
2007 – Sibiu

The European Cultural Parliament (ECP) held its 6th session in Biblioteca Astra in Sibiu, Romania, 5-7 October. The City of Sibiu was European Capital of Culture 2007.

Two themes were discussed in plenary – “*Intercultural Dialogue*” and “*Communicating the European Idea to Citizens*”. A workshop was organized in cooperation with EUSTORY, Körber Foundation, Hamburg – “*The Role of History in the European Project*”.

The Mayor of Sibiu, Klaus Johannis, welcomed the participants and invited them to a reception in the City Hall. The Romanian vice minister of culture and religious affairs, Andras Demeter, addressed the session. So did the ECP senator, former Romanian minister of culture, Ion Caramitru, the strategic director of the EU Commission (Communication), Tamas Szucs and the representative of the Council of Europe, Ulrich Bunjes. The EU Parliamentarian Erna Hennicot-Schoepges sent a message to participants. Paddy Woodworth, Dublin, presented his new book, “The Basque Country – a cultural history”.

The focus of the plenary debate was on Intercultural dialogue and had the “Malta report” from the ECP research group as a starting point. A **Sibiu Declaration** with a focus on Intercultural Dialogue was adopted unanimously on 7 October. The Session also adopted statements on human rights in Burma and in commemoration of the assassination of the ECP Member Anna Politkovskaya.

In the following pages you will find summaries of and some images from the debates as well as the full text of the Sibiu Declaration.

Karl-Erik Norrman

The Sibiu Declaration

European Cultural Parliament, 6th session, Sibiu, Romania

Sibiu declaration

- Europe is a cultural project
- Europe is a space of shared values
- Intercultural dialogue is an essential tool
- Common space for culture
- Communicating the idea of Europe
- ECP research programme on culture
- We as individual educators, artists and cultural animators assembled in the European Cultural Parliament share responsibility for the future of Europe, must make sure that the idea of Europe that we project – among ourselves and among others living outside Europe – should be that of a promoter of peace, based on the ideas of justice, equality and freedom.

Europe is a cultural project

Europe's identity is characterized by a rich diversity of cultures

Culture is gaining a new strategic significance for the development of vibrant and inclusive communities in search of shared European aims and ideas

Culture provides a domain with new opportunities actively inspiring social, political and sustainable economic development

Culture stimulates all citizens and in particular young people to take part in the ongoing development of the European idea

A cultural perspective should be integrated into the decision making processes in public bodies throughout Europe

Europe is a space of shared values

An intercultural dialogue does not threaten the common underlying values:

human rights
democracy
rule of law
freedom of
religion
freedom of political and creative expression
equal rights for
women and men
freedom of sexual orientation
peaceful solution of
conflicts
prohibition of the death penalty

A secular state is the best way to guarantee and safeguard these freedoms

Intercultural dialogue is an essential tool

Intercultural dialogue is characterized by specific qualities. It acknowledges 'the other' as a source of inspiration and allows us to recognize that we, too, are 'the other'. It is essential for cultivating diversity and has the potential to bypass the dichotomy between assimilation and multiculturalism. As history conditions identities, mentalities and culture a true dialogue requires an appreciation of the history, customs, traditions and possible futures of oneself and the other. It affords opportunities for personal and social growth, it allows us to widen circles of solidarity at the local, regional, national, European and global levels.

Common space for culture

An intercultural dialogue flourishes in a 'common space'

a 'common space' is characterized by genuine dialogue and requires participants to abandon any notion of cultural superiority

a 'common space' would take us beyond existing cultural practice and allow for a new quality of dialogue

a 'common space'
aggregates behaviors and shapes communities of
allegiance
allows for both expression and reflection on critical issues

creates transformation beyond tolerance and acceptance

a 'common space' grants human beings' creative space free from violence.

More than any other group in any society children deserve and are in need of such space.

Communicating the idea of Europe

The process of intercultural dialogue is simultaneously shaping and communicating the ideas of Europe

intercultural dialogue allows us to restate the implications of the basic values we aspire to

culture should stimulate all citizens and especially young Europeans to act as ambassadors for cultural transfer

intercultural dialogue may touch the hearts of individual Europeans, strengthen the identity of groups, develop the richness nations and stimulate a sense of Europe

ECP research programme on culture

The ECP recognizes that the new role of culture requires research to be developed further.

Therefore one of the strategic goals of the ECP is the promotion of sustainable research on creativity and culture.

