



Continue Change

Fostering a European Culture of Solidarity

Strategy of the European Cultural Foundation 2025-2029

Executive Summary

As Europe stands at a crossroads, the challenges we face today feel both familiar and unprecedented. The rise of nationalism, deepening inequalities, and geopolitical tensions are testing the very fabric of our continent.

How do we stay united in a world that seems determined to pull us apart?

At the European Cultural Foundation, we have long believed that culture is the cornerstone of European unity. For over 70 years, we have worked to foster a shared sense of belonging across the continent. Today, this mission feels more urgent than ever.

Culture connects us.

Culture challenges our assumptions, bridges divides, and fosters empathy. In a time when politics seems more divisive than ever, culture offers a way to transcend borders, both physical and ideological.

Libraries are the European Social Network.

We have seen first-hand the power of culture to bring people together. Our work with libraries across Europe has shown how these spaces can become hubs of community and solidarity. Libraries, often overlooked in conversations about infrastructure, are in fact vital to the social fabric of our societies. They offer a space where people come together to learn, share, and imagine a better future. They are spaces where people can engage with one another, confront their differences, and build a collective vision for the future. This is the kind of work that Europe needs now.

Defending Democracy in the Digital Age.

Europe is increasingly shaped by the digital world, and this presents both opportunities and risks. We are all too familiar with the threats: misinformation, online hate speech, and the erosion of democratic norms in the digital space. These issues don't just undermine individual countries; they pose a real threat to Europe as a whole.

That's why digital citizenship is another central pillar of our strategy. We are working to promote critical thinking, digital literacy, and responsible online engagement. The digital space can be a force for good, but only if we equip people with the tools to navigate it responsibly.

Culture of Solidarity: A Lifeline in Crisis.

In times of uncertainty, solidarity is more than a buzzword—it's a lifeline. This is why we will use our Culture of Solidarity Fund to support civic lead cultural initiatives that foster collaboration and solidarity across borders, offering hope and connection at a time when it is so easy to feel isolated and desperate.

The European Funding Challenge: A Call to Philanthropy.

One of the greatest challenges we face in the coming years is securing sustainable funding for this important work. This is why we are calling for a new wave of philanthropy with a European purpose. More than 99% of Europe's philanthropic funding is focused on national or regional issues. But most of the challenges we face today are pan-European, and they require pan-European solutions. We need a new approach to philanthropy—one that transcends borders and invests in the European common good. By facilitating the sharing, pooling and scaling of resources, we aim to create a more sustainable funding model that can support Europe's civil society for the long term.

We are determined.

We are acutely aware of the work that lies ahead. The European Cultural Foundation is not just here to weather the storms—we are here to shape a better future. And the future we envision is one where Europe remains united, resilient, and hopeful.

Europe's future depends on the choices we make today. We cannot afford to take our European unity for granted. Now is the time to invest in the bonds that hold us together—through culture, through solidarity, and through a shared commitment to the common good. The challenges we face are great, but so is our determination.

Why planning

In 2019, we drafted a five-year strategy that we believed would deliver significant impact. Two months into the new strategy, the Covid-19 pandemic hit; two years later, the war in Ukraine broke out; and since then, more conflicts and geopolitical shifts have dominated the geopolitical landscape. Climate change has become a tangible reality. Did our strategy make sense and deliver impact? It did, but mainly because we embraced a flexible strategy, adjusted it, and developed new responses. Our strategy has become a living and breathing reference point; a framework with flexible borders. Do we need a new strategy? Do we need a strategy at all? According to Winston Churchill, “A plan is useless, but planning is essential”. Our plan may change over time, but it is important to spend some time upfront thinking about the purpose of what we do, the context in which we live and the ways we want to achieve something. Planning is essential.

Inspiration comes also from one of our own founding fathers, Robert Schuman. In his 1950 Schuman Declaration, he issued a call to make the creative efforts proportionate to the challenges of the time. Are our creative efforts proportionate to the challenges of today? They must.

With this determination, we evaluated our strategy, critically assessed our achievements and our failures. We have reviewed the current societal context for our work. We have gone on a listening tour across Europe and we have asked a diverse group of people what they consider to be the greatest challenges facing Europe and how our foundation can best respond. On this basis we have drawn up our next five-year plan. We are prepared for the fact the plan may need changing and it will need adapting. This strategic plan is our starting point.

