Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'A European agenda for culture in a globalising world'

(2008/C 53/05)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

— underlines that local and regional authorities play a key role in developing and fostering culture, especially in protecting cultural heritage and promoting artistic innovation;

— highlights that the cultural sector plays an important part in attaining the objectives of the renewed Lisbon strategy. It draws attention to the tremendous opportunities afforded by cultural tourism for the economic development of many regions. It nonetheless warns against placing one-sided emphasis on the purely economic importance of culture. Equally important is the importance of culture in creating a good and dynamic living environment, a prerequisite for development;

— regrets that, in establishing a European agenda for culture in a globalising world, the European Commission makes no reference to the large number of partnerships between cities, local authorities and regions;

— is critical of the European Commission's failure to provide any information in its communication on how the very ambitious objectives to be pursued under the agenda for culture are to be funded;

— would like to open a constructive discussion on the European Commission's plan to use the open method of coordination in the area of culture. Attention will have to be paid to the sub-national levels, which are to a large extent responsible for culture, and the added administrative burden involved will have to be kept to a minimum.

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Reference document

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European agenda for culture in a globalising world

COM(2007) 242 final

Policy recommendations

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. explicitly welcomes the European Commission's submission on a *European agenda for culture in a globalising world*. The document rightly sets out the key role of culture in the integration process and notes the need for appropriate tools to promote to the full Europe's cultural richness and diversity and thus achieve the 'strategic objectives of prosperity, solidarity and security' both inside and outside the EU.

This requires increased cooperation among all cultural policy players at all levels, taking due account of civil society representatives and their networks.

As moves are made to come up with a new European cultural agenda in response to globalisation, regional and local cultural policy is becoming increasingly important. The challenge of globalisation inevitably means a reawakening of the 'Europe of the regions' — not least in the light of the EU's subsidiarity principle which is predicated on the idea that culture emerges from the grassroots level — i.e. from the cities and regions. Local and regional authorities play a key role in developing and fostering culture in their respective areas, not least in protecting the cultural heritage and promoting artistic innovation, as well as in supporting and assisting not only cultural institutions and initiatives but also education and training, and in staging festivals and cultural events.

In cross-border regions in particular, the quality and scale of cultural cooperation is a crucial element in the European integration process as it faces global challenges;

2. is pleased that, in its communication, the European Commission for the first time articulates the need for a wide-ranging cultural agenda in order to develop an effective strategy that reflects the key role of culture both for relations between the Member States and their regions and relations with non-EU countries.

Intercultural exchange should become the cornerstone of dialogue with candidate countries and part of the Union's neighbourhood policy. The CoR also shares the Commission's view on the need to foster dialogue between religious communities and associations;

3. welcomes the Commission's clear reference both to Article 151 as the EC Treaty base (Amsterdam — 1997) and to the subsidiarity principle; the communication stresses that:

— Community input into European integration in the area of cultural policy must respect Member States' 'national and regional diversity';

— cooperation is to be fostered in all cultural areas not only between the Member States but also with third countries and the competent international organisations operating in the sphere of culture, in particular in collaboration with Council of Europe;

— the Community must take 'cultural aspects' into account in all its activities 'in particular in order to respect and to promote the diversity of its cultures'; and

— the Community can only act to support and supplement Member States' cultural policies, not to replace them with its own measures;

4. is pleased that the European Commission communication explicitly highlights the CoR's constructive role in encouraging the cultural agenda and in involving local and regional authorities and civil society in the process;

With regard to the main objectives of the communication

5. highlights the direction of the objectives set out in the communication and endorses these objectives, prioritised as follows:

— promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue;

— promotion of culture as a vital element in international relations;

— promotion of culture as a driving force for the creative industry (Lisbon strategy);

6. welcomes the fact that the Commission highlights the key role of culture and the creative economy in generating growth and creating jobs. Culture is a European growth industry. The cultural sector thus plays an important part in attaining the objectives of the renewed Lisbon strategy. Encourages therefore the European Commission to better assess the impacts of the cultural and creative sector on regional and local economies;

7. notes in this regard the special role played by cultural tourism. The CoR calls for a stepping-up of European-level exchanges of experience with the cultural tourism industry, cultural associations and other cultural players and regional representatives. The CoR would draw attention to the tremendous opportunities afforded by cultural tourism for the economic development of many regions, but also to the risks involved for cultural heritage, especially through inappropriate use;

8. despite its wholehearted support for the Lisbon objectives, would nonetheless warn against placing one-sided emphasis on the purely economic importance of culture in this context. Equally important is the importance of culture in creating a good and dynamic living environment, a prerequisite for development. The CoR urges that the Community should first and foremost meet its remit under the Treaty to foster 'non-commercial cultural exchanges' (Art. 151(2), third indent, EC Treaty);

The Committee would like it made clear that the Lisbon objectives can only be successfully pursued if the European Union focuses its cultural efforts on the importance for society of the intangible values of culture. The CoR feels that cultural education and cultural cooperation must be fostered if society's creative resources are to be tapped and the cultural industry is to flourish. Culture exists without a cultural industry, but a cultural industry cannot exist without culture;

9. Related to the above is the intrinsic value of culture and CoR wants to highlight the importance of promoting quality. One objective of a European agenda for culture should be to achieve a dynamic cultural development and to present cutting edge culture in Europe; and in a global context;

10. would therefore urge that steps be taken to strengthen and foster international cultural exchanges, the acquisition of intercultural skills and multilingualism among the EU public;

11. feels that the plan propagated by the Amsterdam-based European Cultural Foundation and currently being pursued by the European Parliament and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture to establish an *Erasmus for Culture* pilot project is a sound and worthwhile way of fostering cultural cooperation by building on the strengths of the regions and regionally based organisations and institutions with a high cultural profile. The CoR will be a willing partner in this initiative;

12. confirms the effectiveness of the current *Culture 2007* (2007-2013) programme and other schemes, particularly those designed to promote cultural development in rural areas 'in view of enhancing the attractiveness of regions'.

