CULTURE

The European Union’s action in the field of culture supplements the cultural policy of the Member States in various areas: for example, the preservation of European cultural heritage, cooperation between various countries’ cultural institutions and the promotion of mobility among creative workers. The cultural sector is also affected by provisions of the Treaties that do not explicitly pertain to culture.

LEGAL BASIS AND OBJECTIVES

The Treaty of Lisbon places great importance on culture: the preamble to the Treaty on European Union (TEU) explicitly refers to ‘drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe’. One of the EU’s key aims, as specified in the Treaty, is to ‘respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and […] ensure that Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced’ (Article 3 of the TEU). Article 6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) states that the EU’s competences in the field of culture are to ‘carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States’.

Article 167 of the TFEU provides further details on EU action in the field of culture: the EU must contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore. The EU’s actions should encourage cooperation between the Member States and support and supplement their action in improving the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of European peoples; conserving and safeguarding cultural heritage of European significance; and fostering non-commercial cultural exchanges and artistic and literary creation, including in the audiovisual sector. The EU and the Member States may also foster cooperation with non-EU countries and international organisations. Respect for and the promotion of the diversity of European cultures need to be taken into account when taking action under other provisions of the Treaty.

Article 13 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union stipulates that ‘the arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint’. Article 22 of the same charter lays down the requirement that ‘the EU shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity’. 
ACHIEVEMENTS

A. Policy developments

1. European Agenda for Culture

On 22 May 2018, the Commission adopted a New European Agenda for Culture, which follows on from the one adopted in 2007, continuing the provision of the strategic framework for EU action in the cultural sector. The new agenda proposes three strategic objectives, with social, economic and external dimensions: (1) harnessing the power of culture for social cohesion and well-being; (2) supporting culture-based creativity in education and innovation, and for jobs and growth; and (3) strengthening international cultural relations. The agenda sets out enhanced working methods with the Member States, civil society and international partners. It is implemented through the Work Plan for Culture (2019-2022), adopted by the Council on 27 November 2018 and amended on 26 May 2020. The 2019-2022 Work Plan for Culture sets out six priorities: (1) sustainability in cultural heritage; (2) cohesion and well-being; (3) an ecosystem supporting artists, cultural and creative professionals, and European content; (4) gender equality; (5) international cultural relations; and (6) culture as a driver for sustainable development (priority added in 2020, following the Council conclusions amending the Work Plan for Culture, see above). These priorities are put into practice through 18 specific actions.

2. International cultural relations

The joint communication ‘Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations’, presented by the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) in mid-2016, has the aim of encouraging cultural cooperation between the EU and its partner countries. It stresses the EU’s commitment to fostering international cultural relations through support and assistance to non-EU countries and promoting the diverse cultures of the Member States through cultural diplomacy.

3. Intercultural dialogue

Intercultural dialogue is an ongoing priority of the EU. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, this priority has become even more significant. Some important initiatives in the specific area of culture policy include those on Roma culture, intercultural cities and dialogue with the Platform for Intercultural Europe. Other EU policies promoting intercultural dialogue include, to name but a few, those relating to the audiovisual sector, multilingualism, youth, research, integration and external relations.

B. Funding programmes and support initiatives

1. Creative Europe

On 14 December 2020, Parliament and the Council reached a political agreement securing EUR 2.2 billion in funding for the 2021-2027 Creative Europe programme. This represents a 36% increase on the 2014-2020 budget of EUR 1.46 billion, and exceeds the EUR 1.85 billion initially proposed by the Commission. The Council adopted its first-reading position on 13 April 2021 and the text was adopted by Parliament at its second reading in plenary on 19 May 2021. The new programme will formally enter into
force immediately after being published in the Official Journal. However, retroactivity provisions in the regulation ensure that the new Creative Europe programme is already in effect as of 1 January 2021, in order to ensure a smooth transition from the previous programme period.

The agreement puts a special focus on three areas: (1) strengthening the music sector, particularly contemporary and live music, which will be covered by the funds for ‘Culture’, which support, among other initiatives, platforms promoting emerging artists and distribution networks; (2) prioritising female talent and supporting women’s artistic and professional careers, and promoting gender equality as one of the main values to be pursued by the programme; (3) fostering inclusion by making it easier for people with disabilities and socially marginalised groups to take part in the programme and simplifying the application process.

