



EUROCITIES

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Good morning,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to be with you today and to follow so many distinguished speakers Mr. Oriol Balaguer - Chair of the Eurocities Culture Forum-, Ms Catherine Parmentier –Chief Executive Officer from Eurocities-, and Mr Bernd Biervert - representative of the European Commission, responsible for culture and sports-.

I am member of the European Parliament and also member of its Committee on Culture and Education. And I consider this a good opportunity to share with you, different European cities dealing with cultural affairs, the current situation of the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament.

So first of all, I would like to thank Eurocities and especially the Chairman, Mr Oriol Balaguer, for having invited me to this special event which I am sure will contribute to tightening the relations between the European Union and its citizens through you, local representatives, who are, indeed, the ones who takes care of the daily life of the people.

As you probably may know, the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament is responsible for different things:

1. the cultural aspects of the European Union, that includes:
 - (a) improving the knowledge and dissemination of the different cultures,
 - (b) the protection and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity,
 - (c) the conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage, cultural exchanges and artistic creation;
2. the Union's education policy, including the European higher education area, the promotion of the system of European schools and lifelong learning;
3. the audiovisual policy and the cultural and educational aspects of the information society;
4. youth policy and the development of a sports and leisure policy;
5. information and media policy;
6. and cooperation with third countries in the areas of culture and education and relations with the relevant international organisations and institutions.

Although the European Union is not empowered to legislate in these areas -where the power belongs to the Member States-, it has a supporting competency in a broad range of issues concerning the culture and education policy.

Since June 2004, we have approved several reports. For example, yesterday, in a partial plenary session we approved, in codecision procedure, a recommendation of the Council and of the European Parliament on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education, an important step towards the creation of a European University Space, and of a knowledge society defined by the Lisbon Strategy to be achieved in 2010.

But this has not been the only report we have dealt with in the Committee, concerning the Bologna Process. In fact, the vision of the Bologna Declaration and the on-going Bologna

Process is a European Higher Education Area by 2010 with wide participation of students and staff in its higher education institutions.

It is an area where students and staff can move freely and have their qualifications recognised. It is an area where European higher education can take its place on the global stage, based on high quality and its rich tradition and diversity.

So in the 2nd December 2004, we approved a decision together with the Council on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences, namely Europass. That legislative proposal aims to create a uniform portfolio of documents to give citizens the option of setting out their personal abilities, skills and qualifications in a clear, consistent and internationally transparent manner when applying for jobs at home and abroad. Therefore, it was another initiative in the same direction of achieving a European Higher Education Area by 2010, and to facilitate both students and teachers skill-related professional mobility in Europe. All this is intended not only to help achieve the Lisbon strategic objectives but also to improve the quality of education and training in Europe.

Another report that has to do with education is the one that we also approved yesterday on immigrant communities' integration in Europe through multilingual schools and education. This is a very important recommendation considering the increasing immigrants arriving to our countries, and especially interesting concerning the integration of these families into the country, the society, the languages and the schools. Indeed, it is an issue that affects primarily to the local councils, as they usually use to deal with the management of the social local services. However, I think it is an area where, more than anybody else, the European Union can give an added value by scheduling resources as well as by coordinating efforts and priorities.

In other areas, such as the audiovisual and information society area, we have given our opinion in issues of great importance as the "TV without Frontiers" Directive. In economic terms, the 1980s were characterised by the end of public broadcasting monopolies and the growing strength of private television stations. And the TWF Directive arose in the context of creating the single market, which facilitated freedom of establishment and the promotion of cultural diversity based on common provisions, measures to protect human dignity, consumers, minors and the right of reply.

The 1990s saw the emergence of pay-TV and the development of new technologies (cable and satellite transmission, convergence of technologies, digital TV). Initially in 2001, and then again in 2003, Parliament stressed the importance of revising the Directive in order to respond to the changes taking place. For that reason, it was elaborated a specific report on the revision of two of the TWF Directive, concerning the promotion of the distribution and production of television programmes.

The revision aims to reconcile two apparently contradictory aspects that might appear to be in conflict: boosting European competitiveness in a global audiovisual market, and maintaining programme quality and access.

In fact, the European audiovisual model is based on a creative balance between two pillars: a strong and independent public service in the majority of countries and a dynamic commercial sector. These two sectors are strong generators of employment, both directly and indirectly. And this model is indispensable to maintain the vitality and quality of audiovisual production and to improve the circulation of European works, but it requires a framework, specially, taking into account all the new forms of television while constantly seeking to strike a balance between too much and too little legislation. In addition, the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament has approved a recommendation together with the Council on the protection of minors and human dignity and the right of reply in relation to the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and information services industry.

Here, the latest statistics show that time spent on the Internet by young people is now greater than that spent watching television. At the same time, it has been established that there are around 260 million pages with pornographic content circulating on the Internet. And it is in this context that the recommendation invites the Member States, the industry and the parties

concerned, together with the Commission, to take measures to improve the protection of minors and human dignity and to enable the right of reply to be exercised in all audiovisual and information services sectors. In fact, it aims to enable users to have full confidence in new technologies, making it possible to develop the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and information services industry.

On film heritage and the competitiveness of related industrial activities, we dealt with the limits of the States aid to the European film industry imposed by the Single Market's rules, and the need to support cultural activity and audio-visual creation within the EU.

In view of the second phase of the World Summit of Information Society (Tunis, November 2005), the Commission has produced a Communication, "Towards a Global Partnership in the Information Society", on which the Parliament has decided to deliver an initiative report. I was appointed as reporter for opinion in the Committee and in two weeks I will represent the Committee in Tunis. Some of the points of this opinion were that full citizenship in the Information Society means granting people rights to access not only basic technologies but also to public services in the most effective, user-friendly and transparent way. This also implies rights to access adequate media education and to participate in democratic processes. We also stressed the need for innovation in educational systems and underlined how Information Society can be an opportunity.

