

## **European Cultural Foundation**

### **Work Plan 2023: New Energy for Europe**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Crisis and uncertainty are the new normal. On the heels of the Covid-19 pandemic, war arrived on our continent. On top of these crises, we are living through a climate pandemic, a pandemic of inequality, a pandemic of polarisation. The war in Ukraine has ushered in high inflation, an energy crisis and possibly a worldwide recession, as well as creating indescribable suffering and destruction. One crisis is stacking on top of the others – and together they are creating unpredictable dynamics. We need to stay alert, flexible and resilient. Rather than succumbing to a permanent state of emergency, we need to build a state of resilience.

The climate crisis is the most important issue of our time. How we tackle it is crucial to the survival of our planet as we know it. Recent years have provided so many indicators of what is to come: floods, droughts, storms, severe weather events, water shortages, unpredictable harvests, food shortages, mass migration and more. The climate crisis is here – it is not just a distant possibility. Everyone needs to act, react and adapt. While initially the European Cultural Foundation (ECF)'s focus was on reducing the CO<sub>2</sub> impact of cultural mobility, we will now address the climate crisis in all our work: through programmes, advocacy, communication, operations and finance. The climate challenge is also a cultural challenge.

In good times we cannot imagine that things can ever turn bad. In the middle of a crisis, the future looks bleak. There is a danger that we become swayed by negative group-think, which can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead, when times are tough, we must keep imagining a better future. We must invest in creativity, seek opportunity, provide hope. We believe the crises of today can, and must, create a New Energy for Europe – and we mean energy from renewable sources in the widest sense.

Throughout history, artists and cultural figures have been drivers of change. They offer hope in times of war and anxiety. They provide resistance against dictators and lies; they keep the connection across polarised lines; they imagine a better Europe beyond war, hardship, divisions and simplistic economic models. They counteract destructive nationalist forces and challenge inertia and nostalgia. Culture creates European experiences. Shared experiences create a sense of belonging, a European sense of purpose. Common experiences build peace and solidarity. Throughout times of crisis, culture has been inspirational and vital to our everyday lives. It has provided hope, strength and resilience. We will build on the capacity of culture to heal, bring communities together and imagine a way forward. Culture can provide new energy for Europe too.

What we can do: Foundations in Europe are doing a great job but – for what feels like a decade or more – the world has not been getting any better. Rather, it has been getting worse. Are we being too ambitious or too modest? Are we part of the problem while pretending to be the solution? Are we heading for another failure of collective imagination? This pivotal moment can be an

opportunity to define European philanthropy – not just as a copy of what currently exists, but as a better model of what it should be.

How can ECF respond to a cycle of never-ending crises? Does our strategy ‘Challenge 2025’ prepare us adequately for the new normal? Have the last two and a half years brought us closer to our mission than the 68 years before? Over the summer/autumn of 2022 we carried out a mid-point review of our five-year strategic plan. While we confirmed our mission and overall strategy, three areas have gained in weight that we will mainstream through all our actions: ECF’s response to the ecological crisis, as well as a concerted investment in community engagement and financial sustainability.

### **Our priorities for 2023:**

1. The **Culture of Solidarity Initiative** is our flexible instrument to enable cross-border European activities in times of war, climate transition and uncertainty.
2. Following successful advocacy for a **Cultural Deal for Europe** that delivered more than €10 billion for culture as part of the EU recovery plan, we will continue advocating for the full integration of culture into EU policies and actions.
3. After a successful review the **Europe Challenge** and the **European Pavilion** will be scaled up by ECF and partners.
4. ECF is mainstreaming **climate action** across all our operations, programmatic and advocacy work, finance and communications. We are committed to the European Philanthropy Coalition ‘We act: Philanthropy for Climate’ – which is both an ambition and a guide for action.
5. As part of our long-term commitment for empowering a **European Public Space**, we will work with our partners to enable a productive exchange of ideas between policy-makers, media-makers, economists, researchers and civil society. To provide a concrete case study, we will contribute to a European media platform, Display Europe, based on existing structures of citizens’ media.
6. We will continue our campaign to make **Europe Day** an occasion to celebrate European unity, solidarity and purpose. The second edition of the **European Sentiment Compass** will be published on 9 May 2023.
7. Throughout our rich history, ECF has been building communities, including Europe’s most famous community – the Erasmus community. Building on a large legacy and network, we will engage strategically with the **ECF community** and make our community an integral part of our initiatives and plans.
8. The current geopolitical uncertainty has implications for the financial strength of the foundation. In 2023, we will invest additional human and financial resources into implementing our **Sustainable Funding Plan**.
9. Operationally, our priority is mainstreaming our climate pledge across our operations and preparing concrete scenarios for a **new ECF office**.