Currently the following activities are taking place

- The ECP research group on the strategic use of culture
- NUROPE, the nomadic university on art, philosophy and enterprise
- EUSTORY, History Network for Young Europeans
- Public Space, research into public space as a catalyst for change
- ArtConstitution, creating a 'constitution' of invited artworks
- AsTide, art for social transformation and intercultural dialogue in Europe networks

The ECP will share the results of these programmes with the Council of Europe, members of the European Parliament and other cultural and political institutions

Statement on Anna Politkovskaya

Statement

The European Cultural Parliament (ECP) — at its 6th session in Sibiu, Romania, today commemorates the anniversary of the assassination of Anna Politkovskaya who was a forceful member of the ECP. The chairman of the ECP, Mr. Pär Stenbäck stated: “we will always miss her honest and courageous voice in our debates.”

This brutal act was at the same time an attack on the freedom of speech and democratic values. Until the murder case is fully solved, it remains an obstacle to Russia’s full inclusion into the European cultural sphere, the ECP underlines.

The ECP is an independent, pan European Forum comprising 150 artists and intellectuals from over 40 European countries.

Statement on Burma

The European Cultural Parliament gathered in Sibiu/Romania for its 6th session, today endorsed unanimously the following statement by its member, Ms. Barbara Hendricks:

From Little Rock to Rangoon

In September 1957 I was 8 years old and living in North Little Rock, Arkansas. Last week I followed the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock Arkansas. Nine courageous teenagers who became known as “the Little Rock Nine” began the process of racial integration of the schools in America. On September 4, Governor Orval Fabius sent in the Arkansas National Guard to stop these high school students from enrolling in the all white Central High School in defiance of a Supreme Court decision. [\(1\)](#) Like the whole world, I was shocked by the photos depicting the hatred of the young white students toward these brave children. President Eisenhower sent in the US military to maintain order and to protect the black students.

I relived this frightening and revelatory event at the same time as I was witnessing courageous monks and ordinary Burmese marching for freedom in Burma, begging for our support. I listened for a response from the International Community and since the General Assembly of the UN was taking place in New York City, I thought that the timing was perfect for a serious response. Yet again, the Security Council showed its uselessness. A scream of indignation stuck in my throat every time I heard yet another Head of State or Foreign Minister say the right words of support without showing the necessary will to do the right actions. And during this time the Military Junta in Burma had started to crackdown on the demonstrators with its usual tactics.

In 1999 with the aid of a clever ambassador I was able to meet for a few hours in secret with Aung San Suu Kyi, who was under house arrest. She asked me if I thought that she and her people could use the example of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement to fight for justice. The Civil Rights Movement Took form in the churches of the south where Blacks were free to attend even when their right to assemble elsewhere were denied. Buddhists do not assemble on a regular basis and without the possibility to have contact with the people and to get her message out, I thought that organizing the masses in the same way would be

extremely difficult. However, today the monks have taken the lead in the rebellion. Maybe she was right.

We have no means of knowing how many have already been killed and injured, we must not abandon Aung San Suu Kyi and the Burmese people. We need action now. How many times can we watch and do nothing? Where is the Security Council, where is Europe? Where have our convictions to defend Human Rights gone? Will we continue to watch the revolt and perhaps the massacre of a people that have suffered enough without putting a stop to it? As in Budapest in 56, Prague in 68, the Soweto Uprising in 76, or Tiananmen in 89?

The American and European neo-conservatives did not hesitate to support sending troops to Iraq to fight an illegal war. Certain voices even speak today, irresponsibly of war with Iran but are content with declarations of support for the suffering people of Burma. Maybe we should drop our hypocrisy and just say, "We do not want to jeopardize our oil and commercial interests". But do not pretend that our goal is to defend democracy and freedom.

President Eisenhower was not pro-integration but he made a courageous decision that changed the course of American history and the bell tolling for justice can be heard from Little Rock to Rangoon. Free democratically elected Aung San Suu Kyi, and all other political prisoners! A true democracy not imposed from outside but for which the people of Burma have suffered and died must be restored.

Barbara Hendricks

Musician President Barbara Hendricks Foundation for Peace and Reconciliation

(1.) On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court announced its decision that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal". The decision effectively denied the legal basis for segregation in Kansas and 20 other states with segregated classrooms and would forever change race relations in the United States.

