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## **Towards the Empowerment of Culture: The EU's Response to Recent Crises Through Its Cultural Policy and Beyond**

### **Abstract**

Given that culture through cultural policies at all levels of governance has the potential to mitigate crises, the main aim of this paper is to indicate that the EU, through its recent actions (i.e. initiatives, measures, and projects) – and within the limits of its competences – is steadily moving in a direction to utilise the potential of culture in this regard mostly through its evolving cultural policy. This aim is achieved by applying qualitative methodology (i.e. a content analysis of relevant primary and secondary sources) in the following ways – firstly, the basic definitions of culture, cultural policies, and crisis are provided in order to eventually emphasise the growing recognition of the importance of culture in confronting crises according to recently published UNESCO and Council of Europe documents. Subsequently, after indicating the current course of the EU's cultural policy and its accentuated cross-sectoral dimension, what follows is a review and analysis of the relevant actions taken within the framework of the EU's cultural policy that are related to recent crises (i.e. the migrant crisis, the Coronavirus crisis, and the Ukraine crisis). In view of that, the results of this inquiry indicate that through its recent cultural actions – channelled mostly through its cultural policy – the EU is increasingly approaching culture as a valuable resource which has the potential to enhance resilience and recovery from crises in an EU context and beyond.

**Keywords:** Crisis, Culture, Cultural Policy, Cultural and Creative Sector, European Union

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## **Introductory Remarks: Crisis and Culture in an EU Context**

The beginning of the process of European integration can be viewed as a response to crises caused by the tragic events of the two World Wars during the first half of the last century. Likewise, ever since it started, and up to the present day, the European project has been faced with numerous, challenging crises – e.g., from French president de Gaulle’s refusal to support European institutions during the so-called “empty chair crises” (1965–1966) until more recent crises such as the lack of a common EU response over the war in Iraq (2003), the Constitutional Treaty failure (2005), the Eurozone crisis (2009–2010), the migration crisis (2015), Brexit (2016), the Coronavirus crisis (2020–2023), and the Ukraine crisis (from 2022) – which were continuously forcing EU policy-makers to adjust the course of the European integration process according to often unpredictable internal and external conditions. For this reason, it is not surprising that, in recent times, topics dealing with crises in an EU context have been the focus of the relevant authors’ attention. For instance, in this regard, Ross (2011) offered insightful views regarding the EU and its crises during the first decade of the 2000s from the perspective of EU officials and interest groups. Moreover, in light of the Eurozone crisis, Habermas (2012) proposed that the Union shall further evolve from an international community into a cosmopolitan community. In addition, Boin, Ekengren, Rhinard (2013) have shed more light on the EU’s crisis management capacities to confront the Union’s internal and external challenges. Subsequently, increasing interest on this subject matter has also been reflected in a number of publications dealing with more recent crises in the EU (e.g., Demetriou, 2015; Laffan, 2018; Castells, 2018; Riddervold, Trondal, Newsome, 2021). Indeed, due to the fact that “over the last decade, the EU has faced an unprecedented number of challenges on multiple fronts” (Riddervold, Trondal, Newsome, 2021, p. 4), it is not unexpected that since 2020, the European Commission has been publishing annual *Strategic Foresight Reports* as a response to past and potential upcoming challenges the EU has encountered and will be encountering (European Commission – Strategic Foresight, n.d.).

On the other hand, it is interesting to notice that since the beginning of the European project, EU institutions have been gradually fostering incremental actions within the cultural sphere at the European level, which, in due course, has resulted in introducing culture within the Treaty on European Union (TEU, 1993) and the subsequent development of the EU’s cultural policy. Hence, the introduction of culture within

