



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

Summary

Berlin Conference 17-19 November 2006

The Second Conference held under the auspices of the 'A Soul for Europe' initiative was held in the hall of the Dresdner Bank building, next to the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin on 17 to 19 November 2006. It brought together about 500 participants; members and officials of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and several national parliaments, together with representatives of civil, business and artistic society, including a wide range of young participants from countries that are not yet members of the European Union. The EU Ministers for Culture were represented by Minister Isabel Pires de Lima (Portugal) and State Minister Bernd Neumann (Germany).

The 2006 Berlin Conference recognised the potential of culture as an indispensable force in the process of European integration. It gave added impetus to the purpose of reshaping Europe in a way that engages not only the political and economic but also the creative aspirations of its citizens. In a passionate speech, the film director Wim Wenders called on the political establishment to rejuvenate enthusiasm for a Europe that celebrates civilisation, promotes humanism and enables its people to realise their dreams.

The President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, said, 'Culture is the keystone of the sense of belonging that Europe needs. By facilitating dialogue, culture opens the way to development in an increasingly multicultural and multilingual society.' He continued, 'Europe, which 'invented' tolerance for individuals, for their opinions, for their beliefs and for their differences, must make its own special voice heard.'

The philanthropist George Soros argued that the European Union 'can set an example for the world in international co-operation both within its own borders and beyond. All that is needed now is for the people of Europe to be inspired by the idea of the European Union as the prototype of a global open society.'

President Norbert Lammert welcomed the conference on behalf of the German Bundestag. He observed that 'without reactivating the cultural dimension, Europe will not be able to make progress on its reform or enlargement.'

Ján Figel', the European commissioner for Education and Culture, pointed out that cultural diversity within the EU has increased and will increase even further as a result of immigration and the enlargement process. As the commissioner said, the cultural sector in the European Union now accounts for the employment of six million people (one of the few areas of consistent growth) and 2.6% of GDP. 'It is therefore no longer a luxury,' he added, 'it is a sound and necessary investment.'

After the opening statements the conference discussions were divided into a number of sessions designed to explore in depth the variety of challenges facing Europe and to suggest practical means of addressing them. The first day looked at harnessing European culture for the economy, co-

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operation between civil society and public bodies, and the intention to create an alliance of organisations to promote the ideas behind 'A Soul for Europe' over the medium term.

The second day looked more closely at political realities. Discussions focused the definition and purpose of Europe, culture as an element of policy making, Europe's world position, and international social cohesion. The final session on 19 November was open to a wider public and devoted to exploring the Jewish and Islamic dimension of creating an open Europe.

On issues between public bodies and civil society several speakers from the 'accession' countries felt that too little progress had been made in modernising cultural policies or financial and institutional models. Too often thinking was confined to the national perspective and the structures discouraged people from forming or participating in networks that could widen the view. Ivan Krastev, of the Centre for Liberal Studies in Sofia, was concerned that European states were proving adept at recognising difference but were losing respect for dissent.

Erhard Busek, the Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, regretted that only non-governmental organisations were active in cultural policy reform, that they were funded from outside their home nation and that in many countries they were under threat as a result. He argued forcefully that there needed to be a strong cultural reform component in the criteria for EU enlargement that extended the EU's competence to protect crossborder and innovative activity. This was underlined by the Stability Pact's Director, Marijana Grandits, who also argued for funding for bilateral exchange projects that involved activity from the opposite ends of Europe 'to see what really divides and joins us.'

The session on the definition of Europe concentrated on the need to find ways of using the media to transform itself into a more responsive agent of integration. Europe needs to be treated as domestic, not foreign, coverage. Translation is vital but so too is the need for journalists and editors who are able to be mobile and to harness contacts outside their own national territories and language groups. European communications should not be confused with the public relations statements of official institutions, commented the Hungarian journalist, Gabriella Gönczy. Similarly, Wim Wenders made a strong plea for the transformation of the EU information shops which occupy prime locations in EU cities. He called for them to be turned into places where people find images that convey the emotions of the European dream, rather than dull leaflets and economy statistics. 'One day,' he said, 'the next generation will reproach today's politicians by asking 'Why did you make Europe so boring for us?'

Many of these themes and concerns were reflected in subsequent sections of the conference. Former French Culture minister Jacques Toubon MEP called for a substantial upward revision of the finances for cultural co-operation in the European Commission's budget from 2008 and others stressed the vital contribution of the Council of Europe in helping cultural policy reform.

Much of the debate centred on how to take the initiative and themes of the Berlin Conference forward in the coming years. The prospect of the Year of Intercultural Dialogue being held in 2008 provides a context and focus for activity in the medium term. The Conference looks to the programmes for that year to demonstrate Europe's ability to play an active role in global dialogue, to lay firm foundations for permanent engagement and to establish the appropriate institutions and programmes to ensure the dialogue is fruitful.



The Berlin Conference invited the key organisations in Europe's cultural and political life to form an alliance that could press for transformation and monitor its progress. The alliance would seek out new partners and develop the relationships with the institutions of national governments, the European Union and the Council of Europe. It would link organisations promoting the development of Europe and gaining the support of its citizens, organisations that foster Europe's cultural strength, public European institutions and those with national or international mandates, and private organisations and foundations bound to the European ideal.

The goal of the Conference and the Alliance that stems from it is to broaden the vision of Europe beyond the utilitarian necessities of economic and regulatory harmonisation. It is to ensure that integration is based on the cultural potential in all areas of policy and on the centrality of open and inclusive cultural policy to successful reform, social cohesion and prosperity.

In the coming years the work of the initiative will be broadened, deepened and rejuvenated through subsidiary meetings, political advocacy and evaluation. It will reconvene as the Berlin Conference in 2008 to review progress.

For more information see under www.berlinerkonferenz.eu

Simon Mundy, 21 November 2006