

Europe. Its Values. Its Citizens

BERLIN CONFERENCE “A SOUL FOR EUROPE” 2015

Conference report, 9 November 2015

Opening

Hella Dunger-Löper (Commissioner for European Affairs and for Active Citizenship at the Berlin Senate Chancellery)

Doris Pack (co-chair of the A Soul for Europe Advisory Board)

Martin Schulz (President of the European Parliament)

Marina Schuster (Senior Representative of Allianz Deutschland AG)

Gianni Skaragas (writer)



Martin Schulz © A Soul for Europe, Yehuda Swed

The Berlin Conference 2015 took place in an important historical time when hundreds of thousands of refugees mainly from Syria and the Middle East have been welcomed in Europe, largely in Germany. In her opening address, **Marina Schuster** stressed the importance of the right of asylum as a European value, requiring citizens' personal commitment as well as the cultural and social integration of refugees.

Regarding the recent massive arrival of refugees and migrants at EU borders **Martin Schulz** drew attention to the beginning of a multipolar and more complex world. Today, the values of the European integration are challenged: Social welfare, respect and tolerance cannot be taken for granted, in particular not on national level, and also in TTIP negotiations. The strength of the European economy should help defending social and cultural values. Martin Schulz concluded with a vibrant statement: "Europe has no alternative: renationalisation is the wrong way".

In her address, **Hella Dunger-Löper** followed the same line, pointing out that "walls do not respond properly to people expecting a better life". She underlined how major cities are the "seismograph" of European challenges, particularly in their long tradition of inclusion.

Part I : The periphery as an inspiration for Europe

Introductions

Georgi Gospodinov (writer)

Hannes Swoboda (member of the A Soul for Europe Advisory Board)

In their introductions both Hannes Swoboda and Georgi Gospodinov insisted on the necessity to consider the periphery of Europe as both geographic and social.

For **Hannes Swoboda** one periphery is against the other, as the socially deprived have the feeling that “it is never about them”. Considering that policy makers do not work enough for peripheries, he proposed three main lines:

- fight against arrogance
- talk with all peripheries
- involvement of citizens to come closer to the so-called centre.

For **Georgi Gospodinov** Europe itself is a periphery and should keep in mind its own marginality. We see ourselves as a centre, as an island, he claimed, but nothing is an island in our world! Gospodinov compared the arrival of refugees in Europe with the meeting of two peripheries: On the one hand, refugees enlarge the European continent where 84 million people live below the poverty line (the social periphery); on the other hand many of the refugees themselves come from a region (Middle East) where the myth of Europe began. He concluded on the necessity of showing an active curiosity and empathy while welcoming refugees.



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Panel A

Antje Contius (managing director of S. Fischer Stiftung)

Alen Kristic (theologian and journalist)

Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi (Minister of Culture of Albania)

Hannes Swoboda (member of the A Soul for Europe Advisory Board)

Rarita Zbranca (director of AltArt Foundation and member of the A Soul for Europe Strategy Group)

Moderation: **Kaspars Ruklis** (Executive Director of Riga Summer School and member of the A Soul for Europe Strategy Group)

Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi stressed the difficulty of the meeting between the centre and the periphery, particularly when the latter feels excluded. She advocated for the involvement of cultural actors in the encounter of centre and periphery.

Apart from the European structural investments in peripheral regions that are improving people's capacities for free movement, **Rarita Zbranca** made two practical proposals to reduce the gap between the European peripheries and the centre:

- the EU should find ways to support small initiatives
- small local cultural projects should help to tell new European narratives.

Panel B

Lirak Celaj (member of the A Soul for Europe Strategy Group)

Thierry Fabre (author and curator)

Georgi Gospodinov (writer)

Doris Pack (co-chair of the A Soul for Europe Advisory Board)

Gianni Skaragas (writer)

Moderation: **Kaspars Ruklis** (Executive Director of Riga Summer School and member of the A Soul for Europe Strategy Group)

Lirak Celaj observed that notions of centre and periphery will always be economical and political: only culture will be able to push boundaries.

Doris Pack gave a specific example on how those boundaries can be pushed, by emphasising that schools and students should be motivated to exchange with other European educational institutions in order to understand early on their European identity.

Thierry Fabre inquired lyrically about the need for a soul for Europe, considering the identity of a disaster continent with its Greek, Roman, Jewish and Arab origins.

Part II: The City as a spot of innovation, inclusion and new models for citizens

Introductions

Michael Roth (Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office)

Peter Vermeersch (Professor of Politics at University of Leuven)

In his introduction, **Peter Vermeersch** addressed the concept of Creative Democracy, insisting on the need to add new channels and create debate arenas in our regular political landscape. This will go through the persuasion of citizens to use their power: not only to give a vote but also to give a voice and participate in the production of a democratic narrative. Because of the relation of proximity, Vermeersch underlined that a city is the key level to express diverse citizens voices.



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Panel A

Daphne Büllsbach (Citizenship and Democracy Director at European Alternatives)

Mahir Namur (member of the “A Soul for Europe” Strategy Group)

Charlot Schans (Project Leader of New Europe – Cities in Transition)

Paul Spies (Director of the Amsterdam Museum, future Director of Stiftung Stadt Museum, Berlin, and Chief Curator of Welt.Stadt.Berlin at the Humboldt Forum)

Peter Vermeersch (Professor of Politics at the University of Leuven)

Amalia Zepou (Vice-Mayor for Civil Society Initiatives of Athens)

Moderation: **Farid Tabarki** (Founding Director of Studio Zeitgeist and member of the A Soul for Europe Strategy Group)

Paul Spies stressed the role of cities' neighbourhoods as laboratories for public space (e.g. the importance of small shops around cities), at small scales where a new form of European identity is created. In this sense, politicians should be facilitators on social, economic, cultural collaborations nurturing lively neighbourhoods. Three reports from practical examples followed.

Panel B

Peter György (director of the Institute for Art Theory and Media Studies at Eötvös-Lorand-University, Budapest)

Volker Hassemer (president of the Board of Stiftung Zukunft Berlin and president of the Board of Management of the EEIG ASFE)

Arne Lietz (MEP, member of the A Soul for Europe Advisory Board)

Miguel Angel Martin Ramos (councillor of the European Academy of Yuste Foundation, Route Charles V and member of the A Soul for Europe Strategy Group)

Jens Nymand Christensen (deputy director-general for Education and Culture at the European Commission)

Moderation: **Farid Tabarki** (Founding Director of Studio Zeitgeist and member of the A Soul for Europe Strategy Group)

Volker Hassemer insisted on our ownership of Europe, considering that our power is built on our capacity of influencing citizens and policy makers.

Jens Nymand Christensen observed that the European values we show in our treatment of refugees are horrific.



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Conclusions and Outlook

Johannes Ebert (General Secretary of Goethe-Institut)

Volker Hassemer (President of the Board of Stiftung Zukunft Berlin)

Arne Lietz (MEP)

Michael Thoss (Managing director of Allianz Kulturstiftung)

Moderation: **Nele Hertling** (member of the A Soul for Europe Strategy Group)

Every participant was asked to comment briefly on the conference.

Goethe Institut, Allianz Kulturstiftung and the European Parliament as the important partners for the Berlin Conference 2015 principally agreed that the choice of topics and invited speakers proved to be right. However, the idea came up to concentrate on one main topic in order to enable a more detailed debate.

All partners agreed to continue the cooperation with A Soul for Europe for the Berlin Conference 2016 based on a true and intensive debate about the choice of content and persons to be involved – if possible with more participants from a younger generation. The preparatory work for the Berlin Conference 2016 will start immediately.



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