



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear President,

The Commission and the High Representative would like to thank the Bundesrat for its Opinion concerning the joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council "Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations" JOIN(2016) 29 final.

We would like to reassure the Bundesrat that, in full compliance with Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the intention of the Commission and of the High Representative is to support in a coherent way Member States in their cultural policies by facilitating their mutual cooperation in common projects that have an European added value and can contribute to the achievement of better results by developing synergies between Member States' policies. This will by no means impose any form of direct control by the EU over institutions in the Member States.

It is the Commission's and the High Representative's intention to put the strongest focus on the exchange of cultural professionals, as is described in chapter 1 of the Communication. The mobility of artists is actually one of the main priorities set out in the Communication with specific mention being made under point 3.2., letter a) and in chapter 4.

The Communication also promotes a new people-to-people dimension on culture as a resource for growth and jobs, precisely intended to be closer to ordinary people and citizens by means of a bottom-up approach, in coherence with the priorities of the Commission work plan for 2017.

The Commission and the High Representative are committed to the protection and promotion of cultural diversity as key aims of the EU. These aims influence all areas of the EU's activity. The basis for this is an explicit mandate in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which in Article 167, paragraph 4, states that:

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"the Union shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of the Treaties, in particular in order to respect and to promote the diversity of its cultures."

Trade negotiations are precisely one of the "other provisions of the Treaties" covered by this obligation. Furthermore, by signing the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the EU is also legally-bound to promote cultural diversity.

This is why in all trade negotiations as well as in any other relationship, the EU takes positions that make it possible for all concerned – the EU and its Member States, but our trade partners too – to take the measures they consider necessary to support and promote cultural activities.

The Commission and the High Representative reiterate their attachment to cultural diversity as the expression of the European Union unity in diversity, nurtured by all European national and regional cultures, in full coherence with its policy of multilingualism and the protection of linguistic minorities.

This Communication is to be seen as the basis for a first step in a perspective of cooperation with stakeholders, Member States and partner countries for the development of a European strategy in international cultural relations. With this Communication, the Commission and the High Representative propose principles and show examples as well as instruments for possible actions, inviting all stakeholders to develop ideas in close partnership.

In the implementation of the Communication, the Commission and the High Representative will take in full account the suggestions of the Bundesrat as well as of all Member States' Parliaments and cultural institutions.

This also applies to any future action on the European Cultural Houses, which is one among the possible ideas to be developed, on the basis of successful patterns already used in the past to celebrate European Union events, such as the European Week or the European Month.

We hope that these clarifications address the issues raised by the Bundesrat and look forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*

*Federica Mogherini
Vice-President/High Representative*