

Let the arts cross borders
**Statement to the First Joint Informal Meeting of Senior Officials of Ministries of Culture
and Senior Officials Responsible for Culture in Ministries of Foreign Affairs**
Pécs, 22-24 June 2011

Developing an integrated strategic approach to culture in EU's external relations is today more than ever a necessity, be it in terms of preserving and promoting **cultural diversity**, of empowering **civil society**, of reinforcing **democracy**, or of improving the quality of the EU's relations with their third countries' partners.

The set up of Joint Informal Meetings of Senior Officials of Ministries of Culture and Senior Officials Responsible for Culture in Ministries of Foreign Affairs, at the initiative of the Hungarian Presidency and following the work plan laid out by the Council, is therefore to be warmly welcomed. These meetings should open the way to further joint strategies and actions, at national and European levels.

For many years already, actors of the arts and culture sectors – within, across and beyond EU borders – have been working together, developing partnerships, and advocating for better conditions for mobility of artists and cultural professionals. They have also developed their conviction on the **key role arts and culture play in democratisation processes, and in human rights and freedom of expression movements**. The current rise for freedom in the Arab world only strengthened this conviction, which has now to be translated into fully-fledged strategies. All dimensions of the potentials of artists and their work in external and democratization policies have to be integrated in EU and national external policies, taking into account the specific needs and operational conditions of artists.

A pro-active engagement meeting the demands of the historic uprising we are witnessing in the Arab world, as well as of all civil society movements active across the globe, is therefore urgent. This engagement should look at actions in different fields of interventions: from the **conditions of artists' mobility** – including the visa issue –, to the **financial support to responsible and sustainable mobility**, or the enhanced integration of culture in **economic, social, educational, human rights and democratisation strategies** the EU and its Member States are implementing in third countries.

This engagement should also translate into a better mainstreaming of arts' mobility and cultural co-operation into the **next generation of EU policy and programmes**. Co-operations with neighbouring and third countries' partners should for instance be enhanced and facilitated in all strands of the next programme for Culture beyond 2013. The EU should also better structure its support, through its different external action geographical strategies, to the arts and culture field, channeling this support in particular through NGOs that provide accurate information and micro-credit funding schemes to mobile artists and cultural professionals.

The [Roberto Cimetta Fund](#), an international association that has been for more than 10 years enabling artists and cultural workers to travel between Europe, the Arab world and the Balkans, the [On the Move](#) network for cultural mobility information, and the [we are more campaign](#), launched by Culture Action Europe in strategic partnership with the European Cultural Foundation, are looking forward to the process to be launched in Pécs, and are encouraging the meeting's participants to associate civil society partners to their work. They remain at the disposal of the group for dialogue and exchange in the future.

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