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**BUREAU OF THE
STEERING COMMITTEE FOR CULTURE, HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPE
(CDCPP)**

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE ART EXHIBITIONS
TOWARD A NEW CONCEPT**

Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by the
Directorate of Democratic Governance
Democratic Institutions and Governance Department

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Background

In November 2015 the Bureau of the CDCPP discussed a first reflection paper "Rethinking Council of Europe Art Exhibitions: Towards a revised concept" and underlined its wish not to suppress, but rather to see Art Exhibitions redefined, to make full use of their potential to promote Council of Europe values. The Bureau asked the Secretariat to consult with a small group of experts to pursue reflections and prepare proposals on the follow-up to Council of Europe Art Exhibitions, for consideration in time for the forthcoming session of the Bureau of the CDCPP, in Spring 2016.

Progress

An expert meeting¹ was held on 18 December at the Council of Europe Office in Brussels with six professionals from the arts/cultural sector, the CDCPP Vice-Chair and a former CDCPP member, to debate the effectiveness of Art Exhibitions/cultural events as tools for communicating Council of Europe values, in response to current political and societal challenges, i.e. those related to intolerance, hate, xenophobia, populism, chauvinism, extremism and radicalization.

Thought was given to procedures for initiating a CoE exhibition or event, the choice of key themes, new formats/structures and dissemination platforms, and key players with whom to collaborate. Findings include the following:

Agreement on the pertinence of cultural/arts interventions for communicating CoE values, but excluding traditional exhibition formats "*...since these would use 19th century methodology in the 21st, not make people participate and connect and not involve them emotionally.:*"; on "*excluding the celebration of any national cultures*" as well as "*not focusing on culturally already well-served capital cities, but rather on 'second tier' towns within member states*".

Overall aims would be to refresh the European democratic narrative; perform Human Rights practically through the arts and culture; develop social and cultural capital and contribute to inclusion and social cohesion.

¹ Participants included: Jaroslav Anđel, Artistic Director-at-large of the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, Prague, Czech Republic; Kimmo Aulake, Vice-Chair of the Steering Committee on Culture, Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP); Ministerial Advisor - Ministry of Education and Culture Ministry of Education and Culture, Helsinki, Finland; Bénédicte de Brouwer, Institutional Advisor, BOZAR, Brussels, Belgium; Paul Dujardin, Director General, BOZAR, Brussels, Belgium; Prof Dr Monika Flacke, Curator, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, Germany; Katherine Heid, Head of Political Development, Culture Action Europe, Brussels, Belgium; Roger Higginson, former Head of EU/International, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, London, UK; Kata Krasznahorkai, University of Zurich/ Cultural Manager at Collegium Hungaricum, Berlin, Germany.

Experts agreed that themes ought to be political themes, artists should be actively involved, but the ambition should clearly go beyond the art world's horizons and any events should address the public at large (explicit outreach policy including towards the young and minority groups and extensive use of social media).

Experts discussed the - as some say - broken European, humanistic narrative. "The future" and the anxiety in society around this was identified as a possible theme for a CoE action, also in relation to a necessary post-growth-paradigm and the potential for the promotion of the Human Rights agenda in the current migration and refugee crisis.

The idea of going beyond a mere exhibition and combining different elements such as an artistic and an intellectual one (involving a European thinker, philosopher) with a series of larger discussion events emerged. Reference was, inter alia, made to figures such as Giotto di Bondone² for the artistic component and Augustine of Hippo³ or Hannah Arendt⁴ as intellectuals, who would assert the values of democracy, tolerance, and Human Rights at a time when the xenophobic rejection of people who are different is on the rise.

Experts agreed on key principles for any new activity, such as: Reconciling bottom-up and top-down approaches in conceptualisation; putting the focus on participation, sharing, networking (artistic, museum, cultural networks); bridging producers' and consumers' roles and blurring lines between amateur and professional interventions; using competition as a selection tool for themes/activities as well as possibly taking thematic inspiration from the World Forum for Democracy.

² A late thirteenth and early fourteenth century Florentine artist and influential painter, whose work is closely associated with the development of a naturalist style in art, and the life of St. Francis of Assisi.

³ An early Christian theologian and philosopher whose writings influenced the development of Western Christianity and philosophy, and whose importance is recognised by both Catholic and Protestant communities. He could be seen of relevance to contemporary events, as a Bishop of what is today the town of Annaba, in Algeria: a coastal port, symbolic of the movement of people between Europe and the Maghreb. His life and writings provide a rich source of material relevant to the themes of tolerance and compassion for others.

⁴ A most important philosopher of the twentieth century, born in Hanover in 1906, Hannah Arendt fled to Paris in 1933 to escape the rising tide of Nazism, and went to the United States at the outbreak of WWII. Her 1958 work, 'The Human Condition' is famous for its emphasis on moral values, and the need to act, rather than passively accepting the events which impact on you. She was a close observer of Adolph Eichmann's trial in 1961, and came to the then controversial conclusion that evil is banal: something that can develop, almost unnoticed, before it becomes overwhelming.

On-going projects such as “New Narratives” project by BOZAR⁵ could provide further inspiration and a current mapping exercise of arts multipliers in Europe run by BOZAR may prove as a useful tool in the re-conceptualisation of Art Exhibitions. Experts advised that all synergies should be exploited whilst Council of Europe action should follow the principle of “variable geometry”, and not focus on one specific institution.

Experts were ready to continue their reflections in 2016 on reorganising the Art Exhibitions, and suggested involving a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in further deliberations.

Action required

Following endorsement by the Bureau of the CDCPP of the general approach suggested in this paper, a second, enlarged expert discussion will be held in late April which will prepare concrete suggestions for future Art Exhibitions/cultural events, for discussion by the CDCPP plenary session in June 2016.

The conclusions of the debate in the CDCPP will be brought to the attention of the Committee of Ministers for decision. If appropriate, the Bureau could finalise the CDCPP’s views and proposals before being submitted to the Committee of Ministers.

⁵ http://www.europanostra.org/UPLOADS/FILS/New_Narrative_Europe.pdf