

# Can “Europe as a Cultural Project” help to overcome the crisis of the European Union?

## The Role of Foundations

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Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues!

Working in the Netherlands and for a truly European foundation – the European Cultural Foundation – I’m sure you will forgive me for having changed my speaking notes for this annual assembly of foundations in Europe. The outcome of the recent referenda indicates a major crisis for the process of European integration.

Allow me to be very frank. If I am too provocative, please forgive me; it’s due to my deep concerns. If you find my arguments somewhat naïve, please correct me. I think we all have to reposition our mission.

The European Union’s current crisis is a crisis affecting a project of ‘the elite’, if not of the elite itself. Foundations in Europe are part of this elite. Can we continue our work in a business-as-usual manner? Or don’t we have to re-define our responsibilities in the European public realm quite fundamentally?

According to many observers, the French and Dutch referenda were less about text than about context; less concerned with the actual wording of the Constitutional Treaty than the context of the political project Europe. Culture – and therefore cultural policies for Europe – is an essential element of this context.

The main argument I would like to share with you today is this: Although economic efficiency is crucial, given the complexity of our post-national age, we won’t succeed in building Europe in a satisfactory way unless we understand the need for the “cultural project Europe”.

### I. The current crisis

“The train was running too fast, too far, and nobody knew the destination. Now the citizens have pulled the emergency break.”

This has been the main reaction of Dutch politicians to the overwhelming NO vote in the referendum. Is it possible, necessary even, to see in the political crisis an opportunity for an improved *political culture* in Europe?

Political elites have – mostly unwillingly and certainly paradoxically – achieved a goal which they have often proclaimed as desirable: Citizens massively engaged, the EU a real and burning topic, the European debate booming in all of Europe’s media. Yet, the same elites are desperate. The citizens’ vote was crystal clear – No – even if the reasons for this No were contradictory. Beyond national specifics and scapegoats, we can identify a range of essential issues at stake:

- The future of nation states at a time of globalisation
- The future of European social models

- Identities and otherness
- The role of Europe in the world
- Questions about democracy, welfare and solidarity

The European Community was undoubtedly a success story in overcoming the kind of mutual hostility which in the past had led to war. Yet it seems that the historical dividend of peace does not register with the public. The European Community was also successful economically, in its creation of an internal market. Yet welfare seems to be threatened by “globalisation”, and rather than being perceived as an insurance policy, the EU is felt to be part of the problem.

Unfortunately, the coming decade will be characterised by an even more cut-throat level of competition – competition between global players as well as between the rich, the less rich and the poor member states of the EU, the “South” and the “East”. What does “solidarity” mean under these circumstances? Who represents whose interests, and to what end? What could bind communities together in a “post-national” era?

The arguments in the No camp range from the bizarre (a key slogan in the Netherlands was: “We are against the constitution because it protects bullfights in Spain”) to the seriously valid, such as the questioning of ultra-liberal economic paradigms. Projections of national identities (“What role for the Dutch in Europe?”) were combined with the pragmatic reasoning of “How much does it cost us, and what do we get out of it?”

Class divisions and urban v. rural splits became evident. Fear of impoverishment and unemployment was as strong a motive as the fear of alienation as a result of multiculturalism. And the Yes camp simply could not make a plausible case as to why we need Europe. The negative vibes surrounding the EU in recent years could not suddenly be changed. Europe is not an affair of the heart. Nor do people believe that it “delivers”.

The current crisis can also be understood as a crisis of political participation. Integration successes were achieved by means of Jean Monnet’s method: engineered behind doors, from the top down. The price of this method was the political disengagement of Europe’s citizens, who never really came to feel that the EU was *their* project.

When it comes to participation, the referenda over the constitutional treaty are only a start, and a cumbersome one at that. Real participation involves risk (the risk of engendering populism, for example); it also challenges the assumptions of the elite.

The fall of the Berlin wall; 9/11 and the Iraq war; the recent enlargement have shaken the old “certainties” of all of us. The EU, like other institutions, is being judged according to the difficult criteria of legitimacy and efficiency in very complicated times. A functioning and meaningful European community needs democratic participation and a political culture which makes citizens feel that they own the European project: a political culture which renders them capable of taking decisions jointly and in solidarity with one another.

And the Union needs to become a global player with a clear stance on human rights, with common interests and values, and with a firm understanding of cultural diversity and social responsibility.

## II. What can cultural policies contribute to the European project?

The process of building Europe can no longer be managed by an ever-more-professional “communication” of political, economic and administrative decisions which are taken far away. It is not only about more and better “information”. At stake are complex concepts of well-being, of “the good life”, of individual and collective identity, of human dignity.

