Conference More Europe in Marseilles
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Conclusions

Challenges and perspectives for culture

Views from Eastern Europe and the Southern Mediterranean

The role of culture in democratic transitions, in view of the experience of Eastern Europe

Current situation and challenges

- **Civil society has played, and is still playing, a crucial role** in the democratic transition of countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, and in the Southern Mediterranean.

- Democratic transition processes, and the role of culture, are nevertheless **specific to each region:**
    - In the Southern Mediterranean, **religion** figures prominently in political affairs;
    - Diplomatic work in the Southern Mediterranean countries is made more complex by the **many different players** vying for external influence over these countries (neighbouring Gulf States, Qatar and Turkey);
    - Former Communist bloc countries had an **effective, institutionalised cultural policy** and have therefore benefited from a rich and diverse heritage in which tangential forces have also been institutionalised.

- The type of democracy to which the countries of the Southern Mediterranean aspire is still to be determined.

    - In view of the experience of countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, **democratic transition can be stable and long lasting**:
    - If there is a **strong State apparatus**, which will become the vehicle for implementing policies;
    - If **powers are balanced**;
    - If **mobility for young people**, and for all relevant players and professionals, is promoted and facilitated.

- As regards the EU, **the two regions are very different:**
    - The countries of the Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe were, and in the case of some still are, committed to joining the EU and adopting the "acquis communautaire";
    - In the Southern Mediterranean, the EU's political objectives are not yet clearly identified: many of the States are privileged partners but do not intend to become EU Member States.

- **Artists have a political role to play,** particularly regarding **citizenship**, as for example in the Tunisian project Dream City, which is an *"experimental laboratory and a think tank"* for the people of Tunis and their citizenship experience.

Péter Inkei, Hugues Mingarelli, Sofiane Ouissi, Rania Stephan, Pavol Demeš

Recommendations

- Artists, political institutions, policy-makers, experts, *etc.* must **work together** to ensure the continuous exchange of knowledge, ideas and experiences and **work towards democratic transition together**.

- **The EU** must support the democratic transition of the Southern Mediterranean countries **without seeking at all costs to replicate political models that would be inappropriate:**
    - **Give societies the time** to choose their own forms of expression, to use their own language, in order to find the model suited to their context and their needs, and not reproduce '*disasters*' as in some Eastern European countries in the 1990s.
    - **Respect the political and artistic pace of new Arab societies.**

- **Support artists:**
    - By ensuring their freedom of expression;
    - By supporting projects such as Dream City, through European national institutes for culture, foundations and embassies.

- It is in the EU's interest to **include culture in its foreign policy** by re-launching a *'ministerial conference on culture'*:
    - According to a representative of the European External Action Service, Albania (a member of the Union for the Mediterranean) has already expressed its intention to hold such a conference;
    - **Provide political impetus** to give culture greater importance in relations between the EU and North Africa and the Middle East.

Artists' mobility and visas

"Connecting people and cultural fields is the primary factor for development."
Patrice MEYER-BISCH (Fribourg Declration on Cultural Rights)

I.   Visas

Current situation and challenges

- The **internationalisation and globalisation of artists' workspaces** run counter to the problems they have crossing borders:
    - The onerous administrative procedures involved in obtaining a visa;
    - The quality of service provided in some consulates, which makes artists reluctant to apply for visas;
    - The silence commonly exercised by embassies and consulates regarding visa applicants;
    - The lack of explanation for refused visa applications, and the scope for arbitrariness in the evaluation of applications.

- The issuance of visas often meets security prerogatives dictated by Ministries of the Interior.

- **Europe is no longer the sole centre of attraction** for artists from around the world: emerging powers – previously considered as 'developing countries' – have their own, extremely effective, cultural cooperation and penetration policies.

- The concept of '*cultural humanism'* is no longer relevant.

Schengen Area

- The 'Schengen Visa' is a **uniform, general visa**, regardless of the reasons for travelling or the socio-professional category of the visa applicant.

- The European institutions govern the issuance of **short-stay visas** for the 26 Member States of the Schengen Area:
    - Stays of up to 90 days in a 180-day period (3 months in a 6-month period);
    - The issuance of long-stay visas depends on the national regulations of each EU Member State;
    - Schengen Visa issuance procedures, the 'Visa Code', apply to all Member States of the Schengen Area: the European Commission can initiate infraction procedures if a State contravenes these rules.

Diederick Paalman, DG Home, European Commission

- The visas are managed by the **Ministries of the Interior,** which see them as a means to regulating entry into the Schengen Area.

Recommendations

- Uphold the **principle of fair relations**, which must be central to visa issuance policies.

- Move to a **culture of trust**: the ultimate goal of mobility is the return, so that the artist or cultural operator can share the benefit of the trip with their community of origin.

- **Raise awareness of Ministries of the Interior**:
    - Raise awareness of relevant staff, to provide a better service for artists;
    - Create dialogue between relevant staff and cultural operators;
    - Work closely with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

- **Give reasons for refused** visa applications, to make **procedures and decision-making more transparent**.

