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CONFERENCE REPORT

# *Cultural policy or politics with culture*

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December 2015, Prishtina



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SWEDEN

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# About the conference

The annual conference of Cultural Forum was held on 27 November 2015 in Prishtina. The discussions of the conference were held in the panel where the issue of cultural policies and political interferences in culture in the recent years were analyzed. In the conference panel, representatives of government, independent scene and foreign experts discussed developments in culture sphere during the last two years, focusing on cultural policy development (strategies), dissemination of funds for culture, structured dialogue between government and civil society and upcoming actions to advance the cultural agenda of Kosovo.

## Current state of affairs

In their research paper for Cultural Forum, Ebba Lekval and Shqipe Hajredini from Group for Legal and Political Studies argue that in Kosovo the only document that mentions some sort of objectives for the cultural sector is the Mid-Term Economic Framework (MTEF), although it is worth noting that in a 226-page document, only two pages are dedicated to culture. In the MTEF 2015–2017, the government states that the mission of the MCYS is the ‘creation and development of policy, appropriate environment and mechanisms for the promotion of cultural activities’. It then lists a few objectives,<sup>5</sup> including support for public institutions of culture as well as the independent sector.<sup>1</sup> To achieve this objective, the government will support public institutions connected to culture, support independent culture and promote cultural diplomacy through improved cultural infrastructure. Specific

1 ‘Mid-Term Expenditure Framework 2015–2017’, Ministry of Finance, April 2014, [http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Korniza\\_Afat\\_mesme\\_e\\_Shpenezimeve\\_2015\\_-\\_2017.pdf](http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Korniza_Afat_mesme_e_Shpenezimeve_2015_-_2017.pdf), p. 74–75.

actions listed include ‘supporting cultural institutions in their cultural creativity in: theatre, music, film, visual art, dance, and books’.<sup>2</sup> To complement the MTEF, the Program of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo 2015–2018 (Government Programme) pledges to increase the funding for both public and independent cultural actors, legislation reform, and improvement of physical infrastructure.<sup>3</sup>

The new government announced in its 2015–2018 Programme that a strategy for culture will be created.<sup>4</sup> A working group, consisting of 25 members,<sup>5</sup> has been established and has started the drafting process.<sup>6</sup> Some of the interviewees

2 *Ibid.*

3 Programme of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo 2015–2018, Approved February 2015, [http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Government\\_Programme\\_2015-2018\\_eng\\_10\\_mars.pdf](http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Government_Programme_2015-2018_eng_10_mars.pdf), pp. 68–70 [Government Programme].

4 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

5 Interview with Vehbi Miftari, Senior Political Adviser, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, 27 July 2015.

6 Interview with Valon Kashtanjeva, Director, Office of Copyright and Related Rights, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, 10 June 2015; Interview with

criticised the government for not inviting civil society or the independent cultural sector to the working group. However, members of civil society are represented in the working group, including two members of the ForumiKulturor, and five independent artists.<sup>7</sup> According to the MCYS, by the end of July 2015 three meetings of the working group had taken place and the first draft is expected sometime at the end of October or in November.<sup>8</sup> The process is guided by an administrative act that regulates the way strategies are developed and approved.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the government's plans for a new strategy on culture, its objectives and planned actions, the government appears to still have trouble defining a clear cultural

policy. Some of those interviewed expressed concern that instead of working from broader policy goals, to objectives, and down to specific actions, the Kosovo government continues to currently work in the opposite direction, starting from actions or activities instead of performing actions driven by policy. While it may be easier to come up with and carry out clear actions than broad policy goals, it makes the government's efforts seem *ad hoc* and without vision. In order for a healthy and stable cultural life, Kosovo needs the government to develop long-term policy goals for the cultural sector, and to let these goals guide its actions.

In order for the government to develop a good cultural policy it needs a vision of where cultural life in Kosovo should be in the long term. To aid in this process, it has been suggested that the government launch an inquiry, which should involve cultural actors from all sectors, civil society, and experts in the

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VehbiMiftari.

