

Europe Needs New Cultural Policies

“I am more convinced than ever that any effort to build a new Europe will fail unless serious consideration is given to the profound importance of the cultural dimension”.¹ This is a strong statement — still quite a rare thing — made by Wolfgang Petritsch, yet a statement that also characterises the work of the European Cultural Foundation (ECF), on whose Advisory Council Wolfgang Petritsch has served as an active member since 2005. Why does culture matter? And why do we need cultural policies for Europe?

Ultimately, the reason is that we Europeans live in a period of massive transition, from ‘national’ ways of organising communities (and diversity) to trans-national models. One of the most successful experiments has been the European integration process. This is not without conflicts, to say the least. The recent discussion in the Netherlands about dual citizenship demonstrates how sensitive and complex this transition is.

The European Union (EU) can be described as a project that has, since its inception, sought to negotiate difference differently. It is not going too well at the moment. This has to do with another ‘transition’: ‘Diversity’ — a sacred European mantra — presents an unprecedented challenge in terms of demography and migration (‘autochthonous’ societies are facing a fast-growing migrant population; in some cities there is already a majority of ‘allochthonous’ citizens) and the continuing rapid expansion of the EU. Both of these parallel processes question the notion of (and emotions associated with) belonging, of identity. How much diversity do citizens want, need, can they ‘digest’, in the context of the globalisation of economy, information, mobility and competition?

It is definitely one of the myths (and persisting mistakes) of cultural historiography that Jean Monnet said if he were to begin European integration again he would start with culture. On the contrary: after the collapse of one of the two major ‘total cultural’ ideologies of the twentieth century, fascism, leaders of the post-war peace-building engineered Europe very pragmatically, by intertwining nations and national economies to an extent that war became

1 Wolfgang Petritsch, “Foreword,” in Chris Keulemans (ed.), *The Heart of the Matter. The Role of Art and Culture in the Balkan’s European Integration* (Amsterdam: European Cultural Foundation, 2006), p. 7.

almost impossible. The question is whether the EU today needs cultural policies. I believe, yes; urgently.

Right now, we simply don't have European cultural policies, apart from a tiny and under-used article (151 of the Amsterdam Treaty) and some programmes that have a collective budget equivalent to that of a large opera house (and this for 450 million citizens!). What we have are 'cultural policies by default'. And herein lies one of the problems: to have no cultural policy is a cultural policy too, but an implicit one, driven by other actors, that is, the market. Europe struggles to build a trans-national community based on respect for and a cosmopolitan outlook on diversity, and has no means or strategy for its 'software'.

Of course, community building beyond the national experience should not be based first of all on culture, but on a contemporary understanding of citizenship: rights and responsibilities, democracy and participation. In fact, in addition to national citizenship (which will long remain the dominant realm for democracy), we have an emerging European citizenship, the concept and reality of which are expanding. However slow this process is, the EU remains the widest possible transnational space in which citizens can assert their rights and exert political control. Beyond this level, we don't know if there will ever be a 'global citizenship', however impressive may be the developing sense (especially among young people) of global responsibilities, socially and environmentally as well as in the fields of human rights, anti-discrimination and development.

However, citizenship — especially contemporary 'multiple citizenship' — also has strong 'cultural' connotations. Habermas was extremely cautious in admitting this; the most far-reaching expression he would probably agree to would be that the political culture of democracy is somewhat 'culturally impregnated'. But sharing communities that 'work' means more than 'constitutional patriotism'. Biku Parekh observed that citizens of communities "entertain expectations of each other that they do not in relation to outsiders." Shared memories (including those of sacrifices) and shared aspirations are essential for sharing communities. On the other hand, "no society can expect to remain the same," and shouldn't. Are there limits? This is probably the most difficult question to be negotiated.

Sharing is essential for trans-national communities, whether within societies (e.g., cities) or in Europe. 'Negotiating difference' requires shared beliefs and the sharing of cultures in addition to (mutual) interests which of course need to be met. European political culture needs to be grounded in this experience of sharing cultures. And such an experience is not a given. We need to enable and promote it; to create cultural policy frameworks that will allow greater experience of mutual enrichment in a culture of cultures, and a mosaic of diverse creative and artistic processes and products, based on freedom of expression, beyond merely utilitarian considerations.

