

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.