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"Rearm... Culture"

"Culture Action Europe calls on the EU to invest €30 billion in the next multiannual financial framework to create European cultural content and strengthen Europe's democratic cultural ecosystem."

Culture Action Europe is calling on the EU to recognise culture as a strategic pillar within the European Democracy Shield, the EU Preparedness Union Strategy, the White Paper on the Future of European Defence and the ReArm Europe plan. The pan-European network, which brings together 250 cultural networks, organisations, artists and activists from 35 European countries, is also calling for the inclusion of artistic freedom in the Rule of Law report.

The organisation has sent a letter to the European Commission, signed by its Secretary General Lars Ebert, highlighting how culture is indispensable to the EU's resilience. Among other things, Culture Action Europe proposes that the EU invest €30 billion in the next multiannual financial framework to strengthen democracy through the creation of cultural content, and that 2% of Russia's frozen assets be used for Ukraine's cultural recovery. The letter comes at a time when the European Union is facing multiple emergencies and follows the announcement of the first ever Security College by the President of the European Commission.

As the letter points out, European countries such as Finland and Ukraine already recognise culture as a key element of their security strategies, and the EU should do the same by

integrating culture into EU policies on defence, security, preparedness and democracy.

Culture Action Europe underlines that, cultural participation directly enhances democracy and social cohesion. According to the European Commission's study, people who participate in cultural activities are more likely to vote, get involved in their communities and volunteer. They also develop a stronger sense of belonging, empathy and trust, especially towards people from different backgrounds.

The organisation's second argument is that promoting European cultural content is a strategic defence against disinformation, hybrid threats and psychological warfare by authoritarian regimes. They say that if the EU does not invest enough in culture, it will leave itself vulnerable to external manipulation, because authoritarian regimes do not treat culture as soft power, they treat it as power. For example, Russia spent more than €1 billion on propaganda through culture and media in 2024, while the Creative Europe budget was €335 million in 2024. China has also expanded its global cultural influence through initiatives such as Confucius Institutes, Belt and Road cultural exchanges, TikTok and media expansion. The letter recalls Romania's experience during the 2024 presidential election, and how gaps in digital cultural and creative infrastructure were filled with disinformation spread through tech platforms. "Investing in robust, independent cultural content rooted in democratic values and developed through cross-border European cooperation is therefore crucial to safeguarding European democracy," the letter says.

The third argument is that culture makes a significant contribution to emergency preparedness by fostering cross-sectoral cooperation, mobilising communities and providing essential infrastructure for social cohesion. Culture Action Europe cites as examples Finland, which explicitly recognises the maintenance of cultural services and the protection of cultural heritage as part of its psychological resilience and comprehensive security model, and Ukraine, which has identified culture as a key pillar of its internal resilience plan. As the letter points out, during emergencies, cultural centres become trusted hubs for communication and resources, helping communities to come together for response and recovery. Culture Action Europe's Culture for Health report suggests that participation in cultural activities significantly improves both individual and collective mental health and well-being, making people more resilient and fostering a stronger sense of community.

On the basis of the above, and given the EU's ongoing efforts to strengthen its defence, security and global leadership as a guardian of democratic values, Culture Action Europe argues that culture should be a fundamental part of this agenda and proposes to streamline culture's contribution to the EU's priorities by:

1. Recognising cultural participation as a strategic pillar within the European Democracy Shield to mitigate the threats of disinformation and manipulation while promoting democratic values.
2. Integrate culture and cultural participation into the EU's preparedness strategy to maintain social cohesion and mobilise communities in times of crisis.
3. Position culture within the White Paper on the Future of European Defence and the ReArm Europe plan as a fundamental pillar of psychological resilience, critical thinking and deterrence against hybrid threats.
4. Include the dimension of artistic freedom in the Rule of Law Report and monitor freedom of artistic expression and the autonomy of cultural organisations across the EU.
5. Use the forthcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034) to invest €30 billion in the

creation of European cultural content and the strengthening of Europe's democratic cultural ecosystem through a strong, stand-alone Creative Europe programme with a dedicated budget line to support European cross-border cultural cooperation; national plans that link reforms and investments to strengthen cultural infrastructure and support small and independent creators in Member States; a Global Cultural Cooperation Fund under the External Actions pillar of the MFF to promote cultural cooperation with strategic partners around the world.

6. Updating the EU strategy on international cultural relations to address the role of culture in security, to counter the weaponisation of culture by authoritarian regimes, to support cultural workers at risk and to strengthen the EU's competitiveness in the global cultural economy.

7. Earmark 2% of Russia's frozen assets for the cultural recovery of Ukraine.

8. Ensure the ethical implementation of the AI Act and other AI policies that respect human intellectual property, personal data and cybersecurity.

[Read the full letter here](#)

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