

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament and the Council: Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations'

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1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 Culture has an important role to play in the current global political environment, in which the respect of human rights, tolerance, cooperation and mutual solidarity are once more under threat. Thus the EESC welcomes the Joint Communication, which reveals a clear understanding of the impact of culture, constitutes an impressive compendium of existing programmes at EU and national level, and highlights potential areas of action in the field of international cultural exchange.

1.2 The EESC now calls for a step forward, from a text 'towards an EU strategy' to the adoption and subsequent implementation of a clear strategy and action plan. The action plan should respond to four structural necessities: providing clarity of governance at EU level; seeking to coordinate and offer subsidiary support at Member State level; clarifying financial aspects; and promoting networks of interrelated cultural players, representing a thriving cultural civil society.

1.3 So as to enable the full recognition of the importance of culture to sustainability, the EESC calls for culture to be recognised as a fourth pillar of sustainable development, on an equal footing with the economic, social and environmental pillars.

1.4 The EESC welcomes the fact that culture is acknowledged as a crucial foundation for peace and stability. Culture is therefore of key importance in furthering the main aim of the European Union: to 'promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples' (Article 3 TEU). The EESC therefore calls on the EU, based on Europe's own experience, to take its place as a global leader in the practice, protection and promotion of peace worldwide.

1.4.1 This could, for example, be promoted by developing experimental initiatives such as the new 'White Dove' initiative, based on the role of the EU in the Northern Ireland peace process, adding a much needed cultural and peace-building strand to conflict resolution strategies.

1.4.2 Promoting culture as a pillar for peace and stability goes hand in hand with drawing attention to the freedom of artistic expression as a human right and supporting global initiatives which protect artists' rights, as well as further developing such initiatives at European level.

1.4.3 The EESC is alert to the possible misuse and manipulation of culture to nourish an authoritarian, populist or other political agenda. EU exchanges allow for the views of multiple stakeholders and pluralistic approaches, with none of the element of control that is typical of propaganda. Based on the extraordinary richness of diversity, culture will inevitably combat populist tendencies and state-led cultural propaganda, build bridges between peoples and open up opportunities for closer cooperation and exchange.

1.5 The EESC underlines the importance of civil society as protagonists in a sustainable society and in the development of all initiatives in the field of culture. The EU should therefore invest in supporting the development of a structured civil society in the cultural field.

1.5.1 The EESC highlights the interest of programmes exploring culture's connections with economic, social and political development strategies, bringing culture from the margins to the centre of the political sphere.

1.5.2 The EESC encourages the development of study and exchange programmes in the field of culture in the wider sense, adapting the model of the successful Erasmus+ programme.

1.5.3 The EESC welcomes the call for the creation of a cultural civil society forum, including all relevant stakeholders. The EESC will commit to supporting such structured consultation and dialogue in the coming years.

1.6 The EESC recognises the importance of culture and the creative industries as a key factor in economic growth, job creation and sustainable development. The Communication highlights a number of aspects and programmes, which the EESC fully supports. The Committee therefore encourages adequate investment in this field.

1.6.1 Skills development in culture and the creative industries lays the groundwork to develop this potential.

1.6.2 The EESC supports the development of a 'capitals of culture' scheme on an international scale, in cooperation with the Council of Europe and Unesco, as well as the reinforcement of existing city networks in terms of their exchange on cultural issues.

1.7 The Committee underlines that a cultural perspective should be integrated into the core of all future international agreements, for example the new partnership with ACP countries after 2020.

1.8 The EESC believes that the positive dynamics of the upcoming 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage should be used to give impetus to the adoption and subsequent implementation of an action plan for culture in international relations.

2. Overview of the Commission's and the High Representative's Joint Communication

2.1 The Joint Communication describes approaches towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations in the framework of the EU's role as a global actor.

2.2 The Communication proposes three pillars for this strategy: (1) guiding principles for EU action; (2) three main strands for such action; and (3) a proposal for a strategic approach to cultural diplomacy.

2.3 The proposed guiding principles highlight the need to promote cultural diversity and respect for human rights as essential foundations for democracy, stability and sustainable development, including freedom of opinion and artistic expression, and the need to go beyond merely projecting the diversity of European cultures, underlining reciprocity and thus mutual respect and intercultural dialogue. Furthermore, the Communication highlights the need for complementarity and subsidiarity with regard to existing Member State efforts. It encourages a cross-cutting approach, going beyond arts in the strict sense of the term and including policies and activities in the fields of intercultural dialogue, tourism, education, research and the creative industries. Lastly, the Communication clarifies the need to avoid duplication, taking existing cooperation frameworks and financial instruments into account — i.e. specific thematic programmes and geographic cooperation frameworks already proposed by the EU.

