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EUROPE UNDER PRESSURE: WHAT ROLE FOR CULTURE AND PHILANTHROPY?

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Abstract

We are living in a time of extremes, possibly the most dangerous years since the beginning of the European political project in the 1950s. As Europe grapples with war, climate and migration emergencies, rising costs of living, and societal disruptions – all fuelling populist narratives – there is an urgent need to invest in transnational debates about the future we want. We need a European public space, based on shared values and cultures, nourishing a sense of community. Culture and philanthropy play a fundamental role as they create and support solutions to address complex challenges while encouraging togetherness, responsibility, and solidarity. Culture and philanthropy are invested in local territories engaging people on issues that matter to them and to society. Their emphasis on community and solidarity values are countering divisive forces that exploit fears, anxieties, and frustrations. Culture and philanthropy are allies in fighting illiberal trends, and they are gearing up for the European Parliament elections in June 2024, which will be a litmus test for the resilience of our community, our European way of life, and our democracy. The European institutions would be well advised to recognise culture as the cement of Europe, embed a cultural dimension across their policies, and engage and partner with philanthropy for Europe.

Flirting with the extremes vs cultivating a European sentiment

2024 is an exceptional year in modern global history: around 40 countries, accounting for over 40 per cent of the world's population, will elect new parliaments and leaders, reshaping geopolitical landscapes. The European Parliament elections are the world's biggest transnational elections and second largest democratic exercise. Given the rise of far-right parties across Europe, it will be the first time that we risk such an important swing to the far-right in a European election. In such a polarised world, diabolising populism is of no use; instead, we need to understand it. As highlighted in a European Council on Foreign Relations policy brief, the value that people place on European standards of living and values does not translate into faith in the European political project or the resilience of liberal societies (Garton Ash, Krastev, & Leonard, 2023). Thus, regardless of the European elections' outcome, illiberal trends are and will remain a serious danger.

The threat of a far-right capture of public opinion and the stifling of European integration demands that all democratic forces and players – public, private, and civic – come together, pool resources, and make a compelling case for a Europe that values diversity and advances through unity. Investing in civic education and cultural initiatives that let us share, experience, and imagine Europe, defining what connects us rather than what divides us, and reinvigorating a culture of solidarity should not be left to philanthropic action alone. On the other hand, Europe should not be the priority of only the

The EU and philanthropy need to work much more strategically together and initiatives that counteract polarisation, shape a European public space, and sentiment.

nt Compass (ECF, 2023), an annual survey of governments' and citizens' pe, shows that most Europeans remain positive about the EU but feel ted from it. There is little human or emotional attachment to the European

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institutions. ‘You cannot fall in love with the Single Market’, as Jacques Delors (1989) famously said when proposing education, culture, and society as areas of intrinsic cooperation for the then European Community.

Since the signing of the Maastricht Treaty (1992), which extended the EU’s competency to education and culture, Europe has become more present than ever in citizens’ lives, protecting their rights and defending standards and interests. In the domain of education, the Erasmus programme, which started as a public–private initiative between the European Commission and the European Cultural Foundation, allowed millions of young people to study and travel abroad, learn about other cultures and languages, and experience what it means to be European. The Creative Europe programme has evolved into an established European cooperation instrument used by thousands of cultural and media organisations in the EU and beyond.

Yet only a fraction of people feel involved, while many are missing out on a strong European sentiment that transcends national, cultural, and generational boundaries. This is a fundamental issue considering that all of today’s key challenges, including climate, migration, security, energy, and artificial intelligence (AI), are post-national, and a strong European sentiment would undoubtedly influence citizens’ political and civic choices for the future of Europe.

Powering Europe through culture

Culture, creativity, and cultural heritage are Europe’s unique features that underpin European values. They play an important role in nurturing Europe’s societies and identities – that is, identities plural. It is essential for each European to know and to feel that belonging to Europe, and being an EU citizen, does not remove one’s national identity. It enriches it, expands it, adds value to it. Next to feelings of belonging to family, local community, language, region, and country, EU citizenship guarantees a certain set of rights and responsibilities that need to be nourished by common values and a sense of purpose. This is where culture can function as a vector and make a significant difference to voter behaviour and ultimately the European project.

