



EU Referendum: a cultural response

Kick-off meeting

30 November 2015

10:30 am- 2:30 pm

hosted by Stour Space, London

Participants: List in annex. Participants were UK-based Culture Action Europe members, members of members, had been connected to the CAE network via prior activities, or were suggested via participants. Approx. 35 people attended, representing organisations active in the cultural and artistic field, political stakeholders and academics (analysts/researchers) and to a lesser extent, arts practitioners.

Moderation: Clymene Christoforou, ISIS Arts, Member of the Culture Action Europe Executive Committee

Reflections by Culture Action Europe

The UK's EU referendum is of key importance to the future of the European Union. It will demonstrate the continuing will of individual countries to support a democratic project of peace and collaboration.

When UK citizens vote in the upcoming referendum, they will carry the responsibility for the wellbeing of future generations, for their own children, but also for all the other European citizens who stand beside them in the European project. This voting decision should therefore not be taken lightly. Self-interested anti-European rhetoric, misinformation and the influence of temporary emotionally driven reactions must be countered by fact-driven information and especially by promoting hope and confidence.

Many initiatives exist, and these should be strengthened and collaboration sought with other sectors with similar perspectives (higher education, science, sports, social movements). It is the unique strength of culture and the arts to convey messages that can hardly be gripped in words alone - messages that speak of communities' needs, hopes and common aspirations.

The UK and Europe are stronger together and drive positive change on a national, European and global level.

The European Union's functioning can and should be criticized, as it is done throughout Europe: this is a fruitful process in all democratic structures. Change can and must be driven from within.

It is only by standing together that we can show the world, and the future generations, that unity is stronger and can overcome fear and reclusion, creating a European Union we can all be proud of.

Discussion outline

The following bullet points document main areas of discussion, points raised by the participant or subsequently clarified.

Background

Clymene Christoforou provided an overview of the referendum's possible timeline and main factors.

- In David Cameron's letter to Donald Tusk, the key issues concerning the EU as seen by Cameron's government are:
 - Sovereignty – moving away from 'ever closer union'
 - Economic Governance (protecting the single market for non Euro members)
 - Competitiveness (cutting the burden on business)
 - Immigration (the abuse of free movement, restrictions on benefits)

A snapshot of the current situation

In the UK

- Four toxic issues were pinpointed by Christopher Gordon for remaining in the EU: Greece, TTIP, Terrorism, Refugees.
- Media
There is press exaggeration about bureaucrats in Brussels, the truth is much more positive. (There was a suggestion that the media are not anti-EU but rather just insufficiently informed.)
- Political power issues:
(Deliberate) misleading information/non-information issues (Christopher Gordon)
Two or three years ago, the UK (Coalition) Government to assessed views of the 'balance of competence' as between UK bodies and the EU. When the different Departmental Reports were combined, it transpired that there was little or no evidence of a huge problem. The exercise revealed that the gap between the political rhetoric, UK press and media, and those who live with the practical realities, was very large.
The government consequently tried to suppress the final report since the answer was not the one they wanted. It took a Euro-sane Conservative politician in the House of Lords to reveal that the report was being hidden away with as little public debate or exposure as possible.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/final-reports-in-review-of-eu-balance-of-competences-published>
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/279456/2901485_BoC_CultureTourismSport_acc.pdf
- Lack of awareness of EU investment in cultural programmes

There is a lack of visible signage on EU supported projects: There are so many 'messages' projects have to communicate that the European dimension often gets lost even if it exists. (John Davis, LIFT)

- Communication weakness of pro-EU campaigners: in comparison, the British National Party, for example, are able to better condense their arguments and tell clear stories.
- Those who do support European cultural programmes in the UK are also arms length Government funded organizations who declare themselves unable to take a position, e.g. the Arts Council, British Council.
- Regional/ National issues
Scotland is highlighted as an example of a country that decided to look to Europe not London, and as result the Country's whole psyche changed. It is proud of its identity in contrast to the lack of clear cultural identity in the English region (this statement was contested). Reports from the North East of England cited the damage caused to European working by the withdrawal of public funding from local authorities and regional development agencies.

A European view from outside the UK

- We need to recognize that the lean to the right and the rise of anti EU rhetoric is not just an issue for the UK, it is a 'European Malaise' (Philippe Rixhon)
- Negative perspectives of EU countries about the UK: For example "There is a misconception in Greece that the UK is/was part of the 'telling them off'" (Stella Duffy)
- There is weariness, and a lack of patience with the political process and a feeling of frustration concerning continuing demands for concessions coming from the UK ("how much more slack must we cut them?")

What can we do?

- "BE SPECIFIC ABOUT LANGUAGE. The referendum is called to consider our membership of the EU not EUROPE. Being in Europe is a given. We are and always will be European." (Charlotte Hamilton , EUYO)
- Avoid the tendency to discuss Europe as if it were "somewhere else" ("the UK and Europe").
- Recognize we have much to learn from engagement with other member states.
- Create common space for the debate to take place in the UK.
- The European Commission needs to work on its own communication and audience development and:
 - Use language which is accessible
 - Make resources/information available beyond Europe House (in the UK)
 - →The EC's material needs to be used, "unpicked" and translated for a range of audiences.