2.4 The three proposed work streams for advancing cultural cooperation with partner countries are: (a) supporting culture as an engine for sustainable social and economic growth; (b) promoting culture and intercultural dialogue for peaceful intercommunity relations; and (c) reinforcing cooperation on intercultural heritage.

2.5 The stream to support culture as an engine for sustainable social and economic growth suggests helping other countries to develop cultural policies, strengthening cultural and creative industries and supporting the role of local authorities in partner countries.

2.6 The development of cultural policies can be supported by deepening policy dialogues and strengthening systems of governance, including via targeted exchange of experience.

2.7 The role of the cultural and creative industries in promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth is highlighted, showing that culture contributes 1,5-3,7 % of GDP in low- and middle-income countries (Unesco's Culture for Development Indicators). Therefore, the Communication proposes sharing expertise to further develop this sector, strengthen creative hubs and clusters, and develop relevant skills, as well as to build a sound regulatory framework to provide support for SMEs and territorial cooperation.

2.8 The importance of supporting culture in urban development is highlighted, underlining its impact in terms of growth and social cohesion; there is also mention of the need to make public space available for all, as well as the impact of audiovisual programmes and architecture.

2.9 The second work stream proposed in the Communication — promoting culture and intercultural dialogue for peaceful intercommunity relations — suggests supporting cooperation, dialogue and mobility among cultural operators and artists' works.

2.10 The capacity of intercultural dialogue to foster peace-building, with culture as a tool both for the prevention of conflict as well as reconciliation in post-conflict societies, is mentioned, and various existing instruments are enumerated.

2.11 The third strand proposed in the Communication is the reinforcement of cooperation in the field of cultural heritage as an important manifestation of cultural diversity and a tool for the promotion of tourism and economic growth. There are therefore suggestions to support research on cultural heritage, combat trafficking and contribute to international efforts, led by Unesco, to protect cultural heritage sites.

2.12 In the third pillar, the Communication proposes a strategic EU approach to cultural diplomacy, encouraging cooperation between all stakeholders to ensure complementarity and synergy: governments at all levels, local cultural organisations and civil society, the Commission and its High Representative, Member States and their cultural institutes. Diverse formats for enhanced cooperation are put forward.

2.13 Furthermore, the Communication highlights the importance of intercultural exchanges of students, researchers and alumni via existing and as-yet-undeveloped exchange schemes.

3. General remarks on the Communication

3.1 The EESC welcomes the Joint Communication proposed by the European Commission and High Representative. At the present time, when social fragmentation and populist tendencies are gaining ground, culture has an increasing role to play in reinforcing ties between civil society, promoting mutual understanding, encouraging diversity and exchange, and countering simplistic views.

3.2 The Communication reveals a clear understanding of the impact of culture, constitutes an impressive compendium of existing measures at EU and national level, and highlights different potential areas for action in the field of cultural exchange and diplomacy.

3.3 However, the Committee now stresses the need to take the strategy a step further. An action plan needs to define precise focal points and strategically relevant countries, allowing for a targeted approach and consistent assessment of a first phase of the strategy, taking into account the existing Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI 2014-2020). The relevance of the strategy in terms of cooperation with the EU's neighbourhood and enlargement countries should be emphasised.

3.4 Culture in external relations cannot be seen as neutral and independent of the political context of the countries involved. Both historic and present-day examples demonstrate the possible misuse and manipulation of culture to nourish an authoritarian, populist or other political agenda. Therefore, while culture in EU exchanges certainly serves an agenda, it is important to underline that, contrary to propaganda, EU exchanges allow for the views of multiple stakeholders and pluralistic approaches. The EU thus relinquishes the element of control typical of propaganda. In this sense, culture based on the extraordinary richness of diversity will inevitably combat populist tendencies and state-led cultural propaganda, build bridges between peoples, tear down walls that are increasingly being thrown up, repair growing prejudice, and open up opportunities for closer cooperation and exchange.

