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Council conclusions on the strategic role of culture, cultural heritage and audiovisual works in upholding European values and democratic resilience

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THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

RECALLING THAT:

1. The European Union is founded on a common set of values, which include respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, equality and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities ([1]).

2. Democratic societies are sustained through citizens' participation and engagement, and in such societies the fundamental rights of citizens, including the freedom of expression, are protected.

3. The fundamental role of culture has been explicitly recognised in EU primary law and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ([2]), and participating in the cultural life of the community and enjoying the arts can play a vital role in fostering peace.

4. Culture, cultural heritage and audiovisual works ([3]) have an intrinsic value and are also a fundamental source of social cohesion and dialogue, inter alia by amplifying an experience of shared values and a sense of belonging.

5. Culture and cultural heritage are characterised not only by diversity, but also by a sense of community, a shared history and a collective memory, which strengthen bonds, mutual understanding and values throughout Europe.

6. Citizens' participation and civic engagement sustain European values, and culture and cultural heritage play an active and crucial role in this respect, both through their intrinsic value and as important pillars of democratic societies and the fundamental rights of EU citizens.

ACKNOWLEDGING ([4]):

7. The European Council's Strategic Agenda (2024-2029) ([5]), which establishes the priority of promoting cultural diversity and heritage with a view to upholding European values within the EU in a free and democratic Europe.

8. The Council resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 ([6]), which underlines the essential role of cultural diversity for the promotion and protection of human rights and positive societal transformation, and calls for action to safeguard heritage.

9. The Council conclusions of 21 June 2021, which set out the EU's approach to cultural heritage in conflict and crises, and the Council conclusions of 21 May 2014, which highlight the potential of culture and cultural heritage as a shared strategic resource for developing a society ([7]).

10. The European Parliament resolution of 20 October 2022 on cultural solidarity with Ukraine and a joint emergency response mechanism for cultural recovery in Europe, which emphasises the need for support and solidarity in respect of the cultural ecosystem in Ukraine, and the importance of supporting the resilience and post-crisis recovery of the EU's cultural ecosystem as a whole ([8]).

([1]) Article 2 TEU.
([2]) Notably Article 3 TEU and Article 27 UDHR.
([3]) Cultural and creative sectors are defined in Regulation (EU) 2021/818 of 20 May 2021 establishing the Creative Europe Programme (2021 to 2027) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013. Audiovisual works include notably feature film, television series, documentaries, animation and video games.
([4]) Legal texts and policy documents that are relevant to these conclusions are listed in Annex.
([5]) EUCO 15/24, annex.
([6]) Council Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 – OJ C 466, 7.12.2022.
([7]) See 9837/21 and 2014/C 183/08.
([8]) See 2022/2759(RSP) https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0374_EN.html.

RECOGNISING THAT:

11. In the current geopolitical situation, marked by uncertainty and multiple threats against European countries, we cannot take European values, democracies and way of life for granted, but must actively defend, safeguard and promote what Europe stands for.

12. Culture remains a cornerstone of European societies, with Europeans placing culture at the top when asked what fosters a sense of community, alongside shared values and history ([9]).

13. Cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage are key in terms of reinforcing democratic resilience, participation and engagement.

14. Cultural rights are essential for a plural, inclusive and democratic Europe. Participation in cultural activities strengthens democracy by opening up spaces for all people and encouraging civic engagement, building trust and fostering civic and democratic values ([10]). In this context, remembrance activities and critical reflection on Europe's historical memory are necessary in order to make citizens, and in particular young people, aware of their common history and values as the foundation for a common future.

15. Participation in cultural activities also significantly improves both individual and collective mental health and well-being, resulting in more resilient and community-minded societies in the face of uncertainty and threats to our values.

16. The European Capital of Culture and the European Heritage Label Actions show how citizens' cultural participation and interaction are changing public spaces into more vibrant and flourishing communities and increasing citizens' sense of togetherness.

17. Cultural institutions and spaces, such as publicly accessible libraries, play a crucial role in addressing the societal challenges of safeguarding democracy by fostering informed citizenship, literacy, civic participation and social inclusion.

18. Culture and audiovisual works influence norms and attitudes among citizens, including children and young people. In this context, access to media literacy and diverse multilingual quality content is particularly important.

19. Culture, cultural heritage and audiovisual works can contribute to European values and democratic resilience and peace-building and provide a forum for democratic debate and civic participation if they are based on artistic freedom, cultural and linguistic diversity and freedom of expression.