- Create a platform between the different sectors of civil society.

- **For the EU,** pursue on-going negotiations to **facilitate visa agreements** with neighbouring countries (Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), and initiate agreements with Morocco and Tunisia. These agreements are particularly aimed at artists and representatives of NGOs or civil society organisations, for whom visa fees are waived.

- **Issue more multiple-entry visas,** valid for 2, 3 or 5 years: cultural operators would only have to apply every 2 or 3 years, and consular services would have fewer applications to process.

II.   Mobility of artists and cultural operators

Current situation and challenges

- Mobility does not just concern travel between countries: mobility problems are sometimes seen within a country or a city.

- Also taking into account the **mobility of artistic works** raises legislative, not financial, issues.

In the Southern Mediterranean

- Mobility (or the lack of) is also linked to border problems, war, refugee issues, *etc*.

- In some cases, particularly for Palestinian refugees, the **right to mobility** is non-existent:
    - Issue of obtaining a visa;
    - Problem with identity papers and passports.

- Legislation in the Arab region is changing constantly and extremely rapidly, sometimes from one day to the next.

- Mobility is still on the agenda for discussion by the **Arab League**, with no tangible solutions emerging at present.

In Eastern Europe

- The **end of programmes** run by foundations and other international organisations, such as the Council of Europe and the Soros Foundation, has had a negative impact on the activities of cultural operators in the region.

- Problems concerning visas and travel for artists hide, in some cases, protectionist issues, as in the United States.

Travel grants

- 30-40% of artists and cultural operators who obtain travel grants do not make the journey due to problems in obtaining visas.

- Regulations and criteria for obtaining travel grants are complex and lacking in clarity and transparency.

- There is growing demand for **greater collaboration between the Southern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans**, but specific travel programmes are rare, if not non-existent.

Recommendations

- Help to establish **regional mobility policies** aimed at strengthening ties between those concerned with mobility (government agencies, foundations, civil society, *etc*.), following the example of the Agenda of the Arab Education Forum, as much in the Southern Mediterranean as in Eastern Europe.

- **Promote dialogue** between the European institutions, the EU Member States and regional organisations from non-EU countries concerning mobility issues.

- **Extend European mobility programmes** beyond traditional geographic borders.

- **Simplify travel grant application procedures**, for example by translating forms into participants' languages.

Mais Irqsusi, Arab Education Forum (Jordan)

Reform of cultural policies in the South and East

Current situation and challenges

- After the Wall came down, **private foundations** such as the Soros Foundation and the Gulliver Foundation played a key role in **funding the arts and culture sector** in Eastern European countries.
  At present, there is no such movement by private foundations in the Arab world.

- There has been **a strong move by European artists and intellectuals**, both in the East and the West, to **rebuild the cultural relationship** between the two sides of Europe.
  Relations and exchanges between Europe and the Arab world have remained, until now, unequal and shaped by decolonisation processes.

- In post-communist societies there is a **very close link between culture and democracy**: culture remained an important topic on the political agenda throughout the period from 1990 to 2000. Nowadays, **cultural policies are marginalised and overlooked by the political system.**

- Neither the 'Communist bloc' nor the 'Arab world' have been, or are, as uniform as one would like to think.

- **The lack of information on the way governance operates** in Arab countries makes the development of cultural policies even more difficult.

- In several Southern Mediterranean countries, **civil society and private initiatives** replace ministries of culture.
  For example, the Racines association in Morocco has started a process to list venues for creation, training, screening and exhibition in all areas of culture, in order to build quantified and specific data to enable the development of appropriate policies.

Philipp Dietachmair, Goran Tomka, Delphine Borione, Corina Şuteu, Ghislaine Glasson-Deschaumes

Recommendations

- **Give cultural practices time** to stabilise and reflect the cultural policies introduced.

- Take into account the **many players** involved in the development of cultural policies: the State must work with civil society in order to implement sustainable and appropriate reforms.

- **Allow societies to define their priorities themselves**, according to their historical, economic and geographical context.
  If priorities are defined through external pressure or support, the cultural sector will be very fragile when this support disappears, as is the current case in Central and Eastern Europe.

- **Keep culture on the political agenda.**

- **The EU** must create the conditions for an effective cultural relationship with its neighbours:
  - By taking an interest in what is going on **in the field**, particularly in the current development of the **independent cultural scene**;
  - **By supporting local authorities**, which have acquired greater power and are developing their own cultural policies;
  - By developing **programmes that meet the needs of local cultural organisations and that build their capacities**.
    Independent cultural organisations are Europe's best allies for creating an effective platform for cooperation, particularly in the absence of a stable government, provided that **effective partnerships are established**;
  - By designing **broad cultural policies** (economy, heritage protection, *etc.*).

Photos Isabelle Arnold/*MORE EUROPE*