
European Cultural Foundation

**A CULTURE COMPASS FOR EUROPE
CONSULTATION OF CULTURAL STAKEHOLDERS
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A Culture Compass for Europe must be more than an agenda, a roadmap, or a strategy. It must unfold an ambitious vision for Europe to which citizens can relate to, providing hope, inspiration and direction. Such a vision must embody Europe's key principles of democracy, solidarity, sustainability and diversity.

The Culture Compass for Europe must provide the framework in which culture is:

- a) fully valued for its intrinsic value;
- b) recognised for its vital contribution to other EU policies (incl. security, social cohesion, digital, social and ecological transformation, international relations);
- c) substantially upgraded (EU positioning and funding) to become a key asset for the EU at home and in the world.

1) MAIN GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO BE REFLECTED IN THE FUTURE CULTURE COMPASS, IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF GEOPOLITICAL INSTABILITY AND POLITICAL UNPREDICTABILITY.

“Before being a military alliance or an economic entity, Europe must be a cultural community in the most elevated sense of the term.”
Robert Schuman (“For Europe”)

We subscribe to these words of Robert Schuman, and share his conviction as expressed in the Schuman Declaration: ‘*Europe’s future will only be safeguarded by making the creative efforts proportionate to the challenge and transformation we face*’. We believe that Europe is a cultural, and not only an economic and a political project which needs be nurtured by growing a common **European sentiment among** its citizens, as expressed by Denis de Rougemont.

As internal and external pressures threaten the European Union’s peace and fundamental values, and destabilise our democratic systems, **Europe’s greatest strength lies in its rich culture and heritage**. These are the foundations that will empower us to actively reimagine and rebuild a more inclusive, democratic and united Europe – one that embraces both its current and aspiring members. To secure its future, the EU must underpin its future internal and external actions by a strong cultural vision – a **Cultural Deal for Europe**.

The Culture Compass must therefore include a **Cultural Deal for Europe!**

The current geopolitical and political context demands that the Compass addresses the following challenges: democracy, security, and sustainability.

The Culture Compass must galvanise all positive European forces and promote “**a coalition of the willing**”, **allowing innovative partnerships of public, private and philanthropic actors** to address forcefully together the challenges of our times. In a time of increasing demands for EU resources to meet the global and local uncertainties, matched with shrinking national budgets for culture, **we need to mobilise and consolidate the impact of philanthropy for Europe**. A Cultural Deal can deliver scale and impact of EU action, if backed up by a robust **public-philanthropic partnership** that imagines philanthropy for Europe (see [Imagine Philanthropy for Europe](#) and [ECF 2025-2029 strategy](#)).

Key principles and proposals to be embedded in the Culture Compass, stemming from the [Key messages](#) of the Cultural Deal for Europe high-level policy event “[Culture: the Compass for Europe’s Future](#)”, 4th February 2025 in Brussels (Bozar) and online, and from the ECF’s [What Can Culture Do? Listening tour](#) of 2024 that we organised across Europe as a consultation process for [ECF’s 2025-2029 strategy](#):

- **Promote a wide understanding of Europe** (not confined to the EU borders) and connect the **EU’s internal and external dimensions** to promote fundamental values through culture.
- **Combine long-term vision and preparedness for “emergencies”** – readiness to respond to crisis & flexibility of funding tools, e.g. a built-in emergency mechanism (some of them could mobilise together public, private and philanthropic resources).
- **Become a “living” framework breathing a new spirit** and enhancing cooperation with the wider cultural ecosystem. It should be co-created and co-shaped/updated regularly with cultural stakeholders. The participants in the ECF’s [What Can Culture Do 2024 Listening tour](#) emphasised the main challenges that Europe is currently facing and which can be possibly addressed through culture:
 - A crisis of identity
 - Disconnection from the youth
 - Shrinking civic and less safe digital spaces, polarisation and populism
 - Climate change that hampers everyone’s future.
- While we acclaim the Commission’s open consultations for contributions to the Culture Compass, we also acknowledge the **need for ongoing meaningful structural dialogue** of the EU institutions with the cultural ecosystem and the civil society, which would effectively address these challenges.

WE RECOMMEND:

- **Culture and cultural heritage to become pillars of the European Democracy Shield**, preventing further shrinking of civic spaces and threats to fundamental rights, including the freedom of expression.
- **Culture to be positioned in the EU’s security dimension**, international relations and diplomacy; Cultural dimension should be integrated in the EU Strategic Compass for security and defence (see [To Make the Silos Dance](#) discussion paper). Promoting European cultural content and strengthening fact-checking are key in combating hybrid attacks and disinformation by the regimes that use culture as “hard power” (see the [Letter to the President of the EC on Culture and Security, Preparedness, Democracy](#)).
- **Culture to be strengthened as a driver of sustainable development** and well-being, not only as an instrument, but as a core agent for change.

To be forward looking, the Compass should encourage involvement of public, private and philanthropic players in the field, as well as strategic alignment and pooling of their resources for common European purposes.

Philanthropy plays a significant role in addressing European challenges (e.g. climate, sustainability, democracy, health, social justice). EU needs a more strategic approach for engaging with philanthropy to address together today's challenges for Europe ([Philea Manifesto 2024](#)). This can be provided through co-design, co-implement and develop innovative funding mechanisms for European purposes, and specifically in the area of arts, culture and cultural heritage. Foundations add value to local, national and international contexts also through knowledge, capacity development, flexible investment tools, impact assessment and more.

