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Fiscal Prudence at What Cost? Networks Reject Proposed Cuts to Culture

CREATIVESUNITE

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The European Council's proposed cuts to the Creative Europe programme risk devastating impacts on artists and cultural institutions. In a letter published by Culture Action Europe, 31 Networks and Cultural organizations reject them, suggesting they are undermining Europe's creative ecosystem, and it's potential.

Should fiscal prudence come at the cost of the continent's soul? The Council of the European Union has proposed to cut the budget of Creative Europe, the EU's flagship program for the cultural and creative sectors, by €27.56 million in appropriated funds.

The proposal also includes another €9.86 million in payment appropriations for the 2026 financial year. This decision has sparked resistance from the European Parliament and a coalition of 31 cultural organisations. They warn that the cuts could have a devastating impact on artists, cultural institutions, and, ultimately, the fabric of European identity, as evidenced by Eurostat figures.

These reductions are part of the Council's position on the EU's draft general budget for 2026. Other key programs will also face significant cuts, including Erasmus+ (-€257.73 million in commitments and -€87.53 million in payments) and the Citizens, Equality, Rights, and Values program (-€54.60 million in commitments and -€18.10 million in payments).

For many in the creative sectors, however, the proposed cuts

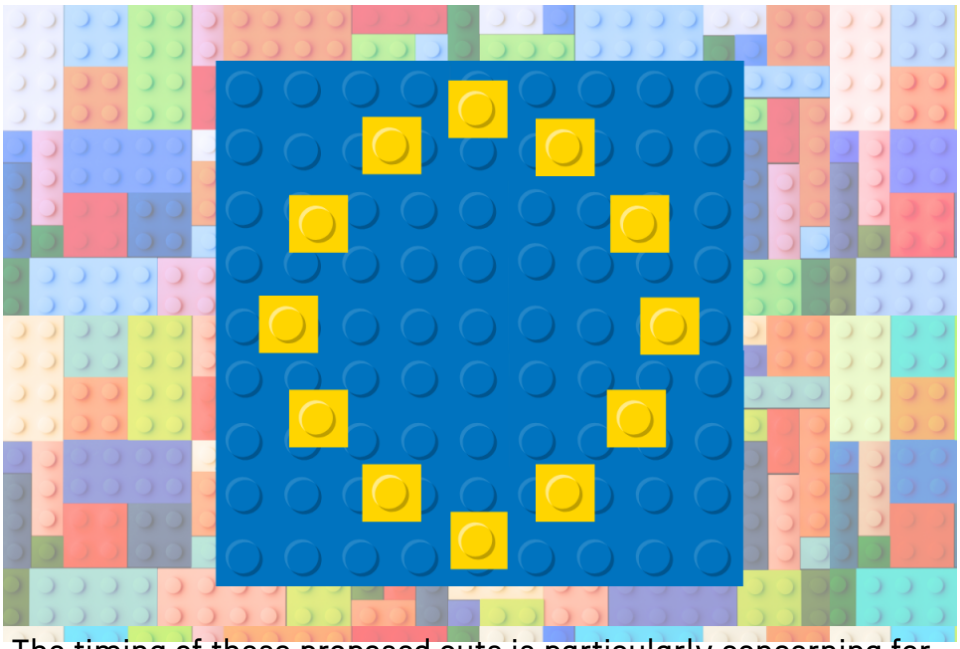
are not just numbers on a spreadsheet, but rather an existential threat. On October 1st, a letter co-signed by numerous European cultural networks and organisations was sent to the Council, urging them to reverse their decision.

The letter emphasises Creative Europe's vital role in supporting the arts. Between 2014 and 2020, Creative Europe supported over 22,000 cultural professionals and funded more than 7,500 cultural activities under the new program. “Countless partnerships, emerging artists, and cultural and creative organisations may never have flourished had it not been for Creative Europe funding,” the letter states.

The Cultural and Creative Sectors argue that Creative Europe is a strategic investment with a significant return, not merely a drain on the EU's finances. According to the European Parliament Research Service, the program generates an estimated €11 in GDP for every €1 invested. Nevertheless, Creative Europe's financial allocation amounts to only 0.2% of the total EU budget, or €2.44 billion over seven years. The letter's signatories also point to the program's high demand, noting that a recent call for proposals received over 1,600 applications. Of those, only 10-15% will be selected for funding, meaning many “extraordinary projects” will miss out.

The European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) has also spoken out against the Council's proposed cuts. In its opinion on the 2026 budget, the committee recommended a “moderate increase above the draft budget of €20 million” for Creative Europe. The committee's rapporteur, Helder Sousa Silva (EPP, Portugal), criticised the Council for “lack of vision” and vowed to “fight against this within the trilogue negotiations.”

The “trilogue” negotiations, a key stage in the EU's budgetary process, will see representatives from the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, and the European Commission attempt to reach a compromise on the 2026 budget. The Creative Europe Program's annual budget for 2026 was originally projected to be around €380 million (the Commission's target), before the Council's proposed cuts. These negotiations are expected to be tense, with the Parliament and the Council holding firm to their respective positions. The final report on the budget is scheduled to be voted on sometime in October.



The timing of these proposed cuts is particularly concerning for the cultural and creative sectors, which are still recovering from the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As seen in different reports, many artists and cultural professionals are facing precarious working conditions, a fact acknowledged by the Council in its own conclusions in May 2025, where it described them as “an engine of creativity and innovation [...] often marked by precarity".

Contrary to the proposed cuts for 2026, the cultural sector is fighting to reverse them and is calling for a more ambitious long-term vision for cultural funding in Europe. In their letter to the Council, cultural networks and organisations requested that 2% of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034) be allocated to creating European cultural content and reinforcing Europe's democratic cultural ecosystem.

The coming months will be crucial in determining the future of Creative Europe, and the future of the thousands of artists, cultural organisations, and creative projects it supports across the continent. “Culture is a vital building block for the common future of a more sustainable, global Europe”, the letter concludes, echoing the millions of Europeans who put Culture at the top of the list of the things that unite them. Will the EU's political leaders invest in that future?

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