

## **A Sign But No Miracle As Yet**

### **The Communication of the EU Commission on a European agenda for culture in a globalising world**

**Sign of what?** And so, after years-long standstill, movement at last. We have been given a sign, a signal that cultural policies for Europe are no longer taboo. An as-yet-unseen paper on culture and Europe has been produced by the new “crew” in Brussels, no doubt with the support of President Barroso. The “first-ever European strategy for culture”.

**Why, for heaven’s sake?** We live in a societal hodgepodge of multiculturalism and globalisation, national searches for “identity” and transnational realities, worldwide competition and efficiency-sapping constitutional crisis in Europe. Soft-power-Europe begins to discover its own “software”: arts and culture, community-building in freedom and diversity. It is a development not to be underestimated, with pressure being applied from “below” (the networks and foundations) all the way up to the Berliner “soul for Europe”.

**Who is to be convinced?** Primarily the 27, split somewhat between East and West, large and small, and most under the influence of voters’ identitarian insecurities and the populism that follows from these. Member States want to safeguard “subsidiarity” (never under threat) and protect their purse, especially the net payers among them.

**How to seduce the sceptics?** Both with the carrot (culture and economic growth) and the stick (increasing heterogeneity of our societies). Convince them that creativity is in fact human capital and can diminish fear of the “stranger” (“contributing to economic growth and intercultural dialogue”). The Communication offers culture as an efficacious medicine and hopes for approval.

**What will change?** Legal grounds? No. The culture budget? No. New culture programmes suddenly? No (see budget). As the German saying goes, Caution is the mother of the porcelain chest. What we have is an “open method of coordination”: a very Brussels expression for non-binding initiatives among groups of member states who wish to set benchmarks in certain areas, measurable targets that work according to the ‘name and shame’ principle. There are models for this, especially where the Commission has no legal competence and where joint progress appears desirable.

**And what else?** The Commission – ‘discovering’ cultural civil society, and realising its usefulness as a catalyst in the power game with the 27 – seeks new alliances and forms of consultation (“Culture Forum”). It considers its holistic mandate and begins to organise itself across departmental borders, the better to deal with both internal and external cultural policy. This is called “mainstreaming”. Progress, in principle.

**Signs and miracles.** The Communication reads the writing on the wall – that classical EU politics won't suffice – and sends out the signal that culture matters for Europe. This doesn't mean that we can expect only purely symbolic policies; practical results are possible too. However, it doesn't mean either that we can count on a miracle, on a quick, conclusive implementation. The mills of the 27 operate slowly. And rightly so. Ultimately, it is about democracy.

**And the miracle workers from the cultural field?** May God preserve us from more cynicism. Let us grasp the opportunity, act politically, assume our responsibilities towards the hoped-for cosmopolitan Europe of diversity, solidarity and respect. Let's see the Commission (not for the first time) as a partner, and let us support them. And what might we get in return? Maybe a new programme that makes practical sense. A cultural mobility programme, a cultural "Erasmus" for Europe?

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The original texts of the Commission are to be found on:

[http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/communication/comm\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/communication/comm_en.html)

Expert opinions in detail under [www.efah.org](http://www.efah.org)

Background texts on European cultural policies (from the author as well as commissioned experts) can be found on [www.eurocult.org](http://www.eurocult.org)

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This contribution expresses the author's personal viewpoint