the primary EU legal framework indicates that EU policy-makers have signified that culture embodies important integrative and legitimating aspects necessary for the further development of the EU project. In this respect, the implications of the emerging EU cultural policy on the overall European integration process have been approached during the last 30 years from various academic viewpoints. In general, some of these approaches encompass critical observations regarding the use of culture by the EU policy-makers in their quest for the legitimacy of the EU project (Shore, 1993; 2000; 2006), including the corresponding inquiries regarding the role of the EU's cultural policy in the process of European identity-building (Sassatelli, 2002; 2007; 2009). Furthermore, with regard to other relevant inquiries in the corresponding field, it should also draw attention to insights provided regarding the process of the "Communitarisation" of the cultural sector at the EU level (Litzo-Monnet, 2007), including an analysis of further significant developments of the EU's cultural policy caused by the introduction of the European Commission's Communication Agenda for Culture in a Globalized World in 2007 (Naess, 2009). Likewise, increasing scholarly interest in different aspects of an evolving EU approach towards culture is further reflected in a number of publications in various fields ranging from legal, external relations, cultural diversity, and cultural heritage viewpoints (e.g., Craufurd Smith, 2004; Batora, Mokre, 2011; Psychogiopoulou, 2016; Jakubowski, Hausler, Fiorentini, 2019). Nevertheless, besides the mentioned corpus of literature, it is also important to signify that the European Commission has shown increasing interest in supporting research which has resulted in studies that have shed more light on the broader socio-economic impact of culture in the European context such as *The Study on the Economy of Culture in Europe*, i.e. the first study conducted with the aim of exploring the direct and indirect socio-economic effects of the cultural and creative sectors in Europe (KEA European Affairs, 2006), and *The Impact of Culture on Creativity*, i.e. the study conducted with the aim to accentuate the role of culture-based creativity on innovation in a European context (KEA European Affairs, 2009).

However, and in accordance with said provided insights, it can be asserted that although there is an extensive body of research which deals separately with both – the impact of crises in the EU context and the implications of the EU's cultural policy on the overall European integration process – there is still a lack of inquiries which provide specific insights regarding the actual and/or potential role of the EU cultural policy in facing and overcoming crises. Nevertheless, there are several possible reasons which can explain why this is so. Namely, culture was introduced within

the primary EU legal framework 30 years ago as an instrument which, within the limits of the EU competences, only complements Member States' cultural policies. Moreover, inquiries which more closely examine the wide-ranging, socio-economic implications of culture in a European context are relatively new occurrence (e.g., KEA European Affairs, 2006; 2009). Last of all, the fact that relevant international organisations in the field of culture have recently started to more explicitly recognise the importance of culture in mitigating crises within their official documents (e.g., UNESCO, 2015; Council of Europe, 2022) further indicates why this topic should still be given more scholarly attention.

Therefore, given that culture through cultural policies at all levels of governance has potential to mitigate crises, the main aim of this paper is to indicate that the EU, through its recent actions (i.e. initiatives, measures, and projects) – and within the limits of its competences – is steadily moving in a direction to utilise the potential of culture in this regard mostly through its evolving cultural policy. Consequently, this aim will be achieved by applying the qualitative methodology (i.e. a content analysis of the relevant primary and secondary sources) in the following way: firstly, basic definitions of “culture”, “cultural policies”, and “crisis” will be provided in order to eventually emphasise the growing recognition of the importance of culture in confronting crises according to recently published UNESCO and Council of Europe (COE) documents. Subsequently, after indicating the current course of the EU's cultural policy and its accentuated cross-sectoral dimension, what follows is a review and analysis of the relevant actions taken mostly within the framework of the EU's cultural policy that are related to recent crises (i.e. the migrant crisis, the Coronavirus crisis, and the Ukraine crisis). This article's conclusion section will encompass some final remarks regarding the results of this inquiry.

### **Identifying the Potential of Culture in Confronting Crises**

In order to emphasise the growing recognition of the importance of culture in facing and overcoming crises, it is first necessary to provide basic definitions of the concepts of “culture”, “cultural policies”, and “crisis”. Accordingly, these views – which are aiming to draw attention to the fact that culture may be regarded as an important resource in confronting crises – will be further exemplified by referring to recent documents from the relevant international organisations active in the cultural field (i.e. UNESCO and COE) on the subject matter. Thus, with the aim of narrowing down wide-ranging conceptualisations of “culture”,

