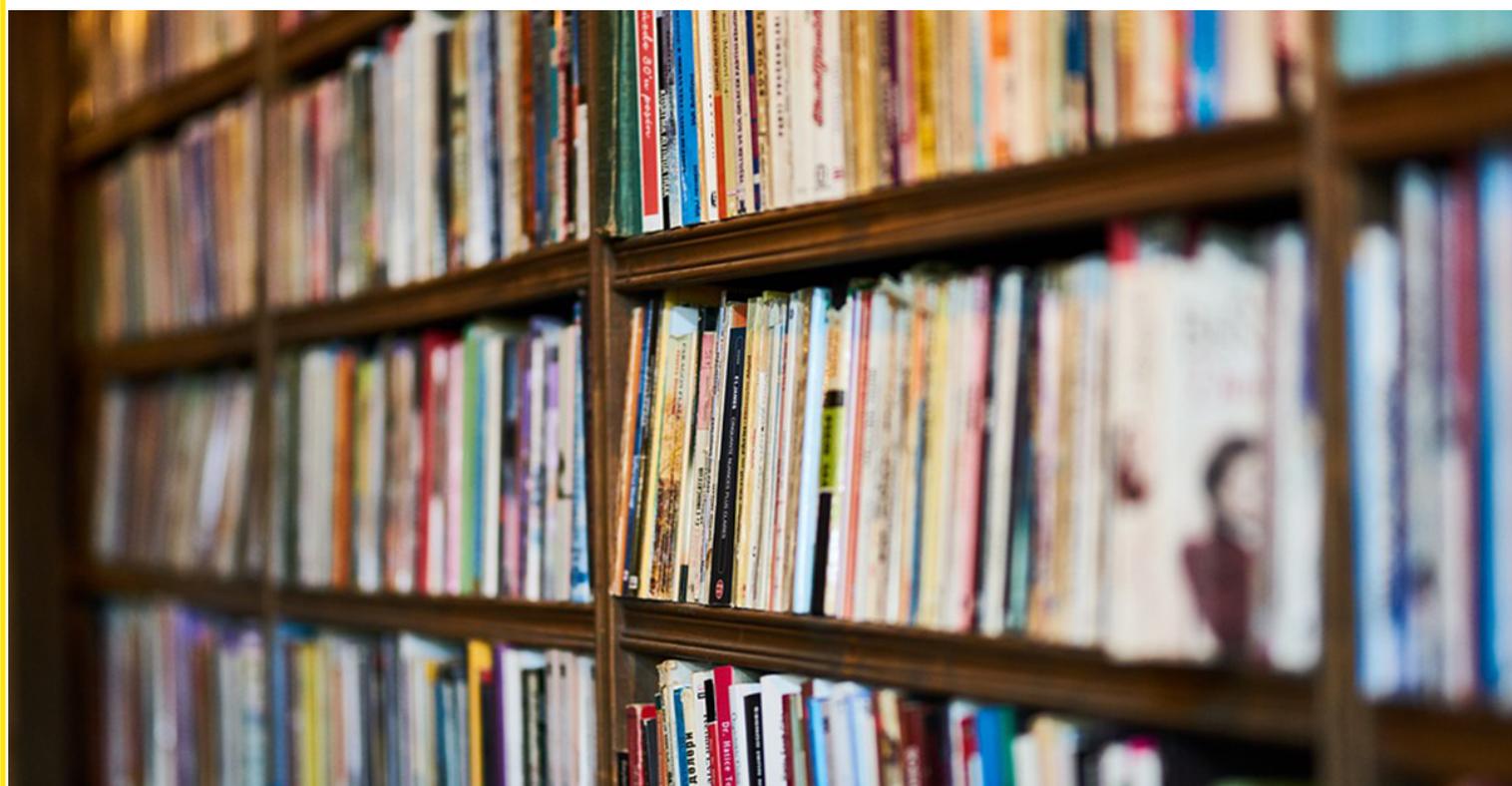


EU MONITOR

The EU invests very little in culture
but the results are visible

Karel Barták

- The European Commission proposed in May 2018 to continue implementing the Creative Europe programme in the next budgetary period 2021-2027 with an envelope of 1,85 billion euros.¹ Should the Member States agree, it would mean an increase of 26,5 percent compared to the current budget (2014-2020). Most of the money should go as usual to the audiovisual part of the programme (MEDIA), with emphasis on distribution of European films outside their country of origin. In the „culture“ part of the programme the draft mentions as priorities music, publishing, cultural heritage and architecture.²



The European parliament has broadly welcomed the Commission proposal but insisted that the budget of Creative Europe should be doubled compared to the current programme, arriving at 2,9 billion euros³. It also stressed that the Commission should do more to collect data and evaluate in more depth the impact of the programme.

