

OPEN LETTER
from
THE EUROPEAN COALITIONS FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY
to
JOSE MANUEL BARROSO, PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Never has there been so much talk in Europe of the potential of the cultural and creative industries, and so little support for implementing policies that would defend and promote cultural diversity.

While the challenges, generated particularly by the digital age, demand ambitious responses European political action falls far short of what is required. Signing the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity has not led to the exclusion by the European Commission of audiovisual and cultural services from its trade negotiations. Neither has it led to legal changes necessary to increase the availability of cultural goods by achieving a wide-scale tax reduction on digital goods. Concern over obligations to finance and provide exposure for European cultural creations on new media formats has come up against legislative evasion and business relocations within Europe itself. The effect of this avoidance is critical. It effectively allows internet giants from Asia and America to exempt themselves from any obligations in relation to cultural creation.

Since the public debt crisis has led most European states to reduce their budgets for culture and the arts, Europe has a greater role than ever to play - a decisive role even - in protecting and promoting cultural diversity.

At a time when some believe that new technologies make support for the arts less necessary, we - artists, filmmakers, writers, composers, publishers, film and music producers - believe that it is all the more important to ensure that a few dominant cultures don't limit our ways of creating, writing and thinking. This principle is fundamental to our European tradition and mustn't be overwhelmed by globalisation and the digital economy. It should inspire the European Commission

and its President to steer a consistent and forceful path of action in promoting cultural diversity.

Neither small compromises nor a naive faith in market principles will be enough to strengthen European identity and creativity in all its diversity, or to offer adequate and effective support for the European cultural industries. We need to develop a system of taxation for cultural products that meets the needs of the digital age; we need to mainstream cultural priorities into EU policies; to simplify assessments for state cultural support and extend this support to digital tools and formats, especially new forms of distribution and broadcasting of artworks. We should refuse to use culture as a bargaining chip in trade negotiations and put an end to the fiscal dumping within Europe that undermines the bases of support for cultural diversity and weakens European companies vis a vis their competitors in non-EU multinationals.

These are clear, genuine and now urgent commitments that Europe must make in order to bring its policies in line with its stated principles.

Failure to take these measures is to enter the battle for the cultural wealth and diversity of Europe unarmed, demonstrating a culpable weakness. The battle is a difficult one, but it should nevertheless bring us together - uniting our creative skills with the European Commission's policies and actions. It is significant, and welcome, that the European Parliament seems to have demonstrated a greater understanding of this issue.

What is at stake is the future of a diverse, European culture, its industry and its jobs. However, we believe that with political will and strong policy the outcome can still be positive.

January 2012