## Jan Truszczynski

### Deputy Director General of Directorate General on Education and Culture of the European Commission

Dear Minister,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to be with you this morning to open this first ever EU–Russia International Workshop on cultural cooperation.

I am also happy to meet so many representatives of the cultural sector hailing from both Russia and the EU.

I see today’s event as a celebration of cultural cooperation; a policy field I particularly like because it puts civil society at the centre.

Cultural cooperation is one of the best policies we have to foster people–to–people contacts – and I don’t need to tell you how important these are in the wider international relations context.

Nothing like academic, artistic, and cultural exchanges can draw countries together. Culture and the arts have a unique power to generate goodwill and lasting relations among peoples and their leaders.

The EU has been looking for a new position for culture in the foreign relations of the Union for some time.

Our policy document called an European agenda for culture published two years ago triggered a broad reflection on what culture and cultural exchanges could do for our process of integration and our relations with partner countries in the region and across the world.

The document presented three strategic objectives: cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; culture as a catalyst for creativity and innovation; and culture in international relations.

These goals have since become general guidelines for action and have been reprised at different times.

For instance, in the first half of 2008 the Slovenian Presidency made the external dimension of culture a priority.

The European Council of June 2008 recognised the value of cultural cooperation and intercultural dialogue as an integral part of our external policies.

These results have been taken forward under the French Presidency in the second half of last year.

The Council Conclusions approved almost exactly a year ago outlined a strategic approach for culture and intercultural dialogue in the context of our external relations.

These developments have created an excellent window of opportunity; it is now our task to take advantage of it and bring cultural cooperation between the EU and Russia to a new level.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

This is a promising time for our cooperation not only because we have a considerable political capital to spend, but also because we can build on a long tradition of exchanges and policy dialogue.

The EU–Russia St. Petersburg Summit of May 2003 was a landmark in our history of cultural relations.

In the course of that meeting, the EU and Russia agreed to reinforce their cultural co–operation in the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

That agreement opened four specific common spaces:

* economic issues and the environment;
* freedom, security and justice;
* external security; and, finally,
* research and education, including cultural aspects.

Since then we have covered a lot of ground, let me recall the main achievements:

* the adoption of the Culture Road Map in May 2005;
* the launch of an implementation process at the Kajaani meeting in September 2006;
* the establishment of the EU – Russia Joint Working Group on culture; and
* the first meeting of the Permanent Partnership on Culture in Lisbon, in October 2007.

The Joint Statement that concluded the Lisbon meeting stressed again the role of cultural operators and civil society.

I believe that this continuing policy dialogue has done its fair bit to improve relations between the EU and Russia.

There is plenty of evidence to prove this point.

Only last month, during the latest EU – Russia Summit in Stockholm, direct people-to-people contacts were cited one more time as essential.

This time, they have been invoked as an element in the cross-border co-operation programmes concluded by Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner and Minister Basargin.

These programmes will involve border regions to promote economic and social development, address environmental challenges, and ensure efficient and secure borders.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Viktor Basargin also agreed that joint action in education, culture, and civil society was a central component in the cross-border co-operation programmes.

Given these encouraging premises, I hope you will agree with me that today’s workshop is an opportunity we cannot miss to boost cultural cooperation between the EU and Russia.

Let me quickly review some of the issues on the table.

* fostering creativity and the mobility of artists;
* extending public access to culture and the arts; and
* looking for ways to increase the impact of cultural industries both in the EU and Russia.

The overarching theme is, of course, promoting a structured approach to cultural cooperation that all the parties can share.

I have no doubt that today’s debates will help us find a common approach. Whatever form it will take, I believe this approach should be based on a simple principle.

I think we all agree on the need to empower cultural operators and institutions, and civil society.

This is not to diminish the role of public authorities, which remains essential. However, I am convinced that we need to involve in our policies artists and performers, curators and museum directors, scholars and intellectuals.

I am convinced that the success and the impact of cultural exchanges crucially depend on the active participation of the people whose day jobs are in culture and the arts, in cultural institutions and in the cultural industries.

Before I close, I would like to mention the Culture Action Plan, which is currently under discussion.

Negotiations are proceeding apace and I have no doubt that we will soon find common positions on all its parts.

When the Plan is in place, it will be the first of its kind in the field of culture between the EU and a third country – and for this reason alone we should redouble our efforts.

Also, I would like to publicly acknowledge the contribution of the EU Network of Cultural Institutes and its cluster in Russia. Its staff is among the best ambassadors of Europe in the world; they are ideally placed to create an environment of mutual trust, foster intercultural dialogue, and build partnerships.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am sure that today’s workshop and the conclusions it will produce will give fresh impetus to cultural cooperation between the European Union and the Russian Federation.

At a time when security and cooperation in Europe have become the focus of renewed debate, I hope that today we can send out a message of mutual understanding, constructive dialogue and concord. And when we do, I guess nobody will be surprised. After all, this has been the historical task of artists and intellectuals; and this is the duty of responsible administrators and decision makers in today's world.

Thank you.