

euinsight

The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue— Together in Diversity

“euquote”

“Europe faces many significant challenges that have their roots in intercultural relations. We must meet these challenges head-on, and bring out the best in our continent’s cultural and religious heritage. But we will only do this if we break down the barriers of ignorance through dialogue.”

—Ján Figel’, European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth

Intercultural dialogue has become a major challenge in our increasingly globalized yet ideologically fragmented world. In today’s European Union, freedom of movement has greatly facilitated dialogue across borders and cultural exchanges are lively and vibrant. EU citizens benefit from increasingly easy access to cultural goods and activities from a variety of ethnic and linguistic origins. However, this discourse has also raised questions about

Europe’s identity and its ability to preserve a cohesive society while continuing to embrace the diverse cultural elements of its 27 Member States.

During 2008, the European Union celebrates the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (EYID) in recognition of one of Europe’s greatest assets—its rich and varied cultural heritage. A joint initiative of the European Union, its Member States and European civil society, EYID 2008 is part of the new European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World and aims to establish a foundation for European policy initiatives in the field of intercultural dialogue. A major component of EYID 2008 is a series of “Brussels Debates” that will help shape the EU’s future strategy in this area; topics include the impact of migration on intercultural dialogue, interreligious dialogue and intercultural dialogue in the media.

Europe’s cultural dynamism and diversity is closely linked to its role and influence in the world. The EU is not just an economic powerhouse; it is also an unprecedented and successful social and cultural project. Much of the success



of the European Union lies in its ability to respect the richness of its varied and intertwined cultural heritage and creativity, while forging common understanding and rules which have guaranteed peace, stability, prosperity and solidarity.

Dialogue and exchange between different cultures is a key element in fostering a socially cohesive European Union, an active European citizenship and a sense of European identity. As the EU moves forward in a globalizing world, respect for cultural and linguistic diversity and the promotion of a common cultural heritage will continue to be indispensable not only to the European project, but also to its relationship with the non-European world.

First European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World

In May 2007, the European Commission launched the first-ever European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World. Its three main objectives—promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity, and promotion of culture as a vital element in the EU’s international relations—are each integral to the success of a contemporary European and global society faced with intercultural challenges.

This European Agenda affirms the central role of culture in the process of European integration and proposes a cultural agenda for Europe, and for its relations with non-EU countries. Culture is an indispensable asset

in achieving the EU’s strategic objectives of prosperity, solidarity and security, and ensuring a stronger presence on the international scene.

As parties to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the EU and its Member States have committed themselves to developing a new and more proactive role for culture in the context of international relations, to integrating culture as a vital element of the EU’s relations with partner countries and regions, and to incorporating culture in development programs and projects.

Action at EU level is designed to support and complement, rather than to replace,

the actions of the Member States. Cultural policy is and will therefore primarily remain a responsibility of Member States; in some countries it is largely dealt with at the regional or even local level.

United in Diversity

“United in diversity” is the motto of the European Union. Through the EU, Europeans are united in working together for peace and prosperity, and the many different cultures, traditions and languages in Europe are a positive asset for the continent.

Survey Shows that Three Out of Four EU Citizens Welcome Intercultural Dialogue

With Member States stretching from Finland to Malta and from Bulgaria to Portugal, daily interaction among people of different cultures is a reality for EU citizens. In a recent Eurobarometer survey, 83 percent of respondents in the EU Member States said that they value the benefits of intercultural contacts, and 65 percent reported interacting with at least one person of a different religion, ethnicity or nationality than their own in the week prior to being questioned.

Additionally, nearly three-quarters of EU citizens believe that people with a different background—whether ethnic, religious or national—enrich the cultural life of their country. Young people, people with the highest levels of education and those living in cities are more likely to consider cultural diversity an asset.

A key vehicle for intercultural dialogue in the EU is the Erasmus program, which allows EU citizens to study abroad in a Member State other than their own. Together with an enriched study experience, Erasmus provides exposure to different cultures. A parallel program, Erasmus Mundus, provides EU-funded scholarships for non-EU nationals participating in approved European graduate degree programs, as well as scholarships for EU nationals studying at partner universities throughout the world.



EU Insight is published by the Delegation of the European Commission to the United States.

Anthony Smallwood
Spokesperson & Head of
Press and Public Diplomacy
Editor-in-Chief

Stacy Hope
Editor

Melinda Stevenson
Writer & Assistant Editor

ISSN: 1830-5059

Catalogue No: IQ-AB-08-03-EN-C

2300 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
202.862.9500

www.eurunion.org
email: delegation-usa-info@ec.europa.eu

Issue No.18, May 2008

EUNIC (European Union National Institutes for Culture)

The European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) is a partnership of national bodies based in EU Member States that engage in international cultural activities and operate with a degree of autonomy from their national governments. EUNIC creates effective networks among members in order to improve and promote cultural diversity and understanding between European societies, and to strengthen international dialogue and cultural cooperation with countries outside Europe.

Many EUNIC members execute programs that develop sustainable, positive relationships between the U.S. and their home countries:

The **Finnish Cultural Institute** promotes Finnish visual arts, design and architecture abroad, and promotes long-term collaborations between Finnish and North American arts professionals. In the U.S., the institute runs an artist-in-residency program, curates and presents touring exhibitions in cooperation with American partners, and develops collaborative international networks within the field of visual arts.

Alliance Française develops knowledge of the French language and French and Francophone cultures, and encourages cultural, intellectual and artistic exchanges between the U.S. and France and the French-speaking countries.

The **Goethe-Institut** promotes knowledge of the German language abroad and fosters international cultural

cooperation between Germany and the U.S. Centers in Boston, Chicago, San Francisco and Washington, DC organize and support a wide spectrum of cultural events, workshops, seminars and educational programs.

The **Romanian Cultural Institute** promotes Romanian culture and builds sustainable collaborations between American and Romanian cultural organizations. The institute acts as catalyst in all artistic fields, but also aims to strengthen academic links and present a new perspective about Romania and its current cultural dynamics.

Spain's **Instituto Cervantes** promotes the teaching, study, and use of Spanish as a second language and contributes to the advancement of the Spanish and Hispanic American cultures throughout non-Spanish speaking countries. At U.S. centers in New York, Chicago, Albuquerque and Seattle, Instituto Cervantes hosts lectures, concerts, exhibitions and film festivals.

The **British Council** builds long-term relationships between the UK and the U.S., and fosters appreciation of the UK's creative ideas and achievements. It promotes the educational opportunities available in the UK and facilitates long-term international educational and artistic partnerships. The British Council also develops initiatives to encourage the next generation of leaders on both sides of the Atlantic to collaboratively explore solutions to global issues.

Intercultural Dialogue and Development Cooperation

The EU implements a wide variety of cultural programs as part of its financial and technical assistance to developing countries. Projects target the preservation and restoration of heritage sites, the creation or restoration of museums, and capacity-building for local artists and cultural professionals. The EU also supports cultural diversity, local access to culture, and the protection of cultural rights in non-EU countries.

The EU strives to leverage intercultural dialogue as one of the main instruments of peace and conflict prevention. For example,

the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures in Alexandria, Egypt—a collaboration between the EU and its partners in the southern Mediterranean region—strives to transform the Mediterranean basin into a common area of peace, stability and prosperity. The EU also supports programs like the Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou, which aims to further develop African cinema as means of expression, education and awareness-raising.

For more information: www.eurunion.org/euinsight