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# A Europe That Protects Its Heritage

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## Summary

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This policy brief analyses the competences and potential of the EU in the field of cultural heritage protection. Despite numerous references to culture and heritage in the EU treaties, the analysis suggests that the Union's focus on cultural heritage remains limited and does not adequately reflect the magnitude of recent challenges.

In the last decade of financial and economic difficulties, Europe's cultural heritage has suffered from major funding cuts. This is now being compounded by the devastating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the culture and heritage sectors. Climate change also represents a growing threat to cultural sites across the EU, and the successes of right-wing Eurosceptic populism have changed the politics of cultural heritage. The EU is routinely portrayed as a remote post-national technocracy bent on overcoming separate national identities and lacking a commitment to the continent's common historical heritage.

This paper argues that all these developments have created the conditions for considerable 'European added value'—economic, social and political—to be realised by stepping up EU action for the protection of the continent's cultural heritage. Currently ongoing negotiations for the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2021–7) and for the post-COVID-19 recovery fund that is tied to it (the 'Next Generation EU' initiative) offer a unique opportunity to advance this important agenda.

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Two-pronged action is needed to secure Europe's heritage. First, significant funding must be devoted to preserving the many sites at risk throughout the Union. Second, massive investment must be facilitated if the culture and heritage sector is to successfully adapt and survive in the twenty-first century, which will involve shifting to a more digitally based operating mode and developing a more diversified and sustainable business model. Accordingly, the policy brief suggests creating a new EU instrument and reinforcing the heritage dimension of existing EU programmes. The creation of a new European Heritage Protection Instrument as an independent programme within the EU budget is recommended. The instrument would allocate funds for the preservation, restoration and upgrade of the most vulnerable heritage sites in Europe. In this way, the Union would be celebrating the member states in their rich diversity and acting as the protector of their national and regional identities.

Concerning existing programmes, the policy brief suggests the following: emboldening Creative Europe and entrusting it with a genuinely independent heritage mission, which would enable it to finance the innovation and digitisation of the whole sector; adding a heritage component to the InvestEU programme, the Juncker Plan's successor in the next Multiannual Framework, which would enable it to commit sizeable funding to heritage purposes; reinforcing the culture and heritage dimension of Horizon Europe, the EU programme financing research and innovation; and incorporating the protection of cultural heritage in the European Green Deal.

Enhanced coordination between the European Commissioners whose portfolios include heritage-related actions is recommended, bringing all heritage-related EU actions under a coherent common strategy that protects heritage as part of the 'European way of life'. Defining cultural heritage protection as an area of cooperation with the post-Brexit UK, which will remain in Europe despite leaving the EU, is also suggested.

These initiatives would not only be economically and politically beneficial for the Union as a whole. They would underline that the EU is not a technocratic project, and that the European peoples' best chance of protecting their cultural inheritance is together, within the EU, and not separately outside of it.

**Keywords** Cultural heritage – EU – Diversity – Identity – EU programmes



# Introduction

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‘If we were to start all over again, I would start from culture’. This apocryphal quote is often attributed to the ageing Jean Monnet, looking back at his life in the service of the European ideal. Although he seems in fact to have said nothing of the sort, to this day the cultural dimension of European integration remains, arguably, the least developed of all, at least as far as the active involvement of European institutions is concerned.

There is a good reason for this: in a continent marked by a very high degree of diversity at the national and regional levels, any EU cultural policy could be suspected of trying to forge a top-down common memory and identity to serve a political project of continental unification. Member states have therefore been understandably sceptical, and EU institutions cautious.

This paper argues, however, that the financial and political upheavals of the last decade—from the Great Recession to the rise of Eurosceptic right-wing populism and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic—have created the conditions for considerable ‘European added value’ to be realised by stepping up EU action for the protection of the continent’s cultural heritage. It insists that the centrality of this issue in the EU treaties is still far from adequately recognised and incorporated into EU policies. The second part of the paper, therefore, makes concrete proposals and recommendations on possible EU initiatives that would create economic and political benefits for all EU citizens.

Beyond practical benefits, what is ultimately at stake is the Union’s ability to successfully transform itself into a strong political community in which its states and citizens feel secure and at home. In the peculiar situation of Europe, forever marked by the diversity of its peoples, a shared sense of purpose and destiny, without which no political community can truly exist, will only be forged through the Union’s active and respectful engagement with the varied and irreducible heritages of its members.



# Culture and heritage are important EU values according to the treaties

In clear and strong language, the EU treaties posit culture and heritage as Union values deserving protection and nourishment. The preamble to the Treaty on European Union, as modified by the Treaty of Lisbon, explicitly refers to ‘drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe’. Article 3(3) of the same treaty specifies that one of the EU’s key aims is to ‘respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and . . . ensure that Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced’. While these are ‘common provisions’ designed to convey the overall identity and goals of the Union, specific attention is also given to those issues when it comes to EU policy competences.

Thus, Article 167(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) states that ‘the EU must contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore’. It then specifies that EU action can do so by ‘encouraging cooperation between Member States’ and, if necessary, by ‘supporting and supplementing their action’ in specific areas. These include the ‘improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples’, and the ‘conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance’, although others are also listed. It is EU support in precisely these areas that the last decade has arguably made ‘necessary’ if the Union is to fulfil its treaty obligations and live up to its potential as a cultural and, ultimately, political community.

