



Cultural Identities on the Move

A SOUL FOR EUROPE Conference 2016

Conference Report, 9 November 2016

Opening

Video Message by Martin Schulz (President of the European Parliament)



Martin Schulz © A Soul for Europe, seesaw-foto.com

What is it that could be described as the soul of Europe? It is the idea of facing upcoming challenges together across borders and with the help of common institutions. It is the idea of a transnational community—a community that by making use of its cultural power is able to come up with new ideas and innovation that help continue the development of the European Union. It is you, dear ladies and gentlemen, who are the soul of Europe. It is us, the citizens.

If we want the EU to succeed, we need to fight hard for it. We should use our culture as a soft power, using its unifying qualities instead of misusing it as an instrument to divide and separate. I am glad that you all have come together here in Berlin in order to share ideas on the future of the European Union. New perspectives on and new visionary images of Europe—that is what arts and culture can offer on a different level than politics. Culture can be used as a weapon against prejudices, against racist and populist movements. (...) I truly believe that culture can play a key role in raising citizens' awareness of Europe.



© A Soul for Europe, seesaw-foto.com

The main co-organizers, funders and supporters of the “A Soul for Europe “Conference 2016 (from left to right): Michael Thoss (Allianz Kulturstiftung), Hana Stojć (traduki / S. Fischer Stiftung) Sabine Hentzsch (Goethe Institut), Frank Piplat (European Parliament Information Office), Monique Canto-Sperber (Evens Foundation). Below (right): Brigitte Russ-Scherer (Cities for Europe/Stiftung Zukunft Berlin)



Monique Canto-Sperber and Brigitte Russ-Scherer © A Soul for Europe, seesaw-foto.com



Debate I: Arts and Culture for Europe Controversy

György Dragomán (author and literary translator)



György Dragomán and Farid Tabarki © A Soul for Europe, seesaw-foto.com

György Dragomán: Art and culture can cross borders, especially linguistic ones. Artists work with empathy and can understand what is happening on the policy level at the moment. Art rather takes a reflective than an activist approach. As an artist you have to listen to your consciousness and be your own consciousness sometimes. And under certain conditions an artist has to become a real activist as well. The same applies for the other way around: politics should be more involved in arts. The people need to listen even if they do not want to hear anything anymore.

Debate

Enrique Barón Crespo (former President of the EP)

Ernest van Buynder (member of the board of directors of Evens Foundation)

Beral Madra (art critic and curator)

Jens Nymand Christensen (deputy director-general for Education and Culture at the European Commission)

Doris Pack (former member of the EP)

Helen Sildna (founder of Tallinn Music Week)

Julie Ward (member of the EP)

Moderated by **Farid Tabarki** (founding director of Studio Zeitgeist and member of the “A Soul for Europe” Strategy Group), **Volker Hassemer** (co-founder of “A Soul for Europe”)



Julie Ward, Enrique Barón Crespo, Doris Pack, Jens Nymand Christensen, Helen Sildna, Ernest van Buynder and György Dragomán © A Soul for Europe, seesaw-foto.com

Enrique Barón Crespo: In the current situation it is not only important to have an economic and monetary union, but also to have a common nationality and common values. Culture is a key element for a peaceful society.

Julie Ward: Arts and culture are the most important factor of all. They can make a significant contribution: dialogue in the area of diversity and different values. By the means of arts and culture people come together, they learn from each other, about each other and about themselves.

Jens Nymand Christensen: The European programmes have to recognise that inclusion is important. It is about integration, it is about living together, it is about building on European values. We cannot live in parallel societies.

Beral Madra: When Istanbul was European Capital of Culture in 2010, there were 600 projects which were realised with partners from the EU. We have a very precise and enthusiastic vision for the transformation of culture. We respect the freedom of expression, pluralism, the human rights and gender equality. This is mirrored in the works of art, especially in the field of visual arts.

Doris Pack: Ten years ago we founded the film award of the European Parliament, the Lux Prize. Our colleagues are thus able to address many more people who are not concerned with politics. An opportunity for conversation opens up.

