

A RIGHT TO CULTURE – A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT
(Keynote at the launch of the handbook "Culture and Human
Rights: The Wrocław Commentaries",
Wrocław – 14 November 2016)

Mr. Mayor,
Dear Guests,
Dear Friends,

It is fascinating, how skillfully Wrocław – a city of new ideas, innovation and wise economic development – in 2016 became a real European Capital of Culture. Real – that is, open to cultural diversity and, at the same time, open as regards the access to culture.

The European Literature Night was attended by more than 10 thousand people, who clearly demonstrated that reading - is in fashion. And the meetings with writers, book fairs and workshops organized as part of the campaign entitled: “Wrocław – the UNESCO World Book Capital” – reinforced the importance of promoting reading. Many shows of visual arts - as Flow, concerts and theatrical performances demonstrated the strength of this city, as a certain kind of *genius loci* for artists, for outstanding creativity. And - it has been like that - for years.

The fact that today Wrocław knows - how to take advantage of what is positive from the old heritage of Breslau... The fact that today Wrocław knows - how to take advantage of the "underground river" of Lviv's traditions... And the fact that today Wrocław - is developing the best traditions of the microcosm of that city after 1945 – makes of it the European Capital of Culture not only because of the nomination but because - of its nature.

Wrocław's success comes from understanding how important the culture is for the development.

It is so, because we no longer measure development exclusively with an increase in GDP. The essence of the economic growth is, in fact, the improvement of the quality of life addressed to the society and the particular individuals.

Therefore, what counts - is salaries and revenues, but also – the quality of education, the chances of a professional rewarding career, the participation in entertainment, sports and culture. What counts - is living in good health and having a possibility of taking advantage of the people-friendly architecture and public spaces of the city, which enable the inhabitants to create new bonds and to build social relations. That applies both to the youngest and to the oldest citizens.

An important thing is the equality in the access to culture, because it is one of the factors which enable us to alleviate the threat of the increasing inequalities and exclusions. What counts - is the access to culture via the Internet.

What counts - is tolerance, that is, the universality of accepting otherness.

Culture, understood in this manner – in all its dimensions: material and symbolic – builds an open society and stimulates the development of creativity.

Not only it is an important factor for the development of innovation and intellectual capital, but, at the same time, it builds a new quality of human capital. Besides, it reinforces trust, creates a social capital. In the contemporary world – if the financial capital, necessary for the economy, is to work creatively, and if the technologies are to multiply the results of investments,

simultaneously facilitating people's lives, then generating the conditions for the development of three types of capital: intellectual, human and social, as well as the harmony between the three components - is the decisive driver of changes.

The changes for the better – even though it may sound idealistic.

Such understanding of the importance of culture has already made it possible in Wrocław - to initiate works on the following matter: should we include a right to culture in the fundamental European rights, and if it is so, then on the basis of what principles?

This would mean the necessity for - defining what guarantees regarding the right to culture should be fulfilled by state-owned institutions and what duties could be assumed by other public entities. This would allow defining - how to reinforce the fulfilling of the right to culture by the appropriate investments in culture, which investments, in this case, should be understood as investments in the development. It would be necessary to describe the normative structure of the right to participate in cultural life. Also, it should be necessary to analyse the potential conflicts between various human rights – freedom of opinion and expression, religious rights, tolerance and the non-discrimination rules.

Thanks to this work, initiated in 2013 with the participation of many prominent experts, there appeared a publication, which today is presented to the broader audience: “Culture and Human Rights – the Wrocław Commentaries”.

The large number of topics addressed in those commentaries and the creating of a special kind of an encyclopedia of understanding culture in the contemporary world and in contemporary Europe, are fascinating. Under the direction of professor Andreas Wiesand, Kalliopi Chainoglou, Anna Sledzińska-Simon and Yvonne

Donders - a good basis was created for understanding the multidimensional nature of the contemporary culture – in its references to human rights.

This image of culture is extremely rich.

It is, at the same time, a right to expression and to creative individualism and it is a guarantee of the rights of linguistic, racial and religious minorities, of the people who differ from others because of their sexual orientation or gender – to express themselves and to have a full access to culture, in an unrestricted manner.

At the same time it is a concern about art, about its elitist meanings and manners of understanding it, as well as about the need for attention to the quality of popular culture. It is bringing up a subject of cultural education and of the role of the media and of the content presented by the media in forming social attitudes. It is the promotion of reading in the circumstances in which we do not entirely know what material form - a book: will have in the future.

At the same time, it is willingness to create the conditions of a mass, democratic access to variegated works of art and compositions, also with the use of the latest digital communication channels, and, simultaneously, it is work on copyrights in the era of the digital revolution and it is the elaborating of a model of legally taking advantage of the cultural goods, as well as it is a question of rewarding artists appropriately.