To do so, it is true that under Article 167(5) TFEU the EU can only adopt recommendations and incentive measures, while no harmonisation of national laws and regulations is allowed. Arguably, however, these stipulations are already sufficient to step up EU action in this field. Besides, Article 167(4) TFEU also adds that the Union ‘shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of the Treaties, in particular in order to respect and to promote the diversity of its cultures’. Also known as the ‘cultural mainstreaming clause’ of the EU treaties, this important provision is designed to allow—in fact, to mandate—the integration of cultural considerations in EU actions across all



policy areas.<sup>2</sup> If rigorously implemented, it might open up additional possibilities in the current context.

## The fallout of the last decade has been devastating for the heritage sector

Due to the multiple crises of the last decade, Europe's cultural heritage is now under serious threat. The financing received by the sector does not reflect this and is inadequate in most member states.

For example, despite Italy being home to 55 UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHSs), more than any other country in the world, the Italian government was forced to cut its culture budget by a third between 2014 and 2017. Economic fragility since the financial crisis also means that Italian families only spend 6.6% of their incomes on culture, nearly half the amount that is spent by families in Sweden or Hungary.<sup>3</sup> This figure dates from 2018, the same year that the Italian government slashed the culture budget by a further €6.3 billion.<sup>4</sup> Italy's economy will now also be one of those most severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5</sup> The public museum sector alone accounts for 1.6% of Italian GDP (€27 billion), employs 117,000 people and attracts 24 million tourists every year, though its untapped potential has been calculated to be much higher.<sup>6</sup>

The monthly losses in this sector during the pandemic have been estimated at about €20 million<sup>7</sup> and are likely to continue for a long time in Italy, as in most other EU countries, due to lower numbers of tourists, sluggish visitor trends and difficulties in ensuring social distancing. To survive, the whole sector will have to shift to a more digitally based operating mode and develop a more diversified

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<sup>2</sup> E. Psychogiopoulou, 'Cultural Heritage and the EU: Legal Competences, Instrumental Policies, and the Search for a European Dimension', in A. Jakubowski, K. Hausler and F. Fiorentini (eds.), *Cultural Heritage in the European Union – A Critical Inquiry into Law and Policy* (Leiden: Brill Nijhoff, 2019), 59.

<sup>3</sup> J. Harris, 'Italy, Cradle of Culture, Curtails Spending on its Heritage', *i-Italy*, 4 November 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> A. Tidey, 'Coronavirus Downturn: France and Italy in Recession as Spain Sees Record GDP Decline', *Euronews*, updated 30 April 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Boston Consulting Group, 'Cultura: leva strategica per la crescita del paese. Focus sull'impatto dei musei statali italiani' (7 October 2019).

<sup>7</sup> *AgCult*, 'Coronavirus, per i musei statali una perdita netta di 20 mln al mese', 23 March 2020.



and sustainable business model. Massive investment will be needed to succeed, at a time when cultural and heritage budgets are being slashed. The EU has a responsibility to respond to this situation by ensuring that Europe's cultural heritage does not pay the price for the inevitable budgetary reallocation that will take place in the aftermath of the crisis.

Greece is another European country whose cultural sector has seen 'large-scale budget cuts and strict restructuring measures'.<sup>8</sup> In the last decade, the Ministry of Culture received 0.37% of the state budget, down 26% from the 0.50% it received prior to the economic crisis.<sup>9</sup> More importantly, this budget is thinly spread, with the bulk of it covering salaries and operational and maintenance costs. Heritage protection unfortunately only receives a very small share of this already limited funding. In fact, since 1994, the funding of culture has been largely dependent on EU support.<sup>10</sup> This situation will become even more accentuated as the Greek economy suffers from the result of the restrictions on tourism. The EU stepping up would avoid the potentially irreparable degradation of Europe's cultural heritage in Greece.

In Spain too, '[a]s a result of the economic and financial crisis, expenditure in culture has been cut at all levels of the administration. The most severe cuts have taken place at the level of the Ministry for Culture (with an accumulated cut of around 15% of the budget)'.<sup>11</sup> Even France will face difficulties. France's cultural sector is reliant on tourism for its survival, a good example being the Louvre, where 75% of visitors in 2019 were from outside France.<sup>12</sup> The museum is home to some of the finest artwork Europe has produced. The expected drop in tourism in the aftermath of COVID-19 will be severe, and the French government's ability to provide the financial means to safeguard the cultural sector will be constrained by the upcoming severe recession. The EU can fill that gap.

These are only a few examples from some of the more exposed countries in the EU, but we are obviously dealing with a more general phenomenon. Clearly, when economies are threatened and funds are scarce, governments tend to prioritise sectors other than culture. This poses a real threat to the survival of our continent's cultural heritage at a very critical juncture.

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<sup>8</sup> G. Gazi, 'Greek Museums in Times of Crisis', in D. Tziouvas (ed.), *Greece in Crisis: The Cultural Politics of Austerity* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 158.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 164. From 1994 to 2006, the Community Support Frameworks, an EU programme, granted €1.7 billion to the Greek culture sector, by far the highest amount of funding the Ministry had ever received.

<sup>11</sup> J. Pascual, *Culture and the Structural Funds in Spain*, European Expert Network on Culture, EENC Paper (2012), 26.

<sup>12</sup> Musée du Louvre, '9.6 Million Visitors to the Louvre in 2019' (3 January 2020).



