EUROPEAN AGENDA FOR CULTURE

Background info

From early on in 2006, the European Commission had indicated a desire for an ambitious *European agenda for culture*, which would build on the result of a commissioned report on the 'Economy of Culture' published in November 2006 (http://ec.europa.eu/culture/library/studies/cultural-economy_en.pdf) and on the added profile for cultural actions that the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008.

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, but the consultation showed a clear predominance of respondents from the older member states. Read Culture Action Europe's submission and discussion paper.

On 4 December 2006, as the second step of its consultation on the future Communication, Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) 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 Director general Odile Quintin committed herself to support the development of a representative consultative body of the civil society named, at the time, a European cultural ago-

ra.

Read our briefing on the public hearing (see *EFAH FEAP 2006 Report on DG Education and Culture*).

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.

The *Communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalising world* was published by the EC on the 10th of May 2007 after having been approved by the college of Commissioners on the same day. One of the strongest proposals of the EC in its Communication is to set up an Open Method of Coordination in the field of culture. This flexible soft law mechanism, to be embedded in the European Council work plan, has already been used in other fields of weak or complementary EU competence like education, youth or social affairs. The method works in stages: Members States fix guidelines and common objectives that they regularly review through a common system of reporting. Another important strand of the Communication is devoted to improving dialogue with European civil society.

On the 26th and 27th of September 2007, 400 participants took part in the first Cultural Forum for Europe, an initiative which results directly from the Communication on Culture's proposals to implement a 'structured dialogue' with civil society. Organised by the Portuguese presidency, the event took place just before an Informal meeting of the EU Ministries of Culture, meant to prepare the Culture Council decision on the Communication in November.

To read the Contributions to the Cultural Forum resulting from an informal meeting

Culture Action Europe's member organisations and of Portuguese cultural organisations and networks.

During their November 2007 meeting, the European Ministers of Culture adopted the objectives and instruments proposed by the European Commission in its *Communication on Culture*. The Council resolution on the 'European agenda for culture' brings to a close the long negotiation and consultation process launched by the Commission early 2006.

The Open Method of Coordination

The Open Method of Coordination (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.

1. First, the Council of Ministers agrees on (often very broad) policy goals
2. Member States then transpose guidelines into national and regional policies
3. Thirdly, specific benchmarks and indicators to measure best practice are agreed upon
4. 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.

The OMC generally involves the following elements (even if OMC processes vary considerably across policy areas):

- Fixing of guidelines with specific timetables in the short, medium and long terms
- Establishment of quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks tailored to the needs of the different Member States
- The translation of these European guidelines into national and regional policies
- A periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organized as mutual learning processes

Pros and Cons: 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 that 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.

Following the adoption by the Council of Ministers of the European Agenda for Culture, the thematic intergovernmental experts groups of the OMC were set up and some met for the first time end of March 2008.

At the Education, Youth and Culture Council of the 21st and 22nd of May 2008, Culture Ministers adopted a [detailed work plan 2008-2010](#) which gives an overview of the different working groups and of their objectives. Following the Council work plan, OMC working groups will focus on the following topics:

1. the mobility of artists and other professionals
2. the mobility of collections
3. stronger synergies between culture and education
4. EUROSTAT statistical working group on culture
5. cultural and creative industries

A 'structured dialogue' with civil society

To implement their 'European agenda on Culture', EU Member States and the European Commission have recognised the importance of a continuous and structured dialogue with civil society. They have also acknowledged the role of a number of representative networks and platforms at European level, such as Culture Action Europe, and of their capacity to bridge to the wider sector by ways of information and mobilisation.

To allow for a broader representation and for more qualitative civil society inputs, civil society actors should be involved in the design and organisation of the structured dialogue. The structured dialogue should also be a regular and inclusive consultation process. The free access to OMC working documents and reports will also be crucial so as to guarantee transparency and allow for a constructive structured dialogue with all stakeholders.

On 19th February 2008 the European Commission organised an information day in Brussels to explain to cultural organisations how it intends to involve civil society in the European Agenda for Culture. In parallel to the Member States nominating experts for a range of thematic intergovernmental working groups, cultural organisa-

tions were to group together in three Platforms. Drawing on the experience of the Culture Action Europe/EFAH-ECF initiated Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue (the Rainbow Platform), a second platform around the topic 'access to culture' and a third on cultural industries will be set up with basic Commission sponsorship. This is a big opportunity for the cultural sector to improve its standing in the EU, but the proposal took many by surprise and raised questions of sustainability, accessibility and transparency.

A call for expression of interest to participate in the two new platforms (access to culture and creative industries) was launched, the Commission received over 200 contributions and hold meetings in Brussels on the 4th, 5th and 6th of June 2008. To read our summary of these meetings click here.

Read an Culture Action Europe/EFAH statement on the development of a structured dialogue at EU level.

Related articles and links

- The European Agenda for Culture on the European Culture Portal: go to website (http://ec.europa.eu/culture)
- Communication on a European Agenda for Culture in a Globalising world, May 2007
- Resolution of the November EU Culture Council of Ministers on a "European Agenda for Culture"
- Law professor Rachael Craufurd Smith's participated in our first round of reflection on the Communication on Culture and has contributed an insightful perspective.
- In the spring edition of our publication the EU Insider, many articles are dedicated to the EC's Communication
- Opinion of the Commission for Culture, Education and Research of the Committee of the Regions on the EC Communication, September 2007

- European Parliament's report on a European Agenda for Culture in a Globalising world, adopted in plenary on the 10th April 2008