I. Taking stock

Europe faces a critical juncture, confronting a multitude of interconnected challenges that test the very foundations of European integration and solidarity. The continent grapples with wars in Europe and its vicinity, threatening stability and security, alongside a resurgence of nationalism and divisive politics. Growing social, demographic, and regional inequalities exacerbate these tensions, while climate change poses an unprecedented risk to human survival. Additionally, the rise of populism challenges established democratic norms and erodes trust in institutions. These challenges echo the rationale behind the establishment of the European Cultural Foundation in 1954, highlighting the enduring need for cultural cooperation and understanding across borders. As Europe navigates this pivotal moment in its integration journey, reminiscent of the foundation’s early days, the importance of fostering unity, shared values, and collective action has never been more apparent. This era demands a renewed commitment to the ideals that inspired European cooperation seven decades ago, calling for innovative solutions, cross-cultural dialogue, and a reimagining of European solidarity to address these complex issues and shape a resilient, inclusive future for the continent.

The European cooperation model is facing serious challenges, both from within and from outside Europe. Nationalists are creating their own illiberal vision and narratives of another Europe. Our ECF mission and values are no longer assured as mainstream. The very *raison d’être* of our foundation is under scrutiny, along with the sustainability of our current funding model. The broader systemic challenge of the absence of philanthropy with a European purpose, coupled with our need to develop new core funding strategies, continues to place significant pressure on our operations.

Our mission to foster a European Sentiment – a sense of European belonging and solidarity – is becoming even more relevant as polarisation, nationalism, and technology-driven divisions are deepening. What was once considered niche is now widely understood.

The last five years have been marked by radical uncertainty. Uncertain times call for agility. Our team here at ECF responded well in the face of multiple crises, which proved we can be flexible when needed. Our Vision Fund transformed into the Culture of Solidarity Fund, reflecting our ability to pivot and stay relevant in a rapidly changing Europe. The Europe Challenge, European Pavilion, and Display Europe have become solid programmes. ECF has become an actor in the European library

sectors, as well as a recognised advocate for a safe European public space. Our budget has grown by 30%, through public and philanthropic match funding. We have played a significant role in promoting philanthropy with a European purpose, launching initiatives like Imagine-Philanthropy for Europe and the New Schuman Plan. Our Cultural Deal for Europe campaign helped secure €12 billion in funding for cultural recovery in Europe after the pandemic. The European Sentiment Compass has become an important research tool and a benchmark for our work.

On the other hand, programme areas like Experience Europe were hampered by the pandemic, while co-funding from other foundations has proven unpredictable due to competition and unclear positioning. Funding from the European Union (EU) has provided scale for projects, but it is no replacement for core funding. Despite increasing and diversifying funding, we are still searching for a sustainable replacement for core lottery funding.

What remains of our Amsterdam Manifesto from 2019? The manifesto called for a sense of urgency in the battle for Europe, focusing on the long-term mission of cultivating a European sentiment grounded in shared values and a collective European identity. While we have achieved some successes and weathered multiple challenges, the future requires continued adaptability, deeper societal engagement, and a sharp focus on scaling our efforts.

The “Queen’s Question”—“Why are our societies regressing despite so many good efforts?”—challenges our philanthropic sector to reevaluate strategies and effectiveness. For our part, the ECF intends to make this a defining characteristic of our work going forward.

The state of the European Sentiment

How do Europeans feel about Europe? It’s complicated. We have asked this question in a joint research project with the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)¹ since 2022. The goal has been to assess feelings of belonging, what is driving positive change in Europe, and what are the risks and opportunities for Europe’s unity, depending on the direction of public debate and public policy.

According to our research, Europeans are grappling with anxiety, grief, and helplessness, influenced by the ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, as well as post-pandemic stress. Despite this, there is a sense of solidarity, European empathy and unity, although it is strained by the prolonged nature of multiple crises.

¹ [European Sentiment Compass 2024 Report](#)

While Europeans expect their governments and the EU to embody leadership in democracy, freedom, and human rights, there is growing disenchantment and exclusion felt by some groups. Economic challenges, stemming partly from the Ukraine war and sanctions, energy crisis, and inflation, only serve to exacerbate these feelings, reviving memories of past crises.

Surprisingly, there is a relatively resilient sense of European belonging across Europe so far, which has also been strengthened by external threats and the belief that Europe is stronger together than divided. Despite a year of wars and elections, the research consistently showed large numbers of citizens in almost every EU member state continued to trust in European cooperation.

There is a clear expectation for responsible and practical leadership that aligns with European values of democracy, freedom, and human rights. Citizens expect decisive actions that reflect these values. The latest edition of our European Sentiment Compass research shows that a growing number of citizens feel “excluded”, “disillusioned” or “uninterested” in the EU. This is particularly the case for youth, people of colour and Muslims, and people in central and eastern Europe. Voting patterns and polling data suggest the danger that the EU is moving towards a more ethnic, closed-minded, and xenophobic understanding of “Europeanness” that could ultimately challenge European unity.