### Europe has become a cultural challenge

Besides the need to provide answers to basic economic problems, a future Europe requires a highly developed political culture, of which cultural strategies would form an important democratic part. I would like to list some of the fears expressed by people, fears which bring into question the top-down policies of European integration thus far:

- “It’s going too fast. First the massive enlargement of 2004, other new countries coming soon, and then there’s Turkey...” Clearly, politicians have failed to invest in the cultural, historical, *human* dimensions of confrontation and hospitality, learning and encounter.
- “We have not yet integrated our migrants, and the doors are wide open again...” Clearly, politicians have failed to invest sufficiently in intercultural competences.
- “Unlimited flexibility and liberalisation serve international capital alone. Our governments and the EU haven’t protected us, and the EU has become an advocate of uncontrolled globalisation...” Clearly, we have lost a sense of balance in favour of one single paradigm: deregulation and privatisation. Public responsibility for the common good (and for culture and the arts) is on the retreat, in parallel with the depolitisation of citizens. Political culture needs uninhibited public debate, and investment in the culture of dissent.
- “The big swallow the small. Everything becomes uniform. And the USA dominates the world.” Clearly, the EU has not realised its leitmotiv of “unity in diversity”. Cultural policies will have to demonstrate that the safeguarding of diversity and of universal access to diverse cultural products is a top priority.

A European cultural policy framework for common intercultural challenges – and joint activities – must be developed. There are three main reasons for this.

Firstly, *culture and democracy*. Europe as a democratic project requires a cross-border civil society and a public European space for debate and for the exchange of information, ideas, and opinions. Only in this way can Europe’s decision-making process be an informed one. And a genuine community requires the stimulation by its most creative members; it needs to be provoked by visions, imagery and narratives that are beyond the realms of science, politics and the market. Europe – an indispensable pillar of the post-national future – needs policy frameworks which will enhance cross-border cooperation and cultural mobility, encouraging greater participation by its citizens across all kinds of borders and boundaries (including psychological ones).

Secondly, *culture and the economic and social project*. Europe’s ‘creative competitiveness’ remains a huge asset, justifying greater investment in what may be termed its ‘creative capital’. It is unsurprising that the European Employers Association is in favour of public as well as private investment in culture, considering the fact that the cultural industries enjoy above-average growth rates. To be successful, however, Europe also needs to develop the ‘social project’ of equal access to culture and shared public and private responsibilities.

And the third main reason for the development of an EU cultural policy framework is *culture and globalisation*. Without intercultural competence, without a cultural understanding of differences and partnership, Europe will simply be incapable of thinking and acting globally.

### Breaking the Taboos

If my assumptions are correct, then the conclusion is: we have to break some taboos.

1. Money. Europe, the EU, deserves a cultural cooperation programme worthy of the name. At present the EU spends 7 cents per citizen per year on cultural cooperation (0,03 % of its budget). There are opera houses which spend more. The European Cultural Foundation and EFAH, an important platform of cultural networks, therefore launched a campaign for an adequate EU culture budget, worth at least 70 cents per citizen per year. A first disappointingly modest success has been achieved: a budget amounting to 17 cents per citizen was recently proposed by the respective committee of the European Parliament. The struggle continues with the Council, and it is clear that it will be a tough one in the post-referendum trauma and the upcoming general budget negotiations.

2. "Subsidiarity". Europe as a cultural space faces a stalemate. Member states do acknowledge the need to invest more in cross-border cultural cooperation, in *joint* efforts to strengthen diversity and cooperative creative industries; yet, common action is difficult to achieve, due to the mantra of subsidiarity. In 14 member states, cultural budgets have been decreasing anyway. We need a much more proactive understanding of subsidiarity.

3. Media. Europe needs shared public spaces for an emerging European Civil Society. So far, top-down attempts have failed, and bottom-up initiatives have not received adequate support.

## III. The role of Foundations

To help redress this imbalance, Foundations in Europe can achieve much by:

- Launching new private-public partnerships with NGOs, NPOs and networks of artists and cultural organisations, enlightened business leaders, the member states, and the European institutions. Europe would benefit from what may be termed a 'variable geometry' of joint efforts.
- Launching and supporting new instruments for cultural cooperation, information and knowledge generation.
- Supporting networks of cross-border debate and media cooperation.
- Facilitating cultural policy development and applied research

### Success stories

One example of unprecedented collaborative efforts which was kick-started by Foundations is the recently launched pan-European pilot project, the Laboratory of European Cultural Cooperation, The LAB.

The LAB, which was initiated by the ECF, will provide practical services and information on a European scale for artists and cultural operators across Europe; it will launch media projects to enhance the European public space of debate and opinion-forming; and it will support tailor-made research, e.g. on mobility, and the cultural dimension of EU foreign policy. Lean in management, it is testing out new public-private governance models, based on shared interests and trust.

