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ADDENDUM

**to the ANALYTICAL BASE-LINE REPORT ON THE CULTURE SECTOR
AND CULTURAL POLICY OF
THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN**

**Studies and Diagnostics on Cultural Policies
of the Eastern Partnership Countries**

The document is prepared by the Regional Monitoring and Capacity Building Unit of the Eastern Partnership Culture Programme

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PREFACE

This document complements the Analytical Base-line Report on the Culture Sector and Cultural Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan prepared by the Regional Monitoring and Capacity Building Unit of the Eastern Partnership Culture Programme (RMCBU) in August 2012 and revised in January 2013. The report was published at the Programme's web-site (<http://www.euroeastculture.eu/en/database-of-materials/view-azerbaijan-analytical-base-line-report-on-the-culture-sector-and-cultural-policy.html>).

The Addendum reflects the major changes that have occurred in the country's cultural policy context since 2012. The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the RMCBU and reflects the opinion of contributing experts. It can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission. The document was prepared by Ms. Asmer Abdullayeva, RMCBU Expert with contributions by Mr. Terry Sandell, RMCBU Expert responsible for methodological guidance for the studies, Mr. Luciano Gloor, RMCBU Team Leader and Ms. Tetiana Biletska, RMCBU Capacity Building Expert.

In 2013 the RMCBU published the Regional Research Report on Cultural Policies and Trends of the Eastern Partnership Countries and six Analytical Base-line Reports on the Culture Sector and Cultural Policy of the EaP countries. The reports were intended for a broad range of audiences that includes all culture stakeholders in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the European Union. The documents summarized results of the Studies and Diagnostics on Cultural Policies of the Eastern Partnership Countries carried out by the RMCBU from October 2011 to March 2012 in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The studies were focused on the national cultural policies of these countries and practically orientated to provide strategic guidance to the entire Eastern Partnership Culture Programme and to all activities of the RMCBU Project. A tailor-made system to analyze the current situation in the culture sector of the EaP countries was elaborated by the RMCBU. It was primarily based on conceptual comparative analysis of the countries' specific policies with applicable international standards exercised by the RMCBU in cooperation with six local experts and guided by an international expert. Preparation, publication and further promotion of the reports stimulated comments and contributions from the Programme's stakeholders and other interested parties, leading to debate on cultural policy matters for the EaP countries and beyond. There is no doubt that in the course of implementation of the Programme the dialogue on cultural policy matters contributed to promoting better integration of culture into national, regional and local development policies of the Eastern Partnership countries.

Major Changes in the Cultural Policy Context of Azerbaijan 2012-2014

In the context of the development and general policy strategy of Azerbaijan, the establishment of a solid base in the cultural sphere is given a special place. In order to promote the role of culture, numerous legislative and related instruments have been developed whose implementation is one of the key tasks for state cultural organizations, and, of course, is the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. In 2014 a presidential decree has been adopted so called 'The Culture Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan'. It serves as the basis of the future cultural development of the country and is considered by the country's authorities as one of the main achievements of the period 2010-2014. The decree sets the President's priorities for nearly all subsectors of culture, with special attention to

- national heritage preservation,
- modernization reforms across the cultural sector,
- educational aspects related to the cultural sector and cultural development, support for new talent and improving the working and professional conditions of cultural workers and practitioners,
- international cooperation,
- development and implementation of high-priority special cultural projects,
- development of a legal base for the proper establishment/functioning of cultural organizations and operators,
- promotion of the country's image through cultural initiatives,
- establishment of a wide network of cultural operators,
- support to the non-governmental sector (NGO), to creative young people and for the creation of a positive environment for development of a new cluster of cultural actors.

Although many cultural activities are still run and managed by state bodies and state agencies, the number of independent commercial structures and creative organisations producing modern cultural product of sufficiently high quality has increased during the last years. The support and funding of such organisations by the state is crucially important. In parallel, real attention is now being paid to local creative potential to facilitate the creation of cultural product that is able to compete in the international market.

A good example of the latter is the activities of 'HIPNOTICA', a company made up of an independent creative team of professionals who work in the area of projection mapping¹ and video-art. Their main activities are video-installation, projection, lighting art and other contemporary forms of video-art. 'HIPNOTICA' is a commercial organisation and its team cooperates with major state and government institutions such as the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Youth and Sports as well as with the business sector. Development of large-scale projects implemented by this young team is a successful example of the interaction and cooperation of different structures within the cultural sector. It is also an example of nascent local creative industries, which may have economic significance in the future.

