



## ***PROPOSITIONS TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION for an EU Year of Intercultural Dialogue<sup>1</sup>***

### ***Introduction***

The term “intercultural dialogue” is used in many different and sometimes confusing ways. This creates a vague area of reflection, often making the development of concrete programmes difficult. For the sake of clarity, we wish to distinguish between three fruitful and parallel areas of endeavour:

#### **1) Inter-continental dialogue**

as a response to globalization and the need for serious cultural bridging.

#### **2) Trans-national dialogue**

as a response to a wider Europe and as an integrated part of a strategy towards neighbouring countries

#### **3) Inter-ethnic dialogue**

as a response to the increased heterogeneity in all our towns and cities due to migration and mobility.

The three areas are inter-related. The skills necessary to respond to them are similar and transferable. The key to a successful strategy for Intercultural Dialogue is to create synergies between these three areas.

### ***CULTURE & SOCIETY***

#### ***From immigration to cultural fusion and multiple identities***

The necessary synergies between the three areas above will have to be sought against a background of the following key contemporary developments and/or requirements.

#### ***First point:***

Millions of people are on the move in today’s world, hence migration has become a major cultural and political force. Mobility – and therefore ‘interculturalism’ in practice – is constantly increasing. Mixed couples and their children, second and third generation immigrants with one foot in each culture, are common expressions of mobility in all European societies. This is a phenomenon that enriches. It may well lead to ***a reduction of the importance of ethnicity***, whether by blood or imagination and tradition.

Our world is changing constantly – and we need to exercise our capacity for change. Confrontation and negotiation with other realities is excellent preparation for confronting an unknown future. When the legendary theatre maker Peter Brook put together his first intercultural company years ago, he dreamed of “making culture in the sense that **yoghurt** is culture”. He initiated a transformation, an ongoing

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<sup>1</sup> This policy/action paper was drafted by an EFAH ‘Task Force’ led by Chris Torch and made up of Mary Ann de Vlieg, Y. Raj Isar, Lidia Makowska and Truus Ophuysen.

fermentation of ideas and perspectives, changing not only the participants (micro-cosmos) but also the context in which they worked (macro-cosmos).

***Second point:***

We should not focus simply on so-called “immigrant artists” reproducing classic forms of European art. Although it seems to be an organic impulse among some artists to gain acceptance in their new countries by re-inventing the wheel and rejecting their “otherness”, artistic assimilation misses the point.

Instead - we need hybrid forms which concretely reflect a culture in the making, a plural society built on exchange and dialogue. This can be called **fusional art**. It increases the oxygen level in a society.

***Third point:***

We must be motivated by curiosity, a desire to be surprised. Intercultural dialogue is not about giving jobs and opportunities to “underprivileged groups”. It is about creating an entirely new context where we are all transformed in the meeting, leading potentially to a relationship of common engagement and focused citizenship.

***Fourth point:***

We must never, never forget the audience. They will affect speed and rhythm. The audience could be inspired, cultivated and - above all – listened to. We need to develop allies in the radical transformation of culture that is required as a response to migration and globalization. Not in the form of “the crowds” but rather culture as meeting points for debate and reflection. The Arts can take a central position: citizenship and participation are only stimulated within an **inclusive** society, created by common values that are being developed, not enforced or taught.

***Fifth point:***

Another challenge we face in a globalized world is the cultivation of **multiple identities**. Each of us has an ethnic background but also personal identities as a parent, as a religious believer, as a man or woman. We have professional identities and cultural identities. We have a class identity. We share hobbies and interests in sub-cultural groups.

These different identities are in continuous negotiation and transformation. None of them alone are sufficient to define a person at any given moment. We weave our way through this complicated map and we relate to one another from various positions, none of them fixed.

***Sixth Point:***

Practicing trans-national collaboration is an important exercise in a globalized world. However, the **standard import-export of national art products** fills a very limited function. Audiences see, consume and applaud. Artists travel, perform and depart. The contact surface takes place only within the theatre, concert hall or museum for a limited time. It borders on exoticism, regardless of the quality or the country of origin. How can we avoid this superficial “internationalism”? By turning superficial contacts into collaborative relationships, working/creating together, discussing our experiences and aspirations at length and learning from each other.

**Seventh Point:**

Intercultural dialogue in daily life is seldom stimulated by massive mainstream events which often unintentionally lead to counter-productive results for the image of the European Union. Any future programme for intercultural dialogue should support an environment in which a diversity of artistic expressions flourish and where discordance is not only tolerated but encouraged.

**Eighth Point:**

Heritage is awareness of the many layers of history and human endeavor that make up a community or a nation. We must always ask ourselves when we consider research and preservation just whose heritage we are talking about? Migration and economic globalization have opened to a diversity of cultural heritages co-existing in the same geographical space. This requires a conscious and innovative approach to make informed decisions balancing between re-invention, diversity and national traditions.

**Summary:** We must cultivate the necessary intercultural competence to negotiate differences inclusively and with parallel strategies, whether on the local/national level or on the trans-national level. At all levels, it is a question of cultural democracy.

