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NOTE

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Subject: The role of culture in building cohesive societies in Europe
- *Discussion paper*
(*Public debate in accordance with Article 8(2) of the Council's Rules of Procedure*) [*proposed by the Presidency*]

Following consultation of the meeting of the Cultural Affairs Committee, the Presidency has prepared the attached discussion paper which is submitted as the basis for the policy debate to take place at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 20-21 November 2017.

The role of culture in building cohesive societies in Europe*Presidency discussion paper***I. INTRODUCTION**

What makes the European Union unique? The answer lies in the cultural richness and variety of languages that contribute to making ours a wholesome society where diversity is appreciated and encouraged, where differences are experienced in a united and collaborative manner. A cohesive society is our common goal and culture can help us to achieve it. Culture contributes to social cohesion in communities across Europe, providing a framework for participation and engagement and fostering integration.

Enriching though it may be, the diversity of peoples and communities in Europe brings about challenges as well. The current context of increased migration from outside the EU and increased mobility of people within the EU sees people with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds living side by side, which may give rise to tensions and put social cohesion at risk. Crises, as history shows, are fertile ground for the rise of populist and extreme nationalist tendencies. But these challenging times also encourage us to engage in discussions at different levels of governance and in civil society to find solutions. The questions at stake deal not only with social and economic matters, but also symbolic and cultural ones. In short, we are questioning our own core values.

Becoming more diverse culturally can make communicating and understanding each other more challenging, but it also allows us to experience differences and build empathy towards others. This reality should be taken into account and addressed at both the individual and the collective level. The foundation for inclusive society is based on a more participatory interaction between individuals, communities and institutions. Wider knowledge of one's history and roots creates culturally competent citizens with dynamic and open identities and a strong sense of belonging. Self-awareness – in the sense of having an understanding one's own culture and background and feeling confident therein – makes individuals more open, tolerant, and appreciative of other cultures.

Cultural policies are a helpful way of making societies more cohesive and generating an increased feeling of belonging. They can also be instrumental in attaining goals in other areas besides purely cultural ones, such as community development and civic participation. Cultural organisations, in turn, have the potential to build bridges between people, challenge audiences through arts and heritage, and engage new segments of the population.

We need to consider what the changing nature of Europe means for cultural organisations in terms of ensuring the transfer of cultural heritage across generations, audiences and different artistic media in order to remain relevant and economically sustainable in the long term. With this in mind, it would be worth exploring the ways in which cultural organisations could cater for the needs and interests of diverse communities, finding a balance between addressing traditional and new audiences and helping newly arrived groups in society to find their feet in local life. One way in which these organisations could contribute would be by creating spaces where positive encounters could take place and offering opportunities to deepen different communities' knowledge of one other. This may involve re-interpreting or re-positioning cultural services.

II. POLICY FRAMEWORK AT EU LEVEL

Concrete steps have already been taken at EU level to address the matter of improving cultural integration of new arrivals. In the framework of the previous (2011-2014) and current (2015-2018) Council Work Plans for Culture, a number of open method of coordination (OMC) groups have approached this issue from different angles:

- In 2012, an OMC report was published on 'Policies and good practices in the public arts and in cultural institutions to promote better access to and wider participation in culture'.
- In 2014, another OMC report was issued on 'The role of public arts and cultural institutions in the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue'.
- In March 2017, an OMC report was issued on 'How culture and the arts can promote intercultural dialogue in the context of the migratory and refugee crisis'.
- Currently, an OMC group is working on a set of recommendations for policy makers and cultural institutions on how to foster the contribution of culture, in partnerships with other sectors (healthcare, social care, prison service etc.) to social inclusion.

Furthermore:

- in spring 2016, the Creative Europe Programme launched a special call for project proposals supporting refugee integration in European societies; and
- in summer 2016, the Commission issued the Communication 'Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals'. This plan includes the launching of European projects to promote intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and European common values through culture, and the creation of handbooks and toolboxes for practitioners.

III. MINISTERIAL INTERVENTIONS

In his State of the Union Address 2017, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, called for celebrating the cultural diversity that surrounds us. In 2018, we are celebrating the European Year of Cultural Heritage, during which we hope to reinforce a sense of belonging to a common European space and raise awareness of our common history and values. This initiative provides a good opportunity to foster new participatory and intercultural approaches to cultural policy.

Given the challenges facing Europe today, ministers are welcome to share their views on the following questions:

- **Given that culture and heritage have an important role to play in building cohesive societies, what actions could be jointly undertaken at EU level?**
- **How could cultural and heritage organisations contribute to more cohesive societies in Europe? Ministers are also encouraged to share positive examples of cultural policy measures and instruments from their own national experiences.**

In order to introduce the debate, the Presidency has invited an external speaker, **Ms Helen Sildna**, creative entrepreneur and social activist. In her presentation, Ms Sildna will touch upon the meaning of the changed world where everything is about communication and information can digitally spread in an instant. This has triggered a major rethink of cultural policy in many countries - social responsibility and awareness of the impact are now high on the agenda. Ms Sildna will showcase that the role, but also the skills and the competences, of the cultural sector are in need of a revamp to act as solid partners for cities, states and communities.

In their interventions Ministers should be guided by the questions presented above. Ministers are encouraged to intervene freely, including reacting in response to the speaker.

In order to give all Ministers an opportunity to contribute to the debate and to have a free-flowing discussion, interventions should be as brief and concise as possible (maximum two minutes).
