



Europa eine Seele geben
A Soul for Europe
Une âme pour l'Europe

Berlin Conference “A Soul for Europe” **European Culture Boosting Society, Politics and Economy**

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Berliner Konferenz

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Conclusions by Simon Mundy

‘Responsibility starts with dreams’, said Meglena Kuneva, the European Commissioner from Bulgaria, taking a line from W.B. Yeats. It is the belief that lies behind the conviction that development in Europe – political, economic and individual – requires creativity and innovation stemming from the cultural core of civil society.

The responsibility to which she referred is the urgent need to re-engage citizens in the process of constructing Europe through shared values. These values, Commissioner Kuneva said, can be distilled as ‘prosperity, solidarity and liberty’. To achieve this, culture needs to be a key component in making Europe work for its citizens.

The conference debated the mechanisms by which this can be made a reality. Importantly it concluded that the three values cannot be taken forward without the political will to move beyond the stereotype of cultures being based on the heritage of national mythology. Europe must lose its fear of its diversity and the first question asked when people meet needs no longer to be ‘where are you from’. As Miklós Marschall, Regional Director of Transparency International, put it, ‘Europe is like a city, which needs a mayor who can navigate through all its district: it needs transformational leadership that its present design, based on bargaining between nation states, inevitably excludes.’

Leaders from industry, politics (European and national), and civil society discussed how to change the political vocabulary and the links between the private and the public spheres. Richard von Weizsäcker, former President of Germany, called for the language of the economic and cultural policy to be brought together so that they were seen to be pursuing the same objectives. With 2008 designated as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, and 2009 to be European Year of Creativity and Innovation, all sides called for the resources and will to make the most of the opportunities that a cultural pillar for European development represents.

Cultural Europe is composed of much more than national heritage. It includes one of the most dynamic economic sectors – that of the arts: a major source of employment and ideas generation. Artists and their fellow professionals in the sector can be crucial in helping Europe design a new model for participatory democracy that engages the inhabitants of Europe on the basis of equality and social justice. This cultural paradigm, freed from the divisive assertions of the past, is also the key to including the areas that border Europe, whether to the east or along the southern shore of the European Union.

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For culture to be a positive force, the mobility of people in its diverse activity is crucial. Opportunities for young people and cultural operators to exchange ideas, to develop projects and participate in networks must not be limited to some member states of the European Union. A porous Europe, not a fortress Europe is required, that is less rigid in its criteria for granting visas. National governments need to recognise that cultural interaction is as vital as free trade. Equally that mobility schemes cannot be left to the limited budgets of the European Commission. Promoting mobility must become a core responsibility of nation states.

The cultural sector offers its ideas, resources, invention and people to help Europe out of economic recession and political stagnation.

After this third Berlin Conference, the initiative "A Soul for Europe" will change format, location and generation. It is multiplying so that the discussion can engage citizens throughout Europe, defined in its widest sense. Over the next two years the initiative will be devolved to many more cities – and implemented by civil society organisations instated by the emerging generation of active leaders.

Simon Mundy, 15 November 2008