Helen Sildna: Art is a medium of communication "par excellence". We have to learn to communicate with the society via these popular means and recognise that we are the ones who are responsible for using communication media as a "soft power" in the political fields.



Debate II: Flight and Migration: The New European Divide

Input

Rita Süßmuth (former president of the German Federal Parliament)



Rita Süßmuth © A Soul for Europe, seesaw-foto.com

For me, culture is the basis of all areas of activities. I wish we would invite more representatives of the world of the arts to our corporations, more writers, painters, sculptors and filmmakers. The same wish applies to the EU: that artists shall be in our midst and not only consulted every now and then.

Are we in a situation in which the European Union divides into West and East? Polarisation rather marginalises us and does not lead to solutions. We are not only facing the polarisation resulting from the refugee crisis, there is also a polarisation going on concerning the states with huge financial and economic problems and high unemployment. Given these problems, solidarity is more than emergency relief. Solidarity is rooted in the common shaping of Europe. That is the social teaching of the European Union: to face the responsibilities together in order to bring them to a solution.

In this phase of the refugee crisis we learned how important the polis, the city, the municipality is. Many initiatives to reduce problems have been developed right there—both with migrants and natives, by the way.

I can only encourage you to try to understand the origin of the people, their identity and also their understanding of sovereignty. Sometimes this is easier to accomplish in collaboration with artists than with citizens in their everyday difficulties. I call upon you not to forward this East-West divide, this cultural split, any further. It is high time to take countermeasures so that populism with all its radicalism and inhumanity will not dominate us.



Debate

Dessy Gavrilova (founder and chairwoman of The Red House Center for Culture and Debate, Sofia)

Aleš Šteger (writer, editor, literary critic)

Dejan Ubović (director of Cultural Front Belgrade, member of the A Soul for Europe Strategy Group)

Rita Süßmuth (former president of the German Federal Parliament)

Moderated by **Gemma Pörzgen** (journalist)



Dessy Gavrilova, Aleš Šteger, Rita Süßmuth, Dejan Ubović and Gemma Pörzgen © A Soul for Europe, seesaw-foto.com

Aleš Šteger: The countries now being labelled as “Eastern” cannot be considered as a uniform region with a homogenous identity. But what do we do with “the other”? I see two concepts: the first is the concept of auto-immunisation, where, by trying to integrate “the other” you enter a democratic process, which—hopefully—leads to an open society. The second concept results from a refusal of the first. Strangers are met with rejection and there is no policy of integration, which leads to the formation of ghettos.

Dessy Gavrilova: In economic terms, we are experiencing a sort of retaliation of globalisation. Globalisation has created worldwide prosperity as well as winners and losers. The working class as losers of globalisation see the world’s problems coming to their towns. It would be better to try to understand these circumstances of life and the resulting attitudes. This is the only way to develop political proposals that solve the problems.

Dejan Ubović: Some countries weigh up the advantages and damages, e.g. “pressure from Brussels” on one side versus social, economic and security reasons on the other. With regard to the government, the key lies in Brussels. Our government in Serbia follows the rules, but



when there are no rules and no “Brussels strategy”, some will react in a way similar to Viktor Orbán’s.

Aleš Steger: On the one hand, you feel as part of a Europe that strives to be organised democratically. There are many initiatives working hard for this goal. On the other hand, we live in a Europe with increasingly neo-colonial features, and small states can easily feel like economic colonies within Europe. Economic interdependence was the fundament of the European Union, so not only do we need “bottom-up” processes, but the EU’s big players also need to reconsider their role and responsibility.

Rita Süßmuth: We have to create an exchange between politics and what is happening among the people. What we need are new forms of participation and of mutual interaction as well as a new dialogue. People have to feel that they are being seen and taken seriously. To get there, we need direct discussions and face-to-face conversation.

