

Ján Figel'—Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth

CISAC—Copyright Summit

Brussels, 30 May 2007

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Mr President,

Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends of culture,

Intro

I am happy to open this Copyright Summit organized by CISAC. Participants represent many different fields. This plurality of points of view will produce an interesting – and I hope also - a fruitful debate.

I would like to explain what Europe can do for culture—and culture for Europe.

Culture is central for the European project

Europe has always been a cultural project, even if it has taken us some time to recognize it. Culture defines Europe much more than geography or markets do.

Bringing together the institutions, and more importantly, the peoples of Europe with their different habits and traditions clearly involves a historic cultural mission.

And, since its beginning, European integration was based on the respect of cultural diversity—national, regional and local.

This is a precondition for its success also in the future.

Cultural diversity is the main issue I would like to discuss today and how it operates in a world dominated by free-market rules.

One question this Summit asks is: “are creators’ works like any other good?”

My answer is "no". Cultural goods and services are special; they have both an economic and a cultural symbolic value.

They represent our value systems, our dreams, our beliefs, our myths and our personal and collective identities.

That is why cherishing each and every form of cultural expression is vital for us.

EU policies that support culture

The EU already does a lot to stimulate the cultural and creative sectors. Financial incentives include:

- Culture Programme;
- Media programme;
- Structural Funds;
- Research Programme;
- External relations and development programmes.

Also, culture and cultural diversity are taken into account in the application of market and competition policies.

Communication

Cultural stakeholders expect the EU to do more on issues such as facilitating the mobility of artists and the circulation of artistic production across national borders.

There is also a growing consensus on the need for greater cooperation among EU countries and between them and the European Institutions.

Our latest response is a policy document that lays down the first ever European strategy for culture.

“A European agenda for culture in a globalising world”—adopted earlier this month—was prepared by an extensive consultation to which many of you have contributed.

Its three major objectives are:

- cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue;
- culture as a catalyst for creativity to boost growth and jobs;
- culture for the Union's international relations.

I would like these objectives to be shared widely, not only by the European Institutions, but also by Member States and the civil society—including the cultural world.

Cultural diversity

All cultural expressions should have fair access to the market place. This is above all to ensure strong symbolic links with one's personal and collective identities. One should have easy access to the expressions of one's cultures of origin and of choice.

I believe that a strong cultural identity is a precondition to an open attitude towards the cultures of others and the perception of cultural diversity as an asset to be protected and preserved.

Copyright and creativity

Issues linked to copyright and related rights are not directly part of my portfolio, but I take, of course, care within the remits of Article 151 IV, that cultural aspects are duly taken into account in all relevant policy areas.

In general, EU legislation strive to duly protect the rights of authors, producers and artists. I see this as essential to encourage creativity and ensure creators fair rewards for their work.

Culture and creativity are important drivers for innovation, growth and jobs.

We should work together to promote the partnerships and clusters between the cultural and other sectors such as ICT business, research, tourism, etc.

We should reinforce the social and economic impact of investments in culture and creativity.

The proposal to declare 2009 as the "European Year of Creativity through Education and Culture" goes towards this direction.

International relations

I am very happy about the integration of EU foreign policy and our new strategy for culture.

It shows the growing importance of culture in the new global order we want; which is one based on peace, mutual understanding, and respect for cultural values.

The rapid entry into force of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions illustrates what Europe can do when it speaks with one voice on the international scene.

The UNESCO Convention is a new international framework which gives a fresh role to Europe through the promotion of balanced cultural exchanges, in particular with developing countries.

As parties to the Convention, the Member States and the Commission will now have to join forces to implement it and promote it internationally.

The Communication suggests measures to make culture a stronger part of political dialogue with partner countries and regions around the world, promoting cultural exchanges and systematically integrating culture in development programmes and projects.

The impact of education and culture in development programmes cannot be overestimated.

Working together

To successfully implement this new European agenda for culture, the Commission wants to establish new partnerships and methods for cooperation.

A fundamental feature of the new strategy is the proposal to introduce a more structured system of co-operation among the Member States and the EU institutions on cultural matters.

The mechanism is based on the open method of co-ordination that has been successfully used to structure our collaboration in the area of education & training, youth and social protection.

However, is above all vital to improve dialogue and partnership with the cultural sector.

Cultural Forum

We want to bring together the different components of the extremely heterogeneous world of culture, ranging from the creative industries and cultural sector to individual intellectuals and artists.

I strongly encourage you to contribute and participate in this venture.

A new balance

We at the European Commission recognise the need to find a better balance between market regulations and the protection and promotion of cultural diversity.

Taking this challenge very seriously we have established a group dedicated to culture which will cut across many policies of the European Commission.

We want to hear your voice. Please tell us how actual and potential EU regulations impact your activities.

This group can be thought as an interface between the cultural and creative sectors and the European Commission.

Close

Our policy document intends to indicate a path. We now have to join forces and implement this European Agenda for culture.

You are part of the process. The success of our action depends on your participation. The really successful European policies are those the people feel as their own.