3.5 Cultural education based on creative processes and the valorisation of diversity, including intercultural exchange, can further develop people's awareness of and resistance to the use of culture in a populist sense.

3.6 The Committee also underlines that in view of the multiple directorates and stakeholders involved, a clear governance structure needs to be established to guide cooperation in order to produce clear proposals and output. This structure should nonetheless demonstrate flexibility so as not to add additional administrative burden. The lead administrator of available funds should be defined.

3.7 While culture should have a stand-alone value, the EESC also underlines the need to mainstream culture in neighbouring fields, allowing culture to promote goals and actions that have been agreed upon and acknowledging its importance to the European project. Currently, however, culture is missing in existing action plans, including the 2017 Commission Work Programme. Culture needs to be increasingly present in European Commission priorities and actions and first concrete actions have to be included in the 2018 European Commission Work Programme.

3.8 Culture is key to strengthening the EU's role as a global actor, including in the focus areas explicitly mentioned, notably the EU Strategy for Syria, the EU Global Strategy and the Africa-EU Partnership.

3.9 In view of the importance of culture and the creative industries, the EESC suggests that provisions be made to ensure that issues pertaining to the fields of culture and the creative industries are taken into account in all future negotiations at international level, starting from the next negotiation mandate for the new partnership with the ACP countries after 2020. This includes trade negotiations, in which the EU should take the necessary measures to support, protect and promote European cultural activities ⁽¹⁾.

3.10 The EESC should include the topic of culture in the permanent bodies that it manages, and in its ordinary work.

3.11 The EESC welcomes the acknowledgement of the importance of culture to the development of our societies and its impact on key policy issues. Nonetheless, the EESC underlines that arts and culture should not just be reduced to their strategic and material value, but should also be recognised for their intrinsic value as hallmarks of our joint humanity.

3.12 'Cultural rights' are mentioned briefly, but the strategy should reflect on this principle of European values as a foundation of cultural understanding, exchange and development. The strategy could also take note of the important work developed by the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights (OHCHR) ⁽²⁾.

⁽¹⁾ In this regard, the EESC restates its support for the cultural exception as underlined in the EESC opinion on 'Creative and cultural industries — a European asset to be used in global competition' (OJ C 13, 15.1.2016, p. 83).

⁽²⁾ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/CulturalRights/Pages/SRCulturalRightsIndex.aspx>

3.13 While the Communication states that people frequently communicate across borders using digital tools, and that the demand for exchange and intercultural cooperation has increased in step with the digital revolution, there is insufficient focus on the implications and potential this digital shift has for international cultural relations. It is thus crucial to research and absorb the impact of the digital shift, taking into account, in particular, the impact on intercultural exchange between people, and examining both its potential as well as the risk of bias and misinformation. In this sense, cultural exchanges allow people to develop interests and encourage access to information and resources available online.

3.14 The mention of digital tools as a driver for this increasing exchange is questionable, as economic shifts and social challenges can be viewed as the dominant force in propelling global movements.

3.15 In the light of current events, the EESC suggests including interreligious dialogue as an element of intercultural dialogue in the Communication, including philosophical and non-confessional organisations, in line with the Preamble of the Treaty on European Union, which draws inspiration from the 'cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe', and Article 17 TFEU. This could be promoted via experimental initiatives, such as facilities for students and scholars of faith-based universities and religious schools of learning in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme.

3.16 The Communication mentions the impact of culture for sustainable development as a sub-section of inclusive and balanced economic growth⁽³⁾. The EESC regrets that this issue is not emphasised further, taking into account ideas to make culture a stand-alone pillar supporting sustainability. In recent years, a growing number of organisations⁽⁴⁾ have embraced this viewpoint, emphasising that culture needs to be considered as being just as important as other dimensions of development: the economy, social inclusion and the environment. The EESC actively supports this approach. This in turn is connected to regarding culture as a key component of inclusive community-building.

3.17 The EESC underlines the centrality of co-creation processes for artistic development and exchange, a factor not mentioned in the Communication. Co-creation not only enhances eye-level exchange and learning, but can also lead to innovative work that furthers both artistic development and growth, including economic and social development.

3.18 The Committee underlines that cultural exchange and dialogue should be based on objective data, allowing for the best possible fit of cultural and artistic relations with a given country or region. This calls for cultural practices, and strengths and challenges, to be studied, both in and with partner countries. One interesting initiative is the Council of Europe's Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe.