The interest of the ongoing dialogue about the final shape of the programme is obviously limited, as culture is only a marginal topic in EU policy making, far away from its main concerns. Culture is a fully national competence, and there are no proposals or plans to change that. The European Commission has the mandate to coordinate some cooperation in specific areas agreed by member states and to implement the above mentioned programme. Even with the proposed increase by nearly one third, the future Creative Europe would not consume more than 0,2 percent of the future seven year EU budget.

Simultaneously, there is more and more talk about the promotion of creative industries at European level, as a catalyst for innovation, jobs and growth. This part of the EU narrative is prevailing over the emphasis on the intrinsic value of culture and the necessity to protect and support the huge cultural diversity of the continent. This diversity is usually described as an asset, while the other side of the same coin, fragmentation of the cultural markets along linguistic and national lines can be perceived as a problem for Europe. One of the aims of the very limited action at EU level is to overcome this fragmentation, exercise soft power internationally, support the cultural and creative industries as a vehicle for European influence on the global scene. This can be helped by mainstreaming culture into other EU policies and programmes; the Creative Europe programme itself, being so small, should focus more on ad hoc support to valuable cultural projects and cross-border cooperation.

The minimalist EU agenda for culture

The European Agenda for Culture⁴, adopted by the Commission in 2018, provides the strategic framework for the next phase of cooperation at EU level, focusing on the positive contribution that culture makes to Europe's societies, economies and international relations. On this basis the Council adopted its own Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022, defining five priorities – sustainability in cultural heritage, cohesion and well being, ecosystem supporting artists and cultural professionals, gender equality and international cultural relations.

These objectives are not supported by any budget and are merely topics for discussion. The Commission organises meetings with the Member States in different formats and on different levels, with some non-binding conclusions. While it can be argued that it is always good to meet and talk, the lack of concrete outcomes and progress is unfortunately a typical feature of these undertakings.

A slightly more ambitious attention is paid to cultural heritage, an obvious legacy of the European Year for Cultural Heritage 2018⁵. Here, a follow-up strategy for long term EU engagement in protecting and preserving cultural heritage is being promised. It is important to note that this European Year was the only one organised during the Juncker Commission term in office and mobilised very strongly all the actors dealing with heritage across Europe. More than 60 concrete and activities are ongoing as a continuation of the Year.

Besides the classical cooperation at political level (open method of coordination), the Commission organises a structured dialogue with the cultural and creative players representing the civil society entitled Voices of Culture, with the aim to strengthen the advocacy capacity of cultural sector. Sectorial debates are organised, as well as the bi-

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/content/investing-people-increased-budget-reinforce-european-cultural-and-creative-sectors_en

² https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/node_en

³ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2018\)628229](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2018)628229)

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/culture/sites/culture/files/commission_communication_-_a_new_european_agenda_for_culture_2018.pdf

⁵ https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/about_en.html

annual European Culture Forum. Obviously, all these activities have some, although limited, impact on national culture policies and stakeholder cooperation.

Creative Europe – MEDIA will cover also journalism

The MEDIA sub-programme of Creative Europe has existed for 27 years and is a rather important part of the European audiovisual ecosystem. Although its budget does not allow for financing production of major movies, it is widely used and appreciated by film producers for offering better distribution conditions. It helps launching projects with a European dimension and nurtures new technologies; it enables European films and audiovisual works including feature films, television drama, documentaries and new media to find markets beyond national and European borders; it funds training and film development schemes.⁶

The main innovation in the 2021-2027 draft is the new focus on media as such, meaning journalism, reporting, freedom of speech, media pluralism and independence and support for media literacy⁷. Despite its name, the acronym MEDIA has never been meant to cover these politically highly sensitive areas, which were always considered as exclusively national competence. The new approach is, therefore, rather revolutionary; it remains to be seen how the programme will be implemented in this new field and what type of projects will be supported. All that is known at this stage is that the EACEA executive agency, normally in charge of implementing the programme, has not yet been approached by the Commission for managing this type of projects.

Creative Europe – Culture to go for individual mobility

Cooperation projects will remain the most frequent way of implementing the culture part of the Programme. Thanks to them, hundreds of cultural organisations across Europe meet, travel and create together. The Commission is planning to come up with three categories of cooperation projects with different levels of co-financing, which should open new opportunities for small and poor organisations to also benefit from participating in these projects.

