

Hearing in front of the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament

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« Check against delivery »

Madam Chair,
Honourable Members,

It is with great pleasure that I stand before you today to discuss the priorities that the Belgian Presidency will have at heart to defend over the next six months. The dynamism of the committee on which you are sitting is recognized and appreciated, and I have no doubt that our collaboration will be fruitful. Allow me, at this point, to emphasize the fact that my team and I for this Presidency will be available to you for any further exchanges of views on a specific topic.

Before addressing the priorities of the Belgian Presidency in greater details, I would like to put your minds at rest about one thing. Although the negotiations to form a new federal government are on-going, Belgium will take every possible step to ensure that the Belgian Presidency is up to your expectations. Moreover, with culture and audiovisual affairs coming under the exclusive powers of the Communities (the French-speaking Community of Belgium, the Flemish Community and the German-speaking Community), the recent elections will have no impact on our management in these areas. Although as Minister of Culture and Audiovisual Affairs in the Government of the French Community, the programme that I will have the honour of unfolding before you shortly is very much a Belgian programme. It has been drawn up in close consultation with my colleagues from the Flemish and German-speaking Communities. There are continuous and excellent contacts among our government departments.

I now come to the priorities of the Belgian Presidency in the fields of culture and audiovisual affairs.

These priorities have been established in consultation with our trio partners, Spain and Hungary. It was a great honour for us to be the first to implement this stipulation of the Lisbon Treaty. I should also like to praise the excellent work carried out by my Spanish colleague, Angeles Gonzales-Sinde, over the last six months. I have no doubt that this work paves the way for the future.

In the field of culture, the Belgian Presidency will work on four priorities.

1. First and foremost, the Belgian Presidency will highlight the potential of the cultural and creative industries and the links between culture and innovation as part of the EU 2020 Strategy. The cultural and creative industries are finally being recognized as an essential element of innovation, and the Belgian Presidency has set herself the objective of moving towards the creation of an environment in which these industries will be able to use their potential fully. As specified by the Green Paper "*Unlocking the potential of the cultural and creative industries*", published by the European Commission in April 2010, it is essential to step up support for this specific sector and, in doing so, to promote culture as a real catalyst of creativity. This will involve, on one hand, to demonstrate that innovation plays a substantial role in the development of the cultural sector and, vice versa, that culture is an important asset for innovation, from both economic and social points of view. On the other hand, and based on this observation, the aim of the work that we will be carrying out will be to identify needs for the development of the cultural and creative industries. Particular attention will be paid to the small and medium-sized enterprises, guarantors of cultural diversity, who will play a decisive role in the development of the cultural and creative sectors. A symposium on the subject will be held in Brussels on the 8th and 9th of September. Moreover, the discussion on the links between creativity, culture and innovation will be pursued during the informal meeting of the Ministers for Culture, which will be held in Brussels on the 7th of October.
2. The second priority of the Belgian Presidency relates to the role of culture in fighting poverty and social exclusion. With 2010 having been declared "European year for fighting poverty and social exclusion", we want to highlight the role that culture can play across-the-board in this regard and to emphasise the need to incorporate the cultural dimension into national and European policies for fighting poverty and social exclusion. To this end, the Presidency will submit the draft conclusions of the Council on this subject to the Cultural Affairs Committee at its meeting on the 15th of July. This is an initiative specific to the Belgian Presidency and one to which we attach a great deal of importance. We thus hope to achieve a balance between the three key dimensions of culture, namely the economic dimension, the civic dimension and the social cohesion dimension. A symposium on this topic will be held on the 18th and 19th of October in Brussels. The fundamental role that public libraries can play in this area will also be emphasised during our Presidency. For example, a conference on the theme of "Digital Europe and public libraries" will be held in Brussels on the 20th and 21st of September.
3. As a third priority, within the framework of the strategic objectives specified in the European Agenda for Culture, the Belgian Presidency will ensure that it carries out the

assessment of the 2008-2010 Work Plan for culture and the adoption of a new post-2010 Work Plan. We read with interest the reports of the other 26 Member States assessing the current work plan and were struck in particular by the fact that everyone is in favour of continuing the open method of coordination in the field of culture, although we do have to improve its mechanism, in particular to allow better use to be made of the results produced. For example, the new Work Plan should contain more operational objectives for a limited number of more clearly identified issues. A better structure will also have to be found between the platforms bringing together the civil society and the expert working groups.

It will also be up to the Belgian Presidency to ensure that the priority actions of the new work plan square with the priorities defined by the 2020 Strategy.

4. Finally, the Presidency will continue the discussions started by the Spanish Presidency with a view to the adoption, by the European Parliament and the Council, of the draft Commission Decision aimed at creating a "European heritage quality-label". The Presidency will be very pleased to work together with Mrs Paliadeli, dossier reporter, so that we can reach an agreement quickly between the two institutions. The aim of this initiative – and it is important to bear this in mind in these difficult times – is to bring Europe's citizens closer together. Moreover, a conference will be held on the 9th of December in Bruges to discuss the means and resources to be made available in order to move towards a European heritage strategy.

