# EUNIC: Building Sustainable Networks and Partnerships between the RF and the EU

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Vice-Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I thank the organisers, the Russian Ministry of Culture and the European Commission for their invitation for me to give these introductory remarks.

European and Russian cultural relations have a long history.

Our museums and galleries, and not least our bookshelves, remind us of those past relationships. Also music by our composers is played every day in our concert hall and broadcast through our radio networks. All of us from the European Union in this room today will be able to recall the first time they came across a cultural influence from Russia. I am sure the same is true for our Russian participants.

Artists, cultural managers, and ideas have moved between our areas. Our intellectual ideas today have benefited from their interactions and interdependence. What was once contemporary art and culture, now is a core part of our heritage.

Artists and thinkers knew no boundaries or they sought to by-pass restrictions. In the same vein, their counterparts today, are curious about developments beyond their immediate area. The creative spirit explores and extends; remaining true to a tradition but infused with new elements.

Professional cultural managers actively seek out their counterparts to learn, to share and to develop together. This is the age of change and of networking.

And change was, and is, always a clear factor in our cultural worlds. We see how the pace of change varies from the very fast in street and digital art and the commercial cultural sector today to the measured pace of change in tradition. But even in tradition we see how change happens quickly; it is perhaps only with historical hindsight we gain the impression of slowness.

Today we are meeting to explore ways of continuing in that tradition of close cultural cooperation. It is an essential tradition.

We are all aware of globalisation, of our shared challenges and of the speed of communication courtesy of the internet. We are realizing that we can no longer attempt to look at, let alone solve, many of the major issues facing the world without working together, without engaging, discussing and learning.

Yesterday in Copenhagen, host to the COP-15 conference, I opened a major conference on the role culture and the arts sector may play as we all adjust to a more ecological future. It was a global conference with participants from all continents seeking to work alongside each other, believing that the cultural sector can make a difference; that its people, institutions and enterprises in art, architecture, films and media, cultural heritage, sports, education, leisure, communication and many more areas can provide leadership for an ecological age through its good relations with citizens.

This essential tradition of sharing and learning, rather than promoting and showcasing, lies at the heart of the network I now represent.

EUNIC, the network of European Union National Institutes for Culture, is a new venture, just over 3 years old. It has been evolving for perhaps some 20 years. Many of our members have a long history and are well known in their own right: the Goethe Institute, the Alliance Francais and the Institute Francais; the British Council.

Others may be smaller but are equally committed to the international cultural cooperation such as the Romanian Cultural, the Czech Centres, the Finnish Institute, the Lithuanian Institute, the Instituto Camoes from Portugal and of course my own Institute from Denmark.

EUNIC now has members from 26 of the 27 member states. Its 31 member organisations have more than 1500 institutes around the world.

We have come together in a spirit of co-operation, not competition, of sharing our experience and of working closer together. We truly demonstrate the European Union’s belief in Unity in Diversity.

In Russia our members work in a vibrant cultural community. Their activities range from teacher training in European languages, teaching those languages, highlighting the educational opportunities available, to programmes in the sciences and in developing intercultural competencies.

The members of the EUNIC network have an active and positive engagement with partners in Russia. The scope and range is a true testament to the depth of the cultural relationship between Europe and Russia.

A noticeable focus is on contemporary literature with EUNIC members supporting writers and publishers at Festival and Book Fairs in Russia and in turn working with Russian authors and publishers in Europe, for example at the London Book Fair in 2011 where Russia will be the country of focus.

Our members’ main offices are in Moscow or St. Petersburg but we operate with partners all over Russia. I look forward to the discussions later today on working beyond these two major cities.

One of the main aims of the EUNIC partnership is to develop, with local partners, common projects. These common projects demonstrate a pan-European dimension rather than the more traditional bilateral national perspective. This spirit of multi-country projects is developing with several EUNIC members now adding this approach to their work.

Here in Russia our EUNIC members are running one of the most ambitious of these projects: a contemporary dance project called Intradance. We will hear more of this project later in the day but let me say now that this demonstrates partnership in practice.

The project is based on creating co-productions between seven EU-based choreographers and seven Russian contemporary dance theatres, for performances between now and April 2010.

We welcome the support of the European Commission in this project. Over the last two years the European Union, at the highest levels, has attached more importance to the role of culture in its external relations. Intradance is a wonderful example of this policy in practice.

We are also seeing the global rise of the creative and cultural industries. The prosperity of our economies is increasingly based on the knowledge economy and the creative and cultural industries are playing an increasingly important role. As they are overwhelmingly small scale businesses we all need to look at a range of regulations and processes in our economic and financial systems to encourage their development.

And finally I think we see a clear emergence and importance of the individual; as an artist, as a creative, as an intercultural interpreter as a cultural and social entrepreneur equipped with new skills and horizons.

And so I turn to the future. The commitment to continue deepening and widening cultural inter-actions at all levels between Europe and Russia is sincere and long lasting.

The cultural sphere is a major part of our lives, our way of life and increasingly of our economy.

And at its heart is the realisation that it is personal. Creative people, in both Russia and Europe, thrive on new influences, of listening. International cultural cooperation succeeds only when everyone demonstrates the skills of listening, of learning, of engaging as equals. Today’s meeting illustrates that pattern of working together.

I look forward to our future cultural cooperation; to greater interaction between professionals in the field; to a easing of those administrative hurdles which make our work that much harder, to the developments of our creative industries and to the richer understanding between our citizens.

The cultural world, from the arts in all its diversity, can provide a force for progress, to bring people together, face to face and online, as professionals, audiences, as a means for joy, for reflection, for prosperity and above all for enabling understanding and trust to emerge.

Allow me to finish off on a very personal note. My first visit to Moscow and Russia, or rather the Soviet Union as it was in those days, took place in 1966, when as a young student representing the One World Movement I was invited by the Komsomol to participate in a 5-week international work camp on an island in the Don near Rostov. This my first encounter with Russian culture and society as well as the daily discussions with Russian and other fellow students from all over the world made an indelible impression on me, as it was my first real experience of an intercultural encounter and the value of intercultural dialogue. I think this experience could well have been a seminal factor leading to my presence here today as president of EUNIC. I therefore hope that this conference will make an important contribution to making the vital experience of intercultural dialogue and exchange available to many more people in Russia and the EU in the future.