new challenges which need to be properly addressed. The development of cultural activities could play a pivotal role by:
a) alleviating anxiety, unrest and distrust, b) promoting a closer understanding of cultural identities and backgrounds, c) reinforcing the process of integrating refugees into society, d) consolidating and safeguarding the established EU model of a free, democratic and tolerant society, e) fostering mutual respect between refugee and host communities and f) demonstrating

⁸ CdR 181/2010 fin.

to European society the welcome enjoyed by our ancestors in the past when they were forced to emigrate outside the continent for economic, political or religious reasons or due to war;

21. draws particular attention to the recent increase in manifestations of extremism and populism with a xenophobic agenda that can also find expression in certain forms of Euroscepticism. The CoR considers, therefore, that there is an urgent need to step up cultural activities aimed at promoting better knowledge of artistic and cultural expression and of the cultural heritage that exists in Europe. It believes that important tools here are mobility programmes, such as Erasmus+, inter-university cooperation and Horizon 2020, the largest multilateral research and innovation programme in the world, as they serve to keep channels of communication open and facilitate the exchange of ideas, independently of people's cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds;

Increased economic impact

22. welcomes the emphasis placed on boosting the cultural and creative industries, as these are important entities that provide quality jobs and promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth;
23. reiterates its previously expressed views on the cultural and creative sectors for growth and jobs⁹, according to which if economic benefits are to be maximised, it will be necessary to facilitate the production and consumption of cultural products and to stimulate creativity. The CoR underscores the importance of cultivating creative skills from an early age, both in education and as a recreational activity, so that the young generation can fully benefit from the new forms of access to culture;
24. recognises that, due to their geographical conditions, some regions such as islands or outermost regions cannot develop their cultural and creative industries in the same way as other European regions. The EU's border and outermost regions play an important role in that they provide unique added value to the European Union through the historical, cultural and linguistic ties they have developed with other continents over the centuries. It is therefore necessary to promote cultural exchanges and communication between these regions and the rest of the EU by introducing measures that make it easier for artists from these regions, and their works, to travel to the rest of the EU and its neighbouring countries, and vice-versa. Doing so will enable them to enjoy the same competitive advantages available to cultural and creative industries, particularly economic growth and employment, as highlighted by the CoR in opinion CDR2391-2012_00_00_TRA_AC;
25. draws attention to the consequences that policy choices, especially in terms of budgeting and resource allocation, have on cultural heritage and cultural policy, including in the longer term;
26. considers it essential to develop a tool that specifically targets young talent, promoting their mobility and opportunities for training and exchanges with other countries, not only in the EU but also further afield. It could take as a starting point the idea of an Erasmus programme for young creators, which would in turn pay special attention to young people in the most remote

⁹ CDR181-2010_FIN_AC.

regions, such as the outermost regions, who, due to the special characteristics of the regions in which they reside, often have limited access to mobility programmes under the same conditions as young people on the continent;

27. notes that at times of economic and financial difficulty, in many EU Member States investments in the area of culture have been significantly affected and curtailed;
28. stresses that spending in the field of culture is not a luxury but an investment, and that strategic backing is needed for the growth potential of a sector that employs more than three million people and involves a million companies in Europe;

The role of regional and local authorities

29. points out that in most Member States, local and regional authorities are responsible for the sectors mentioned in the joint communication, especially culture and cultural heritage, research, education, tourism, development cooperation and employment;
30. stresses the desirability of including the culture sphere in national and regional internationalisation plans and of supporting the internationalisation of cultural industries themselves;
31. would draw attention to the importance of preserving the traditional appearance of the countryside and built-up areas and to the leading role of this aspect in conserving cultural heritage. In order to make built-up areas attractive, support should be given to programmes which, in architectural terms, respect traditions, from the point of view of both planning and materials used, while meeting current spatial requirements;
32. draws attention to the fact that the future strategy could contribute to laying the foundations for sustainable tourism in the EU's neighbouring countries and promote recognition of the significant benefits generated by the cultural heritage at local and regional level;
33. calls on the Commission to include the Committee of the Regions in the planning phase and regional and local authorities in the development and implementation of the strands of action and measures proposed in the Joint Communication, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity;
34. considers it important to simplify and accelerate procedures for funding for cultural activities, ensuring that regional and local authorities have more direct access to the existing framework of cooperation and to funding under the EU thematic programmes for promoting international cultural relations;
35. welcomes the proposal to establish European Culture Houses based on cooperation between the EU and the partner country in question; believes that further budgetary analysis of this is needed and requests that regional and local bodies be involved alongside cultural institutes and other players. The CoR notes that the actual centres could take a variety of forms. They could for example be run as libraries, digital or otherwise. In this respect, ongoing training of the

stakeholders involved will only secure the success of the initiative if there is real cooperation, as opposed to competition, between EU players operating in partner countries;