In the audiovisual field, the Belgian Presidency will work on the following three key areas.

1. The Presidency will initiate a discussion on the support mechanisms needed by European cinema. This priority is prompted by a concern for culture diversity. European cinema is one of the best reflections of that diversity. But that diversity cannot be guaranteed without considerable public support and an effective promotion of European works. This is why, right at the outset of our Presidency – on the 5th and 6th of July in Mons – we held an important symposium aimed precisely at coming up with ways of encouraging the promotion and circulation of European films, in order to ensure that cultural diversity flourishes in Europe. This symposium, entitled "From the AMS directive to the Cinema Communication: towards a global and coherent approach to European cinema", was a great success. It brought together a large number of professionals, institutional representatives and experts from the sector, who were able to exchange their points of view regarding the following questions:
 - Is there a need to provide public support at all stages of the film creation and distribution process, from its writing to its marketing?
 - In what way can the coexistence of cultural and economic support systems contribute both to the development of a strong and competitive film industry and to cultural diversity?

The discussion will now be taken up at Council of Ministers level. We wanted the informal meeting of Audiovisual Ministers, which will be held in Brussels on Friday the 8th of October, to be an opportunity for an initial exchange of views on this subject at Council level.

2. The second key area of work in the audiovisual field is triggered by the challenges asked by the digital age. The Presidency will be placing the emphasis on the preservation and safeguarding of audiovisual and cinematographic heritage, which will be the subject of the Council conclusions. The Presidency should again draw the Council's attention at the means to be implemented, on the national and European levels, in order to support cinemas that wish to acquire digital projection equipment. A conference on the challenges of the digitalization of audiovisual heritage will also be held in Ghent on the 13th and 14th of October. Finally, the exchange of views among Ministers at the formal Council meeting of the 18th of November will be dedicated to a discussion on the cultural and audiovisual aspects of the European Digital Agenda. We felt that it was particularly important for our area of activity of the Council to be able to intervene in this matter and for the discussion on this important question not to be the sole reserve of the Telecommunications component of the Council.
3. The prospects for the development of digital libraries in the digital age and of Europeana will also be examined by the Presidency as will, more generally, the challenges raised by the long-term conservation of Europe's digital cultural and audiovisual heritage. Therefore, on the 18th of November, the Presidency will hold a meeting between the Council and the Committee of Wise Men assigned by the Commission to propose recommendations to speed up digitalization, on-line accessibility and the conservation of cultural works.

As you can see, there is a lot of work to be done!

Before concluding, allow me to underline a few facts, which I feel are particularly important at this point in time.

- First, as I said a few moments ago, the wish of the Belgian Presidency is to facilitate a discussion on the Digital Agenda within our area of activity of the Council. This decompartmentalization of subject-areas is a factor to which we will be paying particularly close attention. Because areas of activity such as Culture and Audiovisual can no longer continue to function in isolation. They have to be tied in with other areas of activity in order to unlock their full potential. For example, I should mention the discussions that I have had with my European counterparts on the EU 2020 Strategy. We were all convinced of the importance of including culture in this Strategy, given, among other things, the importance of this sector in terms of economic development and jobs. The Chair of your Committee, Mrs Doris Pack, also emphasised it in her noteworthy and noted speech to the Forum on the cultural industries, held in March by the Spanish Presidency. Mentioning the inclusion of culture in the EU 2020 Strategy within the Culture area of activity alone was not enough. What mattered was to persuade our Colleagues from the other areas of activity, in order to stop culture being marginalised during final arbitrations. The same now applies to the European strategy for innovation. As I explained beforehand, the Belgian Presidency intends to pay particularly close attention to the

links between creativity, culture and innovation. The Council Competitiveness area of activity must also pay attention to it..

- Then, close cooperation with the Youth area of activity of the Council will also be established. I have very much in mind the "creativity and culture" points of the resolution on "An European Union strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering", which you adopted on 18th May last. My colleague with responsibility for youth, Pascal Smet, has been entrusted with the task of presenting the draft conclusions of the Council on the matter of access for young people to Culture. It goes without saying that we will be working closely together on this.

- Finally, I do not forget the cultural dimension of European Union foreign affairs that continues to be of great interest to you as seen at the round table organised by the Chair, Doris Pack, on 23rd June. This foreign dimension should feature heavily in the new work plan that we hope to see adopted at the Council meeting of the 18th of November. An important deadline will, however, have already passed before that date: the New York summit for the Millennium. This will be an opportunity that we will have to seize in order to include finally the cultural dimension in the Millennium Development Objectives.

Madam Chair,
Honourable Members,
thank you for your attention. I am convinced that, together, we will make this Belgian Presidency a great success! I will now be pleased to answer any questions and comments.

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