It is the respect for the heritage of the European culture and, at the same time, the complete openness for understanding and for diffusing values – with the cultures of other continents. It is the complete respect for the cultural standards based on the experiences and religious values and, simultaneously, it is a

concern for avoiding a war of cultures, which takes place when the recognition for one's own religion or culture overshadows another culture and, consequently, that other culture becomes a culture which one - does not profess, does not feel, therefore, perceives it negatively, wants to destroy it and - to colonize it.

It is an attempt to understand cultural distortions, such as - an onset of genocide, without justifying evil.

It is the understanding of an intergenerational nature of culture when heritage is being created and also when the tensions between the generations break the cultural continuity.

It is an effort to understand and to describe new phenomena, so important for the mechanisms of cultural changes, for instance: whistleblowing, trolling, investigative journalism etc.

I have an intuition that the encyclopedistic effort of the authors and the "Wrocław Commentaries" have a hidden meaning and a hidden pattern. It is about wisely describing various phenomena and the world, in order to understand them better and to bestow a new sense upon culture.

As the French Encyclopedists did – founding the heritage of Europe in the age of Enlightenment.

And now the most important question.

Why exactly today - is that singular, some kind of "Wrocław Encyclopedia of Culture" - so important and needed ?

Why now, in 2016, do we start to need the Enlightenment?

There are several reasons for that.

Firstly.

At the turn of the XIX and XX centuries the results of the great industrial revolution started to appear – the right to participate in elections, that is, in democracy, the right to assemble, as well as the right to education and to social insurance. That period also brought about the democratization of the access to the broadly understood culture. It resulted in the processes described by Ortega y Gasset in “The Revolt of the Masses”.

Still, a few dozen years later it contributed to giving away power by the masses – to authoritarian leaders. There appeared fascism, Stalinism and, with some delay, the authoritarian rule in other regions of the world.

An authoritarianism is never a supporter of the open and diversified culture.

What we are experiencing today – I will risk such a thesis – is, unfortunately, some kind of a replica. One week ago the "Financial Times" wrote: “Is the world today so different than the last time fascism was ascendant?”

Now, a great industrial and digital revolution is lifting the world out of the threat of poverty, is creating new opportunities. We are still unable to imagine those opportunities, as we are on the eve of the commencement of the cooperation between humans and robots or at the early times of biopharmacy, that is, the developing of medicines in our own bodies, as they will be substances which will cure the diseases better.

Over the last 20 years the Internet has multiplied our access to information, knowledge and also culture. It has created a figure of a prosumer: someone who is a creator and a recipient at the same time. It has enriched us.

Never in history - has there been - such a breakthrough in the access to culture. Perhaps only Gutenberg's invention can be compared to this phenomenon. However, the results of Gutenberg's revolution grew for 300 years, whereas the results of the Internet, as a driver of a global change, can be seen already after 25 years.

The Internet is becoming the fifth power. Nonetheless, apart from the bright side it also has - the dark side.

For the Internet community it is easier to break the rules of the analogue society. With its structures, with its intermediary mechanisms, with the democracy as the game of interests, which, however, aims at solving problems. In the Internet there is no stability. Norms are violated as quickly as they are brought to life. Individuals become elements of a mass, losing somewhere their unique features.

Since inventing the social possibilities of the Internet, of course, openness and diversity have been developing.

However, in front of them - there emerges a community of those who want to exist only in a closed circle of "their own people", in their own camp and in their own understanding of identity. As recently as two years ago on Twitter we conducted not only the exchange of information, but also of opinions. Today - it is impossible to exchange opinions, because hate speech is dominant. Here is the result: I am "banning" them, they are "banning" me, whereas supposititious belligerent trolls are attacking everyone for everything.

The paradox lies in the fact that, on the one hand, the Internet gives freedom and the access to culture and, on the other hand, it brings about threats by building a dualistic world of good and evil, like in the models of reality created in the past by the Inquisition.

Where should there - really be - space for openness and diversity, as a universal value, if the central idea is - to annihilate a different community in order to ensure the reign of only one, one's own, tribal community?

An open society clashes with a tribal community. Walls are being built in our heads.

Sometimes I have an impression that the aforementioned negative side effect of the existence of the Internet supersedes - what is good about it.

Secondly.

After World War II a number of institutions were established with a view to protecting democracy against the temptation of allowing distortions. Such institutions were to protect an individual against the state and against the policies introduced by governments, which governments could tend to impose on the individuals some rules violating their sense of freedom.

Hence a very rich catalogue of rights – the rights of a human being, the rights of a citizen – provided for in international jurisdictions. Hence it is so important to separate the following powers: the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. Therefore, the principle of the rule of law is (i) to protect democracy (which is understood as the compliance with regulations and with election results), as well as (ii) to protect the impartiality of the media and of the administration and (iii) to supervise the observance of the catalogue of fundamental rights.

Thus, the protection of an individual and of a minority has become the essence.

In this context it is surprising that the right to culture has not been defined and reinforced. After all, culture is an environment in

which the cultivation of the democratic values may be effectively developed.

Today, in the “post-truth” world, new models of conducting politics, the vehicles of populism, which are unbelievable efficient at the time of elections - are downgrading those principles.

