

Report of the meeting with Mr Jan Figel', European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth and the presidium of the European Music School Union (EMU) in Bratislava, Slovakia on 9 November 2007

Introduction

On 8 and 9 November, the presidium was the guest of the Association of Basic Arts Schools of the Slovak Republic "EMU Slovakia". It was quite a challenge for the new EMU presidium to get to meet the European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, Mr Jan Figel'. The EMU presidium would therefore like to thank the Slovakian Association of Basic Arts Schools of the Slovak Republic for their hospitality and for arranging the meeting.

Mr Figel' has close contact with the music and arts schools in the Slovak Republic. Three of his children have been educated in piano at the music school of the president of the Slovakian association, Mrs Anna Gondášová, and of the secretary of the association and also piano teacher at the same music school, Mrs Mária Slaninová.

The meeting with Mr Jan Figel' focused on an important strategy document on culture, adopted by the European Commission on 10 May 2007 in the form of a Communication, which proposes a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world.

Our main question to Mr Figel' was: 'How can we – the European Music School Union, with our experiences and our capacities - contribute to the development of this document and how can we put this dialogue into practice'.

The EMU board was very impressed by Mr Figel' messages full of wisdom and optimism and by his strong belief in a new Europe: a European mosaic of culture.

Dr Gerd Eicker
President EMU

The EMU presidium asked Mr Figel' for his views on the following topics:

(the full version of the questions is provided at the end of this report)

- . **Challenges for European music education relating to the European Commission communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world**
- . **A project similar to the Pre-college Polifonia project**
- . **Music political meetings**

Mr Jan Figel' focused on the importance of cultural diversity in Europe. The European identity is based on cultural diversity and the European Union wants to preserve this diversity in Europe.

The example is not the United States, with its ideal of a cultural melting pot; instead, Europe should be a mosaic unity in diversity, based on shared values. Especially culture is a very important component of European diversity: 55 % of world tourism comes to Europe because of its cultural diversity and all the different customs.

In March 2007, the European Commission for the first time adopted an important strategy document on culture in the form of a Communication, proposing a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world. This means that Europe is becoming more aware of culture and is starting to realise its responsibilities. It also means that member states should realise their responsibilities, although it is up to each member state to decide about its own culture. Each member state should realise, however, that if people lose the value of culture they will ultimately lose their own culture.

The European Union has agreed that music education is important, since culture and education are closely connected. The one cannot exist without the other, but the European Union can 'only' offer all member states its help and support. The European Music School Union could be a kind of bridge between education and culture and can mobilise its members to create a more education-friendly Europe.

The European Union has designated 2008 the 'European Year of Intercultural Dialogue', to give expression and a high profile to best practices and processes of intercultural dialogue, with the aim of establishing a sustainable strategy beyond 2008. Particular attention will be paid to the multilingual dimension of this dialogue. The key aspects will be: building European identity, within the framework of diversity and lifelong learning.

On the basis of existing Community funding programmes, the European Union has designated 2009 the European Year of Creativity and Innovation through education and culture. The aim is to raise public awareness, promote policy debate within Member States, and contribute to fostering creativity, innovation and intercultural competencies. For the first time, research has shown the investment in culture to be a positive investment. It has shown that culture is not consumptive but productive: culture generates money. The European Year of Creativity and Innovation could present a special opportunity to gain more visibility and to promote art education. We therefore need creative and talented people who are able to develop our pupils talent and who are able to stimulate our creativity.

Funding possibilities may be found in the Comenius Programme, the Culture Programme and in the Erasmus programme. The Comenius programme supports partnerships; the Cultural Programme supports the mobility of artists and teachers.

The granting of funding is based on the submission of a project application following a published call for tender. The selection of projects is carried out by an independent group of experts.

Mr Figel' stressed the various possibilities for developing the field of art education and he translated EMU's questions to a concrete level: how to find structural funds for EMU?

1) EMU could work together with other networks.

It could be interesting for EMU to start with a small but reasonable project in the field of a pre-college Polifonia project. "But do not glorify the past but modernise: start with a maximum of diversity and a minimum of space but realise that the budget should be found in the national states and that the support comes from Europe".

2) Education

It could be a significant move for EMU to develop a framework of levels of qualification: knowledge, competencies and output-oriented descriptions.

3) Lifelong learning

One of the key competencies for lifelong learning is the cultural awareness of art.

EMU could focus on a common approach, for instance on curriculum reform and the exchange of students and mobility of teachers.

Full version of EMU presidium's questions to Mr Figel'

Challenges for European music education relating to the European Commission communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world

We are proud to work in this beautiful area of art education, with beautiful gifted children and many supportive parents. But there are a lot of challenges to tackle:

- About 5 % of the children in Europe participate in music education. The situation is even bleaker in big cities, with less than 2 % participating;
- Many countries don't have any legislation relating to art education;
- In some countries there is not even a national or European curriculum;
- There are not enough teachers at primary schools, and not enough time left over for art education;
- Working with all the differences among children is too difficult for most teachers;
- The various media have a strong influence on parents, while teachers tend to operate as administrators, which doesn't help create a love for culture;
- The differences between West and East Europe are considerable, with big differences in viewpoint in terms of offering wider opportunities for every child versus talent coaching;
- There isn't a clear shared European culture;
- To tackle all these challenges, EMU needs the help of the European Union.

A project similar to the Pre-college Polifonia project

In 1999, the Bologna Declaration on Professional Music Training in Europe provided a starting point for the development of European higher education and a Europe-wide harmonisation. The Erasmus Thematic Network for Music, 'Polifonia', initiated by the European Association of Conservatories

(AEC), was one of the outcomes of the Bologna Declaration. EMU is of the opinion that a project similar to the Polifonia project should be continued in music schools, for the following reasons:

- Compared to other academic disciplines, music presents a very specific situation in terms of the relation between pre-college and higher education. Music universities and conservatories very much depend on the work achieved by pre-college music education in music schools;
- Among other important issues, the preparatory role of music schools with regard to higher education raises the following question: should we have a European project for basic art education?
- As universities had their own reasons and interests for developing European higher education areas, so do music and art schools have theirs, such as: musical diversity; "Music for all" ideology; active citizenship; integration and tolerance; students' personality development; identity; social and economic aspects; creativity;
- EMU's proposal is to start a project similar to the pre-college Polifonia project with the help of EU funding. The project model will be based on the Tuning and Polifonia project and could be realised in close co-operation with AEC.

Music political meetings

- At present in Europe, there isn't any dialogue between national "grass root level organisations", national culture and education ministries, European music organisations and European politicians and officials.
- We should develop, in Europe, cultural-political discussion forums to bring together music organisations and cultural networks with different interests and from different backgrounds: education, professional training, creative industries, amateur music practice, professional music practice, cultural networks.
- European "umbrella" organisations in the field of music can keep track of changes and developments in music education and cultural life, and can prepare cultural discussion forums at a national and EU level.
- EMU would like to ask the European commission to help organise European meetings between cultural networks and national cultural ministries in order to promote music education and all kinds of cultural campaigns and programmes.

Report: Gerrie Koops

Secretary General EMU

The Netherlands, November 2007