



CULTURE IN EU'S EXTERNAL RELATIONS: THE WAY FORWARD?

The COVID-19 pandemic is generating the devastating storm of adverse social and economic impacts within the cultural sector in Europe and elsewhere around the globe. The responses by major and regional powers to the pandemic will prove to be highly consequential in the long term, especially when it comes to how regions and nations manage the central levers of geopolitical power—credibility, economic performance, social cohesion, diplomatic engagement, trust and global leadership.

While it is of utmost importance and urgency that the EU gives substantial attention, means and resources to the European cultural sector, heavily hit by the crisis, it is also crucial that the EU considers and weighs the role of international cultural relations in these times and in the coming years. Cultural exchanges and collaborations are not confined to borders. Global audiences, markets, and partners are spread all over the world, increasingly present and available thanks to the surge of online platforms and digital innovative tools. Opportunities for the European cultural sector depend on the global cultural sector and market e.g. co-productions and cooperation are strongly and widely intertwined.

While culture is a strategic factor of the EU and constitutes an important part of its economy, it also contributes to the development of democratic, free, and sustainable societies in times exacerbated by nationalism, disinformation war, artificial intelligence, conspiracy theories, confusion and fear of the other. The EU should emerge strengthened from the crisis and assert its leadership at global level by, embedding culture across EU policies, and strengthening international cultural relations through integrating the cultural dimension within country and regional partnerships as well as into foreign and sustainable development policies and goals.

In April, following a meeting convened by UNESCO to discuss the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, 130 Ministers of culture agreed that “the response to the crisis calls for multilateral, coordinated and global action on a large scale, to reestablish trust and build shared responsibility”¹. Accordingly, these recommendations open a call to reiterate the EU commitment to international cultural relations and cooperation, for the need to match a global crisis with global actions and shared responses but also for the moral imperative of global solidarity that should drive cultural relations.

Global challenges are common to all cultural actors and institutions, from the loss of economic revenues linked to the COVID-19 crisis, the shrinking of free and democratic spaces to the mobility constraints and the challenges driven by climate change. In relation to the latter, we recall the Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen calling, in the [A new European Bauhaus](#) project, for a need of a “systemic change, a broad engagement, and a wide support and lots of innovation and creativity” though we strongly believe that the new project needs substantial finetuning, as raised already by many stakeholders from the sector.

In recent years, the approach to the role of culture in EU's external relations has significantly developed, with culture increasingly perceived as strategic for political, social and economic development and contributing to external policy objectives. We strongly believe that the European Commission should build on what has been achieved so far (see policy background below) and put adequate efforts and resources to further strengthen cultural relations.

¹ [Online Meeting of Ministers of Culture: Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Cultural Sector and the Public Policy Response, 22.04.2020](#)



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Against this background and on behalf of all supporting organisations among the European cultural sector and other sectors, we urge the European Commission to take the necessary actions for:

1. A comprehensive inclusion of international cultural relations in the implementation guidelines of the [Proposal for the establishment of the Neighbourhood and Development Cooperation instrument](#) in order to achieve the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals at a global level, in the areas of human rights and democracy, civil society, stability and peace, as well as addressing global challenges.
2. Enhance the coherence between Creative Europe's international dimension provisions [Proposal for establishing the Creative Europe programme \(2021 to 2027\)](#) and the guidelines of the Neighbourhood and Development Cooperation Instrument and the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III), as foreseen by the legal basis of the Creative Europe Programme.
3. Embed and allocate resources to international cultural relations within the [Next Generation EU](#) instrument which calls for strengthened international cooperation and common solutions to face global challenges.
4. Build an Action Plan on the cultural dimension of sustainable development, based on recommendations from cultural organisations and civil society actors through Voices of Culture.
5. Dedicate staff in related Commission departments, including in [FACEA](#), to support the mainstreaming of cultural relations throughout the different new instruments and programmes, recognising the cross-cutting nature of culture in all areas of development and foreign policies.

We count very much on your support and continuous efforts to recognise the value of culture and cultural relations in European foreign, development cooperation, and neighbourhood policy and we would be very pleased to receive your feedback on the above-mentioned issue.

SIGNATORIES:

Goethe-Institut | British Council | Institut français | European Cultural Foundation | International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM) | European Creative Hubs Network | International Music Council (IMC) | On the Move | European Festivals Association (EFA) | Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa) | culture 21 UCLG Committee | Culture Action Europe (CAE) | Théâtre de Liège | Circostrada - European Network Circus and Street Arts | MitOst | EU National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) | fundació Mies van der Rohe | Art Moves Africa (AMA) | Bozar – Centre for Fine Arts | European Music Council (EMC)



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POLICY BACKGROUND:

1. With the 2016 Joint Communication "[Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations](#)", the EU has established a framework for cultural cooperation with partner countries. This is fully in line with [the UNESCO 2005 Convention](#) on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, to which the EU and all Member States are Parties.
2. [The Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy](#) has identified cultural diplomacy and cultural relations as a new field for EU joined- up external action.
3. [The New European Consensus on Development](#) recognises the role of culture as an important component and enabler.
4. The 2018 [New European Agenda for Culture](#) published on 22 May 2018 confirms that strengthening international cultural relations is one of the main priorities of the EU cultural policy and the [Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022](#) to be adopted in December 2018 includes international cultural relations as one of its 5 priorities.
5. More recently, the EU's Foreign Affairs [Council conclusions](#) adopted on 8 April 2019 establish the EU strategic approach to international cultural relations and a relevant framework for action. They recognize the need for a crosscutting approach to culture, while aiming to strengthen the effectiveness and impact of its foreign policy by integrating international cultural relations in the range of its foreign policy instruments
6. In line with the Joint Communication "Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations", the future Creative Europe programme post-2020, currently in negotiation [Proposal for establishing the Creative Europe programme \(2021 to 2027\)](#), foresees a strengthened international dimension. Reinforcing international cultural relations is one of the objectives in the Commission's Proposal for the future Creative Europe programme, and **1)** "promoting international capacity building of European cultural and creative sectors to be active at the international level", and **2)** "contributing to the EU global strategy for international relations through cultural diplomacy" are listed among the priorities of the Culture Strand.