- Arts and cultural organisations/ artists:
 - We need to promote the European Union's support of our programmes/projects, articulating the value through stories.
 - We are cultural ambassadors. We must lead, and be seen to lead telling clear stories.
 - Companies who are working internationally need to share their experience.
 - Arts Council NPO organisations are not necessarily the ones with the best international experience, those who are actively engaged (all) need to be identified and their stories shared.
 - We need to audit what has been done.
 - We need to assist the institutions who are unable to politically take a side
- Media: We have a London centric media who need to be briefed with broader stories.
- Last week, a successful initial cross-party meeting of MEPs (Greens, S&Ds with an anti-austerity outlook took place in European Parliament (shows also that change can be promoted from within).
- 'We need to avoid demonizing those who don't want to be part of the EU, this does not mean they are anti Europe nor that they are xenophobic'. (Christoph Janowski)
- We need to recognize we have much to learn from other sectors, e.g. faith groups, life long learning, higher education sector (Arts and Sciences), children (Julie Ward)
- Make use of European initiatives including:
 - Heritage Open Days (Council of Europe initiative, which happens at a local level and are not always recognized as a European initiatives)
 - Town Twinning programmes
- Reaching voters - Whom do we need to talk to?
 - How do we talk to the people for whom David Cameron's concerns are the important issues?
 - *The biggest group we need to talk to are the indifferent.*
 - There is a shift towards grass root action, but are we harnessing it?
 - Poll results reflect that higher socio economic groups (A,B,C1) vote to stay in and lower (C2-D, E)→ How do we reach the latter?
- The question is highlighted whether a pro-EU campaign/actions should focus on emotional or rational arguments.
While both perspectives are important, it is believed that rational arguments are needed to support pro-EU voters to convince their friends and counter anti-EU narrative, the initial voting decision is presumably an emotional one.
- Knowledge is lacking, and the presumed consequences of an in or out vote are not entirely clear. Arguments for and against must be analysed.
- Conversation must be initiated, via stories, billboards (« Capitalism works for me » project: <http://visitsteve.com/made/capitalism-works-for-me-truefalse/>) or other activities.

- It must be underlined that the UK voters are responsible for all other European citizens when casting their vote
- Evidence from Ireland / Scotland shows the benefits of coordination of the arts and cultural sector to pass messages, but every cultural player must take responsibility.
- An out-decision will impact not only current voters, but their children and mortgage future generations. The idea is discussed of actions targeting children, or linking children and the older generation (which still has memories of times before the strengthening of the EU/ memories of the aftermath of WWII). (Young people + Older people => History + the Future)
- It should be underlined that the aim is not Britain stronger in Europe, but that Britain and Europe should remain united to mutually gain in strength.
- The question is raised by Culture Action Europe whether a positive campaign by other European countries would be useful.

Existing UK actions and campaigns

- Arts Yes Campaign: <http://www.artsyes.eu/>
Initiated by Geoffrey Brown (EUCLID – Consultancy <http://www.euclidnetwork.eu/>)
- Britain Stronger in Europe: <http://www.strongerin.co.uk/>
60 000 likes on facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/StrongerInCampaign/?fref=ts>)
- Campaigns of European parties:
“Another Europe is possible !” {slogan of the GUE/NGL – European United Left / Nordic Green Left}
- National political parties and cross-party programmes: (All parties have their campaigns.)
 - European Movement: <http://euromove.org.uk/>, including Students for Europe: <http://euromove.org.uk/students/>
 - Forward in Europe: <https://www.facebook.com/forwardineurope/?fref=nf> (Cumbria and North Lancashire)
 - Labour Movement for Europe: <http://labourmovement.eu/>
- Facebook group “Workers for Europe” (Workers’ Europe - <https://www.facebook.com/ForAWorkersEurope>)
- What next? <http://www.whatnextculture.co.uk/>
(plan to integrate EU referendum topic in regional and London meetings; e.g. invitation Luca Bergamo)
- Creative Industries Federation (<http://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/>)
Focus on the role of Europe in Higher education
(<http://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/news/october-newsletter-higher-education-and-europe-members-have-your-say>) CIF’s member referendum indicated balanced number of yes and no votes amongst its membership (full report due March 2016)
- Arts Council England (www.artscouncil.org.uk/)

Have recently conducted research on international work providing a body of evidence to support pro-EU argumentation

Cross Sector Collaboration

- Local Authorities, e.g.
 - Local Government Association - <http://www.local.gov.uk/>)
 - Eurocities
- Collaboration with Higher Education, e.g.
 - Universities UK (July event) (<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx>)
- Collaboration with Science, see also Guardian articles on value of the EU to science
<http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/may/13/eu-science-funding-the-uk-cannot-afford-to-lose-out-on-this-pot-of-money>
<http://www.theguardian.com/science/occams-corner/2015/jun/15/excellent-science-in-the-uk-is-at-risk-if-it-votes-for-brexit>
- Benefit from MEP websites as source of information, e.g.
http://www.juliewardmep.eu/making_the_case_for_europe
- Trade Unions
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/southern-and-eastern>
TUC (South East) Culture Campaigns SERTUC "Future of the arts & culture" conference
<https://www.facebook.com/events/429006157266799/> (Tom Taylor)

European networks underlined their support and expressed the intention of addressing this issue with their members (e.g. CAE members PEARLE (<http://www.pearle.ws>), IETM (<https://www.ietm.org/>), European Music Council (<http://www.emc-imc.org/>))

What can Culture Action Europe do to help

- Support a line of argumentation / collection of arguments useful to the culture field and beyond and prepare a handout.
- Promote members' and friends actions linked to the EU referendum (tell CAE what you are planning), creating useful links.
- Regularly communicate on this issue.
- Liaise with European institutions and inform if useful.
- Call a regional meeting in collaboration with EUCLID in Manchester (22nd January 2016).
- Culture Action Europe shall not be investing in a full-blown campaign in the UK.
Further actions may be developed as necessary, but these need to be driven by the culture sector in the UK.