What can culture do?

To challenge our thinking and involve different perspectives to nourish our strategy, in 2024 we went on a listening tour throughout Europe. Asking the question “What Can Culture Do?”², we organised 13 roundtable conversations in 11 countries with a wide range of people in quite different places and settings. The following is a summary of the key findings.

Europe faces many challenges that influence our European sentiment and relationship to our continent as it grapples with globalisation, sociopolitical fragmentation, technological anxiety, and war in Europe and in its southern neighbourhood. Europe is faced with a loss of geopolitical influence and with internal disunity, exacerbated by a rise in populism and xenophobia. As digitalisation is increasing, democracy seems to be diminishing. How much is this correlated? There is a pervasive sense of complacency, particularly regarding the preservation of peace and a sense of European togetherness. This has

² [What Can Culture Do Tour 2024 Report](#)

led to a disconnect between citizens and the European project. This disillusionment is most pronounced among young people, who feel alienated, overwhelmed by current challenges, and disconnected from political processes and institutions such as the EU.

What can culture do? Culture can address these challenges by inspiring hope, fostering dialogue and a sense of community, and amplifying marginalised voices. It can reimagine a united and inclusive Europe, encouraging solidarity across diverse communities and parts of Europe. Culture can inspire creative spaces to survive and challenge oppression. Cultural initiatives can narrow the intergenerational gap by engaging youth in meaningful ways, reigniting their connection to European values. Through storytelling and creative expression, culture can bridge societal divisions, challenge taboos, and promote a deeper understanding of Europe's complex social fabric. Cultural actors in the West can learn from their counterparts in the East about how to survive uncertainty, oppression, and authoritarian rule and empower democratic change. Culture can celebrate European diversity and must avoid a simple replacement of nationalism by Euro-nationalism.

What can philanthropy do? The social contract between society and its key institutions is fraying. Philanthropic institutions – with their long view, their flexibility, and their independence – can take the bold action that other organisations cannot or will not do. Philanthropy can play a role in support of democracy, resilience and inclusivity. However, much more must be done in the face of current challenges. It is vital for philanthropic organisations to act as trusted partners rather than saviours. They can do this by promoting co-ownership of projects and ensuring that support reaches grassroots organisations effectively. Philanthropy can also create and sustain collaborative spaces for cultural engagement and the connection and transformation of venues such as libraries and museums into inclusive hubs for community participation. Philanthropy should not just fund pilot projects for others to scale but should consider scaling successful pilots organised by others too. Philanthropy should support civic lead, practical solutions rather than more and more “think tanking” with little impact on reality. Philanthropy should allocate more funding for European initiatives. Philanthropy can address the precarious financial constraints of European civil society, which is overly dependent on public funding and oftentimes suffers from heavy EU bureaucracy.

How can we work together? Even the biggest foundations cannot achieve anything on their own. To have impact we must cooperate. The way forward requires a flexible and innovative approach. There is a need to revive the European narrative by embracing diversity and expanding the conversation beyond traditional cultural, geographic, social, and technological boundaries. Trust, risk-taking, and continuous learning must underpin the efforts to create a more agile and responsive European civil society.

II. Who we are

The European Cultural Foundation is a unique European foundation with an impressive legacy and significant impact. We were established as the first foundation with a dedicated European mission, and we are still the biggest among a tiny segment of foundations working for Europe. We have co-created the Erasmus programme, the European Foundation Centre and many other European ventures. We have incubated ideas that we scaled with foundation partners and the EU. Over the last five years, we have successfully developed programmes such as the Europe Challenge with the libraries and the Culture of Solidarity Fund. We have a recognised advocacy capacity that creates policy impact such as the campaign for a Cultural Deal for Europe. We have a team of talented professionals and manage our resources well. We are not perfect, but we have a strong foundation to build upon.

A foundation for Europe

We are a foundation for Europe. Europe is our geographic focus, our purpose, and our passion. Being a European foundation is our DNA and makes us unique.

The European Cultural Foundation believes in a united Europe that works better and delivers more because of cooperation, sharing, and solidarity. Our foundation is guided above all by the European common good.

ECF works within the geographic boundaries of the Council of Europe which currently comprises 46 countries. Europe is more than the EU, and the ECF works beyond the EU. Still, the EU is a central societal achievement, and its key actor. The EU is not perfect and needs reform. ECF will challenge the EU and its member states to live up to the original promise of creating peace, stability, and prosperity for all.

