



Press information for immediate release

BERLIN CONFERENCE 2015

Europe. Its Values, Its Citizens –
“Solidarity, Respect, Tolerance”

Initiative „A Soul for Europe”

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Berlin, 11 November 2015 – For the seventh time the initiative “A Soul for Europe”, together with **Allianz Kulturstiftung** under the patronage of the **European Parliament** held the **Berlin Conference**. This year’s Berlin Conference with the title “**Europe. Its Values, Its Citizens**” took place on **8 and 9 November at Allianz Forum** in Berlin. Especially in times like these where the European idea faces severe crisis the conference succeeded to connect cultural activists, intellectuals and politicians in order to highlight the importance of culture for a democratic and participatory Europe.

“The time has come to fight for the basic European values solidarity, respect, and tolerance”, Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, stressed with respect to the current refugee crisis. *“It’s time to fight against those who are in favour of renationalisation and desolidarisation,”* Schulz said in his welcoming address.

The **periphery of Europe** serves as a laboratory for all kinds of civil society movements. *“That is why we need curiosity and empathy and an open heart for the other’s stories. Europe and its institutions as the center should keep such sensitivity for the periphery”,* emphasised Bulgarian writer **Georgi Gospodinov**.

Cities and regions were identified as key actors whose strategic role should be enhanced in the European political arena. They are home for the majority of Europeans and a source for a Europe from the bottom-up notably through innovative deliberative and participatory democratic processes. *“If there is democratic fatigue, the answer is not resting, the answer is more exercise”,* Dutch professor **Peter Vermeersch** stated.

As a result of the **Berlin Conference 2015** a second department of the Committee of Regions was demanded in which achievements and contribution of cities for the development of Europe are highlighted. Also, a competence group “Periphery” consisting of MEPs and members of European civil society organisations should be established.

Among the participants of the conference were writer and curator **Thierry Fabre**, the historian and publicist **Karl Schlögel**, the long-term members of the European Parliament **Doris Pack** and **Hannes Swoboda**, the Minister of Culture of Albania **Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi**, the Bosnian writer and activist **Alan Kristić** as well as **Paul Spies**, future director of the Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin.

The initiative “A Soul for Europe” mobilises citizens and democratic institutions across Europe, fostering a sense of responsibility for the future of Europe and democracy through culture. It connects communities in order to build a common European public space and a culture of proactive citizenship.

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#BC2015



European Parliament President Martin Schulz speaking at the Berlin Conference 2015



Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi, Alan Kristić and Antje Contius debating at the Berlin Conference 2015



Gerorgi Gospodinov at the Berlin Conference 2015