The intimate connection between culture and democracy is evidenced by a recent EU report demonstrating that citizens actively participating in cultural activities are more likely to engage in democratic processes.¹ They are more likely to vote, volunteer, and engage in community activities. The ongoing war in Ukraine is a stark example of the intrinsic link between democracy and culture, and between culture and identity. Ukrainians are fighting not only for their physical freedom and sovereignty but also for the preservation of their cultural identity and their future within a democratic Europe. Our support to Ukraine must continue and include a strong cultural dimension. This is important now – to support its cultural resilience and resistance – but also in the future with regard to its reconstruction and EU membership. Culture needs to be part of Ukraine’s Europe package, including the €50 billion Ukraine Facility.

Culture is an indispensable element in a flourishing democracy, shaping societal values and envisioning alternative ways of life. However, despite its significance in the broader context of the Sustainable Development Goals, as highlighted by the United Nations, culture is mostly absent in current political manifestos, programmes, and election campaigns. Culture cannot fix all problems, such as war, the climate emergency, or the challenges posed by AI, but it is very much a part of these struggles and transitions, helping people make sense of things, find creative solutions, and imagine a different future. With this in mind, a central place for culture in pre-election debates would help bring Europeans together and focus their imagination on finding creative solutions and creating better and desirable futures rather than driving them further apart and deepening divides.

The economic argument also plays in favour of investing in the creative and cultural ecosystem. In addition to strengthening societies, their creativity, resilience, and cohesion, culture is a non-negligible economic sector. It employs 7.7 million people across Europe, which is 3.8 per cent of total employment in the EU (Eurostat, 2023). These figures are growing year by year, with more than 1.7 million active enterprises in the creative economy, arts, entertainment, and other culture related activities in the European Union in 2023.

The EU has recognised the role of culture and its contribution to other EU policy goals such as regional development, international development, and foreign relations. However, despite the adoption of a New European Strategic Agenda for Culture (2018), culture still occupies a meagre space in EU policies and budgets. It serves here and there rather than being fully embraced and strategically positioned in EU policy thinking and action. In budgetary terms, culture is a lightweight. The EU’s Creative Europe budget amounts to €2.44 billion for seven years (2021–2027), a tiny fraction (0.2 per cent) of the EU’s overall budget.

In the spirit of the Schuman Declaration (9 May 1950), embodying the idea that big solutions cannot be found without creative efforts proportionate to the challenges, there is a need for a much more bold and ambitious European framework for culture. Culture and creativity should be among the EU’s strategic priorities. The good news is that a coalition of cultural and philanthropic partners have launched a campaign and developed a comprehensive plan to turn this idea into reality.

Making a Cultural Deal for Europe

Roosevelt’s New Deal, the Cultural Deal for Europe offers a far-sighted vision of culture. It takes culture out of its small niche and evidences its interrelatedness with our lives: from the way we live, travel, produce, consume, create, collaborate, and as we build with each other in our homes, at school, at work, abroad, and with other peoples. Culture is the basis on which we build our lives and through

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which we project our futures. Culture helps us to better understand our past, to make sense of our present, and to navigate the future.

That is why it needs to be at the heart of the European project and its policies: cohesion, climate, migration, security, health, employment, urban and regional development, technology and innovation, international relations and development – all these policies have a strong cultural dimension but are under-resourced in cultural terms. Culture is not the solution to all the challenges of our times, but it is an indispensable asset for finding creative, people-centred, and sustainable answers. Culture is pivotal to the resilience and progress of Europe.