Culture is generic diversity; in a wide sense, it forms the arena of how people and peoples shape (and distinguish) their diverse ways of life. The 'political culture' of Europe is built on the protection and promotion of cultural diversity. Under the conditions of a 'new diversity', its 'management' is a political, economic, social and cultural task. Culture and art build bridges between communities (cohesion) and diversity (difference). Yet culture (including art) is not the universal remedy for difficulties with diversity. The root causes of these are manifold: inequality of social and economic resources affect both individuals and groups; educational backgrounds determine the ability to deal with diversity, on 'both sides'; decency of public discourse in politics and the media can ease or poison reconciliation, result in self-assurance or insecurity; global political constellations can falsely magnify or distort perceptions (e.g., the 'Islam debate' in the wake of the Middle East crisis). Where other root causes are much more relevant, we have to combat the 'culturalisation' of difference.

Let us therefore remind ourselves: Culture is not innocent as such. Wars have been waged and exclusion and racism 'justified' by cultural arguments and fuelled by misled artists. 'Cultures' have been used as a synonym for superiority. 'Modernity' has ended up in totalitarian catastrophes.

The political culture of the emerging European project was therefore wisely based on pragmatic considerations following the defeat of fascism: creating an interdependence of nations and economies. Today, a growing diversity under one roof asks for more: namely, a cultural diversity policy at the European level. On the one hand, diversity is endangered by global homogenisation trends, while on the other hand 'too much diversity' is perceived by many as a threat. The promotion of cultural diversity is a must in democracy (and in 'our' culture), as is respect for differing opinions and concern for the anxieties of citizens in the face of a fast-growing diversity. Ideological 'correctness' cannot mitigate emotional insecurity or combat populism. In democracy, however, the experience of all living on a territory, whether formally 'citizens' or not, forms the basis of policymaking for the common good. And this entails integrating the experience of those who are being excluded and stigmatised.

Culture can 'bring people together'; unlock frozen curiosity, help us encounter otherness, build up respect, change mindsets. Cultural cooperation enlarges intercultural competence. Policies are needed to create and develop these resources.

Culture in a more specific sense forms the complex body of expression, the symbolic codes of individuals and societies, from memory to aspirations. Cultural policies for Europe secure a wide space for art in its freedom and diversity, and public support. Art, as one of the most powerful 'cultural techniques', mirrors and changes society. Art embodies essential paradoxes of being, links sameness to otherness through its 'machinery' of creating images and 'languages', forms and processes. Art plays with diversity. Art can make

a radical difference. Viewed in the *longue durée*, artistic courage has influenced European history at significant turning points. Artists question power structures and discourses through their creative disentanglement of taboos and canons. Yet art reveals its richness also subtly, through radical formal courage, the tacit and ‘irritating’ art of deconstruction and composition; its diverse surprises remind non-artists of their own creativity and resources for ‘inventing’ their existence differently. Art is unique in providing profound experience that goes beyond personal life-experience. Going to the roots of imagination and form transcends the limits of reality and ‘functional’ identities. Art enables us to experience different lives, others’ lives too. Art is not ‘real life’: artificiality enables us to experience what we never imagined before. Ultimately, this has an impact on ‘life’ as well. Art, by its very nature, crosses borders — ultimately because thoughts (forms) are free. Works of art open up spaces of participation. Art is a means of cultural survival. However varying our degrees of freedom are, we are aware of the limitations of ‘reality’. Art reminds us of our potential to be different (‘Who am I?’) and to relate to others (‘Who are they?’). Individuals, artists and networks are starting to organise diversity differently, beyond considerations of mere comfort. ‘Minorities’ know how to use the power of art. Art becomes ‘political’.

The concept of cultural policies for Europe doesn’t imply conflict with the policies of member states or with subsidiarity; one complements the other. However, cultural policies for Europe require the financial means and instruments needed to realise democratically set objectives. There are nine areas in which European politics must be active:

- 1) *Integration and diversity*: If the concept of European citizenship (one that possesses a global cultural perspective) is to take root, then the EU must genuinely advance European cultural cooperation and also develop policies useful to the concepts of diversity and cohesion.
- 2) *Culture and economy*: In order to allow access and participation and protect intellectual properties, the EU needs a wise balance of, and framework for, the public and the private in cultural production, dissemination and consumption. The goal is to enhance competitiveness, but without using art and culture as mere tools.
- 3) *European cultural heritage and contemporary creativity*: In addition to protecting local and national heritage, Europe must look after its trans-national and trans-cultural heritage. And it must create innovative foundations for the trans-cultural heritage of the future. Europe must not become a global museum of diversity. Such a broad heritage (meaningful to people across borders) allied to creativity (bringing excellence and participation) would advance the cause of multiple identification and citizenship.

