



ROUND TABLE ANNIVERSARY UNESCO CONVENTION
PARIS - NOVEMBER 11, 2010

Panel :

M. Frédéric BOUILLEUX, Director for French language and cultural and linguistic diversity, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)

M. Jacques FANSTEN, Screenwriter and Director for documentaries and fiction.

M. Jacques MARTIAL, Actor and Director, President of the « Parc et de la Grande Halle de la Villette » in Paris

M. Jean MUSITELLI, State Councillor, French Ambassador to the UNESCO (1997-2002)

Mme Hélène RUIZ-FABRI, Professor at Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne University

Mme Gallia SAOUMA-FORERO, Director of the Division of Cultural Expressions and Creative Industries, UNESCO

M. Xavier TROUSSARD, Acting Director of the Directorate « Culture and Media », Head of Unit in charge of « Culture policy, diversity and intercultural dialogue », European commission

Debate moderator:

M. Pascal ROGARD, President of the French coalition for cultural diversity, Director General of the Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques (SACD)

DEBATE SUMMARY

Jean Musitelli opened this round table organised by the French coalition for cultural diversity by recalling in which context the Convention for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions came to be. At a time when different existing cultures were threatened with standardisation and decline worldwide, creating and recognising the principle of cultural diversity emerged as a means to stand up against liberalisation of international trade in the cultural sector. Adopted on October 25, 2005, the Convention aims to legitimize on an international scale the development of national cultural policies and to encourage North-South cooperation in this field.

Jean Musitelli and Xavier Troussard underlined how strong the mobilization was in the early stages of the Convention resulting in a coming into force less than two years after it was adopted, with an impressive number of State Parties (115), a speedy set up of the Convention's governing bodies and of the International fund for cultural diversity.

M. Jean Musitelli then listed the serious challenges facing the Convention:

- the culture/trade link on the international scene, particularly at the WTO;
- weighing on State Parties' commitments where cultural policies are concerned, so they comply with the Convention, in a context of budget reduction;
- developing the Fund for cultural diversity which still suffers from insufficient resources;
- the European union must keep on acting as a leading role model;
- analyzing cultural diversity in the digital world, particularly with regards to the influence of the "pipes", internet neutrality, digitalisation of theatres, respect of intellectual property rights...

Mrs Galia Saouma-Forero emphasized the State Parties' lack of voluntary contributions to the Convention fund (2.1 million US\$) compared to the needs of cultural and creative industries in developing countries – this in spite of culture being recognized as a development factor when new UN Millennium goals were set up last September.

Frédéric Bouilleux said he considered that the States' enthusiasm for cultural diversity has waned. M. Jacques Martial completed the picture by stressing the lack commitment of States in favour of cultural diversity on a national level. M. Musitelli pointed out their financial withdrawal from cultural policies, also in western countries, which represents a serious threat for the implementation of the Unesco convention today.

This being said, the panellists put forward various proposals:

Mrs Saouma Forero mentioned civil society. Civil society played a major role in the setting up and implementation of the Convention and it should, according to her, stay at the forefront by submitting innovative solutions for the implementation of the Convention.

As far as States are concerned, they should make a fixed and substantial contribution, let's say for example 1% of their UNESCO budget, as this is done for other conventions, in order to provide the Fund of the Convention adequately.

Extending the application of the Convention to as many countries as possible worldwide is another UNESCO goal, with a view to reach 156 State Parties by 2013. Xavier Troussard explained that to do so, it is essential to maintain a steady effort of communication and explanation of the objectives and principles of the Convention because misunderstandings remain about the Convention, particularly in Asia. But this is also the case within the Flemish community in Belgium as the President of the Belgian coalition for cultural diversity, M. Luc Jabon, pointed out at the end of the debate.

According to M. Troussard, a good and proper understanding to the Convention is essential because this would result in creating a strong international consensus around the Convention, also within other international bodies.

Mrs Ruiz-Fabri explained that presently the protection and promotion of cultural diversity within international trade institutions still remains a challenge. So far, the Convention has only been mentioned once at the WTO in a case opposing China to the US. Moreover the operational directives on articles 20 and 21 of the Convention still have not been adopted by State Parties to the UNESCO Convention.

On this later point, X. Troussard tried to reassure the European coalitions for cultural diversity which have warned the Commission against violating the principles of the Convention by offering cultural cooperation protocols (CCPs) and pointed out the lack of political engagement of the European union in the cultural and audiovisual sectors at the WTO.

He explained that the European Union maintains the principle of non liberalization of exchanges of cultural services and goods. As for CCPs - even those which are concluded with developed countries which have cultural policies - they are meant to reinforce the implementation of the UNESCO Convention by inciting these countries to ratify, to preserve their cultural policies and to develop exchanges with the European Union. He also pointed out that various guarantees have been attached to the CCPs (an initial test period limited to three years for Korea for example). A note from the Commission is now being presented at the Council and a consultation with stakeholders will be organised early next year.

In conclusion, the 2005 UNESCO Convention still faces numerous challenges. Besides issues on trade and development, Jacques Fansten also mentioned the issues concerning internet. The implementation of the UNESCO will also go through internet; it is imperative to find ways to insure real cultural diversity and to learn how to adapt our actions and expectations to the reality of the digital world.