This is why the European Cultural Foundation (ECF), Culture Action Europe, and Europa Nostra – representing thousands of networks, organisations, and individuals across Europe – launched the Cultural Deal for Europe, initially in response to the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cultural and creative sectors and industries (November 2020). In cooperation with the European Parliament, the alliance has since achieved some major milestones, including a €12 billion investment in culture from Member States' National Recovery and Resilience Plans. Albeit not at the same pace everywhere or creating the same opportunities, this was a significant win, and a historic step. But much more must be done for Europe to thrive through culture – internally and externally.

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The Cultural Deal for Europe is a transformative path. But unlike the Green Deal proposed by the European Commission, the Cultural Deal is a movement which has its roots in civil society, is closely connected to citizens and their aspirations, and links the local to the European. The Cultural Deal for Europe makes concrete contributions to European policy design while mobilising public, private, and civic actors to join the transition. This makes it potentially very impactful.

The Cultural Deal for Europe is ambitious and pragmatic at the same time. It has a long-term vision, supported by tangible policy goals and immediate demands. It calls on the European Parliament and its members to make culture a pillar of the political agenda of the future (ECF, 2023b).

The Cultural Deal for Europe calls on the European institutions to do the following:

Effective use of National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) for culture:

- Include civil society in the implementation of the NRRPs and the monitoring of investments in culture.
- Allocate funds for the highest-quality conservation and restoration of Europe's heritage

European Cultural Deal for Ukraine:

- Include culture, cultural heritage, and creative industries in the EU's relief packages for Ukraine and the future Ukraine Facility (2024–2027)

New EU strategic framework for culture:

- Develop an ambitious strategic framework for culture which reflects the challenges of our times and the opportunities that culture provides.
- Work in close collaboration with civil society to frame and design a new strategic framework.

Partnerships with European philanthropy:

- Enable new and innovative collaborative ventures with European philanthropy.
- Facilitate cross-border philanthropy and remove barriers to cooperation.

Common standards for working conditions of artists and cultural workers:

- Establish common and ambitious standards for the working conditions of artists and cultural workers across Europe.

Culture's potential for sustainable development:

- Accelerate efforts to leverage the potential of culture for sustainable development and social justice.
- Fully incorporate culture into the European Green Deal.

public debate:

the centre of the 2024 European Parliament election debates and discussions across Europe.

In a future deeply rooted in culture, the Cultural Deal for Europe offers a path towards a transformative journey. It calls on the EU to broaden its view and

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understanding of culture and to make it an ally in addressing the multifaceted challenges facing Europe. Investing in culture is not a luxury but a smart, strategic choice, an economy's bread and butter, and a necessity for the resilience, well-being, and unity of people.

Breaking taboos: philanthropy, politics, and Europe

It is common knowledge that traditionally philanthropy only engaged very timidly with politics, and even less with the European project. But things are changing, and both foundations and the EU are increasingly interested in finding ways to collaborate with one another and ultimately in partnering for greater impact. However, the EU still often sees philanthropy only as a source of funding and not as a partner with whom to shape common agendas and strategies of intervention.

Institutional philanthropy in Europe comprises more than 186,000 foundations with an accumulated annual expenditure of nearly €64 billion. Besides providing funding and investments, foundations boast deep expertise and knowledge, as well as many stakeholder networks in the areas of their activities, which can be leveraged significantly with the appropriate framework conditions.

Foundations are particularly active in the arts and cultural space, recognising the important societal role and transformative power of the arts and culture. A Philea (2023a) study titled Arts and Culture at the Core of Philanthropy, involving 55 foundations investing a total of €478 million annually in arts and culture, has shown that despite the dramatic challenges of the past five years, foundations remain committed to providing resources and strengthening the resilience of the arts and culture sector.

Public funding and philanthropic funding are not comparable in size and impact but would substantially gain by working together. Neither public organisations such as the European institutions nor private foundations and civil society organisations at large will be able to handle European challenges on their own.

Considering the number and level of the crises, all possible effort must be made to work together, lift the barriers to partnering, and find creative solutions proportionate to the challenges.

