



european cultural foundation

Hopes for the New Member States

On 1 January Bulgaria and Romania at last joined the European Union. The accession was celebrated in both capitals, Sofia and Bucharest. But with the firework displays and light shows now over, what are the realistic hopes of the cultural sectors in these newest of Member States?

Margarita Dorovska, Director of Bulgaria's Cult.bg Foundation, which is devoted to developing cultural practice and policy, had this to say: 'The role we could have as a member state with regards to culture is to be active in the area of neighbourhood policy and reconsider our role in the often stigmatised Balkans. The same feeling is shared in Romania as well. We have the unique chance to build a bridge between the EU and our non-EU European neighbours. Last but not least, we have the unique chance to join and contribute to the union right when the topic of European cultural policy is being approached.'

The benefits of the accession are far from being one-sided. As Margarita points out, her own country boasts a strong tradition in theatre and the performing arts, its visual arts promise a dynamic future, and there is a celebrated music scene as well as quality contemporary literature, much of which awaits translation. Support and stimulation are needed, however, particularly for the independent arts scene.

Strong initiatives presenting Bulgarian culture in a way that escapes the usual clichés are already in preparation. These include a series of interviews with the country's artists and intellectuals; a peer-to-peer platform for the promotion of contemporary Bulgarian culture (image.bg); a mapping of the cultural sector in Bulgaria (map.cult.bg); and a new residence programme covering both Bucharest and Sofia. Cultural initiatives of this sort should make fellow EU citizens more aware of the two countries, the people who live there, their artists and cultural institutions and policies.

'Culture was mentioned in all official statements and welcome speeches,' Margarita observes. 'But in this mode of speaking and writing, culture is usually too abstract to bring any substantial meaning and understanding. But now when Europe is focusing more and more on the cultural dimensions of the union, we should be very particular in what we say.... There was this feeling of responsibility. The new members have to show the lessons are learned and that they are doing well. Shall they manage?'

<http://foundation.cult.bg/en>