Artistic Intervention

MitMachMusik



MitMachMusik © A Soul for Europe, seesaw-foto.com

MitMachMusik (in English “Making Music Together”) is based on the conviction that music is a wonderfully effective medium which can help refugee children to feel at home in their new host country, Germany. Professional musicians, including also some from the refugee community, visit several refugee centres in Berlin and Potsdam regularly. Through music, the children learn to express themselves, and to listen and respond to others—their social “antennas” develop. By learning the new skill of playing an instrument, they gain a sense of achievement and pride, as well as experiencing emotional satisfaction. And it is a skill which gains them praise and acknowledgment from others.

Debate III: Starting from the Bottom-up Controversy

Ivan Krastev (chairman of the Center for Liberal Strategies Sofia)

Elmar Brok (member of the EP)



Elmar Brok, Ivan Krastev © A Soul for Europe, seesaw-foto.com

Elmar Brok: The core problem I see is that citizens are so worried about the economic and social consequences of globalisation that they resort to the haven of nationalism and authoritarian leadership. In times of distress, the nation still is the provider of identity. For this reason, Europe can only be renewed once national governments assume their responsibility for decisions taken in Brussels. We therefore propose in the European Parliament that the Council of Ministers shall hold its sessions in public just like the Federal Council of Germany. Citizens have to get a chance to politically punish those who are responsible for a certain decision. When responsibilities in decision-making are not apparent, distrust and aversion can easily gain ground.

Ivan Krastev: The change of what is possible and impossible is the distinguishing mark of our time. Eastern Europe is not euro-sceptic but euro-pessimistic. Many of us have experienced how fragile and vulnerable the political process is. Many have first-hand experience of their country's disintegration. Central and Eastern European countries act reservedly when it comes to the EU, as they fear ending up on the loser's side. It will not be enough to only fight the populist parties. We need contact with the political elite as well as with the part of the population that is doubtful of Europe. Many of these people do not like to discuss with persons who have values different from their own. Europe's task is to fight fragmentation and to arrange for a return to the public space of society, where people can share experiences.



Debate

Maria Badia i Cutchet (former vice-president of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament)

Rumena Bužarovska (author, literary translator, assistant professor of American literature at the State University of Skopje)

Ulrike Guérot (director of European Democracy Lab)

Arne Lietz (member of the EP)

Lorenzo Marsili (co-founder and director of European Alternatives)

Hannes Swoboda (former member of the EP)

Jon Worth (blogger and communications consultant for European institutions)

Moderated by **Farid Tabarki** (founding director of Studio Zeitgeist and member of the “A Soul for Europe” Strategy Group), **Volker Hassemer** (co-founder of “A Soul for Europe”)



Ulrike Guérot, Jon Worth, Rumena Bužarovska, Lorenzo Marsili and Maria Badia i Cutchet © A Soul for Europe, seesaw-foto.com

Rumena Bužarovska: In Macedonia, we are only just beginning to understand the importance of a civil society and the concept of citizenry and how citizens can find their role. One has to find ways to enable people to raise their voice. Fear and the lack of tradition of speaking out freely are the main problems in this discourse.

Jon Worth: I believe that the individual person has a responsibility. Each individual has to become active. On European average, only 2% of the citizens are members of a political party. You in the audience should join one and participate in the local campaigns!

Lorenzo Marsili: NGOs, bloggers and activists open up a third space between the establishment and other parties. This third space asks everybody to act. We now have to come together to build something as close as possible to a pan-European party.



Maria Badia i Cutchet: Within the European Union in particular, the problem is the missing connection with decision-makers. "Connection" is the key word here; people need to be connected with the work of cities and regional governments as well as with the EU.

Arne Lietz: In my home town Lutherstadt Wittenberg, not many are interested in getting involved in politics. This has to do with the basic understanding of the political system. How much do we have to invest in education to start by explaining the European system to young people?

Ulrike Guérot: The large majority of civil society can de facto not be elected. This is why I would like Europe to become a republic in that cities and provinces form a democracy network, where all citizens are equal before the law. We have to think in interconnected forms of democracy, where small entities provide what citizens request: participatory democracy in a localised manner. When tying together these entities in a European whole without any nation-state competition, the European republic emerges.