7 Interview with VehbiMiftari.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Administrative Instruction No. 02/2012 on the Procedures, Criteria and Methodology for the Preparation and Approval of Strategy Documents and Plans for Their Implementation, 23 March 2013, [http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Draft\\_Udhezimi\\_Administrativ\\_Per\\_Strategjite\\_FL-NAL\\_2012\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Draft_Udhezimi_Administrativ_Per_Strategjite_FL-NAL_2012_2_.pdf).

field, etc. Such an inquiry should properly analyse cultural policies of other countries, particular EU member states as Kosovo in on the path towards EU integration.<sup>10</sup> Some have also suggested that the government should make sure it maps the cultural sectors of Kosovo to see where investment is necessary and where there is the most talent. A mapping of the creative industries was performed by the Culture for All project,<sup>11</sup> but this might already be out-dated and the government should map *all* sectors. The government could also request assistance in developing a cultural policy from independent cultural organisations in other EU member states, such as Nätverkstan in Sweden. When contacted, Nätverkstan expressed willingness to assist the government in developing a cultural policy and to hold workshops, courses etc. for ministers and civil servants at the

MCYS about cultural policy.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Interview with David Karlsson.

11 'Creative industries assessment report' and 'Cultural mapping report', Culture for All, 2010-2012, <http://www.culture-ks.org/pdf/creative%20industries%20and%20mapping%20report.pdf>.

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12 According to David Karlsson, Nätverkstan would be willing to assist the government in developing a cultural policy



# Discussion in conference panel

Panel moderator, Shqipe Haredini opened the conference and panel discussion through a number of questions. Is there a policy for culture in Kosovo? Is there a strategic orientation for culture? If yes, what sort of strategic orientation is followed? What kind of regional or European practices have been proven to function in the neighborhood countries? Is the Ministry exchanging practices as such? Is there a clear and regular communication between institutions, independent sector and public? To what extent is this communication having a direct impact in the decision-making for the citizens of Kosovo in challenging, changing local policies in culture?

Some of these questions have been tried to get an answer through a number of policy papers published from Forumi Kulturor throughout 2015. In addition, the conference strived to contribute in this debate. Nevertheless, the findings show that culture in Kosovo remains in the margins of public policies and

as such also present a burden for the state budget. Despite the initiatives undertaken during the 2015, Kosovo still lacks adoption of a national strategy on culture, leaving a gap where the public institutions are positively discriminated towards budget allocation. In 2015 there has been an expression of continuous dissatisfaction from the independent artistic community, as a result of several decisions taken from the MCYS.

Representative of Ministry of Culture, Faton Peci presented financial figures which reflect the situation found in the Ministry from the beginning of the LDK mandate. The overall debt amount roughly above 1.5 million euros. He added that the Ministry has set some 'policy' goals through interference in the distribution of projects. Namely, the Ministry believes that every sector should be treated equally (public and independent institutions);

On the strategies, it has been

noted that working groups have been formed to address some of the challenges in cultures through initiation of two strategies (the Strategy on Culture 2016-2020 and the Strategy on Cultural Heritage). Dissatisfaction expressed for the work dynamics of these two working groups, but at the same time willingness to cooperate with Forumi Kulturor (expressed also with the inclusion of the two members in the working groups)

Florent Mehmet, President of Cultural Forum elaborated on the work done so far by Forumi Kulturor' adding that cultural policies are being constantly neglected. He argued that culture is being used as a political instrument and that the latest calls for project applications only confirms such a claim. In an early paper of Florent Mehmeti, published by Forumi Kulturor, he would argue that since the whole Kosovar society lived in a parallel system during the 90s, outside of the institutions of the regime, after the liberation,

the thirst for institutionalization of life was turned into a mania and in due time it developed into a phobia, which did not allow processes to develop toward their normal flow and in a manner dictated by the "culture market". UNMIK Administration, which by nature was overly bureaucratic, contributed greatly to this. With hope that this spasm would ease after the declaration of independence and local institutions taking over full responsibilities, in fact the opposite occurred; local institutions with their aim of establishing and strengthening the state continued further toward institutionalization as a phenomenon and bureaucracy as a form of "raising" the importance of the state and its instruments. While this phenomenon may even bear fruit in other sectors, it impacts the culture sector largely by creating a petrification and denigration of quality, as well as serious development obstacles to cultural life in general. Every problem that would emerge in the sector, an

attempt would be made to solve it through a legal or sublegal act and then the authorities used this to hide and state that they have no legal means to “help” or “improve” something. Such a phenomenon occurred at the time when city’s theatre funding was stopped by the central level by creating sublegal acts and then followed by the Law on Theaters by leaving the funding of the work of theatres fully under the responsibility of municipalities. Ministry of culture would fund them on *ad hoc* basis through a certain amount that was distributed to various city theatres without estimating neither the strength, size nor the seriousness of these theatres, which, in fact have huge differences between themselves. By always calling on the curse that allegedly the law and other legal obligations would not allow greater funding of the institutions, be those public or independent, and impression was given that the value of the proposed projects and the potential of these

institutions is very good and significant, but it is the legal obstacles that do not allow for more funding.