it is adequate to provide its formal definition articulated within UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) by which it is reaffirmed that "culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (UNESCO, 2001). Moreover, in line with the abovementioned definition which encompasses both tangible and intangible dimensions of culture, it is important to stress that in a contemporary, globalised world, activities in the cultural field are mostly being articulated and implemented through cultural policies beyond a strictly national context, that is, by various stakeholders at all levels of governance (i.e. those of the local, national, regional, and international). In this regard, according to UNESCO's Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005), cultural policies refer to "those policies and measures relating to culture, whether at the local, national, regional or international level that are either focused on culture as such or are designed to have a direct effect on the cultural expressions of individuals or groups or societies, and including on the creation, production, dissemination, distribution of and access to cultural activities, goods, and services" (UNESCO, 2005). Correspondingly, in order to conceptualise why culture matters in times of crises, it is necessary to provide basic insights on the crisis concept. Therefore, from the broader perspective of social sciences, "crisis" can be articulated as a "serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which, under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances, necessitates making vital decisions" (Rosenthal, Charles, 't Hart, 1989, p. 10; according to Boin, 't Hart, Kuipers, 2018, p. 24). Likewise, Boin (Boin, 't Hart, Kuipers, 2018, pp. 24–25), in their further elaboration of the aforementioned definition, placed emphasis on the notions of threat, uncertainty, and urgency as a three key components of the crisis concept. Specifically, according to same authors, threat represents one of the main features of crisis because "crises occur when core values or life-sustaining systems of a community come under threat" (Boin, 't Hart, Kuipers, 2018, p. 24). Furthermore, urgency constitutes an integral part of crisis because "threats that do not pose immediate problems (...) do not induce a widespread sense of crisis" (Boin, 't Hart, Kuipers, 2018, p. 25). Lastly, uncertainty complements threats and urgency as one of the key components of crisis since it "pertains both to the nature and the potential consequences of the threat" (Boin, 't Hart, Kuipers, 2018, p. 25). In line with the provided basic insights regarding the key concepts of this inquiry, it can be argued that, although not explicitly, UNESCO's

conceptualisations of culture and cultural policies are implicitly indicating that culture has potential power to confront crises. More precisely, the fact that culture beyond the tangible inseparably encompasses intangible and therefore subjective elements which are shaping both individual and collective realities points to the additional fact that the design of cultural policies at all levels of governance may play a powerful role in maintaining sustainable “lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs” (UNESCO, 2001) when these are confronted with challenging crises characterised by threats, uncertainties, and urgencies (Boin, ‘t Hart, Kuipers, 2018).

According to the provided views, it can be asserted that cultural policies designed and applied with an aim to mitigate crises may be regarded as valuable means for this purpose. Therefore, it is interesting to note that this intention has been recognised rather recently in the documents of international organisations such as UNESCO and COE whose actions and initiatives are making great impact on cultural policies at all levels of governance. Namely, in the Strategy for the Reinforcement of UNESCO’s Action for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of Armed Conflict, it has been explicitly stated that “participation and access to culture and its living expressions, including intangible heritage can help strengthen people’s resilience and sustain their efforts to live through and overcome crisis” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 3). Likewise, in the preamble of the COE’s recent Recommendation on the Role of Culture, Cultural Heritage and Landscape in Helping to Address Global Challenges, the power of culture and creativity are put forth as forces capable of sparking “lateral and critical thinking (...) and hence [can] contribute to supporting a collective ambition at addressing global challenges and global co-operation, engaging young people, changing behaviour and thus furthering democracy and human rights” (Council of Europe, 2022). Additionally, in the same part of this document, it is also emphasised that culture, along with cultural heritage and landscape – as manifestations of culture – have value and potential “in helping to address global challenges (including democratic, economic, health, climate, and technological challenges, along with hardships due to social inequality and the loss of biodiversity) and enhance the quality of life in a constantly evolving society” (Council of Europe, 2022). Therefore, according to denoted views expressed within selected documents by both UNESCO and COE, it can be affirmed that culture can be viewed as a valuable resource which – if managed through well-designed, and therefore, crisis-resistant cultural policies – contains limited albeit potentially powerful characteristics to confront crises. In other words, these characteristics,



among many others, refer to the potential of the tangible and intangible dimensions of culture to enhance resilience and recovery from crises by fostering wellbeing, psychological stability, intercultural dialogue, critical thinking, as well as by promoting the democratic values and principles of sustainable development at all levels of governance. In this regard, the following contextualisation of the current course of the EU's cultural policy serves the purpose to highlight its recent developments which suggest that culture is increasingly perceived from the EU level as a powerful resource which fosters the European integration process, and as such has potential in dealing with the Union's internal and external challenges.