The first Creative Europe programme (2014-2020) brought several earlier EU programmes together under its umbrella: the MEDIA programmes (1991-2013), the MEDIA Mundus programme (2011-2013) and the Culture programmes (2000-2013). Under its CULTURE sub-programme, funding was made available for (1) transnational cooperation in the cultural and creative sectors; (2) European networks enabling workers in the culture and creative sectors with specific skills and experience to access international cooperation and new professional opportunities; (3) European platforms facilitating the mobility and visibility of creators and artists; and (4) literary translation of works and their promotion.

2. European Capitals of Culture

European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) is one of the EU's best-known and most successful cultural initiatives. Each year, two cities in two different EU countries are named European Capitals of Culture. Exceptionally, due to COVID-19, the 2020 capitals were allowed to hold their titles until April 2021.

The cities are selected by an independent panel of experts on the basis of a cultural programme that must have a strong European dimension, involve local people of all ages and contribute to the long-term development of the city. Over the years, the initiative has become a unique opportunity to regenerate cities, boost their creativity and improve their image. So far, more than 50 cities have been awarded the status of European Capital of Culture. The procedure for choosing a city starts some six years in advance, although the order of the Member States entitled to host the event is established before that.

The rules and conditions for holding the title, which are valid up to and including 2033, are set out in Decision No 445/2014/EU. The decision gave candidate and potential candidate countries the chance to be involved in the initiative, provided that they are already participating in the Creative Europe programme. This decision was further amended in 2017 by a decision to open the initiative to European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and European Economic Area (EEA) countries as well (Decision (EU)2017/1545). Most recently, the decision was adapted in 2020 to reflect the changes in circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Decision (EU) 2020/2229).
3. The European Heritage Label and the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018

The European Heritage Label began as an intergovernmental initiative between several Member States in 2005. In 2010, at the request of the Member States, the Commission proposed making the European Heritage Label a formal EU initiative, and the label was established in 2011 by Decision No 1194/2011/EU. Its overarching objective is to strengthen intercultural dialogue and people’s sense of belonging to the EU. European Heritage Label sites are selected for their high symbolic value, the role they have played in the history and culture of Europe and the EU, and their relation to democratic principles and human rights. Since 2013, 48 sites have been awarded the label.

On 30 August 2016, the Commission put forward a proposal to Parliament and the Council calling for 2018 to be designated the European Year of Cultural Heritage, in response to prior requests from both institutions. The proposal was adopted in the first half of 2017. The European Year of Cultural Heritage initiative sought to highlight the role of Europe’s cultural heritage in fostering a shared sense of history and identity and received EUR 8 million in funding for the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2018.

4. Unlawful removal of cultural objects

With Directive 2014/60/EU, a recast of Directive 93/7/EEC, the EU seeks to safeguard national cultural heritage and reconcile its protection with the principle of free movement of goods. The directive provides for the physical return of cultural objects that have been unlawfully removed from the territory of one Member State after January 1993 and sets out cooperation mechanisms and proceedings to secure the return of unlawfully removed objects. The directive covers all cultural objects identified as ‘national treasures possessing artistic, historic or archaeological value’ under national legislation.

5. Prizes

The EU’s cultural policy supports various prizes in the fields of cultural heritage, architecture, literature and music. The objective of these prizes is to recognise the excellent quality and success of European activities in these fields and put the spotlight on the work of artists, musicians, architects, writers and those working in the field of cultural heritage. They also serve as a showcase for Europe’s rich cultural diversity and the importance of intercultural dialogue and cross-border cultural activities in the EU and beyond.

6. The New European Bauhaus

The New European Bauhaus initiative was presented by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and officially launched on 18 January 2021. It is described as a ‘think-do tank’ and a ‘design lab, accelerator and network’; a creative and interdisciplinary project constituting a meeting point and a space to design future ways of living at the crossroads between art, culture, science and technology.

Its main goal is to promote the creation of living places that are in line with the European Green Deal by supporting (1) inclusive, accessible spaces fostering dialogue between diverse cultures, disciplines, genders and ages and (2) sustainable solutions respecting the planet’s ecosystems. The New European Bauhaus will unfold in three phases:
design, delivery and dissemination. These phases will partly operate in parallel in a large ‘co-creation’ process. The initiative will also develop a framework of funding sources to align with the multiannual financial framework (MFF).

