

Memo November 2008

A memo sent to correspondents, friends and acquaintances of the Budapest Observatory (BO) in November 2008

How to squeeze so much information into the usual memo frames? 1059th on cultural diplomacy

The 1059th Council meeting manifested itself on the role of culture in external relations of the Union. The ministers acknowledged that Europe's position in the world greatly depends on its cultural dynamism. The conclusion calls on a balance in the exchange of cultural commodities and services with "countries"; a clear reference to the Unesco convention on cultural diversity. It does not forget, at the same time, about urging for strengthening cultural exports from Europe, "including those of an audiovisual nature". In an enlightened manner, the conclusion calls for the analysis of culture in third countries; encourages synergies between actions by the Union and the member states; and advocates for the involvement of civil professionals in drawing up external cultural policies. Nevertheless, the press release of the latest Council meeting on external relations still does not mention culture. 1059th on architecture

The Council concluded that architecture deserves more attention, especially its many sides, "in particular its cultural aspects", and that architecture is an important player in sustainable development. 1059th on digital content And this is not all. The Council meeting of education and culture ministers also issued conclusions on legal access to online content and its opposite, deplorable piracy. The text seems to reflect the same uncertainty with which most of us address the issue. Perhaps this record of talking about these and similar matters in plain language helps to understand some of the dividing issues about digital content. 1059th on languages

Multilingualism is not a nice word. Not even unambiguous. Two things are nice and certain. First, no or little language barrier should hamper European citizens in their thrust towards a competitive knowledge society and in indulging into intercultural dialogue. Second, linguistic diversity should be cherished (instead of efficient monolingualism). The 1059th meeting of the European Council had more to say on the topic. You know it ain't easy

Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam (OBA) "is a great illustration of how a new city library functions as a lively community centre. (It even has a small theatre hall). BO went there to a European expert meeting on harmonising book and library statistics. The way things are going, the boundaries of concepts like book, bookseller, reader etc. will be blurred beyond recognition. You know how hard it can be

From now on Vienna, too, has an international book fair. BO went there to attend a meeting on translation. The conditions of literary translators were in focus, thanks to the impressive pool of comparative data collected by CEATL, the international organisation of literary translators. One of the main findings was that in spite of the large imbalance in absolute earnings, translators in some western countries are lagging behind the living standards in their environment more than their colleagues in the east (Graphs 8.4.1-2). Limited thirst for cultural policy

What is the impact of the many conclusions of the 1059th on the general public? The latest standard Eurobarometer survey found that 6% of Europeans put cultural policies among the most important issues of European integration. There is no eastern country where more people supported the idea than the European average.

Estonian puppets on pillory

News came about one more top 100 list, this time about wasting of EU money in annoying and ridiculous ways. BO approached it with the usual twofold concern: how many cultural or (and) eastern items are picked out, and with what right? The independent British group cannot be blamed for prejudice against the new members, indeed, we are represented modestly. About half of the cases in the list are not connected to EU grants but to the wasteful functioning of the common institutions. We found one pinpointed case only from the eastern cultural cluster, the "€106 thousand paid to create new and innovative means of using puppet theatre in Estonia. The link, given by Open Europe, to judge for yourselves is, however, out of function. Latvian city on the move

There is no BO memo without at least one error. Last time it was putting Liepja of Latvia (old Russian name Libava) in the wrong country. How did this historic city get among the least visited tourist spots in Europe? Because it was a closed Soviet naval base for forty years: western cities have not known this kind of handicap. The no less than twelve occurrences in the latest Culturelab newsletter convince you about the cultural strengths and ambitions of Liepja. Eastern mobility matters, too

Although BO took part, we don't know whether to set up such a complex web site was part of the deal with the European Commission, or it was a bonus complementing the other products of the six month project on mobility incentives in the culture sector. On the site you can browse for mobility schemes or successful cases to convince your own authorities for similar measures. Many of the 39 "cases" in fact describe and assess large organisations, regions and movements, besides concrete examples like the small concert swapping project presented by BO. The geographical scope of the EricArts study is well balanced. This for BO, of course, means that Eastern Europe is well represented. The report acknowledges that northern and western countries tend to offer a wider range of mobility opportunities than our region. Who on earth is William?

The question refers to the enigmatic corner of the mobility matters site: go and discover it for yourself. William's adventures are partly connected to the issue of visas in Europe, the subject of a recent publication. In this memo, the previous is the second link to the site of ECA, the Copenhagen based European Council of Artists.