A cultural foundation for Europe

Culture is the shared space where we live together, understand our identities, and feel a sense of belonging.

Culture is an ongoing social process in which people and communities engage with each other, experience what distinguishes them, and understand what they believe they have in common.

Culture is creative and artistic expression and production that can assign deeper meaning to our lives and make us reflect.

Culture is the societal foundation of building and experiencing Europe. It connects us to a sense of being European, while allowing for the many national, regional, local, and migrant identities that coexist within this space.

It is through culture that we challenge, discuss, and defend the values we uphold as Europeans: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and human rights. It provides a platform to question, rethink, and refine these principles that are essential to the European identity.

Culture is the way to experience, shape, and imagine a shared European future.

Supporting culture is an investment in inclusive, open, and democratic societies in Europe.

Our mission

Our original statutes state, “The European Cultural Foundation was created for the stimulation of the European sentiment, to promote the development and preservation of a feeling of mutual comprehension and democratic solidarity between the peoples of Europe by encouraging cultural and educational activities of common interest”. Our original mission is as relevant today as it was in 1954, as nationalism is making a strong come-back, while polarisation within societies and fragmentation between countries are both increasing.

A resilient Europe needs a sentiment of democratic solidarity between the people of Europe. With it, we can master challenges together. But without it, Europe is vulnerable to division, regression, and setbacks. This is the problem we are addressing.

We have invested in this mission for 70 years and it will likely take another 70 years or even longer to sustain such European sentiment in an ever-changing world. We consider our mission as a “cathedral mission” – a mission that goes beyond the lifetimes of us as individual cathedral builders.

Our values

In times of uncertainty and unpredictability, a clear set of values provides a yardstick and compass for action. Living our European values is the best way of defending them.

In times where core values are being challenged around the world, in Europe and even inside the EU, stating our values openly is not an act of marketing. It is an act of understanding our history, showing attitude and aspiration. Our values are the basis of who we are and what we do.

We believe in the appreciation and celebration of our diversity. Europe is the product of a culture of exchange. Diversity is a matter of life. It is not always easy to manage but without it, a good life in Europe is not possible and it would be boring.

Diversity is a value, but it is also a method.

Culture must be free, and Europe should stand and fight for cultural freedom in Europe and worldwide.

Out of the ashes of our history, we have built a Europe based on democracy and the rule of law. We believe this is essential and must not be taken for granted. But equally, democracy needs continuous work and imagination.

We believe in the power of human dignity and ingenuity, whether as a response to the suffering of people who need our solidarity or as a response to the challenges of unbound technology.

We believe in the equality of people, and we believe in the equality of opportunities in achieving every individual's best potential.

We believe in freedom – in the freedom to express oneself, in the freedom of conscience, the freedom of movement, the freedom of the media, the freedom to challenge those in power and the freedom to resist regression and destruction.

We believe in the best of people, in the power of hope, curiosity, and optimism. This alone is not enough, but without it, a better world is not possible.

III: What we do

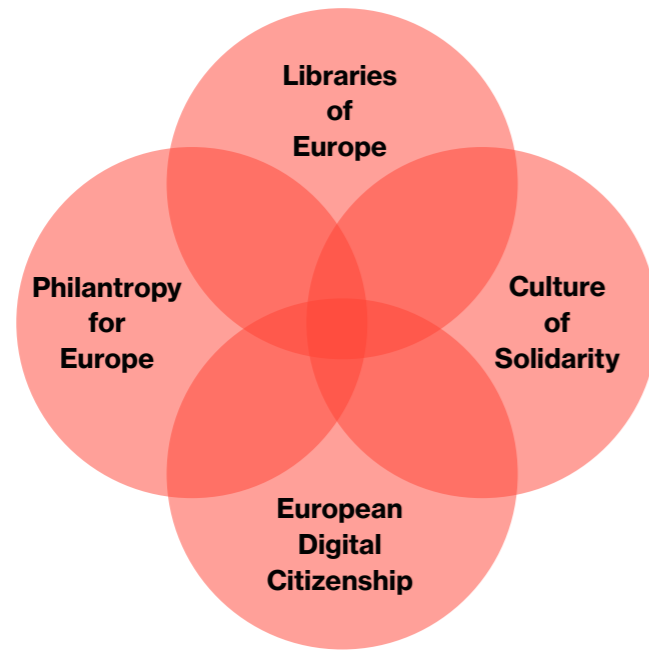
We will continue, develop, and scale successful initiatives. But we will also change to address the evolving context, to address the lessons we have learnt as well as taking advantage of new opportunities. A key rationale for change is the need to develop a truly European and sustainable funding model. We need to change to continue investing in our mission.