At present and in the last two years the governmental bodies in charge of culture administration (the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, regional cultural administration departments, the Ministry of Youth and Sports etc.) as well as the Heydar Aliyev Foundation are focusing on development related to

- restoration and conservation of historic monuments,
- creation of new exhibition spaces,
- review and modernisation of cultural sector administration,
- organisation of joint projects, exhibitions, master-classes, workshops and special conferences related to contemporary topics and issues with local and foreign foundations, NGOs and voluntary organizations,
- cultural initiatives in the regions,
- involvement of young people's organisations in cultural projects,
- modernisation of museums and improvement of all aspects of contemporary museum management.

¹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Projection_mapping

Another development has been the introduction of an e-government portal², which has led to the updating of the web-sites of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism where comprehensive information about the activities of the Ministry can be found as well as copies of current legislation as well as implementation and reporting information about completed programmes and projects.

n independent companies are beginning to produce pro which augurs well for the future of Azerbaijan national cinema. Since the revival of the State Film Fund, film-making is a priority for investment. Independent film production companies such as Narimanfilm, Adari Films, Butafilms and Salname are particularly active alongside Azerbaijanfilm, the state studio. Short films are gaining popularity in Azerbaijan.

In the film sector, independent companies are producing more and more self-initiated projects (as compared to state commissioned products as was the rule some 10 years ago), a development supported by the authorities that expect from it an increased international visibility of the country. Since the revival of the State Film Fund a couple of years ago, independent film production companies such as Narimanfilm, Adari Films, Butafilms and Salname are particularly active alongside Azerbaijanfilm, the state studio. Recently local short films are gaining popularity in Azerbaijan.

A particularly interesting initiative has been the 'Cinemarathon' which began in 2012 and was developed by 'Cinemasports', a creative team led by Gurban Bunyatov and Eldar Albertson. 'Cinemasports' is a group of filmmakers and film lovers with a passion for making films. The participants of the 'Cinemarathon' are given ten hours to come up with a plot on a given topic, to shoot and to edit the material, and upload it to the internet. 'Cinemarathons' have been supported at different times both by government and non-government organisations (e.g. the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Historical-Architectural Reserve 'Icherisheher', the Public Youth Union 'DAN', the public association 'Joint & Healthy' and the non-profit organisation YARAT.

Another interesting initiative is an educational project in the sphere of theatre in cooperation with well-known international organisations such as British Council. In this case the project resulted in new work by well-known dramatists. The participation of international specialists in the project allowed the dramatists to share their experience and knowledge.

One of the immediate problem areas that require active intervention is education and training and the creation of cultural clusters. This is recognized in the general strategy of the authorities. New educational and training programmes are needed in all the cultural sub-sectors. This process is currently at the stage of development.

Highest priority is at present being given to building the foundations for the smooth integration of Azerbaijan into the global cultural space. It is positive that this is one focus of cultural policy and that activities are being launched, but a lot still needs to be done in terms of legislation and appropriate initiatives in order to see it really producing the intended results.

In the educational sphere related to culture there is urgent need for reform because the old classical system and its teaching content and methods have remained unchanged for some fifty years. There is a lack of qualified personnel in the field of art management and of specialists who are well acquainted with modern art. There is a lack of educational programmes related to the history and theory of modern art, for curators and arts managers, and for students of art and theatre. Some active changes in state curricula for culture institutions are being seen. Reform of general educational syllabuses, modernisation and the involvement of highly qualified international specialists are positive factors. Intercultural education is a part of the general school and university curricula. This field is administered mainly by the Ministry of Education, excluding music, art and painting schools for children that are under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Within humanitarian disciplines, themes such as shared national values and identity; promotion of tolerance, multilingualism and equality; informing students about world cultures, religions and traditions, are addressed at all levels of education.

The activities of 'YARAT' may serve as one of the successful examples in this context. Founded in 2011, this non-governmental organisation works in the area of contemporary art, developing and promoting

² <http://e-gov.az>

contemporary Azerbaijan at a national and international level. 'YARAT' fulfils its mission through a continuous programme of exhibitions, educational events and festivals. 'YARAT' facilitates dialogue and exchange between local and international art communities, including foundations, galleries and museums. The educational events of 'YARAT' include lectures and seminars with the involvement of international specialists as well as implementation of projects for the development of the young talent within an umbrella project 'ARTIM'. 'YARAT' created 'YAY' gallery in 2012 as part of a project to develop the infrastructure for local visual arts – the first gallery of modern art. The multidisciplinary activities of 'YARAT' allow talking of a new phenomenon in Azerbaijan's culture, a new culture "generator" on which future cultural initiatives can be built. It is without question that such a concept would not be financially sustainable without the engagement of generous sponsors.