# Climate change is a serious threat to Europe's cultural heritage

Many areas in Europe are threatened by rising sea levels. Venice stands out of course, but in addition, there are 40 different areas across Italy, comprising hundreds of coastal cities, that are at risk because of rising sea levels.<sup>13</sup> And this is to say nothing of other countries. Due to the many different civilisations which developed near the Mediterranean coast, there is a large concentration of WHSs in countries such as Italy, Croatia, Greece and Spain (Italy, Spain and France alone are home to 16% of all UNESCO WHSs, and a third of those in the EU).<sup>14</sup> Research has shown that under current forecasts<sup>15</sup> 75% of the sites in the Mediterranean Basin are at risk of flooding due to rising sea levels; 86% of those sites are also at risk of erosion.<sup>16</sup> These numbers are even more frightening in certain European countries, such as Italy, where 14 (93%) of the country's WHSs situated in the Low Elevation Coastal Zone are at risk of erosion.<sup>17</sup> In Greece (4) and Croatia (7), 100% of WHSs in these zones are threatened.<sup>18</sup>

Studies recommend coastal protection in order to save heritage sites: 'One example is the MOSE . . . project currently under construction in Venice. The entire lagoon will be protected by submerged mobile barriers at the lagoon inlets that will be raised during high waters of at least 1.1 m.'<sup>19</sup> The situation in Venice is particularly pressing, due to both the city's unique architecture and significance in European

<sup>13</sup> M. Galeotti and L. Lanza, 'Sea Level Rise: Causes, Impacts, and Policies', in Institute of European Democrats (ed.), *Sea Level Rise. A Crucial Challenge for the Future of Cities and Communities, Ecosystems and the Heritage, in Our World Upset by the COVID-19 Outbreak* (Brussels: Institute of European Democrats, 2020), 13.

<sup>14</sup> M. Pasikowska-Schnass, *Cultural Heritage in EU Policies*, European Parliamentary Research Service (2018).

<sup>15</sup> The data reported in the study uses 2000 as its base year.

<sup>16</sup> L. Reimann et al., 'Mediterranean UNESCO World Heritage at Risk From Coastal Flooding and Erosion Due to Sea-Level Rise', in Institute of European Democrats (ed.), *Sea Level Rise. A Crucial Challenge for the Future of Cities and Communities, Ecosystems and the Heritage, in Our World Upset by the COVID-19 Outbreak* (Brussels: Institute of European Democrats, 2020), 41.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 43. MOSE stands for Modulo Sperimentale Elettromeccanico/Experimental Electromechanical Module, see [www.mosevenezia.eu](http://www.mosevenezia.eu) for more information.



history, and the fact that the city has sunk by as much as 10 cm in the last century.<sup>20</sup> The mobile barrier solution is far from a perfect fix, however, as biologists warn it could destroy the ecosystem in the lagoon. In any case, this solution suits Venice due to the lagoon's unique geography; most coastal areas do not have this option and therefore other solutions must clearly be devised and financed.

Climate change also poses a threat to non-Mediterranean European countries: the historic centre of Prague fell victim to terrible flooding in 2002, and metal barriers had to be erected to protect the city when this happened again in 2013.<sup>21</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports that this is due to increasing rainfall in that area of the world, a trend that is only set to increase.<sup>22</sup> In the Netherlands, most of the country is at a high risk of river and water drainage flooding. Dutch cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht are located in the country's vulnerable part.<sup>23</sup> Among other places, the Seventeenth-Century Canal Ring Area of Amsterdam is a UNESCO WHS.

The EU's renewed commitment to fighting climate change under Commission President von der Leyen is obviously good news for all these territories and sites. But the Union must also stand ready to specifically assist its member states in the struggle that rising sea levels and other climate threats represent for much of their cultural heritage. The European Green Deal will be all the more successful if it includes a specific heritage focus.

## The rise of Eurosceptic right-wing populism justifies a stronger EU focus on cultural heritage

The last decade has also witnessed something of an 'identitarian reawakening' of Europe's nations and regions, which a variety of predominantly right-wing populist movements have capitalised on in most EU member states. From the

<sup>20</sup> Europe for Visitors, 'Acqua Alta. High Tides and Flooding in Venice, Italy'.

<sup>21</sup> BBC, 'Floods Threaten Dresden as Prague River Levels Fall', 4 June 2013.

<sup>22</sup> UNESCO, *Case Studies on Climate Change and World Heritage* (Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> N. O'Leary, 'When Will the Netherlands Disappear?', *Politico*, updated 26 December 2019.



National Rally's (Rassemblement National) references to Jeanne d'Arc in France to the Danish People's Party's (Dansk Folkeparti) insistence on Danish identity and Golden Dawn's (Λαϊκός Σύνδεσμος – Χρυσή Αυγή) obsession with Ancient Greek civilisation, the evocation of a threatened national heritage is often at the heart of these forces' political discourse.<sup>24</sup> Despite their strong nationalist commitment, these movements also profess allegiance to a shared European heritage with markedly exclusionary traits towards a variety of non-European 'others', usually immigrants from the Middle East, Africa and Asia, with Muslims often being the 'other of choice'.<sup>25</sup>

This phenomenon is unfortunately accompanied by a negative perception of European integration. The EU is routinely portrayed as a remote post-national technocracy bent on overcoming separate national identities and cultural heritages in favour of some sort of continental melting pot. At the same time, it is also accused of lacking a real commitment to the continent's common historical heritage, if not 'invincibly prejudiced' against it.<sup>26</sup>

As already mentioned, considering the number and strength of treaty provisions enjoining the EU not only to respect, but in fact to actively protect and even enhance the rich variety of national and regional heritages within it, this perception seems largely unfounded. Nevertheless, it does capture—and use at the service of a Eurosceptic political agenda—an important evolution in the conception of 'cultural diversity' as a core value in EU cultural policies.