What will we continue? The foundation will continue and substantially scale its investments in the libraries as a trusted European cultural infrastructure for fostering community and solidarity. We will continue to invest in a fair and safe European public space. We will continue to support resilience and solidarity through our flexible Culture of Solidarity funding for civic lead change. We will continue to advocate for our mission. We will continue to develop partnerships and coalitions while scaling established funding sources and further developing our EU fundraising capacity. We will continue to mainstream climate action in everything we do, starting with our own operations.

What will change? The foundation will invest in the expansion of the European funding ecosystem. We will exit our own Experience programmes and instead shift to advocacy for scaling EU exchange programmes along an Erasmus4All approach. We will develop a new European Digital Citizenship Initiative, mainstream a focus on young people across all initiatives and move to a shared home of international cultural cooperation in Amsterdam. We will invest in hope-based communication, working together with young European influencers. We will hold ourselves open to new alliances, platforms, and coalitions if it furthers our mission.

Our Focus and Goals

1. Connecting libraries of Europe to a European Social Network
2. Empowering European Digital Citizenship
3. Growing a European Culture of Solidarity
4. Imagining philanthropy for Europe



Our four focus areas are no silos and intentionally overlap, connect, feed off each other, create synergy effects and together aim to grow a European sentiment of belonging and solidarity. For example, there are close links between the Culture of Solidarity Fund and Philanthropy for Europe, between Libraries and Philanthropy for Europe. Synergy effects are also intentional and will develop out of the new home for international cultural cooperation in Amsterdam.

Connecting libraries to a European Social Network

Libraries are an essential public infrastructure. They are safe and trusted cultural public spaces for people and communities in turbulent times full of challenges, uncertainties, and questions. Libraries help us find answers. They are human spaces in an age of artificial intelligence. Libraries create a sense of belonging. They are both local and everywhere in Europe, yet universal. Libraries are unique while sharing a recognisable and trusted format.

They are part of their communities. Connected, they form a true European social network. They are a cultural network, a knowledge network, and a community network. We believe in a European community powered by libraries.

There are 65,000 libraries in Europe. Libraries are uniquely placed to connect the local with the European. We believe Europe's libraries may create the next Erasmus effect, if we connect the people and communities working in and around them. What does it take? It takes ambition and funding. And a public-philanthropic partnership to kick it off. ECF has all the ingredients and we are determined to make it happen.

Over the last five years, we have built a programme, portfolio and internal expertise working with over 100 libraries in more than 30 countries across Europe.

We will further invest in the great potential of Europe's libraries as neutral and safe public spaces where people and communities can be and express themselves, regardless of their background, age, education, or identity. These spaces serve as hubs for learning, collaboration, and envisioning a better future through participatory activities that contribute to Europe's social, green, and digital transformation.

Inspired by our programme the Europe Challenge, we will continue to support local development, as well as common causes of communities found across territories in Europe, through thematic and regional collaborations hosted by libraries. With open calls and dedicated grants for libraries, international peer-to-peer exchanges, and advocacy for libraries as democratic spaces, ECF has established itself as a key European player, fostering a growing community and strengthening the library infrastructure across the continent.

We will forge new partnerships with philanthropic organisations, public funding institutions, library networks, and European innovation platforms to champion community librarianship. We will advocate for Europe-wide, structurally funded programmes under the umbrella of "Libraries for Europe".

Empowering European digital citizenship

Democracy is underpinned by an open and fair public space. As we grapple with polarisation, misinformation, hate speech, and populism in online media, we see how these issues impact core European values such as human dignity and democracy.

At ECF, we have invested more than 20 years in media and digital programmes that promote critical and independent thinking, reflection, debate, and inclusive representation for young people and media creators with a migrant background. We have advocated for inclusive media and successfully contributed to new calls and pilot programmes in the EU.

Through the Display Europe initiative, we are investing in European open-source technology and ethical Artificial Intelligence, while aggregating content from media across Europe to establish a new pan-European digital media platform. With European co-funding, we aim to scale this platform with growing content and continued technological development.

We are witnessing a decline in critical thinking among young citizens in the face of the overwhelming abundance of information available on online platforms and in media. Digital citizenship is a vital foundation for an inclusive and democratic European public sphere. It encompasses the responsible and respectful use of technology to engage online, find reliable sources, and protect and promote human rights. This includes skills for effective communication, collaboration, and positive engagement on any online platform, as well as teaching empathy, privacy protection, and security measures to prevent data breaches and identity theft. With our cultural perspective and European mission, we will focus on fostering meaningful dialogue and constructive conversations among individuals in the European digital public space. We aim to promote the skills and knowledge necessary for citizens to navigate the digital landscape critically and advocate for European values.

