

UNESCO Paris conference, 2007-11-26

Ladies and gentlemen, Cheres Mesdames et messieurs,

After the lunch break it is not so easy to start, but I will try to make you listen.

I am very pleased to be here with you in Paris, in the head quarter of UNESCO, to this important debate on the follow up of the UNESCO convention.

Many of you have been working on this important document and piece of international legislation since a lot of years and in a certain manner it was a heritage to me when I entered the European parliament in 2004.

But since then, being a vice president of the culture committee of EP, it has been for me one of the most exciting and important dossiers we are tackling in our committee. But what is much more challenging is, to make it a part of general European politics and interest.

It should be the

“Magna Charta for international Cultural Policy”

No doubt it is one of the cornerstones of European and global cultural policies; it is a major and comprehensive international treaty on cultural policy, on the protection and promotion of and of cultural expressions and diversity. It is a great potential to influence the state of play and in the globalisation process by reaffirming culture as an essential "global public good". The convention should play a major role as a catalyst for international cooperation in the field of culture.

I would like to talk at first on the very fundamental meaning of our subject. Culture always has a double character, being a good and carrier of meaning and sense. This is an imperative to act according to this double character. Einstein ones expressed it like this:

"Not everything that counts can be figured and not everything that can be measured counts."

That is at the heart of European cultural politics. All the conflicts within European politics and between the institutions especially deal with the conflict of market politics, opening up markets and how to protect cultural diversity which should not be sacrificed to the laws of market economy. Or as Wim Wenders has put it:

"I am in favour of paying the relatively small price for maintaining diversity, rather than the large price for its loss."

Europe has a great wealth of different cultures, religions, traditions, perspectives, ethnics, aesthetics, and European cultural politics is about to protect and to develop this cultural richness.

There should not be the category of singularity, but always plurality in thinking European cultures. Europe has not just one soul, but many.

The German Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt, the French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva and the German feminist thinker Christina Thürmer-Roth, all these 3 women argued that we should always think with the category of plurality because it is much more dedicated to the real pluralism of people being different and on the political level it is a much more democratic approach.

Of course we need European narratives to tell to each other our European stories about the history about our continent, his great achievements, his big mistakes, crimes, totalitarianism, the division of Europe in east and west and how to build a better future. The question is, how to overcome nationalism, totalitarianism, ethnic thinking and how to develop free and open societies where every citizen, chaque citoyen has the right to live his difference and singularity without any fear.

The basic values of European cultural politics are:

Diversity, pluralism, liberty and reciprocity. Reciprocity means, If I give you the freedom to practice any religion you want you have to give me the right to criticize it. It is a new contract to build a basic compromise in modern societies..

P. Legrand puts thinking of diversity in the following way:

"...the specificity of Europe lies not in the abolition of difference but in the deft management of the cultural heteronomy within the whole, in the assumption of pluralism, in the acceptance of coexistence of non-harmonized rationalities on its territory..."

We need political will and political skills to give the thinking of difference and cultural diversity a major role in global politics.

That means we have to regulate globalisation. The main trend of globalisation means only to be open for market driven liberalisation. To some extent cultural politics is the centre of globalisation, because it wants mobility of artists and artistic products, flows of ideas and international exchange, but with the regulation that market does not destroy diversity and with the objective that politics do support real diversity and protect differences. Therefore we need an international legal instrument and to address local actors as well.

During the negotiations of the convention it was a great success that Europe was talking with one voice and being strong in the negotiations because we acted as a united body.

Now there are current problems of the application of the convention within EU Member States.

Latest developments have shown that there is a problem in the legal interpretation of the Convention and on whom it applies. It seems that certain commissioner (including Mr McGreevy and Mr Mandelson) assume that the Convention only applies in the field of Cultural cooperation and therefore in relation to third countries but not within Members States of the EU.

Currently Ms Hieronymi, MEP, has sent a written question to Commissioner Figel on the matter and requested that all commissioner concerned come and explain in front

of the Culture Committee of the European Parliament what their views on this legal problem and the convention are.

From my point of view it must apply to the internal market, be valid within the EU, otherwise it does not make sense.

Within the new telecom package we have again the question how to protect public (and even) private broadcasting.

I am not supporting Ms Reding's argumentation which is far too much market orientated.

One of the decisive points will be to promote the objectives and the principles of this Convention actively in the other international fora, especially in the World Trade Organisation and the World Intellectual Property Organisation.

The convention must not apply only to third countries but of course within the union. From my point of view there is no alternative to this understanding of the convention, otherwise it would not make political sense.

For successful implementation in the European Union it is vital to understand the Convention as a transversal legal obligation and to attune the Community's instruments of trade-, internal market and cultural policy in such a way that they reaffirm both the economic and cultural nature of cultural activities, goods and services as stated in the Convention's preamble.

We have to continue to use all our political will and all our skills to work with civil society, with the public, with stakeholders and within the institutions to make clear that cultural politics for cultural diversity must be an integral part of foreign, trade and development politics.

We have to include the approach of TTT, talents, technology and tolerance to develop and promote new jobs, much more in the Lisbon Strategy.

Now in Germany and in other European countries we have a lot of conferences on creative industries and recently we had a hearing in the culture committee of the European Parliament on the impact of creative industries on job growth.

To make the Convention a success, we should connect it to the initiative of 'a soul for Europe', we should involve institutions at all levels. We should work with universities and academies, with NGO's, artists, producers, political foundations and the European public sphere. That means to work with internet platforms like eurozine and sightandsign.com to let the people know of the importance of the convention.

But of course it is as well necessary to achieve social inclusion for example to work in a cultural manner with early leavers. In my hometown Bremen there is a project that deals with young people, who finished to go to school at an early age. The project gives them the chance and opportunity to express their situation in a cultural way. Often they describe in their works their feelings, their migration background but also difficulties of their lives. This is as well a contribution to live cultural diversity in every day life.

Connecting all the different bodies and different political levels is a task in order to give the convention a success.