

## European Cultural Foundation (ECF)

A long history of supporting mobility and cultural co-operation

### Background

The European Cultural Foundation (ECF) was established in 1954 by the Swiss philosopher Denis de Rougemont to support European educational and cultural initiatives, and was relocated to Amsterdam in 1960. Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, ECF President from 1955-1977, proposed that a percentage of the income of the Prince Bernhard Cultural Foundation derived from Dutch lotteries and football pools should be earmarked for European projects run in co-operation with ECF. These sources continue to represent a considerable proportion of ECF income. In its first 25 years ECF offered grants for cultural co-operation and initiated a number of emblematic European projects. This was a time when a network of ECF committees began to emerge in different European countries in support of ECF's work.

East-West relations and the media became priorities of ECF in the later years of the 1980s, leading to support, for example, for the Fund for Central and East European Book Projects. In 1987 it established the *Priz Europa* for European television programmes in conjunction with the Council of Europe and, the same year, it took on responsibility (until 1995) for the European Commission's new ERASMUS programme for university exchanges.

Since 1994 an ECF focus has been the geo-cultural priorities of the wider Europe, in particular the Mediterranean area and consolidating its support for projects in Eastern Europe. This included the launching of an East-West and East-East mobility programme (APEXchanges) for young artists and cultural professionals in Central and Eastern Europe.

Between 1990-2000 the ECF supported 871 projects involving collaboration across borders. Support was provided for several cultural networks, among them IETM (Informal European Theatre Meeting, now known as the International Network for the Performing Arts), EFAH (European Forum for Arts & Heritage, now known as Culture Relais Europe) and the *Pepinieres europeenes pour jeunes artistes* (a case study referred to separately in this Annex).

By the new Millennium, ECF had three priorities: encouraging intercultural dialogue; promoting social participation through the arts (eg the *Art for Social Change* programme supporting artists who work with young people in South East Europe and the Baltic region); and strengthening the cultural sector (eg support for arts professionals and policy makers in South East Europe through its *Policies for Culture* programme). Since 2002 advocacy on behalf of the cultural sector in Europe has also played an important part in ECF actions.

In pursuit of its mission to foster cultural diversity and co-operation in Europe by supporting artists, creative projects and cultural organisations that promote these aims and by helping to create favourable conditions for working across borders, the activities of the ECF today are organised around two pillars:

- support for cultural organisations (where it is most needed); and
- cultural policy development (where it can make a difference).

## How it works

Although much of what the ECF does contributes directly or indirectly to mobility, a number of its programmes and grants have mobility as a focus.

*Stepbeyond* provides mobility grants for artists, cultural practitioners, translators, journalists and researchers to pursue cross-cultural projects through travel within the wider Europe, including EU candidate nations and the South Caucasus countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The aim is to motivate artists and cultural practitioners to explore, experience and stimulate innovative cultural connections by: exploring new territory and discovering new ways of working; collaborating and exchanging ideas; and through networking. The fund has been run in partnership with the Open Society Institute, Budapest. It pays for cheap air flights or other budget travel and can also cover visas and per diems for a limited period. There are no set deadlines. 178 projects were supported in 2007 and the average allocation per award was 537.50 EUR.

The *ECF Grants programme* is for cross-border cultural co-operation between organisations in EU and EEA countries and Albania, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Russia, Serbia, Montenegro, Turkey and Ukraine. NGOs from several Middle Eastern and North African states are also eligible if they have partners in the European countries mentioned. Projects are assessed specifically on their collaborative nature and the added value they bring to the practice of cultural co-operation in Europe. 57 awards were made in 2007 worth 918 730 EUR. The programme in 2008 was divided into two parts: *Making Collaborations Work Grants* were to stimulate collaboration between cultural organisations in projects that add value to cultural co-operation in Europe. The maximum grant for a project is 30 000 EUR and 27 awards were made in 2008 from 328 applications. There is an annual deadline. *Artistic Project Grants* support outstanding projects of cultural organisations and individuals which demonstrate vision in illuminating the issues of diversity in Europe. The average grant is 30 000 – 60 000 EUR and there is an annual deadline.

