

BERLIN CONFERENCE “A SOUL FOR EUROPE”

3 March 2014 | Allianz Forum Berlin

Observers' Report

Andreas Bock, Marijn Duijvestein and Benedict Schofield, March 2014

Over the past 10 years the Berlin Conference has involved individuals and representatives from civil society organisations, activists, and politicians in a dialogue on the advancement of the European process. With the financial and economic issues, not least the euro crisis dominating the European debate, the Berlin Conference 2014 was even more needed than before in its goal to bring together leading personalities from European politics with civil society representatives, artists and intellectuals to lobby for our conviction that it is necessary to make culture the driving force for European integration.

The event was co-organised by civil society initiative A Soul for Europe, the European Parliament and Allianz Kulturstiftung, on 3 March 2014 in Berlin. Full documentation – videos, photos, and media coverage – can be found on the ASfE [website](#).

Welcome

Ambassador **Wolfgang Ischinger**, Global Head Public Policy & Economic Research, Allianz SE

Rarița Zbranca, Member of the A Soul for Europe Strategy Group

José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission

György Konrád, Writer

In his welcome address **Wolfgang Ischinger** underlined the importance of the Berlin Conference and expressed his hope that the conference will become “a permanent annual opportunity to present the face of the European Union”. A cultural Europe, he argued, is not simply something “nice to have” – a mere “added factor” after policy has been formed. Rather it is “essential for stability, prosperity” in the Europe of today and the future.

Rarița Zbranca made her opening speech a clear call for action and stated that it is a citizen's project to implement the cultural component of Europe in the integration process and the need to further engage citizens at all levels” into that process. In this context she presented A Soul for Europe's draft [Resolution on Culture](#).

José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, emphasised that “Europe is more than a market. It is not complete without its cultural dimension” and “Culture is existential while politics is instrumental”. Yet he also noted that to secure Europe's future, we need to listen to both the critics and supporters. In his opinion, a European public sphere is central to the establishment of a political union for Europe, and he concluded “the new enthusiasm for Europe needs to come from the citizens”.

György Konrád finished the panel with an emotional notion stressing the transnational melting pot of culture and language that forms the very basis of Europe as it is experienced every day.

Artists and intellectuals debate with European political leaders

Debates moderated by Kathrin Deventer and Farid Tabarki

Panel 1

Jean-Claude Juncker, European People's Party

Fruzsina Szép, Program Director Sziget Festival

Wim Wenders, Film Director and President of the European Film Academy

The purpose of the following four discussion tables was to create a chance for an intensive debate between the main candidates for EU Presidency and artists and intellectuals on the role and importance of culture in the coming period of EU integration.

Wim Wenders and **Fruzsina Szép** challenged Jean-Claude Juncker to agree to the need of a closer cooperation between policy and personalities from art and culture, to share seriously the responsibility by listening to each other in a continuous dialogue. Policy should accept and use the different competence of artists and intellectuals for a common working process. To Juncker's complaint on the existing ignorance about the complexity of Europe, Wenders pleaded for the involvement of artists to help Europeans learn more about each other. A Soul for Europe already developed concrete tools for this.

Panel 2

Alicja Gescinska, Philosopher

Martin Schulz, Party of European Socialists

Klaus Staeck, President of the Academy of Arts, Berlin

Martin Schulz agreed that the defence of culture and cultural values is a central activity of Europe, but one that is both aided and complicated by the processes of globalisation. He argued "We do not want our cultural richness of Europe to become a plaything of economic interests. [...] In the next legislation we will need to speak more about how to protect cultural diversity with financial means. [...] You can knock on my door, and I will make sure that you can also knock on the doors of other MEPs."

Schulz also argued that culture plays a central role in bringing to an end the social imbalances of Europe. It lacks social coherence and solidarity (lacking "glue"). This can only be resolved by the end of the social imbalances, where cultural activity can be vital – and can also be the "glue". People must get the feeling that Brussels is capable of restoring social justice: "We cannot expect that people love the EU when the Union rescues banks with gigantic sums but isn't able to lower unemployment."