Speech by Tamas Szucs

Tamas Szucs

COMMUNICATING EUROPE

Thank you for inviting me to represent the European Commission at your session in Sibiu, a town with rich cultural and architectural legacy – well deserved to be European Cultural Capital.



I see the European Cultural Parliament as a forum for artists, intellectuals and other cultural stakeholders to come together and share their ideas. Your aim is to give culture a more defined, more significant role in the European Union. And rightly so.

Debate is not just the preserve of politicians, but of every citizen.

As artists and thinkers, you are well placed to see and understand the needs of your communities, and communicate them through your art forms.

This is a two-way process. Not only can you represent your communities in the EU cultural forum, but you can also engage people with the European project and what it is trying to achieve.

Many people are not fully aware of the EU and the relevance it has to their lives. You are opinion shapers in your country and through artistic initiatives you can help educate, inform, excite and empower.

I was also happy to see in your invitation that 1 of the 2 key issues the ECP wanted to focus on in 2007 was: *How to bring the European project closer to its citizens*. This is precisely what the European Commission, and specifically VP Wallström has been trying to achieve since the beginning of our mandate.

To bring the 'European project' closer to citizens we need to contribute to the emergence of a European Public Sphere. This is one of the most important goals of our communication policy, and culture and intercultural dialogue obviously play an important role in this. I will

therefore divide my presentation into three sections. Starting with the topic of the European Public Sphere, moving on to the new initiatives proposed by the Commission just two days ago under the title 'Communicating Europe in Partnership', and finally moving to the role of culture in connecting Europeans.

I. Where are we now in terms of BUILDING A EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE

Unfortunately far away from an ideal situation. The EU is big, complex and looks distant for most people.

There are:

- 27 national spheres, 23 official languages, over 3500 TV channels (2330 regional), many actors (European institutions, national governments, regional and local authorities, national, regional and local media, transnational, national, regional, local NGOs etc.) with different agendas. Different issues are important in different countries. National media report European issues from a national, or quite too often nationalistic perspective. Our communication tools stop at national borders, we have very few transnational forums for debate.
- There is an Information overload, but due to the complexity of institutions and decision-making processes, paradoxically also
- A general lack of knowledge. This leads to a lack of trust in political institutions (not just in the EU!) and a lack of an E-n identity.

So what's the result?

- **Blame game** – national governments seeking re-election take credit for successful European policies, blame 'Brussels' for unpopular ones.
- **Declining participation rate in EP-elections.** Elections fought along domestic political issues (although important to note the recent examples of European issues – such as enlargement, the Constitutional treaty or the services directive entering election debates in some member states).

- **Lack of coordination** concerning EU related communication

What would be the requirements of a European Public Sphere/transnational debate ?

3 key items

- Empowered citizens who would have the information, the means and interest to actively exercise their European citizenship. In concrete terms they would have to be aware of their rights as EU citizens: right to live, work, study in another member state.
- Debate and dialogue on European affairs should involve not only politicians, but also different social and professional groups – like yours!
- Delivery should be ensured on EU policies to match citizens' expectations, otherwise very difficult to demonstrate the relevance of Europe for them. Even the best communication cannot compensate for poor policies. The EU must deliver and be seen to deliver!

II. How do we want to tackle all these issues?

The Commission has already taken concrete steps and will take more to change this. This Wednesday a new Communication entitled **Communicating Europe in Partnership** (text available) was adopted. This communication aims to consolidate the reforms launched under the Action Plan and Plan D, and to translate the expectations formulated during the consultation process on the White Paper into action.

In a nutshell, our objective is to provide information adapted to national, regional and local contexts, promote active European citizenship and contribute to the development of a European public sphere. But of course the Commission cannot do this on its own! The blame game between the EU institutions and Member States must stop. Communication on EU issues is the responsibility of all those involved in the EU decision-making process. "Communicating Europe in Partnership" sets out the preconditions for a successful communication policy on two fronts. It proposes a citizen-oriented policy content based on

listening and consultation and a partnership approach with major political, economic and social actors in Member States.

The Commission intends to work in close partnership with the other EU-Institutions, Member States and all interested stakeholders around selected annual communication priorities.

To this end the Communication is proposing:

- an inter-institutional agreement to structure the EU communication process, and to engage all stakeholders,
- management partnerships to Member States on a voluntary basis as the main instruments to carry out joint communication initiatives,
- to develop the network of European Public Spaces in the Representations to reach out to citizens, to continue to support active European citizenship through existing programmes and additional activities in education and civil society,
- to implement the Pilot Information Networks (PINs) to improve communication between European and national politicians, journalists and other opinion formers by the means of internet discussion forums and meetings across the EU.

