



european cultural foundation



Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue 1st meeting 24 Nov 2006

Detailed report

At this first meeting representatives from 13 organisations from the cultural/arts sectors and 9 organisations from other domains (youth, social, education, migration and minorities) brainstormed on the purpose and functioning of a Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue, contextualized in the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008, initiated by the European Cultural Foundation and the European Forum for the Arts and Heritage, and financially supported by the Network of European Foundations.

While this was a first encounter for many, a strong sense emerged in the meeting that the platform could play a useful role and that the collaboration on intercultural dialogue across sectors is desired. The inspiration for a participative joint endeavour during the day and beyond was boosted by an artistic group activity at the beginning of the day under the guidance of Brussels painter Blaise Patrix. Blaise Patrix also spoke on his convictions about creativity as a means to enter relationships and to take ownership of public spaces and public services, about individuals recognising themselves in collective art, collective art as a way of paying mutual respect, collective art as a means of increasing social cohesion.

Half way through the kick-off presentations (by Sabine Frank, EFAH, and Isabelle Schwarz, ECF) and discussions, Kevin Robins, sociologist at North London University, made the participants lean back and take in some reflections on the prevalent way of thinking about culture within which political initiatives for intercultural dialogue are embedded – culture as identitarian, as defining belonging, as bounded, as a set of ‘containers’, all in the logic of nation states. Kevin Robins pointed out that the culture model of the Nation State is grounded on a bedrock of anxiety and encouraged the audience to think more creatively by considering, for example, new forms of transnational existence, such as embodied by ‘the Polish plumber’ and to promote new ways of negotiating identity.

Of course, not all questions arising around the proposal for a platform on intercultural dialogue were answered in a conclusive manner in the course of the discussions. However, some common viewpoints and emerging

preferences can be traced; some differences of opinion remained as well. Both of these 'results' will be captured under the headings of questions below with a view to identifying what clarifications the participants need to work on for themselves so that they can then flow into an agreement on the preliminary shape of the platform.

Gottfried Wagner (ECF) chaired the meeting in the morning and Ilona Kish (EFAH) in the afternoon.

Whose platform will it be?

A rather fundamental issue arose early on in the discussions, set off by Roshan di Puppo (Social Platform) and Gottfried Wagner (ECF): Given that the platform is initiated by cultural organizations, would the role of the arts in intercultural dialogue and the need for the arts to work with partners from other sectors be central, or would all sectors with their specific tools for intercultural dialogue be equals in the platform?

Tatiana Damarad (EFIL) affirmed that all sectors should be on board as equal partners. Roshan di Puppo's statement "the cultural sector cannot highjack the year of Intercultural Dialogue!" (supported by Tatiana Damarad saying "Culture is not just the arts!") was countered by explanations from Chris Torch and Ilona Kish that the proposal for the Year happened to emanate from Commission DG Education and Culture, which is why the cultural sector/the arts sector had taken charge of the platform initiative. The expressed fears about cultural organizations possibly dominating the platform was countered by assertions about the 'weakness of the cultural sector' and its 'need for help from other sectors' (by Gottfried Wagner and Ruth Jakobi, EMC). Chris Torch emphasized the mutual need for enrichment; "The cultural sector needs to be 'socialised' and the social sector 'culturalised'". Ilona Kish added: "Even if culture can not be reduced to the Arts, you can not speak of culture without speaking about the Arts".

This discussion showed where sensitivities lay – a useful watch-out area as the platform evolves.

What are the interests in creating bridges between different sectors in the context of intercultural dialogue?

Roshan di Puppo (Social Platform) said that the Social Platform was interested in the arts as a non-verbal tool for ICD. Michele Le Voy (PICUM) affirmed the interest of her organization in the work of cultural organizations with migrants. Ruth Jakobi (ECM) on the other hand said that the platform was a way for the cultural sector "to appeal to the social sector for help and advice to carry their socially engaged artistic work further."

Others emphasized the generic benefits of collaborating between sectors: Ilona Kish (EFAH) highlighted that the platform would be a way to learn to work on a transversal issue together. Judith Neisse (Roberto Cimetta Fund)

said that the platform was about obtaining critical mass. Chris Torch (EFAH) said it was about political power.

What should the purpose of the platform be?

