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The Last Year of Creative Europe Starts

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The EU's flagship culture programme enters its final year with €402 million to spend and a brand-new performing-arts prize on the way. What replaces it, and with how much money, is still being fought over by EU's institutions.

For the cultural sector across Europe, 2027 will be a year of endings and beginnings. It is the seventh and last year of Creative Europe, the European Union's programme for cinema, theatre, literature, music and journalism, which the Commission has confirmed will receive €402 million to see out its final twelve months.

According to the Commission's own notice, published on 22 September, next year's money is meant to do two things at once: keep existing schemes running smoothly and pilot ideas that are likely to carry over into AgoraEU. The programme's Culture strand will publish a €61 million call for European co-operation projects in the first quarter of 2027, alongside a call for the circulation of European literary works due this autumn. New for the final year are an action to support cultural operators in EU candidate and neighbourhood countries, a "Music Moves Europe" call aimed squarely at digital and AI tools for the music industry, and a scheme developed with the World Health Organisation on the links between culture, health and wellbeing.

The most eye-catching addition, though, is a new EU Prize for the Performing Arts — the first flagship action to emerge from November's Culture Compass for Europe, the Commission's long-term cultural strategy. Officially, the Commission has committed only to *proposing* the prize in the second quarter of 2027, as one of twenty flagship actions under that strategy. No categories, prize money, jury or eligibility rules have been published. What is settled is its purpose: the Commission's founding text says it wants the prize to recognise artistic excellence while also strengthening skills, market access and professional networks across theatre, dance and the wider performing-arts sector — a broader brief than a conventional lifetime-achievement award.

The European Theatre Convention, which represents almost 500,000 artists and cultural professionals across the continent's public theatres, has welcomed the move as going further than its own long-standing campaign for a dedicated European theatre prize.

MEDIA, the programme's audiovisual strand, gets two new measures of its own: support for film distribution in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine, explicitly designed to reduce those markets' reliance on Russian distributors, and a fresh push on audiovisual co-productions with South Korea. The cross-sectoral strand, meanwhile, will fund a new round of Creative Innovation Labs, continue backing the Media Freedom Rapid Response mechanism and the Media Pluralism Monitor, and keep the national Creative Europe Desks running through the handover to the next budget cycle.

Creative Europe's full seven-year budget is usually put at around €2.44 billion, the figure the Commission used when the programme launched in 2021; the Commission's current funding programme page now lists the total at €2.53 billion in current prices, reflecting later top-ups. Either way, next year's €402 million is not a farewell discount: it is roughly in line with recent annual spending, released to keep 41 participating countries' worth of cultural operators funded until the new system takes over.

What follows

The Commission's proposed successor, AgoraEU, would merge Creative Europe with the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV) into a single instrument for 2028 to 2034, restructured into three strands: Creative Europe – Culture, a strengthened MEDIA+ covering both audiovisual content and news media, and CERV+ for democracy, citizens' rights and equality. Today's cross-sectoral strand disappears as a distinct category, with journalism and media-literacy functions folded into MEDIA+ and democracy-related work moving to CERV+, according to the European Parliament's own research service.

On paper, the numbers look generous. The Commission's July 2025 proposal put AgoraEU at €8.582 billion in current prices, or €7.606 billion in constant 2025 prices — nearly double the €4.35 billion equivalent spent on culture, media and civil society under the current framework. Parliament's research service calculates that, in real terms, the culture allocation would rise from €805 million to €1.592 billion (up 98 per cent) and the media allocation from €1.404 billion to €2.830 billion (up 101 per cent).

Those are still proposals, not settled law, and the institutions are some distance apart. The European Parliament adopted its own position on 28 April, calling for €10.72 billion for AgoraEU — a rise of over €2 billion, and proportionally the largest increase it proposed for any programme in its area of the budget. The Council of the EU has gone the other way. Its member states agreed the *structure* of AgoraEU in May without putting a figure on it; a month later, the Cyprus presidency's negotiating paper trimmed the Commission's number to €8.233 billion in current prices, or €7.295 billion in 2025 prices — about 4 per cent below the Commission's own proposal. Those Council figures remain in square brackets, EU jargon for "not yet agreed", and a revised version is expected before EU leaders meet in October, with the current Irish presidency still working member states towards a compromise on the wider seven-year budget as of a paper circulated on 14 September.

That leaves a triangle of positions — roughly €8.2 billion, €8.6 billion and €10.7 billion — with the final figure to be thrashed out in trilogue negotiations once the Council settles on its own number.