Until the 1990s, this 'mainly referred to diversity of national cultures within a European cultural unity', which was manifested in a common heritage. The concept has since been 'incrementally extended to encompass diversity within the European societies due to migratory flows and multi-ethnic populations. In

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<sup>24</sup> So much so that the expression 'heritage populism' has been coined. See D. Reynié, 'The Specter Haunting Europe: "Heritage Populism" and France's National Front', *Journal of Democracy* 27/4 (2016), 47–57. See also A. Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe: Lost in Diversity and Unity* (London: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>25</sup> C. De Cesari, I. Bosilkov and P. Piacentini, '(Why) Do Eurosceptics Believe in a Common European Heritage?', in C. De Cesari and A. Kaya (eds.), *European Memory in Populism: Representations of Self and Other* (Routledge: London and New York, 2020), 26–46.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, the Paris Statement, written by an important group of conservative intellectuals: P. Bénéton et al., 'The Paris Statement: A Europe We Can Believe in'.



the last decade, diversity was progressively placed at the core of the EU cultural policy, incrementally supplanting European heritage as pivotal value of this policy.<sup>27</sup>

Of course, far from being necessarily reprehensible, as many right-wing critics of the EU believe, this evolution was partly an adaptation of EU policies to changing societal values and dominant ideas of diversity in many of its member states. Without it, EU policies would likely have become irrelevant very quickly. In truth, however, a cultural policy acknowledging and celebrating the internal diversity of European societies could be well combined with one celebrating and protecting their specific national and regional historical heritages, as well as the common heritage that they share with each other as a civilisation.

In fact, the populist exclusionary weaponisation of heritage against the EU should alert us to the possibility—perhaps even the need—of deploying an inclusionary conception of it, one in which there is space for various notions of diversity to coexist and balance each other out. Investing political and financial capital in cultural heritage protection would illustrate how the EU’s focus on tolerance and respect for diversity does not mean abandoning the continent’s roots. It would show that in these as in many other areas, the European nations’ best chance of protecting their cultural inheritance is together within the EU, and not separately outside it.

## EU action on cultural heritage is lower than its potential

In the last few decades, education and culture have gained more prominence in EU action, while remaining comparatively marginal. This is also true of the EU’s involvement in the preservation of cultural heritage, though to an even lesser extent. The most relevant and wide-ranging EU programme for the cultural sector is by far Creative Europe, which enjoys a budget of approximately €1.46 billion for the period 2014–20. The first of its two stated objectives is ‘to safeguard, develop

<sup>27</sup> This complex EU evolution was very much influenced by similar trajectories in other international organisations active in the culture and heritage field, most notably the UN and the Council of Europe. It started in the 1990s, partly as a reaction to the violent ethnic strife of the Yugoslav wars, and continued in the 2000s after 9/11, when the problem of Muslim and other ethnic minorities came to the fore. It was formalised in the concept of ‘intercultural dialogue’ within individual states and applied during the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. In the subsequent decade, this conception remarkably transformed EU cultural policy. See O. Calligaro, ‘From “European Cultural Heritage” to “Cultural Diversity”?’ *The Changing Core Values of European Cultural Policy*, *Politique européenne* 2014/3 (no. 45), 60–85.



and promote European cultural and linguistic diversity and to promote Europe's cultural heritage'. It is, however, the second objective to which most efforts and funds seem to be devoted, strengthening 'the competitiveness of the European cultural and creative sectors . . . with a view to promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'.<sup>28</sup>

This is important because it signals that 'Creative Europe has established a framework for the funding of heritage-related projects that advances a particularly instrumental vision of culture, acknowledging its potential to make a major contribution to the Union's economic and social agenda.'<sup>29</sup> There is nothing wrong with 'acknowledging' this potential, which exists and must be realised if the heritage sector is to thrive in the very difficult environment of the twenty-first century. But this predominantly instrumental approach to cultural heritage does not seem to capture its status as an autonomous value in the EU treaties. Even more importantly, it could 'dilute energies and undermine cultural actions aimed at coping' with the really existential challenges of the sector.<sup>30</sup> In future, it would make sense to direct at least part of any increase in funding for this programme to narrowing the gap between its two objectives.

At the moment, Creative Europe supports prominent EU initiatives on cultural heritage such as the European Heritage Awards,<sup>31</sup> European Heritage Days,<sup>32</sup> the European Heritage Label<sup>33</sup> and the European Year of Cultural Heritage. In 2018, all EU institutions, all EU member states and nine non-EU partner countries took part in the last-mentioned initiative. Almost 12,000 events were held across Europe and over 6 million people were reached, raising awareness of the European dimension of cultural heritage.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> European Parliament and Council Regulation (EU) no. 1295/2013 establishing the Creative Europe Programme (2014 to 2020) and repealing Decisions no. 1718/2006/EC, no. 1855/2006/EC and no. 1041/2009/EC, OJ L 347 (11 December 2013), 221. The programme has provided funding to 2,500 artists and cultural professionals, 2,000 cinemas, and for 800 films and 4,500 book translations.

<sup>29</sup> Psychogiopoulou, 'Cultural Heritage and the EU', 71.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>31</sup> Previously known as the EU Prize for Cultural Heritage, these awards honour up to 30 outstanding heritage achievements from all parts of Europe every year.

<sup>32</sup> Established in 1985, this is an initiative of the Council of Europe that offers access to rarely opened monuments and sites on an annual basis. Since 1999, it has been co-organised with the EU.

<sup>33</sup> Since 2013, the EU has awarded this label to around 50 sites that it sees as representing milestones celebrating and symbolising European ideals, values, history and integration. The focus is on promoting the European dimension of those sites and providing access to them.

<sup>34</sup> European Commission, 'European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage'.