It is because the contemporary populism is not only a matter of buying social submissiveness for the price of social packages, which at times is destructive for the economic stability. It is not only a revolt against elites: described as leftist or “filthy rich”. It is something more. It is stirring up negative emotions, building the images of enemies, shaping stereotypes in hate speech in order to – through arousing fears – immediately produce a strong response and positive emotion. That – only our community is a community of truth and good. That – only our identity is positive. That – only our leader gives us the sense of being the sovereign and the only representative of the nation.

This mixture of negative and positive emotions is the instrument of manipulation.

That is, if we win the elections, then, in the name of democracy, we can do everything - against democracy !

It needs to be honestly admitted - that one of the reasons for the processes which are now underway is, undoubtedly, the loss of the legitimacy, visible in many democracies, on the part of many public institutions and authorities - which have lost contact with the citizens.

Can a situation in which populism is predominant ever create conditions for the development of culture?

With the culture’s openness and diversity?

With its unrestricted nature?

And in the populist policies the culture has to be reduced: it becomes an instrument of the new ideology. This new ideology means the extreme polarization of the society and the management of a conflict in which some people have rights and others are to be “second rate” citizens.

Thirdly.

The susceptibility to generating a "a mass-man" is growing. An antidote should be found in education, in creating the standards of freedom and respect for the otherness, in a culture which is open and full of diversity.

However, suddenly a return to conservative, closed and traditional nationalist standards is visible.

It is true that the processes of globalization did not build a sense of identity in people. And maybe that is why nationalist movements are returning, like echoes of the history from the time before World War I. Like the conditions and the content of identity. It is obvious that nations need their own identity. But it is also obvious that nations can experience the encounters of their own identity with other identities. They can exchange values, build a greater community and take roots. After all, there is no conflict between the European identity and the national identity.

Unless - we make national values become a populist vehicle. In such circumstances the conflict between: what is national and what is European appears as a herald and as an executor of Brexit, mutated in the subsequent national editions already in at least some capitals of the European countries.

Consequently, it is difficult to speak about including the right to culture in a set of universal European rights, because for the people who support the weakening of the European bonds it will mean an attack on their national sovereignty and on the principle of subsidiarity. Culture is exclusively a national matter, some would say.

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Then, all the more so, the initiating of the process of implementing the right to culture as a fundamental right of a human being and of a citizen, proposed in the “Wrocław Commentaries”, seems a breakthrough.

Different works are underway. For example: if we are speaking in Europe about a digital single market, we are seeking solutions for the harmonization of the regulations. The same conditions of the access to the cultural content available through digital channels have to exist in all the EU countries, irrespective of the place in which I find myself. Geo-blocking does not protect anything and it only hinders the access to the cultural content. We have a similar situation with the Open Science and with the European Open Science Cloud, which are the chances for the better exchange and the development of science. And if we want to protect the cultures of minorities, the cultures of smaller scales or the cultures of less popular languages, we can do it in a new manner, without the excessively traditional solutions in the area of copyrights. The framework of the audiovisual directive should support the popularization of the European heritage in all the countries, without imposing one scheme of solutions. Simultaneously, it should pay attention to the pluralism and to the impartiality of the media, as well as to the conditions of the development of quality journalism.

In my opinion, all those works: the present ones and the forthcoming ones, should include the interpretation of culture

which, if one can say so, in principle - should treat culture and the access to culture as fundamental rights.

There is also one more element. Only the culture understood in this manner will become a stronger factor of growth and of building the synergy of the following capitals: intellectual, human, social and financial. The synergy: between democracy, education and culture.

And only the culture understood in such a manner will become a place of rescuing a human being, an individual, from the populist storm, from the new revolt of the masses.

Therefore, the Wrocław Encyclopedia of Culture is so much needed, if we want to survive.....and protect the set of values, which have been developing step by step our world in the good direction.

Only in the language of culture can we ask about the specific nature of what is called: the “Polishness”, the “Britishness”, the “Frenchness” or the “Germanness”, without losing the values which are important for the communities of those fatherlands. And without losing the values which are crucial for the particular persons, individuals, citizens – for a human being.

The responses to those questions, the wise definitions of the national identities, are crucial in order to avoid the growth of extreme nationalism and also in order to develop positive cultural identifications with national values and to take roots in the broader, European and world’s heritage.

Dear Friends,

thank you for that inspiring work. We need - the New Enlightenment.

I think that in a relatively short time we will organize together in the European Parliament a public hearing on the “Wrocław Commentaries”, so that practical work on including the right to culture in the catalogue of fundamental rights would be able to commence.

I think that during the meeting of mayors and presidents of the former and the future European Capitals of Culture it would be worth presenting the “Wrocław Commentaries”, even at the forum of the Committee of the Regions.

I think that, when I look at Wrocław and at the Mayor of that city, it is always worth simply looking ahead, to the future. And doing it...in the cultural way.

Michał Boni, MEP

Wrocław, 14 November 2016