



Rainbow Platform on Intercultural Dialogue **Meeting on 4th June 2008** **Maison de la Culture 'Flagey', Brussels, Belgium**

Report

The 4th of June was an important day for the Rainbow Platform, otherwise known as the Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue. It was an opportunity to consider and augment the results of the public consultation on Rainbow Paper II, an on-line, real time editing and contribution process (25th April - 13th June). Rainbow Paper II is a European Policy Paper with recommendations on Intercultural Dialogue. The meeting focused on the overall results of the platform's work to date and discussed options for its future. Most significantly, the meeting established the Platform as a key part of the Structured Dialogue process with the EU institutions.

Around 70 civil society organisation representatives from all over Europe gathered in the House of Culture 'Flagey' in Brussels. The day centred on working group sessions with expert facilitators and rapporteurs, framed by plenary presentations, a plenary debate and finally a plenary with reports from the workshops, which brought the elements of the day together. The European Commission was present in force, as was the European Cultural Foundation as one of the initiative's chief funder and shaper.

The main successes and results of the process and the day

1. Rainbow Paper II was reworked and refined, and the job of editing it to a workable document for representation at the end of the Year on Intercultural Dialogue was confided to a dedicated editor.
2. The Rainbow Platform was recognised as an interlocutor between civil society and the European Institutions on the subject of intercultural dialogue.
3. The possibility of funding for the future of the platform was confirmed by the European Commission (in addition to the possibility that the current foundation funding for the platform continues).
4. Strong statements in support of the ongoing work of the platform were made by the meeting participants.
5. Culture Action Europe was confirmed as the organisation hosting the platform and delegating a key staff member for its coordination and its strategic and thematic development.
6. The coordinator will continue to be supported by the steering group and a group of expert advisors. An open invitation was issued for new individuals to apply to join the steering group.

Issues – strengths and weaknesses to date

The Platform is already taken seriously by the European Institutions, and the issues it faces are common to any emerging policy framework and, as the European Commission made clear in an

informal intervention, the very complex nature of the Platform is what makes it interesting and valuable for European policy makers, seeking as they are to extend their listening and dialogue with the widest possible sector. The experimental and test ground nature of the Platform was verbally recognised by the Commission, which on the whole strongly supports the on-going work.

The main thrust of the day was to identify the weaker points of the Rainbow Paper to date and to develop more focussed and concrete recommendations on Intercultural Dialogue.

The development areas of the paper were identified as:

- Its broad and unfocused nature
- The lack of strong, 'provocative' and practical recommendations from the sector
- The breadth of the sectoral response leading to confusion over terms and objectives
- The mismatch between recommendations concerning on the ground work (practice) and those concerning executive or institutional level activity.

Responses

Participants helped to clarify these issues throughout the day. In particular, it was agreed that first there was in fact a lot of useful content already in the paper, but this required a stronger and more dynamic formulation. Second, that a strong editorial hand was now needed to lend the paper both a provocative and a realistic character. Third, the workshops came up with a number of very specific and useful clarifications that will find their way into the next stage of the paper: they tended towards stressing the intersectoral nature of the work, the need for more on the ground learning and an ongoing commitment to research and learning. The challenge is clearly to create a space for these grass-roots encounters while extrapolating from these observations into policy.

Perhaps most importantly, the meeting served to underline the importance of the platform as a test case for Structured Dialogue, and indeed in some sense leading the way for the other two platforms, which are currently working through some of the issues that the Rainbow Platform has already dealt with. The platform is clearly an important experiment in shaping, democratising and legitimising EU policymaking.

Next steps

The next step remains of course the reworking of the Rainbow Paper and the launch of a sign-up process. An expert editor has been appointed alongside an expert committee to support him in this work. Further details on this will be made available on the Rainbow Platform website within the next few weeks. The next meeting of the Platform is on 12-14 November in Stockholm.

Conclusions

The Rainbow Platform as a civil society initiative has set an important precedent for the overall Structured Dialogue process - constitutive sessions of two more thematic platforms followed its meeting. The Rainbow Platform has demonstrated rallying power and political dynamism with which it moves ahead to creating real effects in policies for intercultural dialogue. Its trans-sectoral character remains a practical challenge, but is also the unique quality on which to build. The optimistic outlook for the Platform's operability justifies new attempts to realise the original ambition to combine exchanges on grass-roots practice with the formulation of inputs to policy at all levels. The EU Structured Dialogue is the encouraging setting for this work and at the same time the process which the Rainbow Platform needs to fill with meaning and therefore legitimise.

The Platform was initiated by:



The European Forum
for the Arts and Heritage



The Platform is supported by: