

ISBN 978-80-7008-242-3



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# Foreword

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“The ideas behind this ministerial conference have been inspired by the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, as well as by the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain. Its aim is to provide different ways of perceiving creativity and culture. Neither of these focus subjects should be considered “extras,” for they are not just means for relaxation or for filling one’s free time. Rather, they are important foundations on which to construct meaning in our lives. Creativity is what differentiates the mechanism of passive consumerism from the active pleasure of production, whereas culture aids us in finding a way into a society, and mediates our encounters with tradition.”

Václav Jehlička,  
Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic

This conference was organized with the financial and expert support from the European Commission, General Directorate for Education and Culture.

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About the **Conference**

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The international conference Forum for Creative Europe, which took place on March 26 and 27, 2009, during the Czech European Union Council presidency, proposed clear arguments on how culture and creativity contribute considerably to social and economic growth.

Perhaps the most important message taken from the conference was that we must stop isolating the arts, culture, and, more importantly, creativity and innovation in our societies, as systemic changes toward the inclusion of culture could help national economies overcome the present crisis. The speakers' presentations made it clear that arts and culture are not only the basis of creativity, new ideas, and innovation, but are also, to a large extent, contributing factors in sustaining healthy development within the whole of society.

Many speakers drew attention to the critical situation of contemporary global society. The former Czech president, Václav Havel, emphasized in his speech the notion that creativity and culture create the essence of identity, as well as a self-awareness of our shared humanity. This, according to Havel, is the reason why the European Union should be asked to reconsider the structure of its political agenda and focus more on the issue of spiritual values, the bedrock of European consciousness, than on economic issues. "The need for new creative approaches always becomes the more urgent when old mechanisms, including economic ones, fail to work. The present economic crisis literally incites us to search for new solutions; things for which we lack the willingness and motivation to consider during times of relative prosperity. There is a chance for us now to fully utilize the creative potential found in the arts and culture," said Václav Jehlička, the Czech Minister of Culture.

John Howkins, author of the books *Creative Economy* and *Creative Ecology*, said that "the roots of the present crisis are social, they lie in the political processes and government's attitudes; however, the symptoms of the present crisis are mostly financial and economical." To those wanting to lead people toward a new society, he recommended sticking to three principles: diversity, change, and learning. Richard Florida pointed to the necessity of

fundamental change in society. In this context he used, for the very first time, the radical term "reset." Florida assigned the hope of healing society to the creative class, while he emphasized that impulses to change society should really come from both civil society and the government. Jeremy Rifkin, an advisor for many European governments, as well as the European Commission, claimed that the "existing model of society—a model based on materialism, use and debt—has failed." He explained that, in his opinion, it's time to create a new narrative for our society: a narrative based on European cultural values, a narrative supported by co-operation between the European Union and the United States of America.

One of the primary issues of the conference was the necessity to support the arts and culture with public sources, especially to create conditions for related creative fields based on intellectual property, such as the film and music industries, design, architecture and advertising. The panel devoted to governmental strategies for creative industries and a creative economy pointed to the fact that in order to generate support programmes, it is necessary to establish co-operation between separate ministries—culture, industry and trade, education, foreign affairs—not only on the national level, but the international level, too.

Another change that was strongly recommended was that in the educational systems: young people must get ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> century; they must be equipped with completely new capacities, attitudes, and ways of communicating. The conference stressed the necessity to maximally apply the ideas of what Florida termed the "creative class," in any discussion on the development of cities and communities. This approach should be particularly stressed in regional and local policy.

All information about the conference (video recording of the whole conference, presentations, information about the speakers, etc.) is available at [www.forumforcreativeeurope.cz](http://www.forumforcreativeeurope.cz). Some presentations, and a number of interviews with the speakers, are available on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and [www.labforculture.org](http://www.labforculture.org).

## **Link:**

[www.forumforcreativeeurope.cz](http://www.forumforcreativeeurope.cz)

[www.eu2009.cz](http://www.eu2009.cz)

[www.create2009.europa.eu](http://www.create2009.europa.eu)

Source: The Czech Ministry of Culture press release from April 8th, 2009.

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