In terms of guiding principles, our actions are based on

- Two-way communication: Not simply top-down information, but also on feedback from citizens. This means listening to them, and to give them a possibility to influence European policy formation (Tools: Quantitative and qualitative opinion polling/Eurobarometer, political intelligence/REPS, citizens questions/Europe Direct, better consultation standards, media monitoring, citizens' consultations.)
- Going local: tailor message to local circumstances, go where people are, talk their language, but also connect local debates, enable people to hear views from other member states.

How to do this - Some specific communication initiatives

- Using multiple channels: mixture of new technology and more traditional methods

- New communication tools. Growth in Internet use, main forum for transnational exchange, primary medium for combining text, sound and vision and for enabling feedback from and discussion among users. (E.g. social networking sites such as MySpace, YouTube, SecondLife etc.)
 - European Public Spaces (EPS) – Seems close to your ideas in the preparatory paper:
 - Goal: Offer new meeting places, new communication formats, new visual image to attract new audiences (youths).
 - Focus: culture, civil society, education/academia, politics.
 - Infrastructural requirements: more open space, exhibition area, coffee/reading corner, conference facilities...
 - Joint activities with cultural and other networks with other EPS, linking national debates. Providing a space for other organizations activities on EU-related topics.
- Aim: 27
- Pilot projects started in three capitals: Tallinn, Madrid (Noche en Blanco) and Dublin. In an attempt to attract new audiences they experiment with popular cultural events such as graffiti artists' exhibition, open air cinemas, or photo competition for primary school students.

III. THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN CONNECTING WITH CITIZENS

As I have already mentioned, culture has an important part to play in this. Europe does not aim to develop a homogeneous "European culture" but rather to facilitate access by everyone to other cultures. The upcoming European year on InterCult Dial will be a good occasion to demonstrate this, and so is, of course this very event, the session of the ECP in the European Capital of Culture!

Cultural diversity is an asset for Europe and at the same time one of its main characteristics when compared to other regions of the world. In this sense, cultural diversity is a factor of "division" as well as one of unity because it characterizes Europe as a whole.

This is what emerged from the latest Eurobarometer study published in September on the issue. The study shows that 76% of Europeans believe that cultural diversity is a unique

characteristic of European culture. According to the same study 67% of Europeans believe that beyond diversities there are cultural features which are common to the whole continent.

But I think the importance of intercultural dialogue or “access” to other cultures goes beyond these general, although important, findings.

Access to a different culture means access to a different “world” and the very capacity of acceding to a different culture, involves a different mental structure which I hope will increasingly characterize Europeans in the future.

National identities are still very much present in Europe in “old” MS, but even more in our “new” MS. But have these national identities remained the same? I believe not. Today, after more than 50 years of European integration, the abolition of boundaries, the development of exchange programmes between schools or universities and with the teaching of foreign languages, young Europeans are increasingly able to access a different culture than their own. Situation different now.

I believe that the capacity to access another culture is a key feature to define European citizens, along with History and common values. The European Union does not aim to harmonize cultures by promoting intercultural dialogue but its ultimate objective is to give the tools to access other cultures to as many Europeans as possible.

The importance given by the Commission to multilingualism should also be seen in this context. Learning another language is the most fundamental tool allowing to promote intercultural dialogue. Encouraging translations and creation of cultural meeting places – as suggested in one of your preparatory papers is also essential.

Turning to our venue, Sibiu, I believe is a good example of cultural regeneration and a good example of how the coming together of cultures can be beneficial. Due to its multicultural character, Romanians, Hungarians, Germans – it has an impressive architectural and cultural legacy.

As a European Capital of Culture, Sibiu has also become an important cultural space for arts, music and thought.

This has engaged the local population and connected them with Europe.

I do hope that it shows that the EU is not just about “bureaucrats in Brussels” but about enriching public life and encouraging participation.

Projects like the European Capital of Culture and European Cultural Parliament help to change that mindset and convince people that they have a right to make their voices heard, that their opinions matter and that they are stakeholders in the European Union.

Speech by Klaus Johannis

Klaus Johannis, Sibiu Mayor

Let me first say welcome to Sibiu!

