

**Civil-Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue
First Meeting 24th November 2006**

Summary and outlook

At this first meeting representatives from 21 organisations from the cultural/arts sectors and social sectors brainstormed on the purpose and functioning of a Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue, contextualized in the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008, initiated by the European Cultural Foundation and the European Forum for the Arts and Heritage, and financially supported by the Network of European Foundations.

While this was a first encounter for many, a strong sense emerged in the meeting that the platform could play a useful role and that the collaboration on intercultural dialogue across sectors is desired.

Focusing on certain spots in the picture

The meeting grappled with the problem that intercultural dialogue is, of course, a very wide topic. It became clear that it needs to be narrowed down or broken up into different topics if the platform is to serve cooperation which leads to some concrete results – a key concern for all. There was a broad consensus to focus on the question of ‘diversities in proximity’, and to see how this European level initiative could be relevant at local level; where intercultural dialogue is a real need. The planned European Year of Intercultural Dialogue will follow the year of Equal Opportunities in 2007. Strong collaboration between cultural and social concerns around equality and diversity is essential.

Balancing representativity with engagement

The meeting also addressed the issue of participation in the platform: While the platform aspires to be an innovative and broad civil society platform, open participation needs to be weighed against the need for effectiveness and the ability to act. The first meeting assembled several European cultural associations and networks as well as European NGOs from the fields of education, youth, social affairs, human rights and migration. The intention was to bring ‘multipliers’ together in the first place. Representative structures from organized civil society will continue to form the core of the platform, but a mechanism will be developed for including individual organizations with strong

competence and a commitment to advancing the platform. The platform will also seek to include sectors not able to attend the preliminary meeting.

At least two tiers of activity

The need for exchange and debate on intercultural dialogue and networking emerged clearly from the first meeting. A second interest is in the platform primarily as a tool of improving and extending the practices of intercultural dialogue themselves. The platform could be an ideal forum for an exchange of best practice, of learning experiences with intercultural dialogue projects or an exchange on hurdles encountered with work on intercultural dialogue.

Practical collaboration could include: Creating a 'competence bank' from which each participating organization could draw on others' expertise when needed; working towards a database on intercultural projects; mapping of participating organisations' activities on ICD, both actual ones and desired ones; and undertaking a comparative examination of the participating organisations' submissions to the EC's Call for Ideas on ICD.

Interfacing with the European Commission as the initiator of the European Year of intercultural Dialogue 2008

The European Commission has taken a close interest in the development of this initiative, and appears to be seeking an interlocutor or even a partner for consultation on actions during the Year of Intercultural Dialogue and on future policy development arising from it. Whether the platform should seek a consultative role with the Commission or consider a project to formulate joint policy recommendations addressed to the European Commission together is a topic for future discussion. The primary task for the platform will be to build trust and mutual understanding across the sectors, a necessary pre-requisite for any future joint work.

Key next steps

Coordinator follow up with individual participants
Fix date and venue for next meeting (February 2007)
Consult and propose participation criteria
Draft work plan for the platform



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