These numbers may seem encouraging but, if read in context, they still appear largely unsatisfactory. Although Creative Europe is a step in the right direction and is expected to be moderately reinforced in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), it pales in comparison to, for example, Erasmus+, the EU flagship programme for culture. The lion's share of EU funds allocated to culture goes to Erasmus+, which received €13.9 billion for the period 2014–20 and stands to receive €24.6 billion (in 2018 prices) under the most recent Commission proposal for the 2021–7 MFF.

The fact that, in the Commission's plans, cultural programmes outside of Erasmus+ have seen their proposed budgets set well below the Parliament's proposals has generated prominent criticism.<sup>35</sup> Erasmus+ is an amazing success of the Union. It has enabled millions of young Europeans from different backgrounds to develop a transnational consciousness. It should best be run in parallel with an equally strong programme emphasising the history, uniqueness and value of each culture in the Union. And such a programme can best be organised around a broad and open notion of 'cultural heritage'.<sup>36</sup>

It is likely that references to heritage that have appeared in recent important documents produced by the Union have been included in response to the rise of nationalist and right-wing identitarian discourses in Europe. For example, in the Rome Declaration of March 2017 commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the treaties of Rome, EU leaders pledged, among other things, to work towards 'a Union which preserves our cultural heritage and promotes cultural diversity'.<sup>37</sup> When setting out its vision for a European Education Area to be established by 2025, the Commission defined as one of its goals, '[a] continent in which people have a strong sense of their identity as Europeans, of Europe's cultural heritage and its diversity'.<sup>38</sup> This also appears as one of the 'social' objectives of the New European Agenda for Culture.<sup>39</sup> Overall, however, such references often seem to be little more than political lip service paid to important articles in the treaties,

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<sup>35</sup> Culture Action Europe, 'Projected MFF Budget for Creative Europe "Unacceptable", Says Chair of EP's Culture Committee' (18 February 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Outside of these core programmes, limited funding for cultural heritage is also occasionally available through other EU initiatives such as the European Regional Development Fund and the EU's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation—Horizon 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Council of the EU, 'The Rome Declaration', Press Release (25 March 2017).

<sup>38</sup> European Commission, *Strengthening European Identity Through Education and Culture: The European Commission's Contribution to the Leaders' Meeting in Gothenburg, 17 November 2017*, Communication, COM (2017) 673 final (14 November 2017).

<sup>39</sup> European Commission, *A New European Agenda for Culture*, Communication, COM (2018) 167 final (22 May 2018), 2.



as opposed to a real commitment to addressing the formidable challenges to the continent's cultural heritage within a European framework.

## Never waste a good crisis: Europe's responsibility towards its heritage

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Although dark clouds have long been gathering over Europe's cultural heritage and a heavy storm has hit it in recent months, 2020 also offers the EU a unique chance to help. By the end of this year the EU's new MFF is expected to be approved, covering the period 2021–7. Its finalisation is taking place in extraordinary circumstances marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, there is already a preliminary agreement in the European Council that it will be topped up by a sizeable temporary recovery fund targeted at 'the most affected sectors and regions'. The heritage sector is certainly among them. Unfortunately, both the Commission's latest proposal for the new MFF and its recent Communication outlining 'Next Generation EU'—an unprecedented €750 billion recovery instrument in reaction to the pandemic—do not seem to take that into account adequately.<sup>40</sup> The Commission has been justly criticised for missing this opportunity to put in place an ambitious plan to help the culture and heritage sectors recover and make a real difference to them for the next seven years.<sup>41</sup>

At this time of extraordinary gravity, nothing more is required of EU institutions than that they should live up to the serious commitment to the continent's cultural heritage mandated by the EU treaties themselves. They should reinforce old ways and find new ways to 'contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States'.<sup>42</sup> They should improve existing tools and find new ones 'encouraging cooperation between Member States' and, if necessary, 'supporting and supplementing their action' in specific areas.<sup>43</sup> They should pursue the 'improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples'. Perhaps

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<sup>40</sup> European Commission, *Europe's Moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation*, Communication, COM (2020) 456 final (27 May 2020).

<sup>41</sup> European Commission, 'Financing the Recovery Plan For Europe' (27 May 2020).

<sup>42</sup> Art. 167 TFEU.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



most urgently, they should ensure the ‘conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance’.<sup>44</sup>

Since, in pursuit of these goals, the EU can ‘only’ adopt recommendations and incentive measures, the remainder of the paper will suggest actions that arguably remain within this limit. To raise the money for Next Generation EU, the Commission will issue bonds on financial markets, using the EU budget as a guarantee, and disburse them through EU programmes, either existing or to be newly established. It therefore seems appropriate in what follows to suggest the reinforcement of EU heritage protection through both new possible initiatives and existing programmes.

## Create a new European Heritage Protection Instrument (EHPI)

This would ideally be an independent programme within the EU budget. If that proves difficult, it should be possible to integrate it within one of the existing programmes, for example a revamped Creative Europe. The instrument would specifically allocate funds to the preservation, restoration and upgrade of monuments, sites, landscapes, museums, libraries, archives and other relevant forms of threatened cultural heritage throughout the Union, possibly on the basis of co-financing with member states.

Priority should not necessarily be given to the most iconic sites, but rather to the most immediately threatened. Unlike an initiative such as the European Heritage Label, the EHPI would not directly promote a ‘European narrative’ or the ‘European dimension’ of a site or monument, but rather represent EU-sponsored protection of the cultural heritage of the relevant nation and region for its own sake. The Union here would be celebrating the member states’ rich diversity and acting as the protector of their national and regional identities. This would arguably create the EU’s first ever programme that does not merely see culture and heritage as means to a higher end (economic growth, social diversity or European identity), but as valuable in themselves, in accordance with the treaties. This would not mean, however, that the Union would not reap economic and political benefits.