It is a great pleasure and honor for us to host this assembly. For us, the fact that the Cultural Parliament meets in Sibiu is a great recognition that the programme in Sibiu, the Cultural Capital of Europe 2007, is an accepted programme.



We have already had approximately 1000 cultural events here in Sibiu during this year. We've had many visitors, endless stories, a lot of delegations. But the fact that you decided to meet here is extremely important for us, as I think that the members of the Cultural Parliament are multipliers of culture, like no others. I wish you a good assembly in Sibiu and hope that you will also have time to attend cultural events. And I wish you a good stay in Sibiu.

Gabriele Woidelko on EUSTORY

Gabriele Woidelko, Hamburg, member
EUSTORY, the history network for young Europeans, currently
connects 19 civic organizations from 19 European countries.



The mandate of EUSTORY is to view European history from the grass roots and to recognize the vast diversity of experience. Opposing the abuse of history as an ideological weapon, EUSTORY emphasizes the view of history as a workshop for intercultural understanding in Europe. EUSTORY is therefore not only a meaningful initiative of historical grass-roots work in Europe, but also makes an important and pioneering contribution to European efforts toward peace and tolerance.

EUSTORY means European history. All countries have misunderstandings due to historical conflicts. We have to go beyond fear and stop thinking of the other as the enemy. Schools must be open to every one – providing an intercultural history – a European perspective on history. Telling and listening, exchanging and respecting our individual stories and thus acknowledging the importance of talking about our different interpretations of history.

We think that history is the initial part of our European identity and therefore should be more prominent in the agenda of the European Commission, in order to educate future responsible European Citizens.

Young EUSTORY participants gave presentations that itself triggered off discussions on the following questions linked to history and identity in Europe:

- a) regional versus national identities
- b) differences between history and memory
- c) the danger of legitimizing conflicts from history
- d) Ethnic, cultural and linguistic minorities/majorities (balance and disbalance of minority politics). This was especially discussed in the context of the Baltic countries.
- e) The meaning of borders and the result of border changes on the lives, mentalities and identities of people (mixing and unmixing of people).

f) Different possibilities of communicating historical knowledge into nowadays societies in Europe.

Speech by Andras Demeter

Andras Demeter, Deputy Minister of Culture and Religious Affairs,
Romania

Dear participants,

I was asked to address you a few words in the opening of this meeting. Looking at the reunion's programme, I've seen that, these days, we are here, in one of this year's European Cultural Capitals – Sibiu, representatives of authorities – from European Parliament to local authorities, representatives of civil society, artists and creators.



That's one of the main reasons – together with the fact that I've participated, only a week ago in Lisbon, at the first "Cultural Forum for Europe" – for which I thought it would be adequate to tell you something about the importance of intercultural dialogue.

It was for me, not only as a state dignitary, but especially as an artist, to hear the President of European Commission, Mr. Jose Manuel Durao Barosso, expressing clearly the fact that culture is an extremely important issue and its potential for development must be taken into consideration in all our policies and actions.

Finally, the other actors on our socio-economical and political stage are starting to see the real value of culture, which is not only a consumer of resources, but also an important producer of benefits: incomes, jobs and implicitly social stability and cohesion leading to development.

Also, as many of us are European citizens, each of us being the "product" of ancient and so diverse cultures, I think we must realize the importance of the role played by the intercultural

dialogue not only in our understanding between each other in view of a common development, but in our relations with the rest of the world, too. In this era of globalization, we, Europeans, have our cultural richness and diversity which make us unique.

Coming now to more concrete aspects, I want to remind you that next year is the “European Year of Intercultural Dialogue”. We took the “European Year of Intercultural Dialogue” as a great opportunity to deal with a more complex and wider cultural environment, as an occasion to get familiar with it and to promote an European citizenship through modern and active means, by connecting between them different actors in the cultural field from all the Europe, and giving them the chance to know people who are interested in promoting a common set of values.

In this respect, we have prepared, as all other EU Member States, a national strategy for this year and we also transmitted to the European Commission our national project, named “Puzzle”. I won’t enter into details regarding the project, but I will tell you that if you’re interested in Romania’s involvement in the program “2008 – The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue” and in the other European programmes, such as “Culture 2007” and “Media 2007”, you can access the website of our Consultancy Center for European Cultural Programmes (Romania’s Cultural Contact Point) – or contact the Center’s team, and they will give you all the information and guidance you’ll need.