**What should be done?**

- ◆ Skills must be developed and transferred.
- ◆ Resources must be made available, for this issue is at the heart of the 'cultural policy' challenge for the European Union.
- ◆ Networks must be supported. They lead to consortia (trans-national and regional) that unite divergent ideas, stimulate projects and initiate programs.
- ◆ Physical places (cultural centres, meeting places) must be "inter-cultivated".
- ◆ Incentives must be offered for training and mentorship.
- ◆ Coalitions must be created
- ◆ Mechanisms to enable broader and more balanced distribution and exchange of artistic production must be developed, both trans-nationally and trans-culturally.

## Headlines for an EU Year of Intercultural Dialogue

*As the EU/DGEAC considers programme actions for the support and development of initiatives for intercultural dialogue, a “roadmap” was written which analyses the different possibilities, among them a year of Intercultural Dialogue. EFAH supports this idea but puts forward some very specific proposals as outlined here.*

*In the “Roadmap”, several options were looked at. Among them **Option 4 (Creation of a multi-annual programme)** and **Option 6 (A European Year)**. The idea of a multi-annual programme was questioned - by those doing the assessment - as “premature”. We find this surprising considering the large number of intercultural initiatives that are at present running throughout Europe today, on a local, national and trans-national basis.*

*We propose that a **multi-annual programme** - focusing above all on existing initiatives which require encouragement and increased resources - would be an excellent way of strengthening the intercultural element in the EU cultural policy area. This could naturally lead to Option 6 (the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue) in 2008.*

*We propose the following areas of focus for the programme and the Year:*

### **1. Existing Events**

Focus on **existing events** (festivals, seasons, debate series) which will happen already and have a strong real or potential intercultural dialogue element. These events, already run by engaged cultural operators and artists, need support and encouragement. They often have difficulty receiving sufficient national or local support because of their innovative and trans-national character.

Offer incentives to considerably **increase public debate and discussion** around them, e.g. open seminars, colloquia, discussions which will be diffused through various media such as radio, television, newspapers and magazines, internet streaming, publication of pre-conference readers and post-conference proceedings.

### **2. Media and Awareness**

Projects, processes and exchanges which already have strong ‘intercultural dialogue’ elements could be offered **incentive grants** to considerably **augment their documentation and visibility**. Writers, journalists, documentalists and others should be commissioned to publish, translate, or produce documentation that can be **significantly diffused to well-targeted publics**.

Actions to bring the **cultural sector** and the **popular media** together:

- ◆ television documentaries and news items
- ◆ short radio features and news items
- ◆ ‘intercultural profiles’ of artists / social workers / community leaders
- ◆ comics
- ◆ publications for general distribution in schools
- ◆ innovative collaborations between mainstream newspapers & cultural events

### **3. International Mobility and Intercultural Competence**

Support should be given to projects and structures which create connections and synergies between artists engaged in international mobility (tours and research) and local communities. Artists should share with one another - and with their target audiences - the intercultural competence that is developed on foreign soil, transferring it to a local, multi-ethnic context.

### **4. Education and the Arts**

It is essential from a long term future perspective to offer support for **innovative collaborations between schools and cultural projects**, so that true intercultural dialogue practice filters down into the earliest stages of development. This could include:

- ◆ projects between children and older generation
- ◆ collaborations between cultural projects and internet, especially in the schools
- ◆ training programs for teachers and other educational professionals

### **5. Cross-Sectorial Actions**

Innovative **cross-sectorial collaborations**, between cultural sector and e.g. education, social, employment, science, business, health, youth, etc should be encouraged and supported. To increase the influence and effect of the “cultural element” in all EU initiatives for Intercultural Dialogue is an essential step in any future strategy.

### **6. Intercultural Meeting Places and Laboratories**

To cultivate new approaches, we need artistic laboratories, “greenhouses”. These production centres must exist outside the traditional institutions. When work develops, it might naturally transfer to a platform for wider distribution, involving collaboration with institutions. Here is the key: ongoing relationships between independent endeavours (sub-culture) and cultural institutions whose responsibility it is to maintain continuity (mainstream).

There is also a need to transform cultural centres and community houses into “intercultural meeting places”, rather than mere hosting sites for mono-cultural events. This requires training, renovation/re-cycling of physical resources (buildings) and new communication strategies. Create intercultural meeting spaces for a wider spectrum of cultural minorities.

### **7. Sharing Skills**

There is a great deal of competence which, because there are few structures for collaboration, is wasted or remains isolated. The mobility of artists in the world focuses on “international exchange” but is never transferred to the needs of the local (urban) communities. Likewise, the experiences of artists at the grassroots level is seldom upgraded to inform work on a trans-national or inter-continental level.

There should be support for “mentoring programs” that allow artists and cultural operators with competence in one area of endeavour to mentor and transfer their knowledge to people working in other areas.

### **8. Audience Development**

Support must be given to **audience development programmes**, focusing on diversity of ethnicity, age, gender and cultural identity. We need to develop allies in

the radical transformation of culture that is required as a response to migration and globalization.

The Arts should take a central position: citizenship and participation are only stimulated within an inclusive society, created by common values that are developed, not enforced or taught. The audiences for cultural activities must see themselves as stakeholders in the programmes offered, not merely as “consumers”.