Klaus Staeck and **Alicja Gescinska** noted that politics alone should not carry the burden of this task. Gescinska argued for the significance of the academy and the humanities, while Staeck stated: "I don't expect politicians to do everything. We cultural practitioners should act."

Panel 3

Rebecca Harms, The Greens/European Free Alliance

Noémi Kiss, Writer and literary critic

Jacques Lévy, Geographer and urbanist

Noémi Kiss opened the debate by urging us to think of Europe beyond the borders of Europe "to develop a format in which we can create dialogue between citizens, intellectuals and politicians". **Jacques Lévy** also urged

us to think carefully about how and where we add culture to the debate: “It’s not about adding culture”. We need to be inspired by what happens at the level of the city and region. “We need a reunification of Europe with the level of civil society”, Lévy argued.

Rebecca Harms noted that Brussels is synonymous for fear and lack of perspective. This, she argued, must change. She noted how she is ready to talk about next steps to strengthen the cultural component in Europe, but stressed that currently culture is not an EU competence. In her view, the Commission should not centralise cultural policy, but it should be an enabler – local, national and European cultures merge, and this diversity should be supported.

Panel 4

Vladimir Arsenijević, Writer

Pilar Velasco, Journalist

Guy Verhofstadt, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats For Europe)

Guy Verhofstadt argued that nationalism has killed the soul of Europe, and the nonsensical notion (in his view) that Europe can invest in everything in European life aside from culture and education. Culture should become more important in the portfolio of the European Commission. We should invest the necessary money in culture at European level. He advocated a return to the cities and regions of Europe to rediscover Europe’s inherent multiculturalism: “The EU is not about nation states coming together, it needs something more – a new narrative, and not the tools of the past”.

The soul of Europe is in its very society, in the “real world”, Verhofstadt stressed. What is the role for artists? Reshape the soul, reinvent what we have lost, in a multicultural, multilingual, multireligious manner. Only in the clash between these forces does creativity emerge.

Kathrin Deventer summarised the morning discussion by noting a number of key themes: “Exchange” (between policy and artistic practice); “Trust” (between all partners); “Subsidiarity” (not as an excuse to do nothing, but as a tool to do something”); and “Commitment” (to new steps and new levels of support). Culture is always on the move, and we must be active to work with it.

1914 – 2014 Consequences for the 21st century

Volker Hassemer, A Soul for Europe

Michael M. Thoss, Director Allianz Kulturstiftung

Michael Roth, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office

Yuriy Vulkovsky, Member of the A Soul for Europe Strategy Group

Hannes Swoboda, S&D Group President in the European Parliament

The following debate discussed the question how a true working relationship between culture and policy could be established and deepened. “It is not enough to simply concern politics with culture; culture must be integral to politics.” The proposal of an annual Berlin Conference as a monitoring process was welcomed. It was also agreed upon that practical actions are more necessary than ever. A Soul for Europe has already developed some good examples (the annual Berlin Conference, the Cultural Coalition for a Citizens’ Europe, the European Resolution on Culture). But how can we continue to build Europe from bottom-up, and avoid the trap of a two-speed Europe, which is not a solution?

