

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world

Information from the Commission on the Communication and the Open Method of Coordination [¹ Non Paper]

The Communication on a European agenda for culture acknowledges the fundamental role of culture in our societies and proposes new dialogue and cooperation methods to strengthen its voice in the European project.

The Communication is based on an extensive consultation process which has enabled the European Commission to identify three major objectives to be shared by the European Institutions, Member States and the cultural world, and to form part of an agenda for culture:

- Promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue,
- Promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy,
- Promotion of culture as an essential element in the Union's international relations.

The idea is for these objectives to be shared widely by all stakeholders in order to foster a strong convergence of efforts at all levels resulting in a stronger European added value.

Thus the Commission seeks to establish new partnerships and methods for cooperation with the different stakeholders to empower them within their respective remits to fully participate in the European agenda for culture. The Communication proposes that Member States endorse these objectives and implement them in full respect of their competences.

How does the open method of coordination work in practice?

The open method of coordination is a non-binding, intergovernmental framework for concerted action, which is suitable for a field such as culture where competence lies primarily at the national level. It consists of agreeing common objectives, regularly following up progress towards them and exchanging best practice and relevant data in order to foster mutual learning.

In this context, Member States are invited to implement the agreed objectives in accordance with their national practices in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity. They may set their own priorities. Local and regional authorities may be associated as deemed appropriate.

The Commission will support the open method of coordination by mobilising its internal and external policies, Community funding programmes, and striking the right balance between cultural diversity and other legitimate public policy objectives.

¹ This document was produced as a "Non Paper" by the Commission at the Cultural Affairs Committee Meeting held on 6 July 2007

It will also carry out studies to reinforce the knowledge base in this field, as well as engage in a renewed role of animation, exchange of good practice and dialogue with the full range of actors..

Civil society will be invited to join forces and contribute to implementing these objectives. The Commission will seek to organise a closer partnership and strengthened dialogue with stakeholders in order to enhance their input into the policy-making process and their involvement in the open method of coordination. Member States will also be invited to associate closely civil society at the national level.

Progress towards the objectives will be followed up. It is suggested that a report shall be prepared every two years on the basis of inputs from Member States, the Commission and civil society.

What are the likely benefits of an open method of coordination in the field of culture?

It is precisely because of our experience in the fields of education and training, youth and social protection that we are proposing an open method of coordination for culture. These other open methods have demonstrated that they help to promote gradual, but positive progress in areas where Community competence is rather limited and to mobilise the various actors.

Experience has shown that the open method of coordination in these areas has helped to strengthen Member States' policy making, as regular participation in a European process raises the profile of these policies at the national level and creates an additional stimulus for them. It allows the actors in these policy fields to have a voice both at the national and European level which they would not otherwise have.

An important aspect of the open method of coordination is the learning process which it stimulates. By promoting the exchange of good practice, it enables Member States to learn from one another, assisting them in developing innovative and effective policies.

The open method will help to mobilise actors more effectively as it will provide an enhanced role for public authorities (potentially at all levels) and civil society stakeholders. This will help to provide an added dynamism to policy in this field.

A specially adapted OMC for the cultural sector

We have sought to propose an OMC which is specifically adapted to the needs of culture. In other words, we have chosen very broad objectives and not proposed the use of benchmarks or indicators, which exist in some OMC. We have done this deliberately in order to leave a maximum of freedom and autonomy to Member States with regard to how they implement the objectives. In view of the special characteristics of the cultural sector, which is highly heterogeneous –sometimes conflicting – and relatively unorganised, we feel that this is the right kind of OMC to propose for this sector at this point in time.

In view of the growing recognition of the importance of evidence-based policy, we are, nevertheless, proposing to work to improve the availability of comparable statistics in this field, which are desperately lacking. Indeed, there is an overwhelming consensus among all Member States on the need to develop comparable statistics, and it was also one of the recommendations in the study carried out for us on the Economy of Culture. In the Communication we are, therefore, proposing to develop a better statistical base in cooperation with Eurostat.

How will progress be monitored?

Regular reporting is essential to any open method. This is because it helps to create greater focus on policy priorities, thereby creating a new dynamism. We are proposing doing this every two years in order to allow all stakeholders a reasonable period of time for action between reporting exercises.

We are proposing that the Commission supports the process and that each Member State appoints a high-level representative, to act as the Commission's interlocutor for culture-related issues and to take part in the regular meetings at the highest level. Such fora shall coordinate the work as well as reporting.

Member States should provide contributions on developments and progress in the autumn of the year preceding the report. The Commission would then prepare a report in cooperation with the high-level representatives, and this would be presented to culture Ministers at their Council in May of the following year.

It would then be up to Member States in the Council to see whether they wish to adopt conclusions, a resolution or recommendations on this basis, as well as to provide further guidance for future work.

What are the plans regarding consultation of stakeholders?

The Commission has proposed a series of initiatives in order to develop the dialogue with the different actors of the cultural sector. This dialogue is a key element in the open method of coordination, and Member States are encouraged to fully associate cultural stakeholders in the process at their level.

The Commission will do so by setting up a Cultural Forum. It also intends to have more specific consultations on the issues discussed within the framework of the open method. However, to do that, the Commission needs to have a better picture of the sectors involved and will carry out a mapping exercise.

The cultural forum should be invited to comment on the developments under the open method of coordination so that it can actively contribute to its development. The first cultural forum will meet in Portugal in September.