36. suggests including regional and local stakeholders in the EU Cultural Diplomacy Platform set up in February 2016, focusing on strategic partners;
37. recalls previous CoR positions considering the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) as a valuable initiative that highlights the wealth, diversity and common aspects of European cultures¹⁰. Together with the European Heritage Label initiative, they could be further used as laboratories for cooperation and citizen participation;
38. maintains its previous position in favour of opening the ECoC initiative to the participation not only of cities from candidate countries and potential candidate countries, but of also European Neighbourhood Policy countries and EFTA countries¹¹. The ECoC initiative represents a potential contribution to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as well as to relations with other European countries, since not only does it help strengthen cultural cooperation within the EU, it also helps develop even closer ties between the EU and the eastern and southern neighbouring countries, with the aim of promoting prosperity, stability and security on the EU's external borders;
39. underlines that local and regional authorities have important remits in promoting intercultural dialogue, as many intercultural initiatives are coordinated at local and/or regional level. Local and regional authorities are, on account of their proximity to citizens, strategically well-placed to respond to the specific needs and demands of the different cultural groups within their territories, and to effectively mobilise them to promote greater intercultural dialogue¹²;
40. keenly awaits the Commission's legislative proposal with a view to combating trafficking of heritage; underlines that this proposal should cover not only illicit imports of cultural goods into the EU but also illicit exports of EU cultural goods with a view to combating trafficking and protecting national treasures with artistic, historic or archaeological value; insists, however, that this proposal must not foresee disproportionate restrictions on legitimate trade in cultural goods and must keep administrative burden for legitimate traders to an absolute minimum. Considers it essential that strict measures be also proposed in relation to unauthorised excavations in the EU;
41. highlights the fact that the Commission's proposal to designate 2018 as European Year of Cultural Heritage will, amongst other things, provide an opportunity to promote intercultural dialogue and the role of culture for peaceful inter-community relations.

¹⁰ CDR191-2011_FIN_AC.

¹¹ CDR2077-2012_00_00_TRA_AC.

¹² CDR11-2006_FIN_RES.

Brussels, 8 February 2017

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Markku Markkula

The Secretary-General
of the European Committee of the Regions

Jiří Buriánek

II. PROCEDURE

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|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Title | Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations |
| Reference | JOIN(2016) 29 final |
| Legal basis | Articles 167 and 304 TFEU |
| Procedural basis | Rule 41(a) of the Rules of Procedure |
| Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter | 6 July 2016 |
| Date of Bureau/President's decision | August 2016 |
| Commission responsible | Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC) |
| Rapporteur | Apostolos Tzitzikostas (EL/EPP) |
| Analysis | 16 September 2016 |
| Discussed in commission | 15 November 2016 |
| Date adopted by commission | 15 November 2016 |
| Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity) | Majority |
| Date adopted in plenary | 8 February 2017 |
| Previous Committee opinions | Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe ¹³ European Strategy for Coastal and Maritime Tourism ¹⁴ Cultural and creative sectors for growth and jobs ¹⁵ The European Capitals of Culture (2020-2033) ¹⁶ Creative Europe ¹⁷ The future of the European Capital of Culture ¹⁸ Local authorities: actors for development ¹⁹ Integration policy and intercultural dialogue ²⁰ |
| Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation | Not applicable |

¹³ COR-2014-05515-00-00-AC-TRA.

¹⁴ COR-2014-02645-00-00-AC-TRA.

¹⁵ CDR2391-2012_00_00_TRA_AC.

¹⁶ CDR2077-2012_00_00_TRA_AC.

¹⁷ CDR401-2011_FIN_AC.

¹⁸ CDR191-2011_FIN_AC.

¹⁹ CDR312-2008_FIN_AC.

²⁰ CDR251-2008_FIN_AC.