There are individuals, including contemporary Azerbaijani artists, who are well known and very experienced participants in international projects and exhibitions. There is also a young generation of cultural actors (artists, writers, musicians, composers, photographers, sculptors etc.) with strong potential for self-development. The creative gallery-studio 'Natavan', established in summer 2013 by the young talented artist Natavan Aliyeva is a good example. Having her own space, she tried to develop a creative area for young and promising artists where they could develop interesting and innovative projects. A number of exhibitions and master classes by such renowned artists as the prominent Russian photographers Oksana Yushko and Arthur Bondarev, or the famous British artist and writer Paul Caldwell and the French photographer Alain Ziemer alternated with courses on drawing, crafts, etc for children.. This is a modern approach to the role of a creative gallery-studio that is open to new developments and establishes a wide network of international contacts and combines a vast variety of cultural events.

The role of independent creative unions in the promotion of the idea of cultural diversity may be seen in the example of 'PROSPERCARTOONSTUDIO'. A group of young creative people were able to create in the course of three years an information-digital agency with minimal funding and provide the full spectrum of services from animation to corporate and social projects. Their wide customer and activity base includes both the governmental and non-governmental sectors, socially orientated projects and there are branches in the regions. One can talk of a truly new form of cultural development. The independent creative sector when it collaborates with both governmental (The Ministry of Youth and Sports of Azerbaijan Republic, Azerbaijan Youth Foundation, Association of Banks of Azerbaijan) and non-governmental commercial structures create a favourable environment for the development of a creative cultural base that produces a specific type of cultural project. For instance, the company Prosper Cartoon Studio launched the project Donorbook (2014) under its voluntary Corporate Social Responsibility according to Azerbaijani laws.

The Eastern Partnership Culture Programme has been very useful for cultural operators from Azerbaijan as an opportunity to expand their network of international contacts, including within the Cultural Policy Exchange Workshops for public and private cultural professionals from the six EaP countries. In July 2014 on the occasion of an Open Session of the workshop held in Baku the recently adopted 'Culture Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan' was presented by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to the participants and to national cultural actors that then discussed it under the question "Does the strategy and policy meet the reality and needs of the cultural actors and sector?" Furthermore, three regional projects granted under the EaP Culture Programme had partners involved from Azerbaijan.

Despite many recent positive developments outlined above, the system of cultural policy, planning, management and funding is not yet 'fit for purpose' in the context of Azerbaijan's ambitions and challenges and wider contemporary developments. Legislation related to culture has been a good example of change not accompanied by 'on the ground' practical coherent reforms. The policy document 'The Culture Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan' adopted by presidential decree in February 2014, for instance, provides a framework for cultural policy and defines the main instruments for adjusting cultural policy mechanisms to the requirements of the sector. The 'Concept' is focused not only on heritage protection and support for professional art activities (as is typical for most post-Soviet countries), but also on the development of cultural industries including cinema and publishing. At the same time, according to the opinion of some Azeri cultural practitioners, the 'Concept' does not analyse the situation in the cultural domain and in hence does not connect to many of the needs and expectations of the professional communities. Obviously that is caused by lack of involvement of all interested parties in the process of policy elaboration in the country.

The attitudes inherited from the Soviet period and the limitations of the current state model of cultural management in Azerbaijan often limit understanding of 'arts and culture activities' as those directly supported or permitted by the Ministry of Culture (and Tourism). There is no 'integrated' commercial cultural sector forming part of the cultural geography of Azerbaijan, while creative industries, as a sector, do not exist in any substantial sense in the country. Cultural NGOs exist and some of them operate effectively and valuably, but it is also not a substantial or properly integrated sector yet.

Serious future change will come only by both reform and development of the state cultural institutions coupled with development of the NGO and commercial cultural sectors. Another Soviet inheritance relates to demographics and ethnic issues illustrated by the on-going Karabag (Nagorno-Karabakh) problem. The low level of technical facilities and equipment of public cultural institutions, lack of access to modern technologies and resources, including for researchers, as well as a limited amount of appropriate public spaces for culture-related activity and a low level of cultural services are perceived as the major threats to the national cultural sector by national stakeholders. Apart from further modernisation of the legislation, training of professionals and the development of professional skills, particularly in museum management, heritage restoration/rehabilitation are considered by national cultural actors to be among the priority needs of the national cultural sector.