



Informal meeting of the Committee on Cultural Affairs

Dear Representatives of the Member States,

Thank you for this very timely and important exchange ahead of the adoption of a new Council Work Plan for Culture. And thank you for inviting Culture Action Europe to open this conversation and to present the views and priorities of the wider cultural ecosystem.

For those who are not familiar with our work, CAE is the major European cross sectoral cultural network, working daily to put culture at the heart of the EU's policy-making. Among our members, we have networks themselves - and I am happy to see some of them here today -, as well as professional organisations, activists, artists and policy-makers.

For a few months, we have been mobilising our communities to collect their thoughts for the next Work Plan for Culture, and we will continue to do so in the coming weeks and months. So, I particularly encourage this participatory method and the active involvement of civil society in the preparation of the next Work Plan.

My intention during these 10 minutes of intervention is to share with you **why**, from the perspective of the wider European cultural ecosystem, **we need a Work Plan for culture that is more ambitious than ever.**

A pandemic and a war have proven that we cannot go back to 'business as usual' anymore. Will need to face and address both old challenges and the new emergencies. Hence, we believe the strategic roadmap you will be working on in the months to come, both under the French and the upcoming Czech Presidency is crucial. We need a courageous Work Plan for Culture that paves the way for future-proof cultural policies.

That is to be aware, to begin with, that culture is both a) **a sector that carries an enormous intrinsic value and needs to be supported and developed** and b) **a fundamental component, a vector that shapes how we live together**. And **both dimensions need to be addressed** in the WP4C.

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I should not make the case for the importance of culture among you all. But it is key that this is reminded to your colleagues in other Ministries as well. Culture should be the basis of the European project **which needs to be a cultural project in order to make sense**.

In light of this, we believe that the next Work Plan for Culture should be capable of two things, to address these two different dimensions:

- On the one hand, to improve the cultural ecosystem vis-à-vis contemporary challenges.
- On the other hand - and from a broader, more anthropological and humanistic perspective - to ensure that politics, the economy, science and society are able to recognise that the cultural dimension is behind all the decisions we make individually and collectively, and the way we understand our world. And without this recognition of the fundamental role of culture, what we get is a world that is less human.

Recently, an image of a graffiti on a street in Spain was circulating on social networks: "Less books, more Spain" was the sentence written on the wall (Menos Libros Y Más España). The slogan bore the signature of an extreme right-wing party that is managing to attract the votes of young men in medium-sized cities and small towns. Less books, less culture, more gut feelings and less complexity.

Alongside this narrative, we see the growing disrepute of politics, the fragility of rights that we thought were consolidated, the growing economic gap caused by a system that fails to redistribute resources, the energy crisis, the acceleration of the climate emergency, and a deadly war on the European continent that threatens us as we feel it very close in its cultural and material implications.

All the above proves, as said before, that 'business as usual' is useless.

Especially at a time when many of us thought that the global crisis provoked by Covid19 was leading us to the collective conviction that many things had to change: we were going to become more aware of our impact on the planet, more supportive of our neighbours, fairer in the distribution and access to resources.... Culture in the form of music on balconies, films on home screens, books read on our sofas, and video games played on tablets, took a central stage during the pandemic. At that time, we dared to imagine that we could be the main player in a most needed paradigm shift, as cultural consumption seemed fundamental for everyone.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, by now we know that the paradigm is not going to change by itself. The trends noted before are accelerating. **If we want to push for this paradigm shift, we have to aim higher and be bolder.** And that ambition is what we need for the next Work Plan for Culture, which should aim at this double dimension of culture: the sectoral and the vectorial. What is at stake is not only the existence of cultural goods, practices and players. We are, today, in a situation that is more unjust, more unbalanced, more scarce and bloodier than the one we started from. And **we need a Work Plan that helps us to identify and address the obstacles, to work with the most vulnerable and dignify all the lives, to stand for freedom, and to recognise the interdependence of human rights and cultural rights.**

Let me drop here a few priorities for the WPC, and unfold them under this double perspective: the sectoral and the dimensional.

1. **In the sectoral dimension,** we need a WPC that aims at **the sustainability of the people and players active in this field.** Starting with the professional status of artists and cultural workers that recognises their activity as a job, that protects it as such in all its phases, (including research, and rehearsal) and in all its specificities (from freedom of artistic expression to mobility, from invisible work to intermittency etc). Several Member States among you have already started working on a national Status of the Artists, or on specific profiles to improve the working conditions in the cultural sectors, some of you have also included it as a reform in the framework of their National Recovery and Resilience Plans, which is highly promising. Now it's time to make a step

