

MANIFESTO FOR CULTURAL COOPERATION WITH SOUTH EAST EUROPE

This Manifesto was adopted by the participants – policy makers, cultural professionals, artists, and representatives of European institutions and cultural networks – in the first ‘Enlargement of Minds’ seminar, ‘Crossing Perspectives’ (Amsterdam, 16-18 June 2003).

BACKGROUND

The 2004 enlargement of the European Union presents new challenges and opportunities to the countries of South East Europe (SEE). These countries – the enlarged EU’s neighbours – already belong to the common European cultural space. It is now vitally important to acknowledge their cultural contexts, vitality and diversity. The underlying values and practice of cultural cooperation in Europe also need to be better understood and promoted.

We firmly believe that culture has a major role to play in building Europe, in creating a new space for dialogue and interaction both within the SEE region and between SEE and the EU. Culture and the arts – with the freedom of expression that they bring – can be powerful driving forces in countering prejudice and reconciling differences, enabling citizens to cope with complex environments.

Culture should therefore be more prominent on Europe’s political agenda. We fully support Article I-56 of the EU’s Draft Constitutional Treaty².

¹ ‘Enlargement of Minds’, an activity line of the European Cultural Foundation under the patronage of Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament, deals with the cultural implications of EU enlargement – and beyond. Two further seminars will consider the EU’s eastern neighbours (Krakow, October 03) and its cross-Mediterranean neighbours (Toledo, November 03). For further information, see www.eurocult.org.
² “The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring states... (aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterized by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation).” CONV 724/03, ANNEX 1

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that existing EU cooperation mechanisms regarding South East Europe – e.g. the Stability Pact and the Commission’s CARDS programme – do not include a cultural chapter in their mandates. Private donors and foundations are also currently *reducing* their support for arts and culture in the region.

PROPOSALS

We propose the establishment of a sustainable platform for developing the policies, practices and tools required. In order to ensure an inclusive agenda of cooperation for and with SEE, a forum for cultural cooperation should be set up, one that would gather together public and non-governmental institutions, art institutions and artists’ associations, as well as experts from the EU and SEE.

We must work now to establish:

- Ø The participation of SEE countries in existing and future Community cultural and educational cooperation programmes.
- Ø Regional cooperation mechanisms, with improved funding for longer-term cultural and artistic programmes.
- Ø Continued support for independent cultural organisations in SEE in terms of training and capacity building; and the extension of such support to SEE cultural institutions so that they can become sustainable and able to compete in the marketplace.
- Ø The removal of bureaucratic obstacles to mobility (such as visa issues) and the provision of a comprehensive mobility scheme for cultural professionals, artists and journalists which would stimulate cultural exchange and exploration between SEE and the EU; as well as funding travel, the scheme should facilitate intellectual mobility, exchange and artistic creation.
- Ø Enhanced media cooperation with SEE and within the region.
- Ø Incentives for improving access to information (regarding best practice projects, for instance); new possibilities for disseminating such information – such as the proposed European Cultural Observatory – should be explored.

WE, THE PARTICIPANTS OF THIS SEMINAR, ASK THAT ALL RELEVANT ACTORS IN SEE, THE EU AND THE ACCEDING STATES – POLICY MAKERS, PRACTITIONERS, EXECUTIVES AND OTHERS – ASSUME THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIVELY INVEST IN CULTURAL COOPERATION. NOT ONLY FUNDS ARE NEEDED, BUT POLITICAL WILL AND A NEW SHARED COMMITMENT.