The expectations expressed varied significantly: Some saw the platform first of all as a means for discussion and reflection on Intercultural Dialogue. Others are interested in the platform as a tool of improving and extending the practices of intercultural dialogue themselves - without any concrete proposals as yet. A third set of people made some very concrete first suggestions for practical collaboration through the platform.

Most participants, however, seemed to be united in the view that the platform should look beyond the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008, and use the Year simply for the momentum it might lend to a long-term process.

The Platform as a forum for debate and reflection:

Judith Neisse (Roberto Cimetta Fund) suggested that the platform could work on a European concept of ICD (involving mobility and mediation) – a view of civil society, which needs to be injected into the political level (does this mean advocacy?) GW asked whether this would entail an exercise of defining rules or norms for ICD? Truus Ophuijsen (ELIA) expressed an interest in the platform developing a mission statement on ICD, but she emphasized that the platform's aims should be strictly additional to those of the individual participating organizations (what would that mean in concrete terms?). Myriam Diocaretz (EWC) said the platform could entail a brainstorming on concepts important to platform participants, such as freedom of speech (important to the EWC). Tatiana Damarad (EFIL) highlighted that the platform needed a theoretical discussion on ICD first in order to reach a shared understanding of the subject and a common understanding of problems and opportunities. Rudolf Bruenger (Res Artis) suggested to work on a collection of issues that need to be worked on urgently in the context of the topic ICD.

The platform as a tool of improving and multiplying the practices of intercultural dialogue:

Roshan di Puppo (Social Platform) underlined her organisation's interest in 'doing' ICD rather than talking about it, in promoting it where it doesn't happen or no longer happens, in focusing on individuals rather than groups, away from the dichotomy of majority versus minority groups, in promoting non-verbal tools for intercultural tools in order to be able to work across language barriers, and in promoting understanding, respects and solidarity through ICD. She said that the 'doing it' must entail managing multicultural societies better, fighting discrimination and addressing inequalities (does this mean the platform should engage in advocacy work?)

Practical collaboration through the platform:

Chris Torch suggested that the platform could provide a 'travelling circus of experts' which could attend the series of intercultural conferences/festivals etc to be expected in the course of 2007 and 2008 in order to provide expertise on the brokering of the relationships between the different sectors.

Chris Torch also threw in the ideas of 'a circle of diversity', 'common templates for ICD' and 'decentralised diversity hearings'. Moreover, he suggested that the platform participants could attend each other's meetings and thus help the cross-fertilisation between sectors. Ruth Jakobi (EMC) suggested that the platform could facilitate bilateral activities, i.e. varying configurations of participants deciding on joint actions.

All of these ideas were simply floated – a decision on what should be done was not yet negotiated. Further reflection is needed on whether the differing aspirations and intentions can be satisfied successively or in parallel: May be debate and reflection on ICD could be the first step and lead via practical collaboration to affecting ICD practice. On the other hand, it might be feasible to create different project groups or task forces within the platform.

Should the platform focus on advancing one particular content goal?

Andre Wilkens (HRDN/OSI) was a strong advocate of a content goal as the starting point for the platform – he said it could be the integration of minorities into societies (although a campaign might, in his opinion, be a more useful tool for that). Blaise Patrix put forward the vision that the platform could help create 'a sharing spirit in society'. Gottfried Wagner (ECF) expressed the desire that the platform could contribute to the 'repolitisation of the European project' or the 'reinvention of political responsibility' in a time where the legitimacy of the European project is at stake – this idea struck a chord with Kevin Robins.

Apart from overall goals, several topics were suggested which should be tackled in the context of ICD: Andre Wilkens (HRDN/OSI) said that conflicting views of the past needed to be addressed. Roshan di Puppo (Social Platform) said that relations between generations were a crucial theme. Bernhard Schneider (Soul for Europe) intervened with the remark that the opportunities which intercultural dialogue would create and the allies (as opposed to the enemies) of communicating about cultural diversity needed to be emphasised.

Should the platform consider ICD with countries beyond the EU?

This question featured only briefly. Nils Erik Forsgard (EPC) said that Russia and Turkey should be considered. Bernhard Schneider (Soul for Europe) remarked that ICD needed to go beyond Europe.

How should an exchange of best practice, of learning experiences with ICD projects or an exchange on hurdles encountered with work on ICD be organized? What should it lead to?

