

FOR A CULTURE OF FREEDOM

Toward a cross-sectoral European policy

As the May 2019 European elections draw near, everything is converging on an alarming observation of the real risk that Europe as a political entity could break apart. Against the background of globalization, with multiple social crises, talk affirming national identity abounds in a Europe experiencing numerous migratory movements. A populist lure is developing dangerously and it is fueled by the rhetoric of extremist policies. We're seeing governments take a fallback position, closing off from one another, or even exhibiting unabashed racism. Under a stranglehold of urgent situations and paralyzed by the populist threat, political debate can barely emerge. And we have to recognize that art and culture for all intents and purposes are virtually missing not only from the debate, but from the landscape.

We should seize upon these upcoming elections to say we want a different Europe, a cultural Europe in the face of populist demonstrations that challenge the culture of freedom expressed by so many artists, writers, and philosophers. We want a Europe that thinks about culture as a vital tool for democracy and dialogue between its citizens and as a component of social cohesion, a prerequisite to social, political, and economic development. We want a Europe that thinks about the present and the future of its youth. For building this Europe of the 2020s, we dream of being many, starting with this mobile but also precarious, fragile, and threatened youth. As leaders with many kinds of prescriptions about art at the heart of youth, we endeavor so that our theatres are public places for culture where art is the focus and they represent the guarantee of safe spaces for creation. We affirm the necessary desire for a European cultural project that thinks about public spaces for art as spaces for peace and hospitality.

A European culture exists and the issue is precisely about recapturing its meaning. It is a culture that promotes the common values of humanism and enrichment through difference and through the understanding and exercise of freedom of expression. And it believes in the strength of creation and the strength of art. The writer Mario Vargas Llosa, Nobel Prize in Literature, reminds us:

“It is fundamental that Europe, where political freedom, democracy, human rights, and coexistence in diversity began, continue to be one of the world’s major development poles.”¹

The historical influence France has had and has in the European Union can’t allow the Europe of today be undermined and invaded by populist ideas. Today, France can set the example of an exceptional artistic and cultural public network. And it’s also the effectiveness of art and culture that must be promoted in a contemporary European project.

In 2019, lucidly we make the observation that the argument for peace is not enough to establish the legitimacy and might of a European continent. True, this Europe built from the ashes of 1945 doesn’t resemble the Europe many of us want today. True, she has to be redefined and repositioned with respect to international political challenges.

We want to promote a Europe that encompasses cultural diversity and builds bridges between communities and stronger ties between its citizens. According to Eurobarometer's 2017 "Future of Europe," European citizens identify cultural diversity and openmindedness as factors that help European countries face world challenges nearly as much as free trade and the market economy do. By being practiced on a regular basis, art and culture are identified as components that guide democratic participation and reinforce the practice of its principles and values. As factors of social inclusion, art and culture play a positive role in implementing intercultural dialogue and promoting integration.

The challenge today is bringing the cursor of history to an exact position in the present, which sees in Europe the near future of an ecological transition. This transition includes digital challenges with sustainable GAFAs and comprises the generation we see today across the Europe it incarnates, a Europe that is mobile, agile, open-minded, and clearly cultural. Symbolic of this Europe are the performances by Deborah Warner, Krzysztof Warlikowski, Maguy Marin, Alain Platel, Emma Dante, Josef Nadj, Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker, Thomas Ostermeier, Caroline Guiela Nguyen, Yoann Bourgeois, Angelica Liddell, Julien Gosselin, and others. The challenge today is clearly about building a cultural Europe of artists and inhabitants.

Many artists have already become a part of these political challenges and everywhere, they are involved in local projects and focus on furthering a different idea of Europe. By including the problems of habitat, environmental transition, and relations between human beings, European cultural projects today demonstrate that art can be a vector of social change. And artists are often the first players.

We currently have valuable systems and tools in a landscape comprised of cultural capitals, festivals, and institutions. In many European institutions, theatres, or museums, policies with regard to public relations now unfold outdoors, inviting everyone to experience accessible art or contribute to the invention of a work of art. Unfortunately, these projects often lack visibility. Yet it's this underground work of patient, meticulous artistic action that little by little builds other European realities. It unbinds, it innovates, and it pushes back being fearful of others. Project after project, it invents relations with regions that politics has turned its back on, to construct a different policy of proximity, friendship between human beings, and complicity that is enriching for everyone through the collective artistic experience. The live performing arts, which time after time apply the reality of the individual at the heart of the collective, naturally play a key role in building our cultural Europe.

But many regions are still a blank slate when it comes to artistic action and still a wasteland, there where those white or gray zones so much need to create real or virtual links. This is especially true at a time when crossing through Europe there are many migrants to be welcomed, taken in, and helped in terms of social and professional integration, in every location where initiatives by associations or individuals need to be relayed and in every location where the meaning of an action has to be carried and transcended through the artist's view.

- Alongside Culture Action Europe², Relais Culture Europe, and European Alliance for Culture and the Arts³, and because we believe that art and culture carry contemporary values of hope, individual creativity, and dialogue between people, we want to see this role and the intrinsic value of art and culture recognized in the building of Europe. As a priority, we call for:
- A future increase in the budget for culture of 1% of total European Union expenditure, accessible to a wide range of organizations and artists, in addition to doubling the “Creative Europe” budget and the gradual expansion of structural funds to include art and culture;
- Artistic and cultural education to prepare the future of the people of Europe and to achieve this, we hold the President of the European Commission responsible for his statement:
“Education and culture are the key to the future – both for the individual as well as for our Union as a whole.”
Jean-Claude Juncker, November 14, 2017;
- Culture to fully contribute to achieving intelligent, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth.

It is by affirming a pivotal position for culture at the core of various areas that the future of a European cultural policy encompassing regions and the territory of Europe, proximity and diversity, and mobility and diversity will play out. And this is to hold high the challenges of the present in terms of what they carry in humanism and collective possibilities, in the foremost affirmation of *a culture of freedom*.

1. L'Europe est en péril... 30 écrivains alertent, *Libération*, 26/27.01.2019

2. CULTURE-EUROPE We want is democratic, diverse, fair, free, human, inclusive, vital

3. allianceforculture.com