

The intense 2-hour forum was animated by what the moderator Dharmendra Kanani called “a stellar cast of contributors”. The discussion was opened with a video address by the European Parliament (EP) President David Sassoli, calling upon *“thinking of culture as a pivot for recovery, in particular for the green and digital transition but also as the social cement of a post-Covid world that needs to be rebuilt”*. The debates then unfolded through three thematic blocs, or ‘chapters’, animated jointly by the key European policy-makers and representatives of the pan-European cultural networks.

CULTURE AS THE DRIVER OF THE RECOVERY OF EUROPE

The first panel ‘Culture as a driving force for the recovery of Europe’ gave the floor to MEP Sabine Verheyen, Chair of the EP CULT Committee, and Tere Badia, Secretary General of CAE. After acknowledging the [increase by 600 million euros in the Creative Europe budget](#) within the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027), bringing the overall envelope for the programme to 2.2 billion euros, Ms. Verheyen then focused specifically on the EU Recovery Fund and the accessibility to the cultural and creative sectors across Europe: *“The CCSs are crucially important for the recovery of the EU in many ways. Our goal is to ensure that culture is seen as both the glue for European democracy but also as a huge sector in the EU economy, key for the recovery of many related sectors (e.g. tourism) and for the innovation in Europe in the future.”* She emphasized the urgency of convincing the Member States that they ‘not only should but have to’ spend money on their CCSs (at least 2% of the national recovery plans, as demanded by the EP and the [European Cultural community](#)) as well as simultaneously prepare the sector for the future, e.g. by supporting innovative projects. Ms. Verheyen also stressed that *“it is not the Ministers for Culture but those responsible for Economy and Finance that we need to convince of the importance of investing in culture.”*

Recovery should not mean returning to the precarious pre-crisis situation but a step forward towards a better and more sustainable future, Ms. Badia highlighted. She called the current crisis a window of opportunity to *“combine creative thinking with effective actions and put culture at the center of reimagining Europe”*. She then outlined the meaning of the European Cultural Deal proposal: *“On the structural level, it aims at acknowledging the contribution of the sector to the European project, in particular by reconsidering the social and legal status of artists and cultural professionals, but also by going beyond the sectoral perspective and including cultural approaches in the main strategic EU programmes and policies. On the financial and technical level, the Deal should mean the creation of a strong mechanism to heal the cultural ecosystem, as well as mainstreaming cultural policies as a priority dimension in the EU funds-allocation”*.

MEP Niklas Nienass (Greens/EFA) has also contributed to the conversation by stressing that *“the time for action is right now, when the national recovery funds are being programmed”* and encouraged everyone to actively lobby on the national and regional level in order to increase the

funds for the sector. MEP Sandro Gozi (Renew Europe) made a historical reference to the devastating Florence plague of 1348 that was followed by the Renaissance: *'To get out of deep social and economic crisis, culture has historically been one of the main allies and should be such this time too. Our new Renaissance that goes hand-in-hand with the green and digital transition will allow Europe to bring its unique added value to the world'*.

'ALLIANCES OF POSITIVE FORCES': CULTURE AND PHILANTHROPY

In the second chapter, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth Mariya Gabriel and Director of ECF André Wilkens shared their perspectives on the role of philanthropy as a formative part of the Cultural Deal for Europe. While advocating for the widest possible access of the CCSs to all the financial support provided by the EU in the context of the crisis, Mariya Gabriel argued: *"However, if we want the Cultural Deal for Europe, we need to go beyond the inclusion of culture into the Recovery Fund. This means to rethink our interaction with foundations and enable them to support the sector in another way. In the EU, the potential of the philanthropy is not being used as efficiently as in other parts of the world"*. She also added that *"the Future of Europe will specifically open the door for increased synergies with other European funding programs in order to find additional solutions to support the CCSs"*.