Violeta Simjinovska, guest panelist from Macedonia told that her country has been striving to define and redefine cultural policies in the last 15 years, with minor positive impact. Project ‘Skopje 2014’ is a pure example on how culture can be used for political purposes. Strategies on culture, working groups etc; all of them have been proven ineffective in changing and designing a good state policy on culture. The Government has not taken into account any of the proposals and expertise offered from of the independent sector and non-governmental organizations. Kosovo should not repeat the same mistakes that FYRoM has made, she added. Nationalist tendencies in culture are on the rise in Balkan countries (example would include ‘Belgrade on Water’, Montenegro cultural policy, FYRoM etc...) and these tendencies are not producing anything substantial in

culture, beside kitsch and anti-culture values.

Zana Hoxha from ArtPolis said that participation in the working group for drafting the Strategy on Culture has been a challenging process for all members. The process has been pretty limited, leaving wider public and communities excluded from its participation. The approach of the Forumi Kulturor has been very direct. There seems to be no interest from the institutional members appointed as members in the working group to participate. Eroll Bilibani from Dokufest brought examples of struggle in organizing the biggest cultural event in Kosovo. He also touched upon the local cultural networking in Prizren, articulating challenges faces by the independent scene in structuring the dialogue with local government due to lack of understating and willingness from local officials to adopt cultural policy.

# Cultural Forum

Oda Theatre held numerous meetings during the end of 2011 with the purpose of establishing a network of the cultural organizations in Kosovo. These meetings were attended by more than 60 participants, representatives of different organizations of culture, thus creating the possibility to organize the founding Assembly on 23 March 2012, which laid the foundation of the Network of Independent Organizations of Culture – Cultural Forum. The founding Assembly laid the foundation of the Cultural Forum with 22 independent organizations as members. Through democratic voting, the Statute was adopted and the network presidency was also elected. The Cultural Forum is an entity registered as a network of independent organizations of culture. It was decided that the role of interim Secretariat will be assumed by Oda Theatre until the capacities are built to form a professional secretariat of the network.

The Cultural Forum of Kosovo is a network of independent organizations of culture in Kosovo, established with the purpose of:

- Strengthening the independent organizations of culture by developing their capacities for the implementation of their programs ,
- Promotion of member organizations,
- Inclusion of member organizations in decision-making,
- Boosting the support for the independent cultural scene,
- Protection and improvement of the position of organizations vis-à-vis the relevant institutions in Kosovo and abroad.

The Cultural Forum aims to fulfill its mission through the following activities:

Communication and networking of independent organizations of culture,

- Dynamic exchange of information and experience,
- Lobbying and advocacy activities,
- Specific trainings for the needs of member organizations,
- Organization of debates and fora,
- Coordination of artistic and cultural activities.

# Cultural Development Forum

Forum for Cultural Development is a Project aimed to further develop and strengthen the Cultural Forum established back in 2012, by providing advice and valuable expertise for the cultural policies of Kosovo. The Project is supported by the European Union Office in Kosovo, and implemented by the Cultural Forum, Oda Theatre and DokuFest. The first Project activities were carried out in December 2013. The Project is supposed to continue through to November 2015. During this two year period, the Cultural Development Forum will come up with at least 28 cultural policy products that will result from research, debates, focus groups and conferences. The Project will also strengthen the network of independent culture organizations, built its internal capacities and impact the development of culture policies of Kosovo by producing the knowledge for culture. In addition, the Project will spur the dialog and cooperation between the sector of independent culture and public au-

thorities so that concrete solutions for Kosovo's cultural development could arise.

[www.forumikulturor.net](http://www.forumikulturor.net)



Project funded by the EU and managed by European Union Office in Kosovo



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