3.19 Additionally, the long-term approaches that are needed call for continuous monitoring and revision, ensuring impact and mutual benefit from cultural exchanges and interactions.

3.20 Funding for translation and interpreting of exchanges should be taken into account when devising programmes promoting cultural exchanges.

3.21 When devising new programmes, the EESC underlines the need to communicate the programme both within the EU and to partner countries and their citizens, explaining the approach, promoting initiatives and providing knowledge about funding opportunities. Various existing channels (Euronews, cultural prize schemes) could be developed to support this effort.

⁽³⁾ See Resolution 70/214 on 'Culture and sustainable development' adopted by the UN General Assembly on 22 December 2015.

⁽⁴⁾ See work undertaken by Agenda 21 for Culture and Culture Action Europe in the framework of the campaign entitled 'The future we want includes culture', focusing on the role of culture in the Sustainable Development Goals.

3.22 The Committee also stresses that the role of sub-national structures, regions and cities should be taken into account, as highlighted in the opinion adopted by the European Committee of the Regions on 7-8 February 2017.

3.23 The Committee underlines the vital importance of encouraging open exchange and the resolution of disagreements between states concerning the possession of artefacts that form part of national cultural heritage.

3.24 While the EESC welcomes this Communication and looks forward to the proposals being translated into specific action, it wishes to further elaborate on areas which lack sufficient emphasis in the proposal: (a) culture as a pillar for peace and stability; (b) culture and civil society; and (c) culture and the creative industries for sustainable growth and development.

3.25 In view of the importance and visibility of the upcoming European Year of Cultural Heritage, the EESC suggests that this framework and positive dynamic be used to develop and launch the action plan for culture in external relations in 2018.

4. Culture as a pillar for peace, stability and security

4.1 The EESC welcomes the fact that culture is acknowledged as a crucial pillar for peace and stability. Culture is therefore of key importance in furthering the main aim of the European Union, to 'promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples' (Article 3 TEU).

4.2 The European Union must take its rightful place as global leader in the practice, protection and promotion of peace worldwide. Its Nobel-Prize-winning model, which, in the aftermath of the world wars, has created the longest period of peace and prosperity in Europe, is a testament to its ability to lead the world in this field. The EU's track record in human rights and democracy, equality, tolerance, understanding and mutual respect is second to none in the international arena. The EU motto, 'United in Diversity', has greater resonance, given the global challenges of today's world, than at any other time in its 60-year history.

4.3 The EESC underlines the importance of exchange in the field of conflict prevention, resolution and post-conflict reconciliation. The space provided via culture and the arts allows for open exchange and the development of mutual trust. While culture in pre- and post-conflict situations is mentioned, this aspect needs to be expanded, particularly as cultural operators from third countries also have a wealth of expertise in this regard, allowing for mutually beneficial reflections. Respect for cultural human rights should be incorporated into peace agreements, which also enables cultural minorities in post-conflict areas to be respected⁽⁵⁾.

4.4 The EU's role in the Northern Ireland peace process is of interest as a possible basis for a peace-building strategy at global level. For example, a new 'White Dove' initiative could be inspired by the role played by the EU in the Northern Ireland peace process via its unique PEACE programme⁽⁶⁾. With a global reach, it could be all-inclusive, ensuring grassroots input from civil and political society. It could be connected with the new EC Solidarity Corps and emulate the Erasmus+ model, but it would not be exclusive to young people. It could interact with all EU measures in the field of defence, security and diplomacy, adding a much-needed cultural and peacebuilding strand to conflict resolution strategies. It would thus promote cross-cultural dialogue, mutual respect, tolerance and understanding through culture, education and media.

4.5 The EESC draws attention to the role of organised civil society, political foundations and local authorities in peace-building and reconciliation. Their expertise must be tapped into and their perspectives integrated and promoted.

4.6 The Committee stresses that in order to promote peace and stability, cultural initiatives and exchange must be developed in cooperation with local players and there must be efforts to reach out to local citizens, going beyond the circles usually targeted by cultural and artistic programmes.

⁽⁵⁾ See also 'Information presented by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to the United Nations on the Derry/Londonderry Report on Upholding the Human Right to Culture in Post-Conflict Societies' (UNGA A/HRC/25/NI/5 on 27 February 2014).

⁽⁶⁾ EESC opinion on 'The role of the EU in peace building in external relations: best practice and perspectives' (OJ C 68, 6.3.2012, p. 21).

