

European Economic and Social Committee

Paul Dujardin – Speech – Journées de la Société Civile : migration

Place: JDE62 – 1 June

Rue Belliard, Economic and Social Committee

2.30-4pm.

With:

- *Jo Leinen, Member of the European Parliament and president of the European Movement International*
- *Paul Dujardin, Chief Executive Officer – Artistic Director of BOZAR*
- *Responses from the workshop organisers, linking to workshop results*
- *Closing remarks by Conny Reuter*
- *Commissioner Thyssen*

Dear all,

I'm honoured to be with you today, not only as a representative from the cultural field, but also from the **European civil society**, with which institutions such as the Centre for Fine Arts, BOZAR, **constantly try to collaborate.**

The idea of a Centre for Fine Arts for Brussels came up after the first World War, at a time when **international cooperation including in the field of culture was more needed than even.** What countries like Belgium wanted was an **active and multidisciplinary laboratory for the exchange of ideas, which would** offer an interplay between national, international and European perspectives.

Designed by Belgian architect Victor Horta, the Centre for Fine for Arts opened its doors in **1928, one year before the Wall Street Crash.**

Almost one century after, we are again facing an **economic and societal crisis.**

In a globalized world you have to constantly look for ways to renew the economy, especially in Europe where creativity is the most important wealth.

Europe has been through a long journey, and cultural institutions as well.

Migration was and still is a key point in this narrative that we all share.

Migration within Europe, or migration from outside Europe. But how to see it

as a new capital for Europe and culture to rely on? And how can we boost it?
Perhaps the Centre for Fine Arts can offer you some inspiration.

In the last ten years, the institution I am running has evolved into **BOZAR**, its brand name, acting as an inclusive arts centre and a **European platform for civil society, artists, and also policy-makers.**

Turning into a **responsible arts house** of the XXIth century stands at the core of our mission. Key challenges such as **Europe, citizenship, immigration, inclusion** or **urban development** are now constantly addressed in our activities. **Finding our place and role between a local and European context are daily questions for our actions.**

A '**New Narrative for Europe**' has also naturally come out as a commitment by BOZAR, and the arts sector, towards the European ideal.

In **2010 José Manuel Barroso**, the former President of the European Commission, asked me to help **to set up an initiative to mobilize artists.** Barroso's key question to the artists was:

"Ask not only what Europe can do for you, ask what you can do for Europe."

This is how the European Commission came up with the **Pilot project 'A New Narrative for Europe'**. It offered an **exchange platform** for artists, scientists, citizens & policy makers. It gathered **top personalities** such as Chancellor Merkel, President Tusk, or artists and intellectuals such as Olafur Eliasson, Michelangelo Pistoletto or Gyorgy Konrad in no less than **17 countries**. Its fundamental rationale was that Europe is **not a self-fulfilling prophecy or a self-legitimated construction** by politicians and bureaucrats somewhere in Brussels; it is a **collective and open project, co-written by citizens throughout the continent** who are prepared to broaden their world view.

For 2016, BOZAR has proposed a specific initiative as a follow up of the project, entitled '**Imagine Europe – In Search of New Narratives**', in co-production with the European Commission. This was a *visual laboratory project with 12 rooms* along which artists, architects and designers including Rem Koolhaas, Ingo Niermann, Louwrien Wijers, Chantal Akerman and various students comment on the current European situation and its challenges and opportunities:

Topics as **immigration, borders, identity and perception of differences** are obviously addressed, but in various ways. From Ingo **Niermann's** *Solution series* and the fictive **island of Lavapolis** with its principle of universal solidarity to the *Recyclable Refugee Camp* installation of **Ives Maes**, in which he questions a

number of contemporary ethical codes and laws of behavior. From **Nastío Mosquito's** video *Frozen War* addressing the consequences of the Cold War, immigration, emigration and the anticipated end of the world in 2012 to young students reflecting upon Europe, the Eldorado, the thickness of borders and their own identity: who am I in this world?

***Imagine Europe* is not giving any answers, but it is a point of departure for an inclusive dialogue.**

This is what artists do: show us our world in a different way, open up our thoughts, depict societal changes, remind us of what we tend to forget and help us to find ways to deal with society and challenges or opportunities such as migration.

You have all seen the paintings that **Banksy made in the Jungle of Calais**. This has cast a new visibility on the reality of the refugees living there. I am equally amazed by the number of **new films or theatre** plays that focus on this drama impacting Europe today. Likewise, the **contemporary arts** world is also clearly concerned by this as explained by a recent Wall Street Journal article giving examples of **Kader Attia** and his peers. The **current Architecture biennale in Venice** has seen Germany destroy a wall in its pavilion to raise awareness on the issue of the walls being built in Europe.

Artist can bring value.

And I'm more and more convinced that migrant artists can bring us a lot.

Two years ago, **Barack Obama** was at BOZAR to express his views on Europe.

Let me shortly quote him concerning our topic of today:

"In the end, the success of our ideals comes down to us, including the example of our own lives, our own societies. We know that there will always be intolerance, but **instead of fearing the immigrant, we can welcome him.**"

And I know this is a statement that even the cultural sector does not always implement in its real life. I hear many cultural operators advocating for more openness towards migrants, but at the same time not willing to see their kids go to the same schools as young Syrians. This is a moral schizophrenia that one can now see in all the sectors.

"Obama calls immigrants **Job Creators**. That is a positive message from an economic point of view.

But what about their cultural value? Are African immigrants perceived as an added value for the European narrative? Do we see immigrants also as **a source of creativity**? Not yet. Not enough.

The creative and innovation potential of European countries heavily relies on their ability to integrate newcomers. I am amazed to see the number of fantastic African artists such as Nastyo Mosquito or Pascal Martin Tayou who now live in Belgium and are having an **international reputation**. See also the success of our pop electro singer **Stromae.. he has African roots as well. Yet, he's one of Belgium's best cultural ambassadors.**

Now, the question is whether a **cultural mobilization can be taken as part of civil society to shape a more inclusive Europe.** I believe so. **For, artists are, by essence, active drivers of civil society.**

In the last few years, democratic movements such as **Occupy Wallstreet, Podemos, Nuit Debout or the G1000** in Belgium have all been supported by numerous artists. And the same reactions have emerged in the midst of the

refugee crisis, because the cultural world perfectly knows that its vitality and resilience depend on its diversity and its ability to embrace the 'Other'.

New narratives for Europe will only emerge if the European project manages to have inclusion as a common denominator in all its actions. Inclusion of migrants, and inclusion through culture and the arts

I thank you all.