### **The Current Course of the EU Cultural Policy**

Even though the European integration process started in the economic field (i.e. by establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952, which evolved soon after into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1958), it wasn't until the Treaty on European Union (TEU) entered into force in 1993 that the European project gained a more explicit, political dimension by transforming itself from a Community into a Union (McCormick, 2008). Nevertheless, since the 1970s, along with the political dimension, European institutions have also gradually started to put more emphasis on the importance and necessity to foster the cultural dimension of the European integration process through incremental actions within the sphere of culture at the European level. Moreover, this intention to accentuate the role of culture as an important, legitimating factor of the European integration process, as well as to provide a legal basis for further actions in the cultural field, was clearly articulated by introducing culture within the TEU (1993) as an area of competence where the Union complements the actions of its Member States – i.e. culture was explicitly introduced in Article 128 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) in 1993, which was later renumbered in Article 151 of the Treaty of Amsterdam (TA) in 1997, and finally in Article 167 of the current Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) within the framework of the Lisbon Treaty (LT) in 2009. In due course, the corpus of the EU actions in the cultural sphere evolved into that which may be regarded as the EU's cultural policy (Obuljen, 2004; Sassatelli, 2009). In this respect, it should be added that the introduction of culture within the framework of Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) indicates both internal and external aspects – as well as the cross-sectoral dimension – of the evolving EU cultural policy.

Namely, this can be further asserted by referring to the aforementioned Article 167 TFEU which, from one perspective, highlights the internal aspect of the EU's actions in the cultural sphere (i.e. the mediating role of the Union in the field of culture according to the principle of subsidiarity, in terms of supporting – and not imposing – cultural initiatives at the level of individual Member States, as well as by encouraging mutual cooperation between them in the cultural field); and which, from the other perspective, accentuates the external aspect of the EU's approach to culture (i.e. fostering cooperation between the Union and its Member States with third countries and any relevant international organisations in the area of culture).

Accordingly, since further developments of the evolving EU cultural policy are mostly initiated by the Union's soft law instruments (e.g., communications, conclusions, and resolutions), it should be emphasised that, among the most important initiatives in this regard, the European Commission's Communication Agenda for Culture in Globalized World (European Commission, 2007) stands out. Subsequently, this pivotal document – which has placed culture in the focus of EU policy-making – has paved the way towards the New European Agenda for Culture (European Commission, 2018a). However, besides the aforementioned central initiatives, further developments of the EU's cultural policy are also echoed in other EU documents – e.g., those concerning the EU's interrelated approach to culture, cultural heritage, and sustainable development such as Council conclusions on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe (Council of the European Union, 2014); Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe (European Commission, 2014); and the Report on the cultural dimension of sustainable development in EU actions (European Commission, 2022a).

Furthermore, it should be noted that besides the internal aspect of the evolving EU cultural policy, the significance of its external aspect has been steadily accentuated ever since the Agenda for Culture in Globalized World was introduced; therefore indicating that culture constitutes an important element of the EU's international relations and its Foreign and Security Policy. Accordingly, this intention to accentuate the importance of the cultural component in the external relations of the Union was later on reflected in several EU official documents – e.g., Cultural Dimensions of the EU's External Actions (European Parliament, 2011); Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations (European Commission, 2016); and Council Conclusions on an EU Strategic Approach to International Cultural Relations and a Framework for Action (Council of the European Union, 2019) – signifying that the implementation of



cultural actions by the EU in the international context can be viewed as an application of soft power, i.e. “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (Nye, 2008, p. 94). Interestingly, a recent EU document which explicitly recognises the potential role of cultural heritage in mitigating crises within the field of the EU’s external relations actually refers to Council Conclusions on the EU’s Approach to Cultural Heritage in Conflicts and Crises (Council of the European Union, 2021a).