These challenges are just too big. Philanthropy is willing to become a partner – co-investing in and co-funding joint initiatives – but this will require that European policymakers create a stimulating legal and fiscal framework and acknowledge the importance of partnership beyond foundations bringing in the cash.

So far, the EU lacks the legal, fiscal, and financial frameworks to allow for powerful EU–philanthropic partnerships, nor do many foundations commit their resources to Europe as a dedicated field of intervention. Philanthropy for Europe is still uncharted territory, except for a few foundations such as the ECF in Amsterdam, which shares the same founder as the European Community, Robert Schuman, and which, since 1954, has invested all its resources in the cause of nourishing a European sentiment and strengthening Europe through cultural initiatives that let us imagine, share, and experience Europe.

The ECF's attempt to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 lockdowns is a good example of a case where an EU–philanthropic partnership would have made a tremendous difference but, due to the existing legal rules and financial regulations, 'partnering for impact' was not possible. At the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ECF launched the Culture of Solidarity Fund, a European rapid response mechanism supporting cross-border initiatives of solidarity in times of lockdown. The European Commission showed great interest in pooling resources for a quick, efficient, and transnational cultural response but, despite many efforts, no solution could be found to move forward together and set an example for further EU–philanthropic partnerships delivering solutions on the ground and benefiting from their respective resources, knowledge, and networks.

To date, the Culture of Solidarity Fund has grown into a public–private coalition of more than 20 foundations and partners and just launched its 11th edition of support for initiatives that, in the midst of turmoil and crisis, cherish, protect, and revive European cooperation and solidarity. The EU is still the big missing actor. Other cases of EU–philanthropic partnerships that have been aborted due to

er and level of the crises, all possible effort must be made to work together, lift
ng, and find creative solutions proportionate to the challenges. It is time to
network and financial rules to new European realities, needs, and
tified in Imagine Philanthropy for Europe (Wider Sense, 2020) and
ie Drawing Board (Van Gendt, 2023) – and launch solid EU–philanthropic

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ventures, co-developed and co-funded, that strengthen our respective action and our impact through engagement, collaboration, and partnership.

Philea, Europe's platform of over 7,500 public benefit foundations, launched a European Philanthropy Manifesto (Philea, 2023b) in 2023 that echoes the above demands and calls for a Single Market for Philanthropy.

The European Philanthropy Manifesto makes four key recommendations:

- Empower philanthropy by creating enabling frameworks in line with the fundamental rights of the freedom of association and movement of capital.
- Facilitate cross-border philanthropy by removing barriers that cost the sector €100 million annually and prevent work on pressing societal challenges that do not stop at borders.
- Engage with philanthropy by better implementing Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union to create an open, transparent, and regular dialogue with civil society, including philanthropy as well as creating other strategic engagement opportunities with the philanthropy sector.
- Partner with philanthropy for public good by creating more opportunities in strategic programme design, cogranting, and creating incentives for co-investing from endowments – mobilising the untapped potential of billions of euros.

Going forward, and with a new European Parliament and a new European Commission taking office in 2024, it is the right time to debate our futures and imagine ambitious yet pragmatic plans for Europe. Among these plans is the creation of a genuine European foundation bringing together EU, public, private, and philanthropic actors to shape and resource Europe. Our Europe and its future cannot be left solely in the hands of the EU, competing European states, and interest-driven lobby groups. There is a need for an independent European actor that provides hope, practical solutions, and resources; an actor that advocates for the European common good, stimulates change on the ground, and strengthens essential social and democratic achievements; an actor that confronts the re-nationalisation and radicalisation of Europe and invests in European democracy, freedom, and solidarity.

This new European actor should have social and financial weight. It must have a European vision and ambition while being firmly rooted in local realities. This actor does not yet exist. The EU and foundations in Europe need to create it together, investing in joint responses to ongoing challenges and Europe's preparedness for future crises. Who will champion this idea within the European institutions? Which political and philanthropic leaders in Europe will have the ambition and determination to make such a new and unique European venture become a reality? The future will tell, and hopefully soon. There is no time to waste.

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