

THE INDEPENDENTS' VOICE

K E A N E W S L E T T E R N ° 2 9 - O C T O B E R 2 0 1 1

— : The meaning of Europe? — : The meaning of a European Cultural Forum?

The European Cultural Forum has just taken place in Brussels on 19 and 20 October 2011. Every year the Forum gathers institutions and organisations involved and interested in the making of cultural policy at European level. The themes of the Forum are linked to the EU 2020 strategy of the European Commission.

The near collapse of the financial system and the sovereign debt crisis are testing the limits of Europe's solidarity and as a consequence the essence of the European project. The cultural movement at the Forum was behaving as if nothing was happening to Europe or worse that it did not care.

This was the opportunity for the Cultural Forum to call on Head of States and Governments to work towards Europe's unity¹ and keep the European utopia alive. Culture activists have a special responsibility to keep alive the perspective of a Europe where all Europeans, despite their cultural differences and mental barriers, work for a common destiny and for the promotion of shared values such as democracy, human rights, social solidarity, cultural diversity and tolerance.

The European project is, after all, foremost a cultural project; nations with different cultures and languages uniting to pursue common goals in spite of resentments and prejudices born from a difficult and a bloody history.

The Euro as well as European institutions were meant to unite Europe! The crisis is now showing substantial cracks in the cement, which is based on purely financial and institutional interests. This is not sufficient to pursue the European utopia.

There cannot be economic convergence without a sociological convergence. Europe has yet to capture the imagination of citizens in the same way as the concept of nation states, rooted in a "common" culture and history, succeeded in the 18th and 19th century. This also means that nation states (which still manage culture) will have to accept cultural collaboration at European level (to abandon sterile cultural competition).

We can now hear or read French intellectuals spreading the idea that the Euro is a German conspiracy to make France less competitive. On the other side of the Rhine German commentators highlight the costs of the Euro to German finances and emphasise Germany's superiority over its unreliable and undisciplined neighbours. In the UK a bill has surfaced calling for a referendum to leave the European Union. Populists and nationalists in numerous Northern European countries are keen to savage ways of life in Southern Europe to justify national posturing.

We are back to the good old days of foreigner bashing! Despite having the European institutions in place for 50 years, European nationals remain largely ignorant of the customs and culture of their neighbours. This ignorance largely contributes to the lack of solidarity between nations and people. Tax payers are asked to show solidarity with people from other countries they hardly know or have the opportunity to empathize with. What would make us less indifferent and by the same token more European?

The case of Belgium shows how cultural indifference is leading a founding member of the EU to the verge of breaking up. In the absence of interest or belief in the advantages offered by multi-culturality, voters are rightly questioning institutional set ups – Why Belgium? Why Europe?

In the foreword of his formidable theater play «Mamma Medea» Flemish writer Tom Lanoye states: «Si la Belgique, avec sa diversité communautaire, cessait d'exister, c'est tout le projet européen qui s'effondrerait». He adds: «Moi je n'ai pas besoin de la disparition de la Belgique pour être flamand»².

It is time to show the fallacy of the current European project:

- The EU 2020 Strategy is architecture without culture.
- There cannot be a European project without a strong cultural component (to reach and touch citizens beyond their wallets!).



1. "There are more reasons now for Europe to Unite" J.C Trichet in the FT on 14 October 2011

2. "Als België met haar verschillende gemeenschappen, zou ophouden te bestaan, dan stort heel het Europese project in elkaar. Ik heb het verdwijnen van België niet nodig om Vlaming te zijn" Tom Lanoye, foreword of his play Mamma Medea, Rideau de Bruxelles, www.lanoye.be

- The EU project requires sustaining solidarity amongst Europeans,
 - By promoting the fecundation potential of cultures as a means to support innovation, creativity, exchange of thoughts, as well as
 - In fighting the sterilization of cultures (leading to intolerance, “repli sur soi”).

The founding fathers of Europe would look today into what makes Europe so distinct: 100's of languages, 27 nationalities, 100's of different cultures – the capacity to be singular whilst remaining tolerant and embracing differences. This singularity and ability to mix the different is the essence of the European project. It is a much desired precious economic and social resource for a world fighting monoculture. This project is unique in the world and should

continue to serve as an example to build peace and prosperity in Asia, Latin America, African or the Middle East regions suffering from cultural ignorance and intolerance.

Tom Lanoye should have received a “Carte Blanche” for the European Cultural Forum. The Forum has missed an opportunity to show the importance of culture in the European project, the requirement of solidarity, fraternity as corollary of a European identity. There cannot be Europe without culture. Yes culture is more³... and the EU is more than a pay cheque for culture.

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Philippe Kern, Founder
and Managing Director of KEA European Affairs

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3. Reference to the campaign from Culture Action Europe – <http://www.cultureactioneurope.org/> Sign the petition we are more on <http://www.wearemore.eu/>



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