4.7 On an intergovernmental level, the Council of Europe's initiatives are commendable. Cooperation with the CoE could be reinforced to draw upon its expertise regarding those countries within the organisation that neighbour the EU. The EESC draws attention, for example, to the Indicator Framework on Culture and Democracy, as well as the Youth Peace Camp initiative that allows young people and youth organisations from conflict-stricken regions to engage in dialogue and conflict transformation activities based on human rights education and intercultural learning. This programme could be a model for cultural dialogue between young people.

4.8 The EESC also draws attention to the impact of culture on safety and security issues in urban areas, as developed in its recent study on 'Culture, Cities and Identity in Europe' and suggests that exchanges on positive experiences in this domain should be promoted ⁽⁷⁾.

4.9 Further understanding of the impact of culture — and the loss thereof — on the radicalisation of young people should be developed. The impact of cultural activities and heritage on social stability and cohesion must be underlined, and the misuse of culture and heritage as a means to promote a radical or nationalistic agenda prevented.

4.10 Promoting culture as a pillar for peace and stability must go hand in hand with calling attention to the freedom of artistic expression as a human right. Global initiatives to support persecuted artists exist at CSO level (e.g. Freemuse, Observatoire de la Liberté de la Création Artistique). Their development and their networking within the European CSO landscape should be promoted.

5. Culture and civil society

5.1 The EESC underlines the need for the development of an active civil society to promote participative and inclusive growth and cultural development. Civil society activities should be strengthened via cultural dialogues and exchanges and capacity-building activities ⁽⁸⁾. Developing administrative capacity in CSOs is a key element to ensuring co-creation and eye-level exchange.

5.2 The EESC thus agrees with the aim of strengthening support for civil society organisations active in the cultural field in partner countries. The need to integrate cultural operators is rightly highlighted, and the EESC wishes to underline the importance of this effort not only for intercultural dialogue, but also for cultural diversity and cultural rights.

5.3 The EESC wishes to underline the need to involve non-governmental organisations and foundations, both in Europe and in partner countries, as valuable players and resources for successful exchange and dialogue. As such, national operators' programmes should be utilised and strengths pooled and learned from, e.g. the Robert Bosch Foundation's activities in international relations, and the projects of Interarts, such as its EU-funded 'Communities of practice for the public value of culture in the Southern Mediterranean — SouthMed CV' project (funded by DG NEAR's Euromed programme), which aims to bring culture from the margins to the centre of the public sphere, exploring its potential connections with economic, social and political development strategies.

5.4 It draws attention to the fact that (inter)cultural exchanges must not be limited to artists and cultural stakeholders, but should include a strong dimension of outreach to and participation of all citizens. Despite efforts to remedy this, cultural and artistic exchanges tend to address a restricted number of people with often similar social, cultural and educational backgrounds. Therefore, the explicit inclusion of exchange on participative cultural initiatives and the development of arts education should be part of cultural programmes. Only then can the potential of arts and culture to promote stability, peace and sustainable development be tapped into.

⁽⁷⁾ EESC-commissioned study on 'Culture, cities and identity in Europe', <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-europe-culture-cities-study>

Conclusions of the conference 'A hope for Europe: Culture, cities and new narratives' organised by the Various Interests Group of the EESC, Brussels 20-21 June 2016: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-europe-culture-cities-conclusions>

⁽⁸⁾ EESC opinion on the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (OJ C 185, 8.8.2006, p. 42).

5.5 The EESC holds the Erasmus+ programme and its importance for exchange and mutual understanding and learning in high esteem. Similar initiatives for cultural operators and citizens active in culture and the arts are non-existent at EU level. The development of a specific exchange and mobility programme for the arts and culture in a broad sense could be considered.

5.6 Many exchange and study visit programmes for artists and cultural operators exist, funded on a bilateral basis via national cultural institutes. Increased synergy between these programmes needs to be examined, including non-governmental initiatives, such as the Roberto Cimetta Fund.

5.7 International cooperation and mobility needs to be recognised as an asset for the development of cultural identity at a time when demographic, social and economic transformations also point to a shortening of distances between and within countries. These shifts have an impact on cultural processes as well as creating more potential for cross-border cultural networking. If supported properly, this mobility, besides its positive impact on economic exchange, can contribute to the development of cultural identity, in turn promoting peace-building and social cohesion. This mobility must be carefully balanced with support ensuring the development of solid structures, guaranteeing a future for cultural and creative initiatives.