- together, and move from these many national experiences to find a European common ground.
2. Also, **the protection of artistic freedom proves to be an interesting testing ground for strengthening the link between culture and democracy**, for example by moving step by step towards a very much needed common approach. And, as we want to be ambitious, to fully include freedom of artistic expression as an indicator of the respect of the Rule of Law across the EU.
 3. We need to support the creation and distribution of cultural content in spaces not dominated by the main private digital platforms (the so-called FAANG algorithms). **Exploring other spaces for cultural content creation and distribution might make the difference in terms of the representation of the cultural diversity, and better accessibility.**
 4. Among other things, the next WPC should further address gender issues, as it did in the previous cycle, but also **diversity (of race, gender, background, sexual orientation etc) in a structural way, so that it can reflect the current social and cultural multiplicities and address systemic inequalities and exclusions.**
 5. Also, we need to specifically **address the relation between the climate emergency and its challenges for the cultural sectors**: on one side the impact of the environment on the heritage sites, but also the high impact of cultural production (travels, uses of ephemeral materials, etc) and the search of other production models based on the circular economy. But also urgent work is needed for bettering digital infrastructures to lower the higher environmental impact of technologies (CO2 impact of servers, the extraction of rare earth minerals for our digital devices etc)
 6. And the next WPC should **explore multiple partnerships between different public and private actors, including philanthropy**, to be able to face the emergencies of the present and the future.

These remarks concern culture as a sector. But let's look at culture as a vector. We need to unlock the cultural dimension and recognise once and for all that **culture is transversal and is a foundational component of economic, social, scientific, environmental narratives.**

That culture is a structural element, the very foundation to make sense. In this regard,

1. It is crucial to start **linking cultural rights with social rights as a cornerstone for the EU's democratic development**,
2. And with a Union that strives for more and is determined to consolidate its role in health and well-being matters, the next WPC should move from the lesson of the pandemic in **structurally addressing the well-living (*buen vivir*) of citizens**.
3. And while addressing new challenges we should not forget the fight to include culture as an essential dimension of the global Sustainable Development Agenda. Some things are happening worldwide in this sense - we are part of the #culture2030goal campaign together with several global networks -, but more efforts are needed. The time is ripe for the EU and its culture policy-making to take up this fight, together with international partners and on equal footing. **In the face of the climate emergency, the link between culture and the Green Deal should be broader, bolder and more meaningful, as a Green transition will not be sustainable for all if not supported by a cultural dimension. The Green Deal needs to go hand in hand with a Cultural Deal**, and cannot be constrained within the borders of the Commission's New European Bauhaus initiative.

This is an agenda we propose at a time when war is again shaking Europe and threatening the peace we have been hardly building in the last decades. The Russian army is systematically looting and destroying any cultural institutions they can target including archives and museums because **their narrative that Ukraine does not exist is only possible if Ukrainian culture disappears**. Ukraine faces cultural repression, cultural suppression and cultural appropriation.

Exactly two weeks ago in a dedicated hearing at the European Parliament on the situation of artists, cultural workers, cultural and heritage institutions in Ukraine, Alona Karavai, from the newly created Museum Crisis Center in Ukraine said that: **"Nobody seemed prepared for annihilation of such extent"**. She was referring to the destruction of the country and its culture, but we can bring this quote here again as a reminder of **how Europe would look if we fail to bring culture at the center of all the challenges we have ahead** (back to the graffiti I was mentioning before).

We have the duty and the urgency now to imagine where we want to be in four years' time. And we have the chance to draft a Work Plan for Culture that helps redirect the tendencies that we face today.

Dear Representatives of the Member States,

We need you as strong allies of the European cultural and creative sectors. Talk to us to grasp the situation of the cultural ecosystem. Talk to each other and work together. And make the case for culture in the complex governmental and intergovernmental negotiations. I am sure I can speak on behalf of all of us here today in saying that the cultural communities stand ready in supporting your efforts.

Two years ago, together with the European Cultural Foundation and Europa Nostra, Culture Action Europe proposed the Cultural Deal for Europe, an overarching framework imagining a meaningful post-pandemic cultural policy at the EU level that includes most of the topics I have been referring to. **We believe that we cannot go back to what it was and that we need a coherent cultural frame side by side to the Green Deal.**

For this it is key that we **tear down silos and engage also your colleagues from different services in understanding the many cross-cutting issues that can be addressed more meaningfully - and in a vectorial dimension - if only culture was at the table.**

Let's not miss the chance to use the next WPC to better structure this dialogue and occasions for contamination, including by organising dedicated Presidency conferences (or - why not - Joint Council Meetings) where not just the Culture Ministers and cultural stakeholders, but also Finance, Ecological Transition, Health, Education - you name them - sit around a table.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We should have **the ambition to show that not only European culture matters, but that culture has a fundamental value in Europe and everywhere else.**

The next WPC is a promising tool in this sense, and thanks to you we can make it more powerful and relevant than ever before. We are looking forward to working with the next Presidencies and you all to make this happen.

Thank you very much for listening.