On 15 September 2021, the Commission published a communication on the New European Bauhaus, including its framework, core principles, key actions and funding possibilities.

**ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

Parliament has, in various resolutions[1], expressed its long-standing interest in the potential of the cultural and creative sectors (CCS) and the prospect of developing them. Not only do these sectors reflect the EU’s cultural diversity, they also employ 7.5% of its workforce, creating approximately EUR 509 billion in value added to GDP.

In its 2016 resolution on a coherent EU policy for cultural and creative industries, Parliament called for a strategic approach to unleash the potential of the CCS and asked the Commission to develop a comprehensive and long-term industrial policy framework for them. It called for measures to be put in place to improve working conditions in these sectors, for example by including them in the Youth Employment Initiative and by providing funds to facilitate careers, entrepreneurship and training.

Parliament has also pushed for a strategic approach to the role of culture in external relations. In its Preparatory Action in the 2013 and 2014 budgets, entitled ‘Culture in EU External Relations’, it highlighted the considerable potential for culture in the EU’s external relations. Recognising culture as a powerful bridge between people, Parliament believes that it should become an essential part of the EU’s political dialogue with non-EU countries, as it can help strengthen civil society, prevent conflicts and promote EU values. In 2016, it issued a resolution on intercultural dialogue. In response to the Commission and EEAS Joint communication ‘Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations’, Parliament adopted in July 2017 a resolution drafted jointly by the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT). The resolution proposed several initiatives, grouped under four strands: objectives; governance and tools; a people-to-people approach; and the EU global strategy. MEPs recommended developing an effective EU strategy for international cultural relations, providing a separate EU budget line for this; launching an EU programme on international mobility and creating a Cultural Visa Programme.

In its role as co-legislator, Parliament adopted the Commission’s proposals to open the ECOC initiative to EFTA and EEA countries and to make 2018 a European Year of Cultural Heritage. In the previous legislature, it shaped the European Heritage Label and the Directive on the return of cultural objects. Parliament took up the subject of cultural heritage in its 2015 resolution towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe, emphasising the role cultural heritage plays in growth and jobs. On 20 January 2021, Parliament adopted a resolution on achieving an effective policy legacy for the European Year of Cultural Heritage, based on an own-initiative report by the CULT Committee (2019/2194(INI)). The report called on the Commission and the Member States to step up their action to protect and promote linguistic diversity

in the digital age, include the cultural heritage of minorities present in Europe in any discussion on European heritage, and to support traditional European and pan-European cultural events.

During negotiations on the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 MFFs, as well as throughout the annual budgetary procedures, Parliament fought consistently for increased budgetary allocations for the cultural and creative sectors, in particular for the Creative Europe programme. In its draft opinion on the Commission’s proposal for a new 2021-2027 MFF, voted on in October 2018, the CULT Committee called for a doubling of resources for the new Creative Europe programme (2021-2017). On 14 December 2020, an agreement securing EUR 2.2 billion in funding for the programme was reached, increasing its current budget by 36%. As regards its amendments to the Commission proposal on the 2021-2027 Creative Europe programme voted on in plenary in March 2019, Parliament proposed that funds be distributed to different programme strands in percentages rather than figures, ensuring a special allocation for cooperation projects in the cultural sector. Furthermore, MEPs suggested amendments in order to better support the competitiveness of the creative market, promote greater inclusivity and communicate the importance of culture for the development of European people and societies. The agreement between Parliament and the Council was endorsed in the CULT Committee meeting of 11 January 2021. On 10 May 2021 the CULT Committee voted to recommend approval of the text, which was formally adopted in plenary on 19 May 2021.

Parliament has emphasised on several occasions how the COVID-19 pandemic continues to negatively affect the cultural sector, and MEPs have urged for adequate and targeted financial support to alleviate the crisis in the CCS and to help the people employed in them. This point was raised during the plenary debate before the final vote on the 2021-2027 Creative Europe programme in May 2021 (watch the debate here). Furthermore, in an own-initiative report on the situation of artists and the cultural recovery in the EU, voted on in the CULT Committee in September 2021, and in a corresponding resolution adopted in plenary on 20 October 2021, MEPs called for ‘European Status of the Artist’, setting out a common framework for working conditions and minimum standards for artists and cultural workers in all EU countries.

Katarzyna Anna Iskra
11/2021