5.8 The EESC emphasises the ability of cultural networks to promote exchange between culture professionals, structure the cultural landscape and develop active cultural civil society. It therefore suggests that exchange be encouraged with European cultural networks, a line of funding in the Creative Europe programme. Links with existing networks at international level and the development of networks in different regions could be promoted.

5.9 Similarly, the EESC underlines the benefit of other strands of the current Creative Europe programme, and encourages all funding options to be examined in the light of their potential for cultural exchange at international level.

5.10 The EESC welcomes the call for the creation of a civil society forum to include all relevant stakeholders and to play a key role in developing the aforementioned action plan for international cultural relations. This could take the form of an annual forum based on horizontal exchanges and debates, with satellite meetings in different geographic regions, in and outside the EU.

5.11 The EESC will commit to supporting such structured consultation and dialogue with relevant stakeholders in the field of external relations in the coming years. The EESC will further reflect on how its role and working methods can make a specific and structured contribution to improving the development of the aforementioned action plan.

6. Culture and the creative industries for sustainable growth and development

6.1 Culture should be fully recognised as the fourth pillar of sustainable development. This allows visions of culture — either as a tool for economic growth or as having an intrinsic value that should not be subjugated to economic priorities — to be reconciled.

6.2 The EESC underlines the importance of sustainability and of alternative measures of growth, such as greater well-being in societies.

6.3 The Communication highlights a number of important points concerning the contribution of culture and the creative industries, which are mainly SMEs⁽⁹⁾, to sustainable development, economic growth, and job creation, which the EESC clearly supports. As the Communication underlines, global trade in creative products more than doubled between 2004 and 2013⁽¹⁰⁾, with cultural and creative industries accounting for about 3 % of world GDP and over 30 million jobs⁽¹¹⁾.

6.4 The need to invest in the development of relevant skills to harness the potential of growth in the creative sector must be underlined. Local markets need to be supported. Mobility schemes enhancing skills development should not reinforce a brain-drain effect that is detrimental to partner countries.

⁽⁹⁾ Eurostat 2013: Key size-class indicators for enterprises in selected cultural sectors, EU-28.

⁽¹⁰⁾ 'The Globalisation of Cultural Trade: A Shift in Cultural Consumption — International flows of cultural goods and services 2004-2013', Unesco Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2016.

⁽¹¹⁾ 'Cultural Times', report by CISAC and Unesco, 2015.

6.5 The experience of the European Capitals of Culture has shown the impact of cultural development on economic and social development in urban areas. Exchange and capacity-building actions with other countries on challenges and strategies, which led to this growth, could be developed.

6.6 As a model of best practice, other transnational organisations and regions have taken up the concept of capitals of culture (e.g. the nomination of Islamic cultural capitals by Unesco, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation). Possible cooperation and synergy should be explored to maximise mutual benefit and learning. An international capital of culture scheme or the twinning of towns within the framework of this programme could be considered.

6.7 Another example of links between places and cities is the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes. This programme could be explored and developed on an international level, developing its potential to increase cultural tourism and an understanding of joint international cultural roots.

6.8 The EESC underlines the need to encourage and facilitate collaboration and networking among cities in and outside Europe. Many European cities are experienced in cultural policy-making and its relation to other areas of sustainable development (e.g. economic growth, job creation, social inclusion, creative education, cultural tourism, etc.). This is an asset for long-term collaboration between Europe and the Global South and the EU could also play a role in facilitating collaboration and networking among cities in and outside Europe. In this connection, relevant initiatives are already in place and able to provide suitable contributions for long-term collaboration, including the Pilot Cities and Leading Cities programmes.

6.9 The existence of city networks that develop culture-related measures, such as Eurocities, Mercociudades, Africities, the Unesco Creative Cities Network, Les Arts et la Ville, Australia's Cultural Development Network or the Creative City Network of Canada should also be considered as a valuable asset in this regard.

6.10 The EESC regrets the lack of a gender focus in the proposed steps towards a joint strategy. While gender equality constitutes the backbone of our European values, studies show gender imbalances in artists receiving visibility and key positions. Similarly, Unesco has described biases in the benefits derived from cultural tourism and cultural development measures. The EESC therefore insists on this dimension being taken into account.

Brussels, 31 May 2017.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
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