Nevertheless, in order to further contextualise the latest EU approaches in the field of culture, it is necessary to provide basic insights concerning the current course of the EU’s cultural policy by highlighting its recent significant developments. In this respect, it is important to emphasise the main objectives of the European Commission’s New European Agenda for Culture (2018) (hereinafter – the New Agenda) and the main priorities of the latest Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026 (adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2022). In other words, the New Agenda – which builds upon the propositions of the previously-adopted Agenda for Culture in a Globalising World – specifies three strategic objectives with social, economic, and external dimensions that are determining the current course of the EU’s cultural policy. More precisely, the social dimension of the New Agenda explicates that the current EU approach towards culture aims at “harnessing the power of culture and cultural diversity for social cohesion and well-being” (European Commission, 2018a, pp. 2–3). Likewise, the economic dimension signifies the EU’s intention of “supporting culture-based creativity in education and innovation, and jobs and growth” (European Commission, 2018a, pp. 4–6). Lastly, the external dimension of the New Agenda indicates that the current EU approach towards culture is also oriented towards “strengthening international cultural relations” (European Commission, 2018a, pp. 6–8).

On the other hand, the current Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026 identifies four priority areas of the EU’s actions in the field of culture which are among other factors articulated in light of “the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine” as well as by taking into account “the serious impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on society as a whole” (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 1). Moreover, these four priorities refer to the areas which are evidently directed towards achieving the social, economic, and external objectives of the EU’s cultural policy. Namely, the corresponding four priority areas have been articulated under the following titles: a) Artists and cultural professionals: empowering the cultural and creative sectors”; b) Culture for the people: enhancing cultural participation and the role of culture in society”; c) Culture for the planet: unleashing the power of

culture” and d) Culture for co-creative partnerships: strengthening the cultural dimension of EU external relations” (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 2).

Correspondingly, in the context of this paper it is important to signify that one of the actions under the third priority area of the Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026 refers to “safeguarding heritage against natural and human-made disasters” (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 9); whereas one of the actions under its fourth priority area refers to “preserving cultural heritage and empowering local CCS in Ukraine” (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 10). In addition, and with the aim of providing a complete, albeit still-basic insight regarding the present course of the EU’s cultural policy, it is important to point out its major initiatives. In this regard, one of the main instruments of the EU’s cultural policy is the current Creative Europe Programme (2021–2027) which is divided into the three following strands that cover specific sectors: the culture strand (i.e. cultural and creative sectors), the media strand (i.e. the audiovisual sector) and the cross-sectoral strand (i.e. actions across all cultural and creative sectors) (Regulation (EU) 2021/818). Likewise, through the years, the EU has also introduced and successfully implemented numerous initiatives in the field of culture at the European level such as the European Capitals of Culture, the European Heritage Label, the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, and the New European Bauhaus initiatives. Also, along with the aforementioned initiatives, it is noteworthy that within the framework of the EU’s cultural policy, numerous prizes are awarded for achievements accomplished in various cultural fields at the European level (Iskra, Renard, 2023).

In line with these insights, it can be affirmed that evolving EU approaches towards culture indicate that the Union’s cultural policy contains both internal and external aspects – as well as the cross-sectoral dimension – by which EU policy-makers are aiming to foster an overall socio-economic development of the EU and advance its position in international affairs. Moreover, recently highlighted developments of the EU’s cultural policy demonstrate that various areas of the EU’s public policies inevitably contain a cultural component and, for that reason, it can be asserted that culture is perceived at the EU level of governance as an important resource which fosters the European integration process. Consequently, it is not surprising that the following review and analysis of the relevant actions related to recent crises within the framework of the EU’s cultural policy and beyond also indicate that EU institutions are increasingly viewing culture as a valuable resource in confronting crises.

## **The EU's Response to Crises Through Culture: Reflections on Actions Related to Recent Crises Within the EU's Cultural Policy and Beyond**

In light of the provided insights, what follows is a review and analysis of the EU's response to recent crises through its actions in the cultural field. More precisely, this aim will be achieved by referring to relevant actions taken mostly within the framework of the EU's cultural policy that are related to the migrant crisis, the Coronavirus crisis, and the Ukraine crisis.