The main targets we aim with our national strategy are:

1. To place the intercultural debate in a strategic European context;
2. To demonstrate the need for concerted European cultural cooperation outside of Europe, respecting European diversity;
3. To prove the viability of an European cultural policy through exemplary projects and initiatives.

Because the central idea of this European Programme is the raising of the public awareness on the importance and the benefits of the dialogue between cultures, we should not stop our efforts at the end of 2008, but stimulate further actions in this direction, of the development of intercultural dialogue.

That's why we, in the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, thought to prepare, also, a National Cultural Agenda for 2008, which will contain all the necessary information for the stakeholders interested in obtaining governmental funding, through our Ministry, for their projects. Also, by elaborating this Agenda, we've considered that it will be a helpful instrument for the local authorities, too, in order to offer them the possibility to connect/ to interlink their own cultural disponibilities for financing cultural projects, with ours. This interlinking can only be for the benefit of artists, creators and cultural operators from every corner of Romania and it can also become, we hope, an example of successful inter-institutional cooperation for other countries, too.

I want to conclude my intervention by wishing you a fruitful debate. Thank you for your attention.

Ulrich Bunjes, Council of Europe

Ulrich Bunjes, Council of Europe

The council of Europe is an international association consisting of 47 national members hence being larger than the EC. We view cultural diversity in a wider sense, intercultural diversity due to the redrafting of national frontiers, creating national minorities. The migration has increased, accelerated by split ups like the ones of the former Soviet Yugoslavia and with the effect of globalization adding layers to this concept.



In 2005 we put intercultural dialogue at the top of our agenda, the UN followed suit and now the EC in 2008. It is not a European question, it's a world wide question. If the theme is so complex with so many discussing it we felt we needed a common frame of reference and therefore decided to publish a white paper which will be done by the Council in December 2007. The paper will summarize the collected experience, where we've been consulting stakeholders of all 47 nations, religious, media etc – the issue is a burning issue.

The main ideas being published in the paper are:

1. Common values – core values uniting Europe (in a legal form, human rights, law, democracy etc.)
2. Dialogue but not between Islam and the West – it's wider. We put the emphasis on minorities and majorities for coexisting within Europe but also with the neighboring regions outside Europe. A dialogue on a local level.
3. Religion, the Council has hardly ever expressed itself on religious matters, here we acknowledge that religion plays a role, we see a certain danger limiting cultural aspects to religious matters where it is easy to fall into the trap of not recognising inner pluralism.
4. Assimilation, how does it fit into the classical portfolio of assimilation, of those who don't share the predominant culture? Addressing the question of cultivation or multiculturalism – to be able to live together with our different cultures.

We would appreciate it if we continue this discussion with the ECP.

Question from the audience;

· Who do the Council dialogue with in the world of the arts?

Reply:

The council is an instrument for agreeing on European standards, it is not a transnational union, it has a parliamentary structure. The government has to get advice from many stakeholders, also in the fields of artistic policymakers. In this aspect we are in touch with many cultural actors for the development of cultural policies.

· You've started defining non negation able laws as a springboard towards a dialogue on local, national and international level. Is it possible to see these levels in the same light, to combine, in order to find solutions?

Reply:

We will come closer to harmonious views on each level but more instruments in the protection of European minority matters. In the wake of September 11 we observe that nations fall back in old traps from the progress done during the last 50 years. The system of

human rights goes beyond national levels. Progress is even more difficult with our neighboring regions to Europe. A little progress is being made but slowly.

Malta Paper

The ECP research team met in Malta on 7 and 8 July 2007 to discuss the following two themes: intercultural dialogue and the communication of the European idea to European citizens. The participants were Ambassador Karl-Erik Norrman, Simonetta Carbonaro, Venu Dhupa, Bert Mulder, Jasenko Selimovic and Joe Friggieri. Laura Gardner, Dr Dhupa's assistant, also took part. The seminar was addressed by Jean-Léonard Touadi, Deputy Mayor for Youth Policy, Security and Universities in Rome.



Here follows the result of the research team summarized by Joe Friggieri

The need for intercultural dialogue
The Commission of the European

Communities' proposal (COM (2005) 467) lays great emphasis on the need to involve "all European citizens and all those living in the Union, and particularly young people" in the process of intercultural dialogue. It was in the light of these considerations that the ECP research team met in Malta in order to examine the nature, structure and aims of intercultural dialogue, the means to achieve it, the problems it faces and the ways in which such problems can be resolved. Intercultural dialogue is an attempt to overcome stereotypes, however a stereotype is never all false, more like a cartoon. The stereotype becomes dangerous when it becomes prejudice.