20. The role of culture and cultural heritage in promoting democratic societies in a trustworthy and diverse way is also at the core of the EU's international cultural relations and partnerships, as the EU's cultural diversity enriches and is enriched by cultural inputs from other parts of Europe and of the world. Intercultural dialogue strengthens social cohesion and participation.

21. The protection of cultural heritage is a global challenge. Not only war and other deliberate acts, but also crises and conflicts can lead to a loss of cultural heritage, not only by way of destruction, but also through pillage and looting. Illegal trade in cultural property perpetuates the deprivation of cultural identity, which is associated with the loss of cultural heritage for the respective states and societies of origin. In this context, international cooperation in preventing and combating looting and illicit trafficking as well as in safeguarding and restoring cultural heritage can contribute to long-term peace by strengthening common heritage, cultural identity, trust and a shared history.

22. Cultural identity is being intentionally targeted, whether through physical – including military – threats, hybrid threats or disinformation, which have become an increasingly prominent part of political and military strategies, both in peacetime and during conflict.

23. The deliberate physical destruction of cultural sites in Ukraine and false narratives about Ukraine continue to pose a severe threat to the Ukrainian identity and to cultural heritage in Ukraine.

([9]) In Special Eurobarometer 562 published on 8 May 2025, culture, values and history are the three main factors perceived as most strongly fostering a sense of community among EU citizens (29 % reported that it is culture first and foremost that creates a feeling of community, and 26 % of respondents mentioned values as the prevalent factor, while 24 % identified history as the primary factor – cf. p. 18).

([10]) Culture and Democracy: the evidence – independent report commissioned by and authored for the European Commission, 2023.

WELCOMES:

24. Measures and initiatives taken by the EU and its Member States to promote cultural diversity and protect European cultural heritage while raising awareness of the strategic significance of culture, cultural heritage and audiovisual works in building democratic resilience.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVELS, TO:

25. Take the necessary action to protect values, identity and collective memory by promoting culture, in all its forms, and safeguarding Europe's cultural heritage.

26. Recognise that cultural resilience requires a strong, vibrant civil society, civic space and participation, based on respect for cultural and linguistic diversity and artistic freedom.

27. Consider ways of further promoting access to and discoverability and re-use of European multilingual content, including digitised cultural heritage content ([11]), among citizens, including children and young people, while ensuring a high level of protection of minors.

28. Continue to promote citizens' access to and participation in cultural activities and thereby enhance democratic participation and engagement at an individual and community level.

29. Continue to enhance the vital role of cultural institutions in providing access to knowledge, information and experiences, and in serving as a forum for critical thinking and dialogue.

30. Continue to integrate culture and cultural infrastructure (e.g. archives, libraries, repositories, museums, cinemas, buildings, including religious buildings, monuments and spaces) in crisis preparedness planning with regard, inter alia, to security threats, for example through defence systems, evacuation plans, risk assessment and mapping, emergency response planning or documenting and digitising and digitally preserving cultural heritage for restoration purposes in the event of damage, taking into account the vulnerability of archaeological sites.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, WHILE RESPECTING THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY, IN THEIR RESPECTIVE AREAS OF COMPETENCE AND AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVELS, TO:

31. Promote the development of knowledge and research and continue to foster standards and skills as well as possible cross-border cooperation mechanisms for protecting, safeguarding and digitally preserving culture and cultural heritage in order to increase crisis preparedness and resilience in Member States.

32. Continue to protect and promote artistic freedom and cultural diversity as part of the support for culture, cultural heritage and audiovisual works.

33. Continue to support the role of artists and cultural and creative professionals for resilience.

34. Consider encouraging initiatives that highlight the way in which culture, cultural heritage and audiovisual works, such as film, reflect common values and a shared past, thereby helping to uphold European values and democratic resilience for the future.

35. Consider encouraging initiatives that increase understanding of the crucial role of cultural diversity, heritage and cultural rights in fostering cohesion, identity and resilience in societies.

36. Continue efforts to safeguard and promote cultural rights and cultural diversity with and through international organisations, such as the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

37. Consider encouraging initiatives that foster international cultural relations and intercultural dialogue of the EU and its Member States in collaboration with international partners such as the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

38. Continue to provide assistance to institutions and organisations involved in the support of artists from Ukraine and/or the protection and recovery of culture and cultural heritage in Ukraine, in particular damage and risk assessment and early-recovery planning, inter alia through cooperation in multilateral fora.