Besides the obvious economic benefits that the disbursement of those funds would have for the affected regions—for example, the profits of the companies involved in the renovations, the support for local traditional craftsmanship that

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



is often under threat of dying out, the increased attractiveness to tourists of the relevant site, and the positive spillovers for the surrounding areas and businesses—there are non-negligible political benefits. The cultural dimension of the Union would be strengthened, but in a highly symbolic way that increases its resilience to the populist identitarian discourse, without abandoning the open EU conception of heritage and diversity.

Finally, the EHPI would probably administer its funds in the form of grants—as opposed to loans. It is likely that southern members of the EU such as France, Greece, Italy and Spain would be among the greatest beneficiaries, as they have some of the richest and most threatened heritage on the continent. In this way, some of their loud demands for European solidarity would be indirectly satisfied through an initiative that the ‘frugal’ countries in the north and east would probably find easier than most others to justify to their citizens. The heritage sector also happens to be among the greenest, so this initiative would easily fit within the priorities of the von der Leyen Commission, as well as satisfying the preference of some northern member states that the EU budget should only finance green sectors.

## **Strengthen Creative Europe and rebalance the programme’s priorities**

Negotiations on the new Creative Europe programme under the 2021–7 MFF are already advanced. Any major alteration of the programme’s strategic priorities might therefore prove challenging at this stage. The latest Commission proposal only provides for a modest increase,<sup>45</sup> a far cry from the proposed increase for Erasmus+. The focus of the programme has also been broadened to accommodate concerns of ‘some stakeholders’ that it takes a narrow ‘economic approach to culture’.<sup>46</sup> As a result, alongside the ‘economic dimension’, it is now also expected to highlight the ‘social’ and ‘international’ dimensions of culture.

Unfortunately, this remains a purely instrumental conception, and the heritage dimension seems poised to become even fainter in the new programme than it was in the old one. For the programme to be truly balanced, it is to its first and much neglected objective—‘to safeguard, develop and promote European cultural and linguistic diversity and to promote Europe’s cultural heritage’—that

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<sup>45</sup> From €1.46 to €1.5 billion for the period 2021–7 (in 2018 prices). See European Commission, *The EU Budget Powering the Recovery Plan for Europe*, Communication, COM (2020) 442 final (27 May 2020).

<sup>46</sup> M. Pasikowska-Schnass, *Creative Europe Programme 2021–2027*, European Parliamentary Research Service (2019).



additional funding and energies must be directly devoted. As mentioned, an elegant way of doing this would be to create a sizeable EHPI administered under Creative Europe's auspices, should its establishment as an autonomous programme prove difficult.

Ideally, however, Creative Europe's contribution to cultural heritage should be additional and complementary to that of the instrument. With a stronger heritage mission, the programme could finance the innovation, digitisation and transition to the more diversified and sustainable business model that the heritage sectors of most EU member states desperately need to survive. It could also help the heritage industry to restructure itself away from big visitor numbers and work more closely with local communities and ecosystems.

In addition, the Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility, for which €121 million within the programme is currently earmarked, could be broadened into a 'Cultural and Heritage Sectors Guarantee Facility'. At the moment, the facility acts as insurance to financial intermediaries (e.g. banks) offering financing to cultural and creative sector initiatives. The scheme is expected to create €600 million in loans through a leverage effect.<sup>47</sup> The financial power of the facility could be reinforced and a heritage dimension could be explicitly added to all aspects of its mission brief.

## Reinforce the culture and heritage dimension of Horizon Europe

Horizon 2020 is the EU's research and innovation programme for the 2014–20 period, worth nearly €80 billion. According to data published by the Commission, between 2014 and early 2019 about €495 million in grants was dedicated under this programme to investment in cultural heritage projects (including the arts, museums and cultural tourism). In the new MFF, Horizon 2020 will be succeeded by Horizon Europe, which is expected to be even bigger. The Commission's proposal envisages support for cultural heritage to be given under cluster 2 in Pillar 2 of the programme, titled 'Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society', within which there will be three areas of intervention: culture, cultural heritage and creativity. Thankfully, during the ongoing legislative process, the European Parliament has insisted on enhancing support for cultural heritage under the new programme, for example by stating that '[c]ultural heritage is an integral part of European cohesion and supports the link between tradition and innovation. Preserving cultural heritage

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<sup>47</sup> European Commission, 'Cultural and Creative Sector Guarantee Facility'.



and developing creative solutions, in particular in the field of digitalisation, will be a priority'.<sup>48</sup>

A potential avenue for increased financing is the Heracles project, which unlocks funding for researchers who are designing and testing a systematic approach to defining the risks posed to ancient monuments by climate change—and how to predict and prevent them. They only received €6 million from 2016 to 2019 from Horizon 2020. Given how ominous certain worst-case scenarios are when it comes to climate change, the EU should be doing more to fund this important work.<sup>49</sup>

Horizon Europe is therefore another suitable avenue through which to reinforce the heritage dimension of EU action with appropriate funding. By promoting the critical engagement of member states with their diverse histories and cultures, the EU can help to combat the populist stereotype that continental integration is a threat to national identities.