- Foundations (for public-benefit) in Europe distribute over 54,5 billion EUR annually ([Philea, 2023](#)). The 55 foundations (included in the 2023 mapping of arts and culture funding) contributed about **477 million EUR/year to arts and culture in Europe** (see [Art and Culture at the Core of Philanthropy](#)).
- The ECF-led initiative of the [Culture of Solidarity Fund](#), launched in the beginning of the Covid19 pandemic as an emergency response, addressed multiple issues, and supported **275 projects** for a total of **5,991,185 EUR between 2020-2024**, mobilising 24 co-funding partners (see [Facts and figures – Culture of Solidarity Fund 2020–2024](#)).

To become a robust strategic framework for Europe and to deliver on its ambitions, the Culture Compass must be equipped with a significantly increased financial envelope for culture. We propose **a minimum of 2% from the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034)** to be allocated to culture, which should include a standalone programme for culture (*Creative Europe*).

2) HOW CAN THE CULTURE COMPASS EFFECTIVELY UNLOCK EUROPE'S CULTURAL AND CREATIVE FORCES?

The EU and its Culture Compass need to recognise the **intrinsic value of culture for Europe** (culture as the fundament of Europe, vector of a European Sentiment, and resource to imagine our common future) and its need for **autonomy and freedom** to inspire others, beyond EU instrumental objectives.

The Compass must invest in a vision of Europe, which serves and unites its people and fosters a **European Sentiment**, while nurturing a **culture of solidarity**. Culture is not just about preserving heritage or the arts: it offers safe spaces for diverse voices to be heard, generations to come together, and solutions from the local to the European level to be imagined. The EU can unlock Europe's cultural power by **investing in physical and digital spaces which bring us together and defend democracy in the digital age**.

Culture inspires and empowers young people. To invest in the next generations of Europeans (in a fast-ageing continent), the Culture Compass shall provide roadmaps and unlock resources for meaningful inclusion of youth (from school age onwards) in transnational exchanges, experience programmes, as well as inclusion of underprivileged youth groups – including through culture.

Public libraries are Europe’s hubs of community and solidarity. There are around 65,000 public libraries across Europe and they deserve special attention in the Culture Compass, to connect locally and trans-locally, and to strengthen their capabilities to address locally inequalities, environmental concerns, loneliness, disinformation, and lack of open and accessible civic spaces. [The Europe Challenge](#) programme of ECF puts the librarians in the spotlight and raises awareness about their indispensable role in their communities (see [If Librarians Ran Europe – a brief consultation guide for the OMC Group for Libraries](#) and [How Libraries Survive Thrive, A Guide for Librarians... and Everyone Else in Europe!](#)).

The Culture Compass should make **Europe’s experience one of its key pillars** by encouraging, facilitating, and supporting European mobility, exchange, and cooperation for as many European citizens as possible—**the Erasmus effect!**

To unlock the potential of cultural and creative sectors to thrive, as well as to contribute more to society, **the Culture Compass must extract from the rich knowledge of the European research and innovation projects** (supported by Horizon Europe, as well as other programmes), **to find solid evidence** for successful policy measures. Understanding the specific needs, functioning, economic and social potential of each of the cultural and creative sectors and industries locally, nationally and across borders, is key to the success of the Culture Compass.

3) CULTURE: A CATALYST AND A COMPASS FOR THE FUTURE

*“No culture, no future! No culture, no life!”
Sam Alekksandra, poet & multidisciplinary artist*

Disconnection and exclusion, polarisation, wars and disinformation have stirred an ever-growing storm, in which many Europeans live every day under pressure, confusion and uncertainty. The climate changes remind us daily about the urgencies, which know no states’ borders, and about which we need to act immediately.

The **EU’s highest political level needs to recognise the catalytic power of culture and develop a vision for culture on par with the European Green Deal**. We need a Culture Compass, with the weight and the effect of a **Cultural Deal for Europe**. It needs to contribute to fundamentally rethinking the European project, its values and principles. For our common future, we need the EU to be a **people-centred project**, in which citizens across all ages and walks of life, of different nationalities, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, have a stronger sense of belonging. Where diversity of cultures, inclusivity and fundamental freedoms should be respected and cherished. **For people to feel safe and at home in Europe, culture should lead the way.**

Sources of information, data and references:

1. [Key Messages](#) and [Report of the Cultural Deal for Europe Annual Policy Conversation](#) “Culture: The Compass for Europe’s Future” (February 2025) (<https://culturaldeal.eu/>)
2. [A European Cultural Deal for Ukraine](#) (2023) – policy paper prepared by ECF in the framework of A Cultural Deal for Europe
3. [Facts and figures – Culture of Solidarity Fund \(2020 – 2024\)](#)
4. [“To Make the Silos Dance”](#) (2021) - discussion paper by Gijs de Vries, commissioned by ECF in the framework of A Cultural Deal for Europe
5. [Imagine Philanthropy for Europe](#) (2020) by Wider Sense for ECF and Allianz Kulturstiftung
6. [Continue Change – Fostering a European Culture of Solidarity](#), Strategy of the European Cultural Foundation 2025-2029 (2025)
7. [Art and Culture at the Core of Philanthropy](#) (vol. 2) by Philea/Arts and Culture Funder’s Forum (2023)
8. [Europe as a Cultural Project](#). Final Report of the Reflection Group of the European Cultural Foundation (2002 – 2004) by D. Klaic (ECF, 2004)
9. [If Librarians Ran Europe – a brief consultation guide to the Open Method of Coordination](#) (OMC) EU Member States’ Expert Group for Libraries, by The Europe Challenge, 2024
10. [How Libraries Survive Thrive, A Guide for Librarians... and Everyone Else in Europe!](#) (The Europe Challenge, 2024)
11. [What Can Culture Do? A Listening Tour](#) (European Cultural Foundation 2024)
12. Culture Action Europe [Letter to the President of the EC on Culture and Security, Preparedness, Democracy](#) (March 2025)