

With royal blessing in the breach for European cultural heritage

In brief

- Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Culture, and Princess Laurentien found each other.
- Together they are committed to the importance of culture in times of corona.
- "Culture is the glue that can hold society together," says Princess Laurentien.
- Gabriel also emphasizes the economic importance of the sector, which would account for 4% of the European economy.
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As European leaders gather in Brussels at the end of this week in a new attempt to break the deadlock over the corona recovery plan, a special alliance is concerned about an underexposed aspect of the debate: the role of culture in the Europe of the future.

European Commissioner Mariya Gabriel forms one half of the alliance. The Bulgarian in Brussels is about culture and youth, among other things, and will not be so well known to the Dutch public.

The other half of the alliance is. Princess Laurentien is president of the European Cultural Foundation. That is an Amsterdam-based foundation that focuses on "supporting people and initiatives that let us experience and depict Europe."

Gabriel and Princess Laurentien met during a recent board meeting of this foundation. They quickly started talking about the role that art and culture can play in the reconstruction of Europe after the corona crisis. The role is underexposed, the two believe.

Modest jar

Gabriel is strengthened in that feeling by what she sees as a modest jar for the Creative Europe program, which she calls "a success story". In the European Commission proposal for the new multi-year budget of the EU, € 1.5 billion has been reserved for Creative Europe. This amounts to 0.08% of the total financial package of € 1850 billion that the Commission intends to work in the coming years. It is 7.3% less than stated in a previous proposal.

Times have changed, of course, the corona crisis necessitates sharp choices and Charles Michel, the chairman of the board of government leaders, made another new budget proposal last Friday. But culture should not be the child of the bill, the two warn in an interview with this newspaper.

Because culture also provides a basic need and can help increase people's well-being, Princess Laurentien believes. She also sees other dimensions. "Culture is also the glue that can hold society together. Who doesn't remember how the balcony singers brought a sense of cohesion during the lockdown? "

Economic interest

Gabriel supports her and does not fail to emphasize the economic importance. "Culture accounts for 4% of our economy and for seven million jobs. The sector has created more jobs in recent years than, for example, the automotive sector."

"The culture sector has created more jobs in recent years than, for example, the automotive sector"- European Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, responsible for the European culture portfolio.

European cooperation, supported from Brussels, can help the cultural sector through the crisis, says Princess Laurentien. She likes to quote the example of the Holland Dance Festival. The Dance on, Pass on, Dream on program of the more than thirty-year-old dance organization in The Hague - in which older dancers take centre stage - was under pressure from the crisis. Princess Laurentien: "They contacted eleven other dance organizations in Europe and successfully approached Creative Europe. This led to a new and European program that is even better and guarantees that the elderly continue to dance, which in turn benefits our healthcare sector.'

Princess Laurentien has found that the Dutch culture sector does not always find its way to Europe. But she hopes that Holland Dance Festival has shown that European cooperation is important in times of crisis and that its importance will continue to be seen by Brussels and the Member States.

Commissioner Gabriel would like 1.5% of the corona repair fund distributed through grants to be reserved for the cultural and creative industries. With the current plans, that

amounts to € 7.5 billion. "It would be a strong signal to the European creative mind that the EU is also there for him," says the Bulgarian.

Hold up your hand

But Gabriel also realizes that it is difficult to hold hands in these times and therefore also seeks the solution in synergies with other European funds. For example, it launched a platform on which Member States share information about which instruments they use to keep their cultural sector afloat.

Among other things, it emerged that not everyone knew that Sure, EU temporary unemployment insurance, could also be used to support the cultural sector. "That is important, because 95% of the people who work in the culture sector are self-employed."

The question remains whether there is such a thing as a European culture and whether it is therefore a task for Brussels to assist if Member States are unable or unwilling to do so.

"Culture is also about shared basic values such as freedom of expression and solidarity. That unites us "- Princess Laurentien

Princess Laurentien is certainly. Culture is also about shared basic values such as freedom of expression and solidarity. That unites us."

Gabriel nods in agreement. "The EU's motto is: united in diversity. Our job is to promote that diversity while responding to common challenges."