Film Director Helena Třeštíková at a press conference in Prague in February 2019: I fit wasn't for the MEDIA programme, I would not have been able to finalise the Forman vs Forman documentary in the foreseen quality. Thanks to MEDIA funding it was possible to purchase expensive footage from shooting Forman's films at different American studios.

Networks will continue to be supported, as Creative Europe is one of the rare sources of funding for large, often pan-European sectorial umbrella organisations, the existence of which is very important for information flows, circulation of art and also advocacy and lobbying activities. Platforms, which was a new scheme under the previous programme, will also be maintained, as they are having a lot of success for their simplicity and focus on emerging artists.

The programme stays open to all cultural fields, meaning that with each call music projects are competing with theater, plastic arts, design, dance or architecture. Aside from that, „targeted actions“ will be for the first time implemented in music, cultural heritage, books (outside the

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/media-sub-programme-creative-europe>

⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/media-sub-programme-creative-europe>

České vize pro Evropu, evropské vize pro Česko Czech Visions for Europe, European Visions for the Czechs

translation scheme, which is continued), architecture and design. The European Parliament and several member states, including the Czech Republic, are questioning the logic and fairness of this choice. Why music and not theatre? Why publishing and not dancing? The Commission will have to better explain its proposals.

Michal Brenner, programming director of the Prague alternative venue Meet Factory and coordinator of the electronic music platform SHAPE supported by Creative Europe-Culture: We are 16 partner venues in 13 European countries. The condition is to showcase emerging artists discovered at the local scene, who merit starting an international career. Thanks to SHAPE we can do this now on regular basis and attain top quality. Some of the artists who have started with SHAPE a year ago have already had concerts in New York and Mexico City.

While until now the programme was exclusively supporting projects run by cultural organisations, this time it also covers individual mobility of artists and cultural professionals, in the pure Erasmus tradition. The Commission has been running a pilot project on this idea in 2019 and is expected to announce its results shortly. It is not clear whether the individual mobilities would be managed centrally, like the rest of the programme, or would become decentralised, with a new and special role for the Creative Europe Desks, which have until now been merely information offices about Creative Europe in all participating countries.

The Culture part of the programme is also financing a series of European prizes⁸, usually targeting emerging artists having or aiming at success abroad, in rock and pop music, literature, architecture and cultural heritage preservation. The European Heritage Label is also managed

from this source, as well as the very visible and popular scheme of European Capitals of Culture. Here the Commission offers only a fraction of the budget of these capitals (1,5 million euros per capital), but it organises and guarantees the correct and fair procedure of selection, monitoring and evaluation, which makes the European Capitals of Culture a popular and highly appreciated concept.

Management of Creative Europe – a major challenge

With the arrival of the Juncker Commission in 2014, the newly created umbrella programme Creative Europe, embracing the previous MEDIA and Culture programmes, was administratively split between two Commissioners and thus also two different departments of the Commission. Commissioner for culture Tibor Navracsics and DG Education and Culture (EAC) have been since responsible for the Culture part of the programme and common administrative management, in particular comitology. The MEDIA part was instead run by DG CONNECT (Communications, Networks, Content and Technology), with Commissioner Mariya Gabriel being lately responsible. This has led to imposing different orientation and philosophy on each part of the programme, with MEDIA being used as an example of technology driven development with little concern for the artistic aspects, whereas the Culture part has stayed much closer to the traditional approach to culture and arts. This split was one of the reasons why the third part of the programme, called cross sectorial (some 13 percent of the budget), was implemented only partially and with difficulties, as the two co-administrators found it hard to agree common actions. The everyday implementation of the programme was also suffering, as the split generated more administrative burden.

It can be therefore regretted that the new Commission has not repaired this anomaly. While the Culture part is now a part of the Mariya Gabriel portfolio (Innovation, research,

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions_en

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culture, education and youth)⁹, MEDIA will be run by Thierry Breton, the new internal market commissioner, with a huge agenda including digital industries. There have been some critique from the European Parliament aiming at bringing the programme under one roof, but for the time being there seems to be no appetite for such a move in the Commission.

This lack of concern shows well the disregard for culture within the European Union institutions. It continues to be considered as marginal, unimportant business for the

individual Member States. While money- and administration-wise this can be true (some 0,15 percent of EU budget, some 100 officials out of 33.000), the impact of this very cheap programme is important. It is money well spent on cooperation and circulation at a moment when Europeans are confronted with surge of nationalism and demagoguery. This should be also taken into consideration in the final deliberations about the size and management of the Creative Europe Programme 2021-2027.



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https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_19_6278