- 4) *Cultural education and languages*: These raw materials of our diversity, the building blocks of our social and cultural growth, require special attention.
- 5) *The European arena of debate*: There is no citizenship without transnational debate. Innovative forms of cooperation in the fields of traditional and new media need to be supported.
- 6) *Cooperation beyond the EU*: Europe is more than the EU. Cultural cooperation with those waiting to join the EU and with the EU's neighbours is strategically important to the credibility of European cultural policies.
- 7) *Culture in EU foreign policy*: Policies of cohesion and diversity underpin intercultural dialogue. Development aid, conflict management, public diplomacy, democratic cultural politics: these no longer belong solely to the national realm. Any EU foreign policy necessarily contains a cultural dimension. Better that this should be recognised, thought through, and consciously implemented.
- 8) *Monitoring mechanisms and research*: European cultural policy needs mechanisms — at national, city and other levels — of planning, data, comparison and supervision.
- 9) *Democratic cultural policy development*: EU cultural policy development needs a well-structured public dialogue involving the public, private and third sectors.

In view of Wolfgang Petritsch's special commitment to culture and Europe, two areas require specific mention here: the Balkans and European foreign policy and culture.

Firstly, as mentioned in *The Heart of the Matter*,² culture didn't feature in EU approaches (and programmes) towards the 'Western Balkans' until today, despite the fact that cultural-nationalistic propaganda featured heavily in the recent wars there, while some cultural people were engaged in a tireless struggle for democracy and dignity, equality and human rights; and despite the fact that it was becoming increasingly clear that post-crisis change was needed in the minds of those in the Balkans and in 'the rest of Europe'. Wolfgang Petritsch was strongly involved in the ECF Balkans Reflection Group in 2005, which not only changed the language of Balkan advocacy, but led to the setting up (in private-public partnership) of a Balkan Incentive Fund for Culture, which is meant to bridge the funding gap that will exist until the EU has adequate instruments at its disposal.

Secondly, referring to European foreign policy and culture, we may state that half a century since the Treaty of Rome was signed, the EU is a highly attractive model throughout the world. Europe is influential. Despite the 'EU fatigue' of many of its citizens, the European Union is a powerful

2 *Op. cit.*

economic and social area, strong on human rights, the rule of law, and respect for cultural diversity. It is built on a unique political culture of sharing powers — among its own member states, and in partnership with others worldwide. And it uses its ‘soft power’ to help bring about a peaceful, safe, sustainable, prosperous and fair world. The future role of Europe in the world will be shaped by the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy being developed by the member states and the European institutions. But the strength of the EU model is that it is cultural as well as political. Foreign policy inevitably has a cultural dimension. There is good reason, therefore, to promote an enhanced and structured cultural component to EU foreign and security policy. This would help the EU to engage sensitively in conflict prevention, invest significantly in post-conflict reconciliation, and strengthen and develop cultural and educational capacities as well as sustainable local structures. Such a policy should obviously respect the *acquis communautaire* and the principle of subsidiarity.³

This refers to the introduction to the ‘Hague Recommendations’, released after the conference ‘Diversity makes the Difference’, The Hague, 9 March 2007 (see www.eurocult.org). Wolfgang Petritsch was part of the preparatory process (and the moderator of the strategy panel) for this public conference which succeeded as none before in gathering decision-makers from the member states, the European institutions and the third sector. It is obvious that the process leading to a more structured, enhanced cultural component to a future EU foreign and security policy will take time. However, the direction is clear, and Wolfgang Petritsch has played a large part in getting the conditions right for such a process to take place.

“2057. Europe is the world’s museum, housing exquisite exhibits — ‘Cultural Diversity’ among them. Or else it is a thriving, creative world power, a competitive, fair and just partner for global stability, democracy and equality”.⁴

3 This paragraph refers to the ‘Hague Recommendations’ released after the conference *Diversity makes the Difference*, The Hague, 9 March 2007 (see www.eurocult.org). Wolfgang Petritsch was part of the preparatory process (and the moderator of the strategy panel) for this public conference which succeeded as none before in gathering decision-makers from the member states, the European institutions and the third sector. It is obvious that the process leading to a more structured, enhanced cultural component to a future EU foreign and security policy will take time. However, the direction is clear, and Wolfgang Petritsch has played a large part in getting the conditions right for such a process to take place.

4 Gottfried Wagner, “Europe: a cultural commonwealth?” *European Union: The Next Fifty Years* (London: FT Business), pp. 118–19. Gottfried Wagner is Director of the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) in Den Hague.