### **Migrant Crisis**

The migrant crisis which occurred in 2015 represents the first of the aforementioned crises that the Union has had to face recently. In this regard, the EU's response to this crisis through its actions in the field of culture is reflected and summarised in the Commission's Staff Working Document (2018) which supplements the previously-denoted New European Agenda for Culture (hereinafter – the New Agenda). Therefore, in the context of providing more details regarding the implementation of the first objective of the New Agenda (i.e. that which refers to harnessing the power of culture for social cohesion and well-being), in this document, special attention is placed on “integrating refugees and other migrants” (European Commission, 2018b, p. 5). Specifically, this intention is expressed by pointing to the fact that 12 projects with a budget of EUR 2.35 million were selected already in 2016 under the special call of *Creative Europe Programme* for refugee integration (European Commission, 2018b, p. 5). For illustration purposes, among the aforementioned were also projects such as the A Million Stories project (which, through various media, individual interviews of refugees and asylum seekers in Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and Greece were presented); a project titled REACT – Refugee Engagement and Integration through Community Theatre (which brought together refugees with local host communities in theatre performances); and the Voices of Solidarity project (which engaged refugees and their host communities in processional performances across Europe by using diverse media) (Lewis, Martin, 2017, pp. 16–17). Nevertheless, since only a limited number of projects were funded through a denoted call, “the Commission made cultural projects for migrant inclusion eligible under other EU programmes including the Asylum & Migration Integration Fund, a Rights, Equalities & Citizenship programme, Erasmus+, and Europe for Citizens”, including the possibility for other

“relevant projects to be supported under the European Structural and Investment Funds, including in rural areas” (European Commission, 2018b, p. 5). Furthermore, within the corresponding Commission’s Staff Working Document (2018), it is also mentioned that a report titled *How Culture and the Arts can Promote Intercultural Dialogue in the Context of the Migratory and Refugee Crisis* (European Commission, 2017) contains numerous recommendations which have been articulated whose aim is to have an impact and reach relevant policy-makers from the local to the EU level on the subject matter (European Commission, 2018b, p. 5). In addition, it is important to stress that the EU’s response to migration challenges through actions in the field of culture was eventually clearly articulated within the new Creative Europe Programme (2021–2027) in the following narrative which indicates that the EU will remain committed to approaching current and possible future migration crises through its cultural initiatives:

“Culture is key to strengthening inclusive and cohesive communities. In the context of migration issues and integration challenges, culture plays a fundamental role in providing opportunities for intercultural dialogue and in integrating migrants and refugees, helping them to feel part of host societies, and in developing good relations between migrants and new communities” (Regulation (EU) 2021/818).

According to the provided insights, it can be asserted that within the framework of its competences in the cultural field, the EU has responded to the migrant crisis by providing funding to a series of projects under the Creative Europe Programme, which have contributed to intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity, and the integration of refugees into their host communities through various cultural practices across Europe. Likewise, a fact that cultural projects for migrant inclusion were eligible for funding under the other EU programs besides the Creative Europe Programme indicates that the European Commission is aware that many complexities caused by the migrant crisis can be tackled by cultural initiatives across a broad variety of EU policy fields. In this regard, the EU has demonstrated its clear stance that culture represents a valuable resource in encountering migration and integration challenges, as well as the fact that it has shown that the Union’s cultural actions – channelled mostly through its cultural policy, can contribute in lessening any potentially negative effects of a migrant crisis.

