



Princess Margriet Award



Speech by Ms Vassiliou at Princess Margriet's award

BOZAR – 18 March 2014

Speech

Your royal highnesses,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

'If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him', J.F. Kennedy once said.

Our laureates this evening - Teodor Celakoski from Croatia and the group behind Teatro Valle Occupato in Rome - are a living demonstration of the freedom of artistic vision. Though different in their orientation, they impersonate the power of culture to affect the lives of European citizens and empower local communities.

Human rights, digital culture, and critical theory lie at the core of Teodor's action, which set out to transform the non-institutional culture landscape in his native Croatia by developing new forms of public action and cultural production.

Mixing arts with civic engagement, the group of artists and theatre workers at Teatro Valle Occupato, emerge as a community with a shared interest to keep theatre “available to all”. At a time of budget cuts for culture across Europe, their engagement becomes especially meaningful.

Our laureates prove with their example one more thing: culture is not a luxury or a cost. It is fundamental for democracy, a necessity for the healthy development of Europe and all the more necessary at times of crisis, like those we are traversing – a crisis which is not just economic, but also social.

If we wish to succeed with the European political project, our citizens must feel part of a European narrative. Culture, with its power to transmit shared values, can nourish our vision for the future and remind us who we are and where we should go as Europeans.

This is the key message of the New Narrative for Europe - a political vision of Europe through culture - presented by a group of distinguished people of art, culture and thought in the beginning of March in Berlin. New Narrative for Europe recognises that Europe as a political body 'needs the arts to generate new and radical forms of imagination that will educate its sensibility'.

It is up to us – politicians and policy makers - to take up this message and, of course, up to the artistic and cultural community to keep pushing bottom-up.

Today, more than ever, cultural actors and artists can help find innovative solutions to societal and economic challenges. We feel that even more at the grass-roots level.

As public authorities at different levels - local, national or European – we must create the space for culture and we must carefully listen to young voices experimenting with new forms of cultural expression. It is these voices, all together, and their energy that make the heart of Europe beat. It is their work and their vision that shows the way for the Europe of tomorrow.

This is what I hope for future generations: to enjoy fully the significant impact of culture has on shaping a 'European'

citizenship anchored on shared values – a citizenship forging a window beyond ourselves.

Since 2008, the Princess Margriet awards contribute in this direction. They not only pay tribute to the enormous dedication of one person to the role of culture in invigorating democracy in Europe, but have also succeeded in showcasing the best among European artists and thinkers dedicated to the potential of culture to help create an inclusive Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Throughout history, there has always been at every living moment of culture a 'will to renewal' – to borrow Eugene Ionesco words. Let us make sure that the people of culture will continue to freely express this 'will to renewal' and to offer their art as a 'window' onto the society and the world at large.

Thank you.