Further to the question on the general purpose of the platform, the proposal that the platform could serve an exchange on ICD practice was discussed.

Ruth Jakobi (EMC) welcomed the idea and said that an exchange on activities alone could already justify the platform. Chris Torch (EFAH) said the platform could serve the purpose of creating a 'competence bank' from which each

participating organization could draw on others' expertise when needed (finding commonalities and gaps and then exchange approaches). Nils Erik Forsgard (ECP) explicitly supported this idea. Ilona Kish (EFAH) suggested that the platform might work towards a database on intercultural projects. She also suggested that the platform could organize a mapping of activities on ICD, both actual ones and desired ones. Isabelle Schwarz (ECF) said that this could start with a comparative examination of the participating organisations' submissions to the EC's Call for Ideas on ICD. Myriam Diocaretz supported this idea.

A number of projects or events of the organizations present were mentioned by the participants during the introductions. These provide a first glimpse on the basis for exchange:

The European Writers Congress runs projects on the culture of reading and maintains a Mediterranean Forum called 'Mare Nostrum'. The [...] EUCl is involved in the DILMULE [?] project. The European Cultural Parliament will dedicate its next meeting in Sibiu meeting to ICD. The European Music Council could showcase its 'ExTra' project. The European Festivals Association could share insights from its research on ICD practice of festivals. The Platform for [...] of Undocumented Migrants would be interested in a joint input to the UN High Level Dialogue meeting on Migration and Development next July in Brussels. The Roberto Cimetta Fund could contribute its experience from the 'Euro-Med Civil Society Forum'.

Ellinor Haase (EUCIS) countered the discussion by saying that a platform could not serve the purpose of a best practice exchange because the organizations present were not involved in first hand practice. Sabine Frank (EFAH) pointed out that the practice exchange could become feasible if 'practicing organisations' were introduced to the platform.

Could/should the platform ultimately engage in advocacy work, especially vis-à-vis the European Commission?

Beyond a discussion on the general purpose of the platform, a further concrete proposal was considered, namely whether the platform could serve the purpose of elaborating policy recommendations. The discussion provided soundings on this question, but no clear majority view emerged as yet:

Rudolf Bruenger (Res Artis) supported the idea of advocacy work implicitly when he said that the platform should help ensure that 'resources go more to bridge builders than to gate keepers'. Ruth Jakobi (EMC) said that the platform could get to the point of being able to make political recommendations over time. Myriam Diacoretz (EWC) spoke of the need to influence the EC. Chris Torch suggested "an examination of EU policies on ICD leading to policy recommendations". Ellinor Haase (EUCIS) said that a platform's key role had to be to work on policy recommendations.

The discussion suggested that those participating organizations, which are about working on policy change, might form a platform 'subgroup' and work on advocacy together, but probably only in the longer run.

What project/event could the platform mount in the context of the European Year of ICD?

This question was not yet taken up by the participants of the meeting.

What should the relationship between the platform and the European Commission be?

Similar to the question on policy recommendations and to whom they might be addressed, the relationship of the platform with the European Commission was not settled. However, it was clear that in most minds these two questions are linked. Several participants spoke in favour of a working relationship with the European Commission, but some hesitations or caveats were also voiced: Truus Ophuijsen (ELIA) said that the relationship with the Commission was tricky but that the platform could not avoid positioning itself vis-à-vis the Commission. She also said there was a role for the platform in formulating policy recommendations to the EC, but that the platform should not be abused by the EC to satisfy demands for the consultation of civil society. Andre Wilkens (OSI/HRDN) cautioned against creating a platform first and foremost to serve the need of the EC for consultation. Myriam Diocaretz (EWC) supported the idea of influencing policy-making as long as it was policy for the long-term. She underlined that the Commission needed the synergies and expertise, which the platform could provide. Bernhard Schneider (Soul for Europe) was alone in saying that national governments and cities would be more important addressees for policy recommendations than the EC.

Should the platform address or interact with other EU bodies (e.g. EP), other international organizations (e.g. CoE, UNESCO) or other governmental levels (cities, regions, Member States)?

These questions were not addressed in detail. However, some participants, e.g. Rudolf Bruenger (Res Artis) and Ellinor Haase (EUCIS) expressed the view that cities are important levels of action for intercultural dialogue. But whether cities, i.e. their associations should be involved or whether they, i.e. at political level, should be 'addressees' of the platform was as fused as the question regarding the European Commission.