The LAB has taken off thanks to the Compagnia di San Paolo, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the Norwegian Foundation for the Freedom of Expression, the Robert Bosch Foundation, the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, the Swiss Migros Foundation, the German Federal Cultural Foundation - with partner: Deutsches Informationszentrum Kulturförderung (DIZK) and the German Agency for Civic Education.

This - mostly private - investment has been seen by national public authorities to pass the “market test”, and these have joined the coalition, e.g. Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway, with others preparing their participation. Finally, the LAB has won the support of the European Commission itself.

There are other examples, such as the Cultural Policy Research Award, which will be presented for the second time during this assembly; joint studies such as “Creative Europe” and the study on the potential of foundations in Europe for cultural cooperation, carried out by Fondazione Fitzcarraldo, both enabled as NEF projects.

The EFC and NEF are ideal platforms for brokering alliances, and the European Cultural Foundation is grateful and eager to be instrumental in achieving even more tangible alliances.

We are at the beginning. The demand is huge: A demand for seed money, for ideas, for new public-private responsibility and governance.

#### IV. Values

Foundations can achieve a lot in practical, feasible steps:

- Promotion of mobility of artists and cultural capital
- Inclusion of the EU neighbours in the shared European cultural space
- Promotion of intercultural competence
- Incentives for cross-border debate and innovative media cooperation on European topics
- Incentives for the competitiveness of the European creative industries, and cooperation with the non-profit sector
- Incentives for innovative private-public partnerships to promote groundbreaking multilateral projects
- Support for truly European cultural networks and platforms
- Development of cultural dimensions of a future foreign policy of the EU.

Yet, more is at stake.

The crisis of the EU is a crisis of post-modern democracy. The first reactions, from the UK, suggest hitting the Stop button to secure the project’s survival and revival. But what would come after that? The FT forecast that “Ms Merkel, Mr Sarkozy and Gordon Brown might offer

a fresh start for Europe, but they are no euro-dreamers,” predicting “hard headed realism: in terms of jobs, growth and international clout.”

I agree. An “ever-closer Union” is not what the referenda indicated. I also fundamentally disagree, however. Jobs and growth are indispensable, yes, but frustrations and hopes go much deeper. Heterogeneity, multiculturalism and disparities demand much more complex approaches. Issues of participation, democracy and solidarity cannot be addressed by “more of the same, but more effectively”. Europe has become a cultural challenge.

The growing demand for a policy towards “Europe as a cultural project” indicates a mismatch between needs and political and financial resources. Foundations have the potential to bridge this gap. They can point out the root-causes of the problem and prepare the ground for the future. Foundations can help to bring awareness, mitigating the frustrations caused by the necessarily lengthy political process.

What should be our values for this task?

Our joint work should not be based on the difficult, if not dangerous notion of a European *cultural* identity. Identity politics appear to constitute one of the ideologies of this so-called ‘post-ideological age’, an ideology which includes hidden or overt claims of superiority over the ‘other’.

Our joint work should be based on arguments for a European *political* identity; an identity in shared diversity.

Political culture is to a certain extent interwoven – ‘ethically impregnated’, in the words of Habermas – with culture in general. Political culture contains attitudes and dispositions, orientations, values, knowledge and emotions. Political culture also encapsulates the blueprints of what a community considers as its identity. It is related to the ‘habits of the heart’.

Political identity is fed by shared memories, and by energies and hopes which are culturally based even if they have not yet been realised politically. Education and cultural cooperation will have to play a new role.

In both producing *and* questioning the system of shared values, *culture and the arts* also *shape and shake* the ‘identity project’ of Europe.

Please allow me, in drawing to a conclusion, to quote some words from Jose Manuel Barroso’s famous Berlin speech (‘A Soul for Europe’, Berlin, 26 November 2004) which has been influential in recent months:

“We are entering a new, challenging, but also delicate, phase for Europe and our Union. The questions of what Europe can do for culture and what culture can do for Europe have acquired a new sense of urgency.... Europe is not only about markets, it is also about values and culture... In the hierarchy of values, the cultural ones range above the economic ones. If the economy is a necessity for our lives, culture is really about what makes life worth living... All of those who have followed the debate about the role of culture in the process of European integration over the decades know quite well that wise words

and ardent appeals have been many, but modest in their effect. What is needed now is sustainability of action – the translation of good intentions into good decisions...”

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues. I believe that investment in “Europe as a cultural project” can help to overcome the recent crisis. I believe that foundations have an obligation to grasp this opportunity.

Thank you very much for your attention. I am very much looking forward to our discussions in the coming days, weeks and months.