



AER Committee 3 meeting

Östersund, 5th October 2007

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FOR ADOPTION

**Position of the Assembly of European Regions (AER)
On the Communication from the European Commission
“On a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world” (COM/05/2007)**

In the context of the consultation launched by the European Commission, the Assembly of European Regions, gathered in Udine on 7th November 2007, having regard to:

- the Art.151 of the Treaty of Nice (26 February 2001);
- the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions by the UNESCO (20 October 2005);
- the results of the 2802nd EU Council Session on Education, Youth and Culture (24-25 May 2007) ;
- the study on the Economy of culture in Europe proposed by the European Commission (October 2006);

Hereby suggests a number of comments on the Communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world:

1. Definition of culture and its benefits

Culture is often very difficult to define as it covers many different fields and spheres of human activity, while it is also constantly developing and changing. Therefore, the AER is convinced that also the European Commission is not in the position to find a final definition that would cover all aspects of European cultural diversity.

In addition, the AER is sceptical to any attempt to measure and weigh the benefits of cultural activities, be they in the field of European cultural identity or of economic value. Culture cannot be reduced to bare economic values – the cultural diversity of Europe should be rather seen a value in itself.

Especially, facing the challenges of Globalization and the need to strengthen the European identity, the notion of cultural heritage and cultural identity remains essential. More than anytime, it is crucial to renew the effort towards the preservation and conservation of our European cultural heritage.

Therefore, the AER welcomes the European Commission’s recognition of the importance of cultural diversity in Europe. However, this requires the respect of national, regional and local levels of government and their specific cultural needs and activities. Cultural diversity must be anchored in regional development strategies and the principle of subsidiarity must be respected.

2. Open Method of Coordination (OMC)

The AER strongly supports the European Union’s principle of subsidiarity, which gives regions the possibility to modernise and find solutions in fields they are most competent, for instance in the field of culture. The

OMC, which assembles the 27 Member State governments to agree on non-binding recommendations and benchmarks, cannot be the complete answer to European cooperation in the field of culture, as the structures closest to the citizens, i.e. regions and municipalities are in most Member States only indirectly involved.

As the European Commission rightly acknowledges the role of cooperation for European cultural policies, it is questionable if the OMC would be the suitable structure. The AER sees with concern that the Communication wants to establish OMC structures without outlining in detail the OMC objectives. Without a clear decision on these objectives the OMC might lead to a streamlining of cultural policies between EU Member States, which would run counter to the preservation of European cultural diversity, as stipulated in the EU-Treaties.

3. International action of the European Commission in the field of culture

Regarding the envisaged role of the European Commission as some kind of “European Cultural Ambassador” outside the EU, the AER appreciates the Commission’s effort. However, the Communication should outline more clearly, how the Commission plans to cooperate with already existing national and regional cultural organisations in third countries.

In addition, the AER sees a need in specifying how the diversity of European culture can be best promoted abroad by the European Commission, bearing in mind the impossibility of defining culture and the difficulties to establish a common European denominator on a European cultural identity.

4. Role of the European Commission

The AER strongly welcomes and highly appreciates the European Commission’s renewed commitment and initiative on cultural policies. As Article 151 of the Treaty of Nice stipulates, the European Union will be supporting European cultural diversity and its cultural richness. The AER would be very happy to discuss with the European Commission, how Europe’s regions can be involved in that process and how the best progress can be achieved.

In the name of its member regions from non-EU Member States, the AER also would like to encourage the European Commission to include these countries and regions also in the EU’s cultural programmes, as Europe always should be seen as a cultural community, independent of the membership of organisations such as the EU, the Council of Europe and others.

5. Role of the Regions

The AER encourages the development of regional cultural policies, strategies and actions in the field of cultural policies. There is much the regions can do to preserve Europe’s unique cultural heritage, if their competences and the principle of subsidiarity are respected – values that are shared by all members of the AER.

Therefore, the AER thanks the European Commission to pursue the promotion of culture in Europe and is looking forward to see the regions of Europe involved in European cultural policies and the protection of its cultural heritage and diversity.

The AER reserves the right to further react to the Communication from the European Commission on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world at a later stage.

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