## Introduce a heritage component to the InvestEU programme

Effective EU action for the protection of the continent's cultural heritage requires that financial means are not only sizeable, but also flexible and diversified. The grants administered by the EHPI, therefore, would be best complemented by a sizeable investment to be disbursed to the heritage sector in its broadest sense through loans. As already mentioned, a reinforced Creative Europe programme and a broader Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility within it, both with a specific heritage mandate, are obvious channels through which to achieve this. By December 2017, the facility had already received an additional €60 million through the European Fund for Strategic Investments, popularly known as the Juncker Plan.<sup>50</sup> A new 'Cultural and Heritage Sectors Guarantee Facility' should now receive much more sizeable reinforcement for its heritage activities from the Juncker Plan's successor in the next MFF, the InvestEU programme. Alternatively, a separate and autonomous guarantee scheme specifically devoted to heritage could be created under the programme, which is not supposed to replace the European Fund for Strategic Investments, but rather to bring it under one roof together with

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<sup>48</sup> A. Zygierewicz, *Cultural Heritage in EU Discourse and in the Horizon 2020 Programme*, European Parliamentary Research Service (2019).

<sup>49</sup> European Commission, 'Protecting Cultural Monuments From Climate Change' (22 July 2019).

<sup>50</sup> European Commission, 'EUR 60 Million Top-Up for the Cultural and Creative Sector Guarantee Facility' (8 December 2017).



13 other EU financial instruments.<sup>51</sup> InvestEU will support four main policy areas: sustainable infrastructure; research, innovation and digitalisation; small and medium-sized businesses; and social investment and skills. These are all relevant to the multifaceted task of protecting and upgrading Europe's threatened heritage for the next generations.

## Add a heritage dimension to the European Green Deal

It seems desirable to explicitly include the protection of cultural heritage in the European Green Deal. The European Commission's Communication on the European Green Deal makes it clear that the plan must pay attention to the regions that will face the greatest challenges.<sup>52</sup> When carrying out the assessment, however, the heritage challenge should be specifically factored in.

There have been encouraging steps in the right direction. At least 35% of Horizon Europe's entire budget will fund new solutions for the climate, which will combine the project's focus on cultural heritage with the EU's fight to address climate change.<sup>53</sup> However, funding for Horizon Europe needs to be substantially increased to be genuinely effective, as advocated by Commissioner Gabriel.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, the current European Green Deal calls for the creation of four 'Green Deal Missions' that would 'help deliver large-scale changes in areas such as adaptation to climate change, oceans, cities and soil'.<sup>55</sup> The Commission would send a powerful signal if it also incorporated the protection of cultural heritage, either as a standalone mission or as part of the adaptation to climate change. The programme will also make cooperation easier between experts and stakeholders. This is a genuine opportunity to enable a common effort for the protection of cultural heritage, as many of the issues faced by European heritage sites, such as soil erosion and rising sea levels, are applicable across the board.

Another potential step would be to incorporate heritage conservation into the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in compliance with the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda, as also proposed in a report by the International Council on

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<sup>51</sup> European Commission, 'What's Next? The InvestEU Programme (2021–2027)'.

<sup>52</sup> European Commission, *The European Green Deal*, Communication, COM (2019) 640 final (11 December 2019).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> The Commissioner made this point in her comments to the press after the Council meeting of ministers of culture in May 2020. She also mentioned that the budget for culture more generally must be increased, and that synergies between Horizon Europe and Creative Europe should be created. See Council of the EU, 'Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council. Press Conference Following the Video Conference of Ministers of Culture' (19 May 2020).

<sup>55</sup> European Commission, *The European Green Deal*, Communication, 18.



Monuments and Sites.<sup>56</sup> The report argues that cultural heritage represents an intrinsic value, an embodiment of knowledge and a symbol of identity. In this sense, it can bond the community to the space, developing practices linked to sustainability and resilience.<sup>57</sup> Popular support and involvement are essential factors in determining the success of this undertaking.

Integrating cultural heritage protection in the European Green Deal can also have a tremendous political upside if the EU can show that this is not just about forcing countries to undergo costly renovations for the sake of ‘saving the planet’, but is also about saving the historical landscapes, sites and memories that have shaped our collective identity.

## Coordinate all heritage-related actions in the various EU programmes

In the field of cultural heritage, as in several others, the EU suffers from the dispersal of actions across many separate programmes and instruments which are not always coordinated under an overall strategy. Consequently, the EU’s presence and added value in this field is less visible and effective than it could be. There are complex and understandable reasons why this is so. The high number of Commissioners means that it is not always possible to concentrate responsibility for a single field under one of them. Furthermore, as prescribed by Article 167(4) TFEU, there is a culture and heritage component, however small, in many EU policies, which means consolidation is not always possible or rational.

Considering the structure of the von der Leyen Commission, it would be appropriate to strengthen the overall coordinating role of two Commissioners in relation to the EU’s actions on cultural heritage: the Bulgarian Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner responsible for ‘innovation, research, culture, education and youth’; and the Greek Margaritis Schinas, who is in charge of ‘promoting our European way of life’. Most heritage-related programmes fall within the former’s portfolio, but the latter deals with a variety of important dossiers touching upon the values and cultural identity of the EU: apart from migration and security, these include dialogue with churches and religious associations, the European

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<sup>56</sup> ICOMOS Climate Change and Cultural Heritage Working Group, *The Future of Our Pasts: Engaging Cultural Heritage in Climate Action* (Paris: ICOMOS, 2019), 9–10.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.



Education Area and, perhaps most relevantly, the task of ‘maximising the potential of culture and sport, the European Solidarity Corps and DiscoverEU programmes’.<sup>58</sup>

Schinās’s appointment, unjustly decried by some political forces, marked an important innovation of the current Commission. By openly taking up the task of promoting ‘the European way of life’, von der Leyen implicitly acknowledged that a desire for identity and protection is mounting in many member states. If the EU cannot find ways to satisfy this desire within an open European framework, right-wing populist parties might succeed in disrupting the Union to satisfy it within closed national contexts. From this point of view, therefore, an open connection between EU cultural heritage protection and the ‘European way of life’ seems a natural reinforcement of the Commission’s strategic agenda in this important area, and a very powerful and symbolic one at that.