## Coronavirus Crisis

Soon after the breakout of the migration crisis, which was followed by Brexit (2016), the EU in 2020 had to face the unprecedented Coronavirus crisis; one of the most challenging moments in the history of European integration. For this reason, it is not surprising that EU institutions had to take numerous measures to lessen the negative effects of the pandemic in its cultural and creative sector (CCS), but also to enable its recovery. In view of this, it is important to point out that the CCS was one of the most affected sectors at the hands of the Coronavirus crisis, which is why the European Commission and the European Parliament reacted promptly to secure support for corresponding sectors within the new EU budget (2021–2027) and especially within its Recovery Instrument (i.e. Next Generation EU) (KEA European Affairs, 2020, p. 9). However, it should be noted that this reaction from those EU institutions is not unexpected since cultural and creative sectors and industries “account for between 4 and 7% of EU GDP and 8.7 million jobs in the EU” (European Parliament, 2021). Eventually, the overall support to the CCS within the new EU budget (2021–2027) has increased more than ever before. More precisely, this especially refers to almost EUR 2.4 billion in secured support for a new 2021–2027 Creative Europe Programme (adopted in May 2021) which represents an increase of 63% in comparison to the previous 2014–2020 period (European Commission, 2021). Likewise, the EU’s response to the Coronavirus crisis is also manifested in providing support to the CCS through instruments that are potentially available to stakeholders in corresponding fields through Next Generation EU such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility, REACT-EU, Invest-EU, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) (Hamhuis, 2021).

Moreover, shortly after the new Creative Europe Programme entered into force, the Council of the European Union, in June 2021, delivered its Conclusions on the recovery, resilience and sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors in which it identified six priorities as a response to the pandemic. Specifically, these priorities aimed to: “Improve access to available funding”, “Enhance the resilience of CCS professionals”, “Further strengthen mobility and cooperation”, “Expedite the digital and green transitions”, “Improve knowledge and preparedness for future challenges”, and “Take cultural scenes and local communities into account” (Council of the European Union, 2021b, pp. 5–7). Correspondingly, and in line with the aforementioned Conclusions, in October 2021, the European Parliament also delivered the Resolution on the situation of artists and

the cultural recovery in the EU by which it has further accentuated importance of revitalising the CCS in Europe due to the pandemic (European Parliament, 2021). In this respect, it can be underlined that the European Parliament (among other propositions) suggests the European Commission and the Member States “recognise the intrinsic value of culture, as well as the fundamental role of culture for society, its progress and our well-being, the economy and inclusiveness, and to translate this recognition into adequate and continuous financial and structural support” (European Parliament, 2021). Subsequently, it is important to signify that behind the aim to support the recovery of the CCS due to the pandemic, there is also a clear intention expressed in the following narrative of the EU policy-makers to empower the potential of culture in confronting possible future crises through new Creative Europe Programme and other relevant EU programs:

“It is important that the Programme addresses the structural challenges of Europe’s cultural and creative sectors, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Programme encompasses the fundamental role of European culture and media in citizens’ well-being and in empowering them to take informed decisions. The Programme, together with other relevant Union funding programmes and Next Generation EU, should support the short-term recovery of the cultural and creative sectors, enhance their longer-term resilience and competitiveness in order to best address potential major crises in the future and accompany their digital and ecological transition” (Regulation (EU) 2021/818).

Subsequently, the provided insights indicate that through actions taken mostly within the framework of its cultural policy, the EU has recognised the importance of securing the recovery and long-term resilience of the cultural and creative sector due to the Coronavirus crisis, since this sector has proven that it plays an important role in maintaining and enhancing the overall socio-economic wellbeing of European citizens. Moreover, for these reasons, securing recovery and resilience of the CCS also indicates that, from the perspective of the EU policy-makers, culture represents a powerful resource with an ability to not just lessen the effects of unexpected crises, but also in preventing potential crises.

### **Ukraine Crisis**

In February 2022 – at a time when the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic had started to lessen – the EU was unexpectedly faced with a Ukraine-based crisis concerning Russia’s invasion of its sovereign



neighbour. In this regard, the Union expressed its immediate support and solidarity towards Ukraine, which was soon enough followed by the EU's support to Ukraine's cultural and creative sector. In view of that, and taking into account the relatively recent occurrence of the Ukraine crisis, it is adequate to refer mostly to official, European Commission web pages (among other corresponding pages), and sources in order to obtain any relevant information about the recent EU response to the Ukraine crisis through its actions in the cultural sphere. In general, this response refers to the EU providing support-based resources to Ukraine's CCS stakeholders as well as the Union's support for the protection of Ukraine's cultural heritage (European Commission, 2022b; European Commission, n.d.).