The *Balkan Incentive Fund for Culture* provides special funding opportunities for cultural co-operation projects in South East Europe (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, FYROM (Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia), Montenegro and Serbia. The Fund is run in conjunction with HIVOS (the Dutch Humanist Institute for Co-operation with Developing Countries), the Open Society Institute, the Swiss Agency for Development & Co-operation and foundations in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, FYROM and Serbia. The application process is the same as for the ECF Grants Programme. In 2007, 23 projects were supported at a total cost of 406 650 EUR.

The *LabforCulture* is an online platform to support cultural co-operation in Europe. It carries information on such things as sources of funding, research, news of events, case studies of good practice in cross-border collaboration, and has an extensive database of cultural organisations. The website covers 50 countries and is in five languages. There are mobility related blogs. This information tool was initiated by ECF (which continues to be the main financial supporter) and 548 668 EUR in sponsorship was provided from other sources towards the cost of the initiative in 2007.

ECF has also provided support in the past for the *On-the-move* website of IETM, which is dedicated to supporting the mobility of organisations and individuals involved in the performing arts (and is the subject of another case study in this annex), as well as the Roberto Cimetta Fund supporting mobility in the Mediterranean area.

*Jump in!* is a pilot cultural work placement scheme to address the lack of representation of ethnic minorities in the arts and in cultural organisations and institutions. It was launched by ECF in 2008 in association with the Network CS and Kunstenaars & Co. Although focused on the Netherlands, if it is adjudged to be successful the pilot will be extended as a European programme in 2009, thus opening up mobility opportunities. The pilot scheme arranges part-time (three days a week)

placements for up to three months for individuals with a non-Western/non European background. It is intended primarily for artists in any discipline, but support can also be given to arts students and cultural entrepreneurs. The aim is to provide opportunities for individuals to undertake research within a professional institution, or work in and learn from a culture related organisation, or for those seeking a new direction in their artistic career. Capacity building could include responsibility, team work and the constructive involvement in the working environment of a cultural organisation. However, host organisations could offer individuals a choice of: working independently on a specific project or programme activity; work on assignments and tasks within a diverse programme; or in depth work with a specific department. Recipients will be entitled to 750 EUR net per month, including a travel allowance.

ECF is in the process of initiating a pilot *Cross-Mediterranean placement programme* to give young European cultural operators the possibility of living and working for a short period in the context of Southern Mediterranean cultural practice. The intention is to provide a spring-board to further collaboration in the region. A fully developed programme is envisaged.

## Results

Many hundreds of cultural professionals and organisations have received support for mobility related cultural projects from the ECF. Its Business Plan for 2008-2012 indicates that mobility will be a core activity, which it will support through bursaries for at least 150 artists and cultural operators each year to travel and work across EU or across 'cultural' borders to develop intercultural competence and collaboration. It also intends to support, through partnerships, the development of "more comprehensive European action promoting artistic mobility", which is likely to be through advocacy for mobility and project sponsorship. ECF is proposing to establish a mobility team utilising synergies between support and cultural policy development and external partnerships to facilitate mobility and placement programmes. Intervention will be targeted and EU neighbourhood countries are expected to remain a focus, along with South Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean rim. The LabforCulture will continue to be supported as an instrument to facilitate cultural co-operation and mobility in and beyond Europe, with the aim of enhancing its usefulness and profile.

ECF established a Task Force in summer 2008 which is to:

- review the performance of the Foundation in recent years;
- look at the implications for ECF structures of the growth of the Foundation; and
- examine how funding can be secured and further developed.

The Task Force is due to report in Spring 2009, so ECF is in a period of transition. However, the future of the *Stepbeyond* mobility programme seems assured.

## Sources

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