([11]) Such as through the Europeana portal and the common European data space for cultural heritage.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:

39. Consider awareness-raising activities focusing on the role of culture, cultural and linguistic diversity and cultural heritage in upholding common values and democratic resilience in Europe, including in connection with the New European Bauhaus initiative and in the implementation of the upcoming Culture Compass initiative, the aim of which is to guide and harness the multiple dimensions of culture.

40. With full respect for artistic freedom and without interfering in content, include the promotion of common values and democratic resilience in connection with initiatives supporting culture, cultural heritage and audiovisual works.

ANNEX

References

The following legal texts and policy documents are relevant to these Council Conclusions:

— *EU Treaties*

  — Treaty on European Union (Consolidated version 2016) – OJ C 202, 7.6.2016

  — Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2012/C 326/02)

— *European Council*

  — European Council Conclusions of 27 June 2024, EUCO 15/24

— *Council of the European Union*

  — Council Conclusions on EU approach to cultural heritage in conflicts and crises, doc. 9837/21

  — Council Conclusions on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe – OJ C 183, 14.6.2014

  — Council Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 – OJ C 466, 7.12.2022

  — Council Conclusions on improving and fostering access to culture – OJ C 7446, 13.12.2024

  — Council Conclusions on supporting young artists and cultural and creative professionals in starting their careers – OJ C 3165, 4.6.2025

— *European Commission*

  — Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Democracy Action Plan (COM/2020/790)

  — European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, ECORYS and Hammonds, W., Culture and democracy, the evidence – How citizens' participation in cultural activities enhances civic engagement, democracy and social cohesion – Lessons from international research, 2023

  — European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Recommendations from the European Commission-led expert group on the safeguarding of cultural heritage in Ukraine, 2024

  — European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Communication to the European-Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Preparedness Union Strategy – JOIN(2025) 130

  — Commission Recommendation (EU) 2021/1970 of 10 November 2021 on a common European data space for cultural heritage: EUR-Lex - 32021H1970 - EN - EUR-Lex https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reco/2021/1970/oj/eng

  — Special Eurobarometer 562, *Europeans' attitudes towards culture,* Eurobarometer Report, February-March 2025, requested by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) and coordinated by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM)

— *European Parliament and Council*

  — Decision No 1194/2011/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 November 2011 establishing a Europe Union action for the European Heritage Label – OJ L 303, 22.11.2011, p. 1

  — Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033 and repealing Decision No 1622/2006/EC – OJ L 132, 3.5.2014, p. 1

  — Regulation (EU) 2021/818 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the Creative Europe Programme (2021-2027) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013 – OJ L, 189, 28.5.2021, p. 34

- *European Parliament*
  - European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019 on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe (2019/2819(RSP))
  - European Parliament resolution of 14 December 2022 on the implementation of the New European Agenda for Culture and the EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations (2022/2047 (INI))
  - European Parliament Report on the implementation of the New European Agenda for Culture and the EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations (2022/2047 (INI))
  - European Parliament resolution of 20 October 2022 on cultural solidarity with Ukraine and a joint emergency response mechanism for cultural recovery in Europe (2022/2759(RSP))
- *Council of Europe*
  - The Council of Europe 2005 Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society
- *United Nations*
  - Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDH 1948)
  - UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966
  - UN Pact for the Future adopted at the UN Summit of the Future, New York, 22-23 September 2024
- *UNESCO*
  - UNESCO, The 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict
  - UNESCO, The 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage
  - UNESCO, The 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage
  - UNESCO, The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
  - UNESCO, The 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions
  - UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration: https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-world-conference-cultural-policies-and-sustainable-development-mondiacult-2022
  - UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2025 Outcome Document and Culture Minister's Commitment: https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2025/09/EN_MONDIACULT_Outcome_Document%20Final%2027.09.25.pdf?hub=171169
- *Other*
  - Porto Santo Charter, 2021, Porto Santo Charter: Culture and the Promotion of Democracy: Towards a European Cultural Citizenship and The Young People's Addendum to the Porto Santo Charter (2025)
  - Cáceres Declaration by the EU Ministers of Culture, 25-26 September 2023, under the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union
  - Niinistö, S. (2024). Safer Together – Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness.