

Seeing the world in a new light London, Athens, Madrid, Mexico City, Tunis and Cairo – the people of many cities around the world are harbouring a sense of anger against the state and the system, against the rich and globalisation. What can Europe do? Does culture have a role to play? It can show how open debate and freedom of thought are vital to a dynamic and democratic society. Europe should take advantage of these opportunities. By Mary Ann DeVlieg



Politicians tend to be obsessed with GDP growth and the economy, while often neglecting the long-term interests and wellbeing of the majority of their people. As Will Hutton, former editor of *The Observer* writes, “There is the sensation of being impotent, of being forgotten, to see services being taken away from us with nothing in exchange and above all, of not being listened to. It is not possible to treat society as a budget line.”

Policy provides a framework for incentives and disincentives, opportunities and effective actions in support of the desired goals. All policies are value-based and

‘values’, like ideologies, are in themselves subjective. Having ‘no policy’ is policy-by-default, as a lack of policy also has consequences. Ideally, a policy framework should be sufficiently open and flexible to allow for new, surprising and innovative responses and methods and new ways of looking at things.

So, which values do we want to use as the basis of Europe’s policies? Free market economy? Definitely. Social protection? Of course. We don’t want a hypocritical Europe, but one which embodies humanistic values in its treaties, conventions and charters. We want Europe to differentiate itself from other continents by upholding its social values. If we accept that public policy is a set of fundamental ideological choices that influence behaviour, then we need to create EU policies that reflect our values. Or, in the words of British historian Tony Judt, “to practice ethical politics is to show coherence between intentions and acts.”

If Europe stood for freedom of expression, it would respect the fact that most of the latest wikileaks were already in the public domain and none of them had been classified as ‘top secret’. And the six per cent classified as ‘secret’ would have been

available under various freedom of information acts. So European politicians should not (as some have) call for wikileaks founder Julian Assange to be “strung up”, regardless of their thoughts about the man.

If Europe stood for respect for the life and the dignity of the individual, it would not have found seven Tunisian fishermen, who saved 44 Africans from starvation and drowning off the coast of Sicily by taking them to the island of Lampedusa, guilty of aiding illegal immigration. Previously, Europe had not brought any charges against those who had beaten African migrants to death in the same region.

### *Joined-up morality*

The British speak of ‘joined-up thinking’; but how about ‘joined-up morality’? Bankers’ bonuses and relaxation of the arms trade...no wonder people are angry. No wonder the Egyptians are saying, “We don’t need the West.”

Yet morality – like ‘democracy’ and ‘terrorism’, ‘revolutionary hero’ and ‘enemy of the state’ – can be slippery concepts. They need to be looked at more closely. Morality has to be discussed, debated and tested in real life; it needs agreement and decisiveness. “Thou shalt not kill”, “Ah yes, but, well, you know, there are cases when...”

It’s the same with democracy: ‘voting’ is not its definition. Voting is merely the end result of a whole series of preconditions such as clearly-defined and transparent options, which are understood by

an informed population who understands the complexity of their environment and the impact of their free choices. Preconditions such as a society which understands the opportunities they have to approve, amend or sanction the political direction of their representatives. Would our ideal Europe send election observers or would it focus on working with the local population to create these preconditions? If it’s the latter, then the arts and culture could have a lot to offer.

Imagination, empathy, critical thought, creativity, curiosity, an interest in complexity and analysis are all qualities that are cultivated in the arts. They are amongst the preconditions for democracy in our globally interdependent world. They help guard against the manipulation of weaker members of society and against the kind of aggressive nationalism and populism that is based on fear-mongering. They support the spread of thoughtful, questioning populations who can make democratic choices. This quality of innovative thinking based on empathy can also help decision makers and politicians to combine economic growth policies with those favouring human and social development.

However, arts and culture cannot mend what’s broken. They cannot miraculously build instant trust in people whose confidence has been systematically destroyed and replaced by cynical protectionism. But they can stimulate the mind and show that open debate, freedom of thought, concern for others and the acceptance of new ideas are essential for a dynamic and democratic society.

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No wonder the Egyptians are saying, ‘We don’t need the West.’”

**The following words still ring true today. They were written by an American (or more precisely, an Irish-American), and Europe would be well-advised to heed them today:**

“Too much and too long, we seem to have surrendered community excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our gross national product ... counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for those who break them. It counts the destruction of our redwoods and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and the cost of a nuclear warhead, and armored cars for police who fight riots in our streets. It counts Whitman’s rifle and Speck’s knife, and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children. Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages; the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage; neither our wisdom nor our learning; neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.....”

(Robert Kennedy, March 1968)

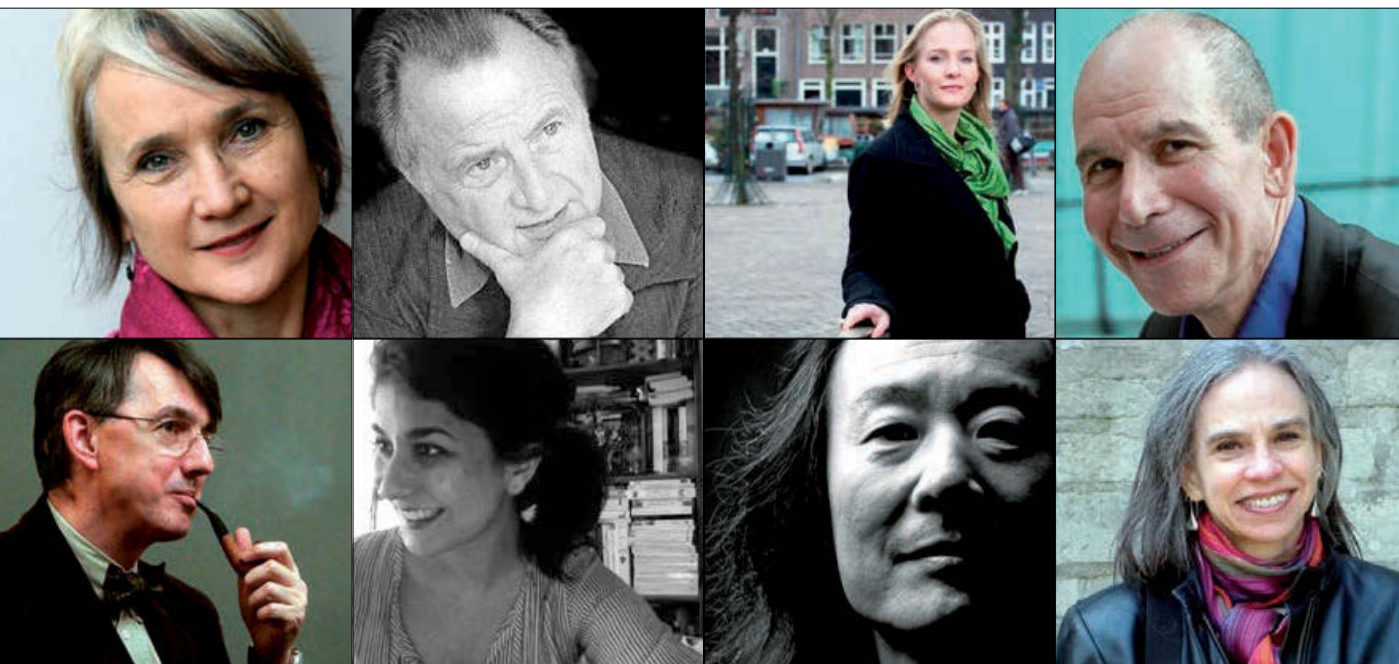
Cultural institutes and the new European External Action Service (EEAS) can work together to strengthen and provide a forum for the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights as recognised in the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon and the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity. Together, they can promote arts and culture projects that exemplify the European values of unity through diversity, cooperation and collaboration and the added value provided by working together. These are special, though not unique, aspects of the European project, and we should be proud of them. Cultural institutes and the EEAS can support the new, positive, angry movements in the arts, such as the EU-funded partner project *Sostenuto*. This project introduces a paradigm shift by uniting the arts, business, sociology, climate change, human rights and city planning in a cross-sector collaboration combined with modern management methods.

Like the new International Coalition of Arts, Human Rights and Social Justice, founded in 2010, the cultural institutes and the EU can support initiatives demonstrating our freedom to criticise society, in order to, in Martha Nussbaum’s words “ask the imagination to move beyond its usual confines, to see the world in new ways.”

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# CULTURE REPORT

## EUNIC YEARBOOK 2011



Cultural relations are the glue that holds alliances together. The geopolitics of the 21st century mean we need to see a revival of cultural diplomacy. China and India are already expanding their external cultural policies. Despite Europe's huge cultural diversity, the EU has still not developed an adequate cultural strategy for its foreign policy. The establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS) provides an opportunity to tighten up and co-ordinate the EU's existing cultural foreign policy. In this edition of the Culture Report, 30 authors from 20 different countries examine what this all means.

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