Round table discussion

moderated by Nele Hertling and Benedict Schofield

with **Ioana Andreescu** (Alumna Allianz Kulturstiftung), **Steve Austen** (ASfE Strategy Group), **Maria Badia i Cutchet** (MEP, S&D Group), **Airan Berg** (Lecce 2019), **Nicolas Bertrand** (ASfE Strategy Group), **Emil Boc** (Mayor of Cluj / Romania), **Erhard Busek** (Southeast European Cooperative Initiative), **Hugo De Greef** (ASfE Strategy Group), **Paul Dujardin** (BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts Brussels), **Johannes Ebert** (Goethe Institut), **Malina Edreva** (Sofia City Council), **Arndt Freiherr Freytag von Loringhoven** (Federal Foreign Office), **Steve Green** (Selection Panel "European Capital of Culture"), **Volker Hassemer** (ASfE), **Hannu Hyttinen** (Finland 100), **Wolfgang Ischinger** (Allianz SE), **Valentin Kreiling** (Alumnus Allianz Kulturstiftung), **Rüdiger Kruse** (German MP, CDU), **Jo Leinen** (MEP, S&D Group), **Morten Løkkegaard** (MEP, ALDE Group), **Beral Madra** (Curator and art critic), **Doris Pack** (MEP, EPP Group), **Aiva Rozenberga** (Riga 2014), **Mikhail Shvydkoy** (Special Envoy of the President of the Russian Federation for international cultural cooperation), **Hannes Swoboda** (MEP, S&D Group President), **Michael Thoss** (Allianz Kulturstiftung), **Yuriy Vulkovsky** (ASfE Strategy Group), **Andre Wilkens** (Stiftung Mercator)

During the round table discussion, moderated by Benedict Schofield and Nele Hertling, challenging topics were addressed by a diverse panel. Topics included:

- Culture as a driving force behind European integration
- Politics as a partner for civil society
- Creating Europe from the bottom up
- The role of the Berlin Conference in supporting and monitoring the integration of culture and politics

The MEPs at the round table were asked if culture is sufficiently present in European policies and about the position of national competences. Further questions were how to get politicians to engage and commit themselves and how to achieve something concrete. It was agreed upon that the conference should lead to concrete solutions including rising budgets. EU institutions have created social dialogues, they should now create cultural dialogues across the EU as well.

Another question was about the need of a centralised cultural policy, or the chance to act where value can be added. Could the Berlin Conference act as monitor, could that be helpful for all partners involved.

A number of concrete points for a monitoring agenda have been presented, as 1) Continuous dialogue with the European Parliament; 2) Support regular dialogue with MEPs on cultural matters, regional affairs, and external affairs; 3) Enable the cultural sector to work more closely together; and 4) Promote further the A Soul for Europe's draft European Resolution on Culture.

Conclusion and outlook

Kathrin Deventer, Member of the A Soul for Europe Strategy Group

Doris Pack, Member of new EP "Steering Committee"

The conference was closed by **Kathrin Deventer** and **Doris Pack**, who both emphasised that the real work is yet to come.

"We need to strengthen and widen the Cultural Coalition for a Citizens' Europe. [...] Today's challenges require different disciplines to work together. Culture can play a leading role in tackling these challenges by facilitating dialogue between citizens and politicians."

The promises of some of the leading political figures to keep their doors open and to continue the work with A Soul for Europe and the Cultural Coalition after the European election was highly appreciated.

Conference results

- European politicians should discuss current issues with intellectuals before taking decisions and they should make these discussions a standard element of their political work in Brussels (Volker Hassemer)
- Europe needs a European media culture, a genuine European public sphere (Wolfgang Ischinger)
- EU funding: The European dimension must be visible, national culture must always be presented in a European context
- Europe's peripheral regions deserve greater attention
- Support of the idea of holding an annual Berlin Conference in order to examine the relevance culture has for European politics
- The focus when dealing with Europe needs to be shifted from a top-down perspective to a bottom-up approach – it is imperative to focus on the grassroots level in order to emphasise the citizens' as well as the cities' and regions' responsibility for Europe

Next steps and goals

- Introduction of A Soul for Europe's formal European Resolution on Culture in the European Parliament during the next five-year political term, a draft text of which is already complete
- Continue to foster citizens' dialogues across Europe
- Set up regular working meetings between artists and intellectuals
- Support the Advisory Board / new steering committee / and possibly attempt a new intergroup on culture
- Ensure an annual Berlin Conference to monitor progress, in cooperation with the European Parliament and Allianz Kulturstiftung
- Support the cultural sector in creating synergies and connection to other projects (like the New Narrative for Europe project)
- Develop even stronger anchoring of A Soul for Europe also on the regional level
- Take over more responsibility in the Balkans
- Include politicians of all levels
- Reinforce the fact that A Soul for Europe is not a political lobby and does not want a centralised European cultural policy