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The Council of Europe Celebrates The 70th Anniversary of The European Cultural Convention

Under the theme “No Culture. No Democracy” the Council of Europe celebrated in a conference in Strasbourg the European Cultural Convention.

The event aimed at [highlighting culture's critical role in supporting democratic institutions](#), human rights, and the rule of law across the continent. Organised during Luxembourg's Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, the conference brought together government officials, cultural activists, artists, and thought leaders from across Europe.

The event featured presentations from Ministers of Culture from Luxembourg, Malta, and Ukraine and a keynote speech by distinguished sociologist Helmut K. Anheier, who explored the relationship between culture and democracy.

The [European Cultural Convention](#) was adopted on 19 December 1954 in Paris (France) and came into force on 5 May 1955.

The purpose of this Convention is to develop mutual understanding among the peoples of Europe and reciprocal appreciation of their cultural diversity. “To safeguard European culture, to promote national contributions to Europe's common cultural heritage respecting the same fundamental values and to encourage in particular the study of the languages, history, and civilisation of the Parties to the Convention” according to the CoE.

“As we look for intergovernmental fora to counter democratic backsliding and other threats to our common principles, culture is an essential element in a transversal response. As such, the capacity of artists and cultural professionals to speak and work freely, to see their freedoms protected, is vital” writes the call of the Luxembourgish Presidency of the Council. “This is all the more so as it is they who provide us with the building blocks of cultural and societal evolution. If they are restricted, all society is restricted. Therefore, in our quest to strengthen the Council of Europe and its work in the field of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, culture must be taken into consideration with renewed attention and commitment.”

Eric Thill, Luxembourg's Minister for Culture, emphasised in a nutshell that “Culture is not just a reflection of society; it is its driving force. In a democracy, culture promotes dialogue, encourages diversity, and enables the free exchange of ideas.”

Council of Europe Secretary General Alain Berset reflected on the Convention's significance, noting it was “ratified by all 46 member States” and had consistently served as “a source of unity, inspiration, and cooperation.”

A notable highlight was the presentation of the 2023 report on freedom of artistic expression by expert Sara Whyatt, accompanied by the Council of Europe's digital exhibition “Free to Create — Create to be Free”.

The 2023 report titled [“Free to Create: Artistic Freedom in Europe”](#) notes that European artists and cultural workers face challenges in the practice of the right to freedom of artistic expression. These range from laws that curtail creative freedom and attacks from non-governmental groups and online threats to “under-the-radar” pressures that force self-censorship.

Artistic freedom is a core human right requiring protection, and it has worsened recently under multiple challenges. Political extremism, economic collapse, a global pandemic, digitisation, an emerging environmental catastrophe, and the return of war in Europe are painted as crises with major impacts on human rights across society. The conference underscored the need to endure the European Cultural Convention's legacy as a cornerstone of democratic values.

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