

★ The way to avoid a ‘clash of civilisations’ is to bring civil society into the development of cultural policy. The benefits would be felt in improved intercultural dialogue – and a celebration of the riches on our own doorstep

# Europe: a cultural commonwealth?



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The first decades of the European project intertwined states and intertwined national economies, and the resulting interdependence brought peace. In solidarity and in mutual interest, prosperity has been shared. The coming decades will decide whether the EU is a shaper of globalisation, or a vessel tossed about in its waves.

This old continent has been buffeted by waves of globalisation before. And what did they bring with them? Colonialism, but enlightenment too; the concept of the nation state, but two world wars as well; capitalism and socialism; history – and perhaps too much of it.

Centuries of cultural trial and error, glories and disasters, have led to the pragmatic political system of checks and balances we call the EU. This Europe is a success story, thanks to an unprecedented and voluntary ceding of powers to a supranational common structure (with all due respect to subsidiarity, of course).

But supranational common structures – widely perceived as bureaucratic, slow and expensive – are not exactly sexy to the man and woman in the street. And with the *Non* and *Nee* to an EU constitution, this high-speed cultural experiment in ‘organising difference’ seems, temporarily at least, to have run aground.

Seen from outside, though, this same Europe exerts a magnetic appeal, tantalising with its many attractions. It is a role model, a seeming guarantor of quality of life. Yet we know that we have a problem.

## Strength without empire

Of course we need an efficient Europe. And of course Europe’s citizens must participate more in the European project. But the central challenge is a cultural one. What *kind* of Europe do we want, and in what kind of world?

Without becoming an empire, Europe must nonetheless become strong, and must become legitimate in the eyes of its own citizens. Its strengths need to be based on shared, measurable standards – above all, in the realm of human rights. It needs pragmatism and a maximum of sophistication – a culture of mutually recognised difference, expressed in convincing political language.

Perhaps uniquely, Europe combines individual freedom with social responsibility for the common good; the noblest expression of its essence being respect for the culture of diversity, a benign ‘assimilation’ of difference.

Europe is a hugely important vehicle for projecting culture. In practice this means creating precious space for the arts, for intellectuals, and for translating freedom into concrete expressions which can be shared.

## Us and Them

Homogenising forces have undoubtedly become stronger throughout the world; but dig a little beneath the bland surface and surprises abound. It is also true that diversity is currently seen as a threat by many; yet, as in times past, the shifting interface between ‘those in’ and ‘those out’ still manages to produce miracles of enriching transformation. The heritage of

the future is made both by ‘us’ (who were previously ‘them’) and by ‘them’ (who will one day be ‘us’).

Ultimately, it is the *quality* of diversity which makes the difference. In the hopefully bright years to come, a firm and proven belief that ‘sharing’ secures individuality ought to be at the core of our union.

Jobs, growth, competitiveness, security: all are vital, yes, but empires could provide such basics. We must continually reinvent democratic policies and politics, in a complex and expanding Europe, and in a complex but narrowing global environment. We must reinterpret the notion of borders in an increasingly borderless world. Europe will be strong if and when it is able to contribute to the building of a cosmopolitan, peaceful world order.

It is with this in mind that the European Cultural Foundation (ECF), together with international partners, in 2006 launched an

## Europe needs a culture of mutually recognised difference

incentive fund for cultural cooperation projects in and with south-east Europe. The fund has a special focus on neighbourly artistic cooperation in the troubled region of the former Yugoslavia, across borders and boundaries.

## Beyond the known

This new type of politics requires cultural policies and frameworks to safeguard and promote ‘multiple citizenship’ beyond the known (nation states) for the yet unknown (the global village). It should mean policies for sharing cultures and for transcultural cooperation; for a smart mix of the public and the private; for creative competitiveness and absolute freedom of expression; for creative mobility, encounters and participation.

It will probably take another generation. We need to secure new resources – including financial ones – and find more flexible tools. A new understanding of cultural power can emerge from new

models of interplay between the local, national and European levels, and between the public, private and third sectors.

In my opinion, a comprehensive cultural policy for Europe would include action in the following areas.

**Integration and diversity:** If the concept of European citizenship is to take root, the EU must deepen European cultural cooperation and develop policies which promote the values of diversity and cohesion.

**Culture and economy:** To enlarge access and participation and protect intellectual property, the EU needs a sensible balance of – and framework for – the public and the private in cultural production, dissemination and consumption. We can enhance our competitiveness, without reducing art and culture to mere tools.

**Securing Europe’s transnational heritage:** As well as protecting our local and national heritages, we must also value the transnational and transcultural heritages of Europe. And lay foundations for the transcultural heritage of the future, injecting it all the while with contemporary forms of creativity. Such a wider understanding of Europe’s heritage would advance the cause of a multilayered European identity and citizenship.

**Cultural education and languages:** We need to learn each other’s languages. They are the raw materials of our diversity, the building blocks of our social and cultural growth.

**Cooperation beyond the EU:** Europe is more than the EU. Cultural cooperation with those waiting to join the EU and with the EU’s neighbours should be a strategic priority for European cultural policy.

**Culture in EU foreign policy:** Policies of cohesion and diversity underpin intercultural dialogue. Development aid, conflict management, public diplomacy and democratic politics no longer belong solely in the national realm. Any EU foreign policy necessarily contains a cultural dimension. Let’s make a virtue of it and set it to work effectively.

## ONE IDEA

How to reap the fruits of our European cultures

- Develop cultural diversity policies for a transnational Europe within the wider global village.
- Develop such policies in new civic-public alliances that reflect mutual recognition of difference and shared interests.
- Provide new tools and resources that match Europe’s standards of freedom and enhance our competitiveness.