With reference to the cultural aspects and I mean by that the dissemination of culture, the protection and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity, the conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage, I must say that it is a transversal issue that appears in all the works done by the Committee, and which we always try to consider and to include.

As you may know, in 2001 UNESCO adopted a universal declaration on cultural diversity, but this proved inadequate for dealing with threats to cultural diversity throughout the world. Consequently, in October 2003, the UNESCO General Conference launched the preparation of a draft international convention on the protection of the diversity of cultural contents and artistic expressions, which was set for adoption in October 2005. In this sense, the European Parliament launched a call for the governments of EU countries to present a united front in the negotiations on cultural diversity taking place within UNESCO. MEPs expressed our commitment to multilingualism and cultural respect in a political resolution (although it has no legal force) adopted on 14 April.

Concerning the youth and sports policy, several programs have been discussed. For example, in the course of the September meeting the Committee adopted by unanimity Mrs Gröner's report on next generation of the new Youth programme designed to promote active citizenship and mutual understanding among young people across Europe. Moreover, last year it was the European Year of Education through Sport. Moving now to the information and media policy, I myself have been shadow reporter of the report on the European Union's information and communication strategy, very essential having into account that, in fact, the main worry inside the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament is how to improve our communication with citizens. In fact, I think that all the national, regional and local governments must do together a common work by explaining people how the European Union works and what it can do for them. Of course, to do so the European Union must be effective and efficient, and this means that the European Member States need to approve the Financial Perspectives for next years, in order to face the increasing challenges derived from the enlargement and the need of cohesion in the European Union.

But it means also that nothing will be done until we have a common tool to do this, which is the European Constitution.

Now, as Ms Wallström explained to us, a White Paper on Communication, in response of the opened debate to make a reflection about the future, is being elaborated by the European Commission.

From my point of view, the guidelines resulting from this document -namely, improving efforts to listening to the citizens, need to communicate better, and going local and adapting the

communication to the countries, sexes, ages and languages of destination of this information-should be accompanied by national or, even better, local debates on how to collaborate with the European Union, and closely linked with a debate on democracy and on strengthening citizenship. The European Union can hugely complement our lives but, to do so, we need also your help. Because of the lack of confidence that the EU project is suffering, it is needed the work and efforts of all partners, and local governments can be a special help to do this.

At this moment the Committee is debating a new programme: Citizenship for Europe, which is a contribution addressed to one of the major challenge of the European Union: how to bridge the gap between citizens and the EU.

This new programme will provide the Union with instruments to promote active European citizenship, put citizens in the centre and offers them the opportunity to fully assume their responsibility as European citizens. It responds to the need to improve their participation in the construction of Europe and will encourage cooperation between citizens from different countries in order to meet, to act together and to develop their own ideas in a European environment which goes beyond a national vision, respecting their diversity.

These intercultural exchanges will contribute to improving the mutual knowledge of the culture and history of the European peoples. It will bring our common heritage to the fore and strengthen the basis for our common future. Mutual understanding, solidarity and the feeling of belonging to Europe are indeed the building blocks for the involvement of citizens and are reflected by the three different programme's actions:

1. Action I "Active citizens for Europe" involves citizens directly, either through activities linked to town-twinning or through other kinds of citizens' projects.
2. Action II "Active civil society for Europe" is targeted to Europe-wide civil society organisations, receiving either structural support on the basis of their work programme or support to trans-national projects.
3. Action III "Together for Europe" supports high visibility events, studies and information tools, addressing the widest possible audience across frontiers and making Europe more tangible for its citizens.

Therefore, it tries to bring people together from local communities and share experiences towards the future through cooperation between civil society, think-tanks, and also through town-twinning. Before deepening a little bit in town-twinning, I would like to underline the idea mentioned by the reporter of this programme, Mr Takkula, of taking profit of local activities in public centres, libraries and so on to get closer to the citizens. To spread information on the Union, through leisure activities again in order to get closer to people who, otherwise, we would not have reached.

So it is crucial to start a debate together with you on the future of the EU and on its policies.

Town-twinning provides the opportunity to find out more about the daily lives of citizens in other European countries, to talk to them and exchange experiences, and to develop joint projects on issues of common interest, such as local integration, the environment, economic development, and cultural differences.

Town-twinning is characterised by large citizens' involvement and can therefore make an important contribution towards the development of European citizenship. Priority is given to events involving towns and municipalities in the candidate countries, to new twinning arrangements, to projects involving small municipalities or municipalities in geographically disadvantaged areas, to multilateral events and to projects involving young people or disadvantaged groups.

The EU support scheme was established in 1989 following an initiative by the European Parliament. And indeed it has been well received by towns and municipalities in Europe.

Moreover, the European Capital of Culture project gives cities a chance to shine and to attract artists and visitors from across the EU, as well as having long-term benefits in attracting jobs and people. Experience has shown that the programme has a lasting positive impact on the development of culture and tourism in the cities so designated, on urban renewal, and also

captures the imagination of citizens. But the focus must be on the European dimension, and on what Europe can learn from the city.

In addition, the European Parliament visits different countries in each Committee depending on a particular interest. For example, last month a Delegation of the Culture and Education Committee visited Barcelona with the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Euro Mediterranean Conference in order to know in detail the cultural, social and human relations established by the Spanish Network of the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures. Then, we took profit of the visit not only by approving a manifesto, but also by getting in contact with representatives of the municipality, as well as from the government, national artists and so on.

To finish, I want to thank you for your attention, and I hope that my words had been of your interest and that could be useful for your works and responsibilities.

Thank you very much.

Maria Badia Cutchet
Member of the European Parliament

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