

## **Just how creative will the EU budget proposal be?**

As we look back over the financial chaos of the past few years, uncertainty over national finances; EU bailouts; the Euro under pressure; National governments making stringent cuts to budgets; we are now at the moment of truth as the European Commission prepares to present its first proposal on a budget to deliver Europe from 2014 onwards and make good on the 2020 strategy for growth...

The cultural sector has felt the hard hand of national austerity measures and has seen cultural budgets slashed across the majority of EU member states, sometimes as much as by 40%. As the stinging impact of these cuts are felt at home, we are entering into a critical phase to make our voices heard on the European stage and to ensure that the hard won gains of past years in the EU policy field are not lost in the budget battles to come.

When the European Commission publishes its framework headlines for a new EU budget after 2013, we will begin to have an idea of the size and shape of its ambitions. Will the EC have the courage to amend the Common Agricultural Policy, currently worth 50% of EU spending? How will the goals of delivering a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy in Europe be reflected in the EU's budget?

We, in the cultural sector, are already convinced of the absolute and essential value of a vibrant, diverse and varied cultural life. We see how our work inspires and engages all sectors of the population; how it can make a city centre vibrate and a rural community come together. We know that the arts are fundamental to our humanity and we vigorously defend our freedom of expression, and the intrinsic value of all types of artistic creation.

We also know that the arts and cultural sector are at the core of any successful societal and economic strategy. The arts are at the heart of innovation and bring an essential dimension to creative skills development from kindergarten to research or higher education. We know that a strong cultural strategy gives backbone to sustainable development policies, especially regional development in both urban and rural areas. 2009 statistical data demonstrated that the cultural sector provides 4,9% of European GDP. At EU-27 level, 3.6 million people were employed in the five main cultural sectors of economic activity, representing 1.7 % of total employment. Numerous studies have demonstrated the cultural sector is an economic sector in its own right and worthy of support and investment as any other area of activity.

As stated in the 2011, [Cultural Statistics pocketbook](#) just published, 92% of European citizens believe that culture and cultural exchanges should have an important place in the policies of the European Union, yet the budget to support European cultural co-operation is less than 0.05% of the total EU budget.

In the last few years, the word creativity has become more and more prominent at EU level. In 2007, one of the three objectives of the [European Agenda for Culture](#) was culture and economic growth, and [Council conclusions on the contribution of the cultural and creative sector to the Lisbon strategy](#) were adopted. 2009 was labelled [European Year for Creativity and Innovation](#) and new Council conclusions were published in this context, entitled this time [Culture as a catalyst for Creativity and Innovation](#).

However, all too frequently arts and culture are marginalized when discussed in overarching political or economic frameworks. When arts and culture are put on the agenda of DGs other

than Education and Culture, or by other Council configurations than the Culture Council, negotiating positions harden.

To transform political declarations into policy frameworks and budget commitments, arts advocates also have a role to play. We have to deepen our reflection around the 'creativity paradigm' that is part of the EU 2020 strategy. We have to validate the fact that associating arts and culture with economic growth strengthen our position within education, economic and industrial policies.

On the other hand, we have to be wary of seeing EU support to arts and culture only channelled through economic strategies. For long-term gains, we have to promote a European integration process valuing economic growth but also democracy, sustainability, social inclusion and solidarity.

Nearly 10,000 of you have already signed the *we are more* campaign [manifesto](#) which appeals for strong EU support to culture in the next budget. We now have to make what is self-evident to us, non-negotiable to our EU policy-makers. When the EU budget proposal is made next month, let our message be heard loud and clear: An EU strategy that ignores the creative potential of current and future generations of European citizens, artists and audiences will fail.

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*The EC proposal for a new budget for the EU is scheduled to be published on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011.*