ECF recognises the growing need for digital literacy as a key skill to navigate the digital world critically and responsibly. With limited financial means but strong experience in community mobilisation and advocacy, we leverage EU partnerships to promote European values online. Key goals include enhancing digital literacy and critical thinking among diverse demographics, particularly youth, and addressing divisive filter bubbles and media consumption.

Digital citizenship emphasises the responsible and respectful use of technology, which is essential for a democratic society in an era of

polarisation, hate speech, and misinformation. We are focusing on promoting digital citizenship through a cultural and European lens, aiming to foster solidarity in the European digital public space. This includes teaching skills for online communication, collaboration, and privacy protection, as well as promoting human rights.

As the first stage of our new strategy, we will map and commission research on the state of European digital citizenship, digital literacy, and critical thinking skills among diverse European demographics, especially young people.

Ultimately, ECF aims to strengthen democratic engagement and public discourse online by supporting inclusive digital platforms, advocating for transparency in social media algorithms, and fostering exposure to diverse viewpoints.

Growing a Culture of Solidarity

Culture of Solidarity funding will continue to provide flexible support for civic lead, cultural, European initiatives and emergencies. To further scale its pan-European impact, our grant-making and support mechanisms will further build on pooled or leveraged co-financing through partnering with other philanthropic and public funders. As a thematically open, yet explicitly cultural funding mechanism, Culture of Solidarity support will continue to foster artistic expressions and their critical reimaginations of Europe by building on the lessons learnt from our European Pavilion and Imagine Europe programme.

Culture of Solidarity funding will also go towards short-term kick-start support for fresh and visionary ideas that are outside the box. These are initiatives that go beyond our strategic programmes but broadly correspond to our vision and values.

Imagining philanthropy for Europe

Europe has strong political, economic, and cultural institutions like the EU, the Erasmus Programme, Eurovision and the Champions League. However, European philanthropy remains underdeveloped, despite 186,000 foundations spending over €55 billion annually and combined assets of European benefit foundations amounting to over €647 billion. Most foundations focus on national, regional, or topical issues. Very few have a European vision and mandate. Philanthropy must evolve beyond its 19th-century patron approach to address today's challenges, fostering

unity and hope across Europe. Foundations can connect the local with the European but very few do. There is a huge potential to activate philanthropic capital for Europe and match it with EU funds.

The Share Europe initiative aims to pool philanthropic and public resources and empower civic lead initiatives to promote the European common good. Its goals are to mobilise resources for Europe, empower European civil society, and invest in initiatives that enhance common understanding, democracy and solidarity among Europeans. By creating a pan-European philanthropic culture, the initiative seeks to address fundamental European challenges and support collaborative governance structures. This initiative complements existing pooled funds. It aims to attract EU match funding. Share Europe envisions philanthropy as a key contributor to a united, peaceful Europe, confronting re-nationalisation and promoting a shared vision for a better future.

IV. How we work

How we work is just as important as what we do. Our operating principles guide our work as a foundation and as a responsible citizen. We are a European foundation. Each of our initiatives – whether at local, national, or pan-European level – must have a clear European purpose. We are based in Amsterdam, but we work across Europe. Initiatives and programmes may be run on a decentralised basis with strong local partners.

We are strategic and nimble. The European Cultural Foundation is strategic, consistent, and coherent in following our vision, but we are also nimble and effective in our day-to-operations. We work based on a multiannual strategy and budget framework that we adjust and finetune on an annual basis. We create our own programmes and we empower others. We think before we do. But then we do. We develop initiatives in-house (operational) as well as supporting the initiatives of others (grant-making). Whether internal or external, all our foundation resources are invested in the European common good.

We understand the ongoing ecological crisis as a cultural crisis. We believe that acting on this global emergency starts with ourselves. We prescribe to philanthropic climate commitments, and we are a European advocate for a just and responsible transition to greener societies. We continue with reducing, pricing, and compensating for our annually reviewed carbon emissions. We steadily diminish our impact on the environment by applying high ecological and social standards in all our operations, guidelines for applications, our shared office environment, as well as in our investment policies.

We work in partnership, coalitions, and platforms. We build on our well-established partnerships, but we also actively seek out new partners. We aim to create a greater impact beyond our own resources and multiply these resources through co-funding. We seek co-funding for our programmes and make it a requirement in our grant-making (counterpart-funding). We build and work in coalitions and platforms, such as the Culture Deal, Display Europe, House of Cultures, Civic Arts, Culture of Solidarity, Share Europe.

