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Culture and Peace-building

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Culture can play an important role in the promotion of peace and in building trust and mutual understanding in conflict and post conflict situations. It has been proven over time, in South Africa, Northern Ireland, Cambodia, Rwanda and other conflict situations, that culture-related activities can work as an active catalyst in bringing together communities that have become estranged during protracted and violent conflicts.

The two leaders, cognizant of this catalytic role of culture, have already taken the important decision to set up a technical committee on culture. The experts appointed by the two leaders have an extremely important task in front of them. To be successful and to produce results that can be therapeutic and meaningful, they should engage and seek the support and enthusiastic participation of artists across the divide, by helping to forge partnerships and common cultural experiences.

Being a firm believer in the role of cultural activities towards fostering peace and reconciliation, I put forward some thoughts on some initiatives that could be included in the committee's agenda.

- 1) In most cases, organizing cultural activities entails cost. To be able to cover such anticipated expenses, it would be important for the technical committee to have, from the very start, available funds that could be used for that purpose. Towards meeting those needs, both leaders could jointly ask the European Union to establish a fund for bicommunal cultural activities, to which the EU institutions, organizations and individuals from member states and other countries, could contribute for the realization of these objectives.
- 2) Important cultural events are already taking place separately in the two communities, which unfortunately cannot be attended by members of the other community because of language barriers. To enable the unimpeded sharing of cultural experiences, these language barriers should be overcome

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by appropriate translation. The recent theatrical performance of the Turkish Cypriot municipal theater of Nicosia in Rialto is a good example. A team of students under the direction of professors of Greek and Turkish studies programs translated the powerful poem of Faize Ozdemirciler in the Greek language, thus enabling the use of surtitles during the performance. The use of similar modalities in a significant number of other theatrical performances and other cultural activities of both communities could prove to be instrumental in building cultural bridges and nurturing mutual respect for cultural achievements.

- 3) To establish annual bicomunal cultural awards, aimed at recognizing successful collaborations of artists from both communities in the fields of music, theater literature and the fine arts.
 - 4) Since youth represents a demographically large and powerful part of society, it is important to engage young people from both communities in cultural activities, by organizing bicomunal young musicians' performances, young artists' workshops and exhibitions, song and dance competitions and festivals. Through such cultural activities an important dialogue can be initiated which could be instrumental in generating mutual understanding and respect among young people, that have not had the experience during their lifetime of coexistence and collaboration with members of the other community.
 - 5) The two communities have shared throughout their nearly 450 years of coexistence in their homeland, some common cultural trends and traditions, which are manifested primarily in the folk dances and songs, but also in the local cuisine and in ceremonials of family and social gatherings. These commonalities in the Cypriot culture should be identified by joint research conducted by experts from both communities and celebrated by holding joint folk and gastronomic festivals. At the same time, cultural diversity should also be celebrated as forming one of the most important assets and wealth of Cyprus and the Cypriots.
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