

First-ever European strategy for culture: contributing to economic growth and intercultural understanding

The European Commission today adopted a policy statement on the role of culture in a globalising world. It proposes the first-ever European strategy for culture. The Communication affirms the central role of culture in the process of European integration and proposes a cultural agenda for Europe, and for its relations with third countries. Its adoption follows an extensive consultation process involving decision-makers and interested parties from all over Europe.

José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission said: "Culture and creativity touch the daily life of citizens. They are important drivers for personal development, social cohesion and economic growth. But they mean much more : they are the core elements of a European project based on common values and a common heritage – which, at the same time, recognizes and respects diversity. Today's strategy promoting intercultural understanding confirms culture's place at the heart of our policies".

The new policy stance, entitled "A European agenda for culture in a globalising world", takes the form of a **Commission Communication** and is complemented by an accompanying Staff Working Paper ¹¹, which describes the many ways in which the European Union supports culture.. They have been prepared following an extensive public consultation with stakeholders.

The policy statement presents **three major objectives that together form a cultural strategy** for the European Institutions, the Member States, and the cultural and creative sector:

1. Promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue;
2. Promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy; and
3. Promotion of culture as a vital element in the Union's international relations.

At a time when the EU is looking forward to the implementation of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions ¹², the Communication also addresses **the external dimension of European culture**. It recognises the need for a European strategy for culture that is both open to diversity within Europe, and at the same time open to the world. The Communication proposes measures to **make culture an even stronger part of political dialogue with partner countries** and regions around the world, **promoting cultural exchanges** and systematically **integrating culture in development programmes and projects**.

In order to support specific actions in ACP countries, the European Commission is proposing to create an **EU-ACP Cultural Fund** as a joint European contribution to supporting the distribution, and in some cases the production, of ACP cultural goods. This Fund will encourage the emergence of local markets and industries, and will also increase the access of ACP cultural goods to European markets. The European Commission proposes to allocate a Community contribution to the fund of about EUR 30 million for the period 2007 – 2013, and invites the Member States to contribute to the fund with additional funding.

A fundamental feature of the new policy stance is the proposal to introduce **a more structured system of cooperation** among the Member States and the EU institutions on cultural matters. The mechanism is based on the **'open method of coordination' (OMC)** that has been successfully used to structure the collaboration of Member States and EU in the area of education & training, youth and social protection.

The mechanism would propose general objectives to be jointly agreed on by the Member States and the European Commission. **Progress towards these goals would be reviewed every two years** by the Commission and the Member States.

This Communication also seeks to involve the cultural sector – ranging from individual artists and performers to the creative and cultural industries - more closely in European affairs. It

therefore seeks to introduce improved structures for dialogue and partnership with these stakeholders through a new "**Cultural Forum**".

The European strategy for culture will be complemented by other actions by the EU in the area of culture, such as the forthcoming **European Year for Intercultural Dialogue 2008**.

More information:

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/index_en.html

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/communication/comm_en.html