The CoR is critical of the continued inadequacy of the resources made available by the EU and Member States for this purpose;

13. is surprised at the European Commission's almost complete failure to take account of recent developments in the most attractive EU cultural project — the European Capital of Culture scheme — to which it would appear to attach no strategic importance. This scheme is the most popular of all the European cultural projects, and is quickly gaining importance in the cultural development of cities and regions, as witnessed by the increasing number of national competitions to secure the title (eight UK contenders for the 2008 award; eighteen German and eleven Hungarian contenders for 2010; eight Finnish contenders for 2011; and seven contenders already in the running for the Spanish title in 2016). Particular momentum is generated here by the fact that, under the Capital of Culture scheme for the years 2007 to 2011, culture is understood and treated as an engine and tool for social development, thus making a major contribution to European added value;

14. urges therefore that the European Commission should be alert to new developments in the European Capital of Culture scheme, studying them closely and giving them its backing.

In doing so, the Commission should pay particular attention to:

— the strong and effective cooperation between the 2007 to 2011 European Capitals of Culture;

— the cooperation under way between the joint 2010 Capitals of Culture — the Ruhr, Pécs and Istanbul — covering not only the innovative potential of sustainable, culture-based urban development and but also the particular opportunities thereby afforded to engage in dialogue with Islam;

— the 2010 Cultural Cities Network, which for the first time brings together more than 20 towns and cities from Hungary, Germany and Turkey to work together on the development of their own European cultural objectives, to join the Capitals of Culture in their preparations for 2010 and to present their projects simultaneously at a wide range of different locations;

15. will, for its part, address the potential for development and integration which, as noted in the 2005 Budapest declaration of the Hungarian and German Capitals of Culture, is inherent in cultural cooperation schemes undertaken by and for the benefit of Europe's regions and cities;

16. regrets that, in establishing a European agenda for culture in a globalising world, the European Commission makes no reference to the large number of partnerships between cities, local authorities and regions which, with their origins in Europe, have spread throughout the world since the end of the Second World War. Such structured partnerships between cities and regions have had — and continue to have — a stabilising effect on society and have made a major contribution to peaceful development and to overcoming the division of Europe. The CoR would therefore ask the European Commission, when drawing up its programmes, to take due account of the cultural potential of urban and regional partnerships — which are so important for society as a whole — and to take on board new, qualitative developments;

17. confirms the importance of the *Citizens for Europe* programme and its impact on regional and local cultural development, and calls for this programme to be broadened;

18. expects practical proposals for action under the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and anticipates CoR involvement in the process. Encourages therefore DG Education and Culture to maintain the focus on intercultural dialogue after 2008 by promoting specific policies and by working together with other Directorate-Generals;

19. is critical of the European Commission's failure to provide any information in its communication on how the very ambitious objectives to be pursued under the agenda for culture are to be funded, noting that funding cannot under any circumstances be provided from the meagre resources available under the Culture 2007 programme. In this regard, the CoR would underscore the key role of the Structural Funds in promoting cultural infrastructure and preserving cultural heritage, and supports the European Commission's plan in future to incorporate cultural projects into other Community programmes. However, the CoR expects more specific information on this point;

20. shares the European Commission's view that the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which entered into force in March 2007, is a key tool of cultural policy and international law that is of major importance for the Community and the Member States and will also have a regional impact.

Therefore calls upon the European Commission, without prejudice to the principle of subsidiarity, to take steps to introduce this global agreement;

21. would again point out that a common external cultural policy agreed on by the Member States can only be developed and put into effect if support is given to the cooperation initiatives and activities of Member State players who cultivate relations with non-EU countries. The Committee of the Regions would therefore explicitly propose to the European Commission that initiatives such as EUNIC (European Union National Institutes for Culture) should be strengthened and supported;

22. is pleased at that, as things stand, the Council conclusions on a reform treaty for Europe are taking on board the firm foundations in the sphere of culture agreed by the European Convention;

23. is critical of the absence of any reference to the Berlin Declaration on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome, which stresses not only the economic but also the cultural importance of integration and highlights the key role of the regions in this regard;

24. would like to open a constructive discussion on the European Commission's plan to use the open method of coordination in the area of culture. The CoR reminds in this context that attention will have to be paid to the sub-national levels, which are to a large extent responsible for culture, and the added administrative burden will have to be kept to a minimum. The CoR recommends making also use of the multifarious opportunities afforded by setting up and fostering European platforms and networks. In particular, the Committee feels that stepping up support for joint, multinational projects and fostering exchanges between cultural professionals offers a promising way of accelerating and intensifying European integration;

25. backs the European Commission's plan to stage a European Cultural Forum every two years involving cultural players and practitioners at every level;

26. explicitly welcomes in this regard the European Commission's plan to submit a cultural policy progress report every two years which should, above all, provide information on the European Commission's application of the cultural compatibility clause (Article 151(4) of the EC Treaty) in other policy areas.

Brussels, 28 November 2007

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Michel DELEBARRE