Who should be involved in the platform? What should be the criteria for participation in the platform? Beyond a commitment to contributing to the platform work, should participating organizations be representative in some way?

This first meeting was meant to assemble European cultural associations and networks as well as European NGOs from the fields of education, youth, social affairs, human rights and migration. The intention was to bring 'multipliers' together in the first place, with the possibility of extending participation to individual organizations. A loose guiding criterion was also that these organizations be 'socially committed' in their work. On this basis, several organizations and individuals, who had expressed an interest in the

platform, and in attending, were in fact excluded from this first meeting (albeit with reference to the possibility of future participation). Nevertheless, with some deviation from the 'criteria', a set of very different organizations eventually attended: European-level NGOs, i.e. membership organizations, grant-giving foundations (European Cultural Foundation, Open Society Institute, Roberto Cimetta Fund), project managing foundations (Yehudi Menuhin Foundation), networks of individuals (European Cultural Parliament), and initiatives of individuals with steering committees (Soul for Europe).

The issue of defining criteria for participation was 'tabled', but not at all settled. A few generic comments were made: Judith Neisse (Roberta Cimetta Fund) said that civil society goes beyond non-governmental organizations. Bernhard Schneider (Soul For Europe) said that civil society was not just about associations, but also individuals – important personalities should be involved in the platform. He said he didn't believe in the efficiency of representation. This approach found only a negative echo. Ruth Jakobi (EMC) said that aspirations to open up needed to be balanced against the need to keep the platform to a feasible size. Luiza Bara (Youth Forum) said that it was too early to tackle the issue of representativity. Sabine Frank (EFAH) called out the names of organizations and individuals who would have liked to participate and asked for opinions on what could be held out to them, but no conclusion was reached on the question. It thus remains an urgent point of reflection.

Guillermo Ruiz (ERIO) said that the platform should include representatives of minorities themselves. Michele Le Voy (PICUM) suggested the involvement of trade unions given that they are touched by the issue of migration from within. She also said the peace movement should be invited.

The question whether representatives of cultural industries should be involved in the platform and who the suitable interlocutors would be, was put but not at all tackled in the meeting.

Sabine Frank (EFAH) wondered whether the following model might help 'classify' organizations for the purpose of the platform: Some promote ICD in the form of direct, human interaction, some promote ICD 'mediated' through books, films, music, education, the media etc, some work on ICD in term of the rules and regulations which can create a favourable climate (e.g. equal opportunities legislation). However, this idea found no resonance. And the question whether it would make sense to bring such different organizations together, remained unanswered.

Should faith-based organizations be involved in the platform?

This question proved controversial in the meeting. Yet it seems that the issue stands a good chance of being settled once concrete organizations are proposed and the question is no longer an abstract one.

On the 'pro' side, Luiza Bara (Youth Forum) said that the inclusion of religious organization would be very important for her organisation (the Youth Forum

has an expert group on inter-religious dialogue). She also pointed out that lots of NGOs work on inter-religious dialogue. Roshan di Puppo (Social Platform) took the same line as Luiza Bara. Judith Neisse (Roberto Cimetta Fund) pointed out that religious leaders are part of civil society too, but that secular organizations would need to be involved beside religious ones. Michele Le Voy (PICUM) also spoke in favour of including religious organisations.

On the skeptical side, Chris Torch (EFAH) said that this platform was not for inter-religious dialogue or for conflict resolution. His pleas was “let’s limit what the platform should try to do’. Nils Erik Forsgard (EPC) said the platform should be liberal and not include representatives of religions. Truus Ophuijsen cautioned against the platform getting hi-jacked by other agendas, including religious ones.

Should there be several tiers of participation in the platform?

Truus Ophuijsen suggested that besides the participants there could be an ‘associate group’ who would be kept informed about the platform work. Rudolf Bruenger said that the platform needed an executive group.

What practical steps forward?

Sabine Frank was approved as the co-ordinator of the platform. Input on all open questions as well as suggestions for projects and additional participants are to be addressed to her.

It was suggested that four meetings be organized in 2007. Additional working group/task force meetings might be held.

The next meeting could be envisaged for 8th, 9th, 12^t or 13th February.



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