André Wilkens further elaborated on this issue from the perspective of the philanthropic organization: *'This extraordinary time could be a moment for European solidarity and sense of belonging. The response to the crisis does not come from the governments only but also from the civil society, creative sector, philanthropic organizations, citizens'*. He then specified that the specific contribution of organized philanthropy is to *'combine and coordinate the efforts initiated across Europe, also on the local level. We can achieve much more in this way, and we can grow out of this crisis with real European philanthropy, or philanthropy with European purpose, contributing to the European project. At the end of the day, why should we replicate the Renaissance or the Bauhaus, if we can create something completely new?'*

This idea was also expressed by the writer Giuliano da Empoli,, who has recently published the ['Seven Ideas for a European Cultural Recovery'](#) paper in *Le Grand Continent*. He stressed, that *"this crisis presents a huge strategic opportunity for Europe to broaden the alliances of positive forces. Tying culture and philanthropy together will help us support positive changes, promote the EU agenda, and make the EU more visible in the world"*.

CULTURE AS A 'CEMENT AND GLUE' OF THE EUROPEAN FUTURE

A video message from Clément Beaune, French Secretary of State for European Affairs, opened the third panel 'Culture for the Future of Europe': *"I am convinced that it is through culture that we can advance the European project. The loyalty to our cultural heritage is the basis on which we are building the European sense of unity and belonging. We also need to defend the European cultural model which surpasses the question of heritage and is based on the freedom of expression, copyright, and cultural diversity."*

This was followed by comments from Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailovic, Secretary General of Europa Nostra, and Apostolos Tzizikostas, President of the Committee of the Regions (CoR). Ms. Quaedvlieg-Mihailovic passionately stressed the *"fundamental importance of culture for the further march of the European project"*: *"Culture and cultural diversity is an antidote to all sorts of nationalism, populism, totalitarianism. For far too long, the unification of Europe was market-driven and not enough culture- and values-driven. 70 years after the adoption of the Schuman Declaration, it is now the time to put culture where it belongs: at the very heart of the European project."*

Mr. Tzizikostas put an emphasis on how supporting culture means *"not only saving the CCS but saving the very notion of Europe itself."* Discussing the current priorities of the CoR with regards to culture, he specified: *"We need to call for more support for the CCS on the EU and national level: earmarking culture in the Next Generation EU via the national recovery and resilience plans, mainstreaming of investment in culture in all relevant EU funds, and actively searching for synergies between culture and other policies, such as tourism, regional policies, education, research."*

SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE AND SEIZING THE MOMENT

A remarkable feature of the discussion was the consistency of the messages repeated across the thematic blocs and by all the stakeholders.

All the participants agreed that, while the crisis requires creative solutions and visionary approaches, it also presents an unprecedented opportunity to change the status quo. Tere Badia thus suggested: *"Now and especially next year, it is time to combine creative thinking and effective actions. We should make common pleas in order to address the lack of centrality of cultural perspectives in the European project which should be a cultural project above all. We need poetics but also politics: in culture they should go hand-in-hand."*

The participants also emphasized that the crisis and recovery should be seen as an opportunity to make a step forward, prepare the sector for the future, and better equip it with means and resources for contributing to the European project. Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailovic added that

"We are not just a sector but also a vector. We need to unite our efforts and act with more confidence".

Furthermore, an overarching key message was related to the need for a common stance and coordinated efforts focused on achieving concrete results in a short- and long-term perspective. As pointed out by Ms. Verheyen: *"What we need the most at the moment is to have a unified cultural sector. While preserving its diversity, we need common action, common approach, common lobbying, we need data, collaboration and cooperation."* A similar point was brought up by Commissioner Mariya Gabriel: *'This is the time for us to stay united and speak with one voice, from the local to regional to national and the EU level, and stay focused on concrete things. We have to work on the common narrative in order to be able to convince the Member States to see culture as a strategic investment. At the same time, the full engagement of our citizens is absolutely necessary. For this, we need to turn political initiatives into societal and cultural projects and preserve the bottom-up approach involving the CCSs'.*

The vibrancy of the discussion and the passion of the participants clearly demonstrates the pressing need for such debates and get-together. Most importantly, the growing realization of the common sense of purpose among the stakeholders as well as their urge to act - and to act as a single front - is a truly timely development. This may very well be the major gain that the COVID-19 has brought to the European CCS and simultaneously the key leverage for turning the devastating crisis into a window of opportunity.