Policy matters. We work with policymakers to scale good ideas into policies and to secure sustainable public funding for them. Our advocacy makes a vital contribution when it comes to leveraging the impact of our foundation and its dedicated initiatives.

We aim to speak a language that is understood by a wide range of people and not just a few insiders. Understandable language is central to our internal and external communications. We aim to be a “low jargon” foundation. We strive to make our communications, operations, and transactions as efficient, coherent, and simple as possible for all parties involved.

Our Programmes

Our programmes build on the rich legacy of the European Cultural Foundation over the past 70 years. We develop multi-annual programmes within our four focus areas and according to our values and operating principles. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Our programmes are developed with methods and tools that best help us to achieve impact. Wherever possible and relevant, we co-design programmes together with partners and co-funders. These working mechanisms include: grant-making; co-financing partnerships; kick-start financing; platform building; as well as advocacy and influencing policy; digital and analogue communication; campaigns, convening meetings and events.

ECF has a unique capacity to bring grantees and partners together from all over Europe. We continue to build a European community by mobilising grantees, partners, policy-makers, media, and other stakeholders. We also facilitate exchange, networking, and peer learning amongst them.

Advocacy, Research, Scale

Committed to making an impact, we connect policy with practice. Our advocacy contributes to our mission by influencing public policies and philanthropic priorities and investments that strengthen Europe and European solidarity. We work with strategic partners from different sectors, connecting knowledge and networks to increase the scale and impact of our common cause.

After successfully campaigning for the inclusion of culture in the EU’s Recovery and Resilience Facility following the Covid-19 pandemic, we are determined to continue our work to position culture as a valued resource in EU, national, and local policies. The Cultural Deal for Europe continues as an overarching framework for our advocacy work, targeting the European institutions but also calling for national governments to place culture strategically on their political agendas. ECF will build on our long-standing piloting of European exchange and experience programmes to further mainstream these programmes, together with

public and philanthropic funders. While exchange and cooperation across national borders will remain an essential support mechanism across our programmes, ECF will refocus our attention on scaling and innovating established pan-European exchange mechanisms rather than running our own experience programmes.

To better understand the evolution of European sentiment in different EU countries and what makes it grow or deteriorate, we will continue to research the state of the European and publish an annual status report. We will use the findings to inform our programmes and finetune them, if necessary, as well as contributing to public European debate and policy thinking.

ECF advocates for rules and legislation that allow for EU-philanthropic partnerships. We will advocate for the lifting of existing barriers to partnership.

Engagement through Communication

Throughout our 70-year history, ECF has been generating a treasure trove of stories, images, and documents that reflect not only the history of ECF, but also align with modern European history. These are stories told by the numerous projects and activities that we have initiated and supported throughout our community and are reflected in our organisational archive, which we will open for the public in cooperation with the official Archive of the European Union in Florence.

The ECF community includes a wide variety of actors and organisations in culture, philanthropy, media and policy throughout Europe. We aim to engage these stakeholders with each other and with our programmes. With a focus on young generations, we will engage a network of friends, ambassadors, and influencers who embrace our objectives, and who will support and disseminate our messages among their followers. We develop our events and publications as tools for community engagement and work together with our partners of our home for international cultural cooperation in Amsterdam to expand our community outreach.

As our main platform for European storytelling and European cultural community engagement, we will develop our website to engage with our stakeholders and more visibly explain the ECF narrative, vision, mission, impact, and the coherence between our projects. Our programme websites will develop further into informative content channels and sources for ECF’s website. Our newsletters social media will We use various communication formats – in particular video, podcasts, and other social media formats to make sure our voice is being heard.

We build on media partnerships with international news outlets by providing European cultural content and journalistic fellowships. ECF's publications such as the European Sentiment Compass, programme publications, and Op-eds provide tools for free publicity. We integrate our content on channels that we co-own, e.g. Display Europe. We work with news outlets to feature our local programme partners and grantees, who tell ECF's story through their projects.

Good Operations

In professionally managing our HR, Facilities and IT, we ensure that the Foundation has the appropriate structures, human resources, as well as technical and office facilities in place for the organisation to function efficiently and smoothly.

And as an organisation, we aim to be a place where people like to work and where this attitude is reflected in how much more we can achieve. We encourage the continuous learning and development of our staff and we strive for an open working culture in which taking initiative, and a can-do mentality are rewarded. We are proud of the growing diversity of our employees and we make an ongoing effort to foster inclusivity and equity. Our HR policies are transparent and accessible and are regularly reviewed.