Extending the protective rhetoric of the EU from sovereignty and geopolitics to culture and identity is the best way to prevent their exclusionary weaponisation by right-wing populists. Just as strong border protection is necessary to avoid xenophobia, a credible EU discourse on heritage protection is necessary to avoid national chauvinism.

## Define cultural heritage protection as an avenue of cooperation with the UK post-Brexit

Cultural heritage protection forms an important avenue for potential cooperation with the UK after Brexit, one that bridges political differences—Brexiters are, after all, the first to say that leaving the EU does not mean leaving Europe. Our shared history and heritage will not disappear after the transition period comes to an end; rather, it must be protected more than ever. The UK has some of the most knowledgeable institutions and professionals in the world when it comes to the protection of cultural heritage, starting with the British Council, a governmental institution, and their Cultural Protection Fund, which supplies funds to protect cultural heritage at risk.<sup>59</sup> The organisation has considerable expertise on what constitutes a worthwhile project and could prove very helpful to a European effort, for example in an advisory capacity to the EHPI.

Just like all other countries affected by the pandemic, the UK will be tempted to redirect funding from culture towards other forms of spending. The difference is that the UK will not be able to benefit from EU spending specifically earmarked for culture, unlike Spain or Italy. As early as 2016, the Heritage Alliance, the biggest alliance of heritage interests in the UK,

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<sup>58</sup> On the responsibilities of Commissioner Schinas, European Commission, ‘Vice-President (2019–2024): Margaritis Schinas. Promoting our European Way of Life’.

<sup>59</sup> British Council, ‘Cultural Protection Fund’.



pointed out that, should the UK leave the EU, the government would have to find a way to replace the diverse forms of EU funding for cultural heritage that the UK received.<sup>60</sup> There is now a strong case for considering post-Brexit forms of cooperation, showing that our heritage is a bridge that can unite, rather than, as in the discourse of Brexiteers and other Eurosceptics, be an identity marker that divides us.

## Conclusion

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In the field of cultural heritage, the potential for EU action contained in the EU treaties is far from having been realised. Although the cultural dimension of European integration is generally underdeveloped, the neglect of cultural heritage as a distinctive component of culture has been particularly serious. In fact, in view of the emphatic language of the treaties on the centrality of national and regional heritage to European integration, and given the unprecedented risks to which this heritage is now increasingly exposed, the weakness of EU action in this field might even be considered culpable and in conflict with, if not the letter, at least the spirit of the treaties. This paper has made some realistic and achievable proposals that would work towards realising the potential of the treaties in this important field, to everybody's benefit.

It is to everybody's benefit because this is ultimately about culture and identity, about what made us who we are and binds us together as a distinctive civilisation of universal import and a nascent political community. When it comes to the Parthenon, we are all Greeks, as much as when it comes to the Colosseum, we are all Italians. In Notre Dame in Paris we are all Catholics, as much as we are all Anglicans in Canterbury cathedral, Muslims in the Alhambra of Granada and Orthodox at Mount Athos. Throughout the nations and regions of our Union, there are thousands and thousands of wonderful churches, castles, sites and museums, far smaller, less known and less emblematic than the Parthenon and the Colosseum perhaps, but no less important in defining the unique heritage that sets Europe apart and must be defended. The protection of this heritage is not only a moral obligation towards our ancestors, who built it, and our successors, who deserve to enjoy it as much as we do. It is about what we have become, who we are and what we want to become as a political community bound by a shared historical space. And ensuring this protection is a noble and symbolic

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<sup>60</sup> The Heritage Alliance, 'Heritage & the EU: How the EU Impacts on Our Heritage in England' (May 2016).



action that would add value to our Union as a whole, regardless of where the money is spent and of who benefits most from it.

Finally, it is time to prove once and for all that the EU is not a technocratic project that ‘knows the price of everything and the value of nothing’. Quite to the contrary, it protects and promotes the cultural diversity of the continent not only for its instrumental economic or social value, which surely exists, but first and foremost for its own sake, as an expression of eminently humane qualities that deserve nourishment. The point of this engagement is not so much to define a common EU identity to legitimise the integration process, at the risk of neglecting national and regional diversity; nor can it be to promote a completely postmodern notion of culture, discarding historical heritage in the name of freely chosen identities. Both are ideological projects that risk betraying the supreme mission of the ‘protective power’ that the EU must aim to be after the many crises of the last decade. Rather the EU should be a benign protector whose ‘primary role should be guaranteeing each country’s right to an autonomous existence in a world in which each of them in isolation would become the vassal of extra-European powers’;<sup>61</sup> and whose central mission must therefore also include the protection of their heritage, ‘. . . the wealth that transcends all political parties, all national frontiers and all centuries, a cultural heritage which brings a deeper value and meaning to our daily lives beyond the economic, financial and material considerations which so beset us’.<sup>62</sup> Thus wrote Lady Diana Elles—incidentally, a Briton—in her 1974 European Parliament report on European heritage, the first-ever document by an EU institution to deal with the topic. This is the spirit we need.

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<sup>61</sup> F. O. Reho, ‘Subsidiarity in the EU: Reflections on a Centre–Right Agenda’, *European View* 18/1 (2019).

<sup>62</sup> O. Calligaro, *Negotiating Europe: EU Promotion of Europeanness Since the 1950s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 86.



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