

Culture and education, tools to strengthen European identity and social cohesion

The aim of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 is to encourage more people to discover and engage with Europe's cultural heritage and to reinforce a sense of belonging to a common European space. At the meeting of the CoR's SEDEC commission on 21 February, members discussed two opinions focusing on the role of education and culture for strengthening European identity and social cohesion.

Rapporteurs **Tanya Hristova** (BG/EPP) and **Babette Winter** (DE/PES) pointed out that education and culture have a broad impact on all areas of life and contribute to social inclusion and cohesion. Therefore the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage should provide a framework for supporting regional cultural development, opening up new opportunities for sustainable cultural tourism and improving opportunities for cultural mobility.

Ms Hristova's opinion on ["Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture"](#) was adopted by SEDEC members in Wednesday's meeting. It welcomes the European Commission's aim to establish a European Education Area by 2025. While education remains a national competence, it recommends Member States to promote language learning from an early age and familiarise learners with a common European cultural heritage, European history and the processes of European integration. SEDEC members strongly support boosting the Erasmus+ programme with the aim of doubling the number of participants.

The opinion underlines the critical importance of looking into the regional disparities and economic and social consequences that arise from skills gaps and mismatches in the EU. Against the backdrop of digitalisation of European education, the rapporteur – Mayor of Gabrovo – pointed out that many rural and sparsely populated areas still lack high-speed connectivity and regions facing demographic and social challenges may struggle to provide teachers with adequate digital skills, competences and equipment.

Following a request from the Bulgarian presidency, Ms Winter is preparing an opinion which focuses on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for more cohesive and sustainable regions in the EU. The rapporteur, State Secretary for Europe and Culture in the Thuringia State Chancellery, highlighted that European cultural heritage can contribute to bringing communities together, promoting regional development and creating long-term local employment. Both opinions are scheduled for adoption at the CoR plenary on 16–17 May.

In the second semester of 2018, cultural heritage will also be the priority area of the [Knowledge Exchange Platform](#) (KEP) set up between the European Committee of the Regions and the European Commission to present new R&I solutions, innovations and best practises. Regeneration of city centres and rural landscapes and innovative re-uses of heritage buildings will be some of

the themes to be discussed in various workshops. During the first half of 2018, the KEP will focus on innovating cities with nature and nature-based solutions. More information: [KEP action plan 2018](#)

Following two opinions were also adopted by the SEDEC members:

The next meeting of CoR's SEDEC commission – standing for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture – will take place on 23 April.

European Week of Regions and Cities 2018: Still looking for counterparts?

□Some regions and cities have expressed their needs to find or join a regional partnership.

Have a look at the final [partner search overview](#) and get in touch. Application to become a partner of the European Week of Regions and Cities 2018 is open until 30th March.

Get also inspired by the sessions organised in the framework of the [#EURegionsWeek 2017](#).

Statement by President Juncker ahead of the Italian parliamentary elections

Elections are a moment of democracy, and this applies to Italy – a country that is very close to my heart.

On 4 March the Italians will go to the polls and cast their votes. Whatever the outcome, I am confident that we will have a government that makes sure that Italy remains a central player in Europe and in shaping its future.

Background – EP Press Kit for the informal EU summit on 23 February 2018

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Commissioner Stylianides meets with Ministers from Luxembourg and Belgium and welcomes Member States' commitment in reinforcing the European Mechanism to respond to disasters

Today, Commissioner **Stylianides** meets with Luxembourgish Ministers Daniel Kersch, responsible for Home Affairs, Civil Service and Administrative Reform and Minister Romain Schneider for Social Security, Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs and Sport on the occasion of a new Luxembourgish contribution to strengthen the EU Civil Protection Mechanism: mobile, satellite-based telecommunications via the platform [emergency.lu](#).

Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides**, said: *"We welcome this contribution which is testimony to Luxembourg's long-standing tradition of providing high added-value capacities for a better EU response to disasters in Europe and worldwide. The new telecommunication platform emergency.lu will establish internet and telephone communication as in the aftermath of hurricanes Matthew and Irma that destroyed communication infrastructure in the Caribbean."*

The Luxembourgish capacity provides advanced communication services such as telephone and internet connections to support the coordination efforts of first responders and humanitarian actors in the field at times natural or man-made disasters destroyed local communication infrastructure. Composed of two experts, one satellite communications system and ICT equipment, emergency.lu can be deployed within 12 hours. It has also been used following major disasters such as the earthquake in Nepal and the Ebola epidemic. The emergency.lu capacity will be deployed to assure stable communication in emergencies to all Participating States of the Mechanism and internationally.

Ministers from Luxembourg will take this opportunity to visit the Brussels-based [Emergency Response Coordination Centre](#) (ERCC), the coordination hub for an efficient and coherent European response during emergencies inside and outside Europe.

Commissioner **Stylianides** also meets today with Jan Jambon, Belgian Minister of the Interior. As participant to the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, Belgium offers expertise and actively supports states in need, like in 2014 when Belgium sent its mobile laboratory to fight against Ebola in Guinea. Both meetings take place in light of the Commission's ambitious new plans to strengthen Europe's ability to deal with disasters. The comprehensive plan focusses on two complementary strands of action, targeting a stronger collective response at European level: rescEU, and stepping up disaster prevention and preparedness capacities. Administrative procedures are foreseen to be streamlined and simplified to reduce the time needed to deploy life-saving assistance.

For More Information

[EU Civil Protection Mechanism](#)