With our relocation to the centre of Amsterdam, in partnership with other international and cultural organisations, our office is entering a new phase. We will team up with our partners in running our new space professionally and use synergy effects where possible. As a small organisation, we strive for a lean IT infrastructure, yet at the same time our systems must be up to date, functional, and digitally safe. By outsourcing our IT infrastructure to a specialised IT company, we make sure to offer a professional IT environment and to comply with all relevant safety standards. Targeted in-house expertise is sought when required.

Our Operations team ensures that ECF is compliant with charity, labour, tax and pension law and relevant professional standards, such as integrity compliance as well as EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and digital safety. All relevant processes are regularly reviewed by our auditors to make sure that we are in full compliance with operational and governance standards.

Good Finance

Our Finance team ensure that the Foundation has the appropriate financial resources, as well as accountable and transparent processes and budget control.

ECF's income is based on five income sources:

1. Dutch lottery funding via Cultuurfonds
2. Co-funding from EU and other public funding
3. Co-funding from other philanthropic foundations
4. Other private funding
5. Securities portfolio.

Our goal is to diversify and increase our current income sustainably. Over a five-year period – based on a conservative income estimate from the Dutch lotteries via Cultuurfonds, and securities – our income is estimated to be €44 million. Taking this as a starting point, our goal is to leverage this income from our sources to reach €80 million over five years. Leveraged funding for our purposes and programmes could be directly via our own budget (co-funding) or indirectly through other organisations (counterpart- funding).

We have agreed investment principles for our Securities Portfolio that adhere to the best ESG standards.

Operationally our biggest challenge is to diversify core funding from the Dutch lotteries through a sustainable and diversified funding model.

ECF is leveraging our core funding through EU co-funding and developing partnerships with other foundations.

In addition, ECF is investing in Philanthropy for Europe with the goal of sharing, pooling and aligning philanthropic funding for Europe and securing institutional match funding from the EU.

We are an operational and grant-making foundation. A minimum of 50% of our budget will be spent via external partners. This share may vary from programme to programme, depending on how best to achieve our programmatic goals. Whether internal or external, all foundation resources will be invested for public European benefit.

As a matter of sound planning and clarity, we work on the basis of a multi-annual budget framework. In this way we will be able to make multi-annual commitments and attract respective co- funding. We draw

up annual work plans and budgets in line with our multi-annual strategic and budget framework

What is success?

In terms of what success looks like, our success has no end date. Our success is incremental.

We are committed to evaluation, not for the sake of it, but to learn, improve our initiatives, and increase our impact. We are keen to learn from our programmes and partnerships and to share the results with our community and in the broader European context.

In line with our Theory of Change, we have developed a set of five success criteria: Relevance, Ambition, Creativity, Accessibility, Sustainability. These criteria create transparency about what we regard as successful initiatives. They are a point of reference for management decisions, creating a certain level of standardisation in how we look at our initiatives. They also challenge us to improve the design of new initiatives, improve the steering of running projects, and form the basis for evaluating our strategy in 2029, as well as creating the foundation for the design of a follow up strategy.

How do we measure whether our cathedral of the European sentiment is progressing? We do our own aggregated research, the annual European Sentiment Compass.

Good Governance

The European Cultural Foundation is a European foundation that is based and registered in the Netherlands. We adhere to Dutch charity legislation and reporting. We endorse the principles of the Code Wijffels: 'Code Goed Bestuur voor Goede Doelen' (Good Governance for Charities Code) as well as to the FIN code of Good Governance.

Annual accounts are independently checked by registered accountants and submitted to the CBF (Central Bureau for Fundraising organisations). They are published online by 1st July each year.

Supervisory Board members and the Director of the Board are registered at the Dutch Chamber of Commerce.

The Honorary President is the guardian of the cultural legacy and foresight of the founding fathers of ECF, and consequently of ECF's reputation.

The Supervisory Board is comprised of a minimum of five and a maximum of 12 voting members. ECF strives for diversity in the composition of the Supervisory Board. Profiles and perspectives include diversity in gender and in cultural, social, linguistic, geographical, and generational background. Recruitment ensures we cover all areas of expertise and perspectives in the Supervisory Board, reflecting the strategic objectives of the foundation.

Risk Management

There are several risk factors to consider, in particular the political environment in the Netherlands and Europe, which may have implications for funding and operating independently across Europe. ECF is monitoring pertinent risks and has a contingency plan that is based on reserves for at least two years of continued operation.

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