The Nature of dialogue

Dialogue is based on the fundamental requirement of seeing the other not as a threat but as an opportunity for growth, a resource of knowledge. But knowledge is a terrible thing,

because it forces us to abandon the security provided by conventional wisdom in order to try to understand a reality which has so far been hidden from us.

Knowledge and fear

Knowledge shifts us as persons. It challenges our generated wisdom. People are afraid of taking risks and don't like surprises. Children are more open, but we as adults often indoctrinate rather than educate. Not everybody thinks that interculturality is a good thing. Some are convinced that the clash of civilisations is unavoidable. And when you believe that something is unavoidable, then, by definition, you also believe that you can do nothing to prevent it from happening.

Images of “the other”

We have to go beyond fear and anxiety. We should stop thinking of the other as the enemy; stop thinking of ourselves as the superior. We must be willing to learn from others, to interact with them as equals, to redress the imbalances and injustices of the past by working together for a better future, in the conviction that unless we survive together, we shall perish together.

Culture and identity

Culture is made, is continually constructed, neither identities are static but is constantly being built. The same goes for societies. A wonderful example is the Romanian. Societies that don't adapt will wither away. The difficulties lie in preserving the past and face the challenges of the present and the future.

The intercultural perspective

In a democracy people are linked together as individuals, not through blood, religion or politics but rather sharing the same rights within a system of rules and values freely accepted by them and always open to change. 200 persons traveling on the same bus do not constitute a community. A community must be genuinely interested in the wellbeing of the others. In a genuine intercultural community, there would be no ghettos and nobody would be living on the fringe.

Some proposals on what needs to be done

- Create a common cultural space where new identities can be negotiated.

- Find cultural catalysts and cultural mediators to spread information of diversity as an asset.
- Tackle the issue of big cities – avoid ghettos, schools open to everybody with intercultural curricula.
- Enable ourselves to write intercultural non hegemonic histories.
- Provide job opportunities after school to avoid social unrest.
- Create a common space for free discussion and the free circulation of ideas.
- Make mainstream media more interculturally inclusive.

Communicating the European idea

Before we talk about deep European ideas, we need to establish which idea of Europe we wish to present. One of the aims of the EU was to prevent catastrophes of national imperialistic ambitions. We project the EU as a promoter of peace and must not seek to create new enemies to replace the old one.

Culture as catalyst of change

A vibrant culture speaks with many voices and theoretically all languages are mutually translatable. Speaking a language means understanding a way of life. When people speak of clash of cultures, they tend to lose sight of the fact that, as human beings, we have the same set of basic needs, desires and aspirations. We should aim at a fusion of horizons. Cultural interactions replace competition and strife with friendship and collaboration, foster understanding, conviviality and harmony rather than fomenting antagonism, enmity and discord.

The group ended in posing a few questions

1. Can all of us living in Europe make a significant contribution towards promoting this different model of human relations?
2. Can we make use of our cultural resources to achieve the desired aim of harmony, conviviality and peace?
3. Can we tap these resources to create a common space where nobody feels excluded, useless or unwanted, but will contribute, in his or her own way, to the common good and the well-being of the whole community?

The members of the ECP research team meeting in Malta feel that these questions can be answered positively. It is now up to this conference to discuss ways and means of achieving those aims.

Paddy Woodworth presented his new book on The Basque Country

Paddy Woodworth, Dublin, presented his new book, "The Basque Country – a cultural history".

The Basque region is a small but very diverse place – a universe where many of our questions here today are of pressing urgency, he said. Some Basques identify their country and culture as entirely separate from Spain and France, others – who are equally Basque – say that the Basque Country is "the heart of Spain". Still others think of the Pays Basque as a region of France.

No phrase is politically neutral in the Basque Country, but bridges can be built through a pluralist and inclusive reading of Basque history and culture. For example, it may be helpful to think of the Basque region as being enriched by multiple identities, each worthy of respect, rather than insist that it must assume one identity or another. "We should not say that Euskera [the Basque's ancient language, of mysterious origin] is THE Basque language," says the Basque novelist Bernardo Atxaga. "We should say that it is A Basque language. We Basques are lucky to have three languages, Euskera, Spanish and French and, increasingly, a fourth one, English."