



Berlin Conference “A Soul for Europe” 2015

Claims and Consequences

It is downright dramatic that the European Union – just at the moment where it is most needed – is called into question. The Berlin Conference 2015 voiced the basic conviction that it is urgent to invigorate and assert Europe’s shared values, its cultural tradition and bonding force – beyond the conflicts of day-to-day politics.

Core themes of the conference were the political power of culture and the role of cities in this process of Europe’s renewal, which has to develop from the bottom up. “A Soul for Europe” considers it as its duty to implement the insights of the conference into concrete claims and consequences. We will set to work together with our political partners.

A. Claims towards politics in Brussels

1) Committee of the Regions (CoR)

The CoR is a weighty representation of Europe’s cities and regions in Brussels. However, it focusses too much on preventing regulations from Brussels which could have negative effects for cities and regions.

We are convinced that the importance of cities and regions demands the CoR to become a vigorous, constructive organisation of the European basis. This Committee should not spring into action as a lobby of the basis only in case of inappropriate actions on the part of the European Commission and Council of Ministers.

We recommend building a second department in which the achievements, creativity, and manifold contributions of cities and regions for the development of Europe are called for and, by pooling them, become increasingly significant for the European unification process. This implies that cities and regions must acknowledge and act upon their joint responsibility as designers of Europe.

2) Commissioner for Culture

The Commission member responsible for Europe’s culture is, by tradition, rather less important and visible. We are convinced that cultural aspects can be – and have to be – an important driving force for European development. We are likewise convinced that therefrom result possible tasks for the Commissioner for Culture:

- a) We recommend that the Commissioner for Culture establishes a series of dialogues between intellectuals and politicians to clarify fundamental topics which determine European politics.
At the Berlin Conference 2014, a controversy ignited between Jean-Claude Juncker and Wim Wenders: that Brussels works politically without real knowledge or perception of the experience and positions from Europe’s cultural field. The EU is in need of new methodologies to increase the visibility of its practical actions in regard to the approved European “values”. European politics is not only the responsibility of politicians.
- b) We furthermore recommend that the Commissioner for Culture dedicates himself more than up to now to the creative (no only cultural) forces of cities and regions. Cities and regions are the source and arena of European culture. We therefrom deduce a special responsibility of the Commissioner for Culture for this basis of Europe.



B. Initiatives with regard to “periphery” and the “European Capital of Culture“

1) “Periphery” Competence Group

The Berlin Conference has discussed in detail the fruitfulness of the “periphery” (understood geographically as well as conceptually). The importance of the periphery towards the centre was agreed upon as well as the significance which particularly the culture of the periphery contributes to the diversity of Europe.

Especially the recent developments with regard to the great number of refugees, migrants, exemplifies that Central Europe has disregarded the broad European periphery, especially the South-East of Europe.

In these “peripheral” countries non-regarded energies exist despite, or perhaps especially, due to the economic difficulties they are facing. We are in need of a new, non-hierarchical vocabulary, and an equal collaboration on political and civil society level.

We intend to set up a “Periphery Competence Group” whose members should consist of members of the European Parliament as well as alumni of Allianz Cultural Foundation and representatives of Goethe-Institute, S. Fischer Stiftung, “A Soul for Europe” and other civil society initiatives.

2) European Capital of Culture

The initiative “A Soul for Europe” with its long-standing practical work has intensively striven for a definition and realignment of this major European project. The initiative’s recommendations were included into new regulations of the European Committee. Despite positive results, an apparent lack of political enthusiasm led to a decrease in local and international awareness. What is missing is a distinguished political authority.

Therefore, we call for a new European, widely acknowledged authority that is characterised not only by cultural, but also political importance. This could be a “senate” consisting of a small circle of personalities, appointed by the President of the European Commission on recommendation of the Commissioner for Culture. A group of competent experts from the present Cultural Capitals should be established for its assistance.