Elmar Brok: When constructing Europe, we cannot bypass the nations without risking a Europe of elites that many will oppose. Europe must not be directed against the nation, for it will certainly lose the debate entitled "Europe or the nation". Europe is a provider of security for the nation; the world order provides security, which the nation alone cannot shoulder. We have to reconcile the nation with Europe.

Hannes Swoboda: We cannot and do not want to abolish the nation, just like we will not get rid of the national governments. What we have to perforate and burst is the layer in-between, which prevents Europe from becoming more citizen-friendly. This can only be accomplished with the help of citizens in various movements.



Debate IV: “15 Minutes of Conversation with”

This interactive format offered a unique opportunity to talk in-depth and on a personal level with experts and invited guests about the conference topics. 13 active participants hosted a table ready to share their practices, tools and reflections. Up to ten participants from the audience joined each conversation, transforming it into a mutual exchange of knowledge in an open and informal setting.



“15 Minutes of Conversation with” © A Soul for Europe, Seesaw-foto.com

Cornelius Adebahr *A Europe Whole and Free – and Flexibly Integrated*

Hubertus von Amelunxen *Bildung as the Essence of Culture*

Enrique Barón Crespo *Sounding out Shared Values: Towards a European Agenda for Music*

Rumena Bužarovska *Civil-Society Development: The Challenges in Macedonia*

Paul Dujardin *The Eternal Quest for a New Narrative for Europe and its Youth through Culture and the Arts*

Rose Fenton *Closed Borders/Closed Minds: How Can the UK Maintain and Strengthen Ties with Europe?*

Ulrike Guérot *The European Republic*

Beral Madra *How Can Art and Culture Help to Become a Cosmopolitan Community?*

Jagoda Marinić *Innovative Concepts of the German “Welcoming Culture”*

Paul Spies *What can Museums do as Generators of European Citizenship?*

Cecilia Strada *Abolition of War*

Hannes Swoboda *The Power of Cities and Culture for Europe*

Julie Ward *Intercultural Dialogue for More Inclusive Societies*



Conclusions and Outlook

Nele Hertling (spokesperson of the “A Soul for Europe” Strategy Group)

Sabine Hentzsch (Goethe Institute Berlin)

Joanna Krawczyk (Evens Foundation)

Michael Thoss (Allianz Cultural Foundation)

Brigitte Russ-Scherer (spokesperson of the initiative “Cities for Europe”)

Hana Stojić (traduki / S. Fischer Verlag)

Astrid Meesters (European Parliament Information Office Berlin)

The „A Soul for Europe Conference“ does not only refer to the civil-society initiative and its „Strategy Group“ – 40 young Europeans from different countries – but also made it clear that the idea and visions behind the event are based on a broad European cooperation.

In the actual critical moment of Europe’s existence it was more than ever necessary to define a clear statement for the European integration process and to underline the important role of cities and citizens in this development – with the strong conviction that culture as a creative force has to be integrated on all levels.

This was made visible by inviting speakers from diverse backgrounds – from policy, civil society, culture and the arts. Several of the speakers pointed out that arts and culture would be a communication tool “par excellence” that can overcome language and all kind of other barriers. In order to use the potential of arts and culture, it would be important that the political field gives it more importance and attention in their decision process. The European Parliament plays a key role in this process and the active involvement of several MEPs let us confide in the fact that the discussions at the conference will have an influence on their decision making.

It is extremely important to find ways for convincing citizens from all over Europe to discover and accept their role and responsibility for our common future in Europe and the world. In order to achieve this, we will develop our contacts to other initiatives, organisations and projects sharing our conviction. We will cooperate in defining content and topics and in our aim to attract new participants for this necessary lobbywork for Europe. Together, we will gain more strength and will be able to reach out for those that have a euro-sceptical attitude. That is the challenge for our future work.

„A Soul for Europe“ understands itself as a lobby group – not for Culture, but for Europe, based on the convincing and influential power of culture. With this belief we will continue, in close cooperation with our partners in Berlin and Europe and with participants and audiences from the younger generation that we will address and activate in the upcoming months.