Therefore, in regard to the EU's support resources to Ukrainian artists and cultural and creative professionals and organisations, the European Commission, already in September 2022, opened a special call under the 2023 *Creative Europe* annual work programme which amounted to EUR 5 million. Moreover, Creative Europe's mobility action titled Culture Moves Europe – which supports mobility grants – has, since 2022, been open to Ukrainian artists and cultural professionals (European Commission, 2022b; European Commission, n.d.). Furthermore, corresponding EU funding opportunities also include support for non-translated Ukrainian books under the exceptional Creative Europe call during 2022–2023, i.e. the Circulation of European literary works (CREA-CULT-2023-LIT) (European Commission, n.d.). In addition, Ukrainian artists and cultural professionals also have the opportunity to engage in mobility exchanges within the EU4Culture programme (under the European Neighbourhood Instrument) which, since 2021, has supported the CCS through cultural co-operation among the Eastern Partnership countries (i.e. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) (European Commission, n.d.; Goethe Institute, 2023). Also, the platform titled Creatives Unite – launched as a response to the Coronavirus crisis in 2020 with an aim to encourage cooperation and the exchange of good practices between CCS stakeholders – represents yet another instrument co-funded by the EU (within the Creative FLIP Pilot project under the Creative Europe Programme) which provides information about initiatives and responses to the Ukraine crisis taken by representatives from the CCS and beyond (Creatives Unite, n.d., European Commission, 2022b; European Commission, n.d.). Likewise, it is worth noting that, in 2022, the Cultural Relations Platform (i.e. an EU project launched in 2020 under the Partnership Initiative which gathers cultural experts in the field of the EU's international cultural relations) published a report titled

Ukrainian Cultural Actors Mapping and Needs Assessment (Karnaukh, Kravchuk, 2022) one of whose aims was to shed more light on the needs of Ukrainian cultural stakeholders in the context of the war in Ukraine (European Commission, n.d.).

Nonetheless, the EU response to Ukraine crisis also includes support for the protection of Ukraine cultural heritage which has been provided through various initiatives. Namely, among such early initiatives launched already in 2022 is SUM – Save the Ukraine Monuments (initiated within the EU-funded 4CH Project that has been running since 2021 under the EU's research and innovation program named Horizon 2020) whose purpose is to duplicate the digital documentation of Ukraine's cultural heritage on safe servers in the EU (European Commission, 2022b; European Commission, n.d.; 4CH Project, n.d.). Similarly, a new social media campaign called #ARTvsWAR was initiated in 2022 by the European External Action Service (EEAS) in order to provide support to Ukrainian cultural heritage in times of war (European Commission, 2022b; European Union External Action, 2022). Moreover, among more recent corresponding EU initiatives is also the campaign #TogetherWeAreEurope initiated by the EU Delegation to Ukraine in support of Ukrainian culture and arts during the war (European Commission, n.d.; Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, 2023). Lastly, it is also important to point out that in 2023 the European Commission fully funded the Creative Europe Desk in Ukraine (European Commission, 2023; European Commission, n.d.).

Accordingly, although the war in Ukraine occurred relatively recently, provided insights indicate that the EU's prompt response to this crisis reflects its genuine stand to provide support to Ukrainian CCS stakeholders as well as to provide support for the protection and eventual reconstruction of Ukraine's cultural heritage. Indeed, provided reflections regarding the EU's response to the Ukraine crisis through a number of cultural initiatives suggest that this support will gradually grow. However, according to the aforementioned initiatives, it is also evident that the EU's support resources to Ukraine's CCS are not provided strictly by the instruments available within the sphere of the EU's cultural policy (e.g., via the Creative Europe Programme), but also through various EU supporting mechanisms in other policy areas (e.g., within the EU's neighbourhood, foreign relations or research and innovation policies) which indicates that the EU is increasingly approaching culture as a cross-sectoral, policy-making field.

## Conclusions

Given that culture through cultural policies at all levels of governance has the potential to mitigate crises, the main aim of this paper was to indicate that the EU, through its recent actions (i.e. initiatives, measures, and projects) – and within the limits of its competences – is steadily moving in a direction to utilise the potential of culture in this regard mostly through its evolving cultural policy. Accordingly, and by applying the qualitative methodology, the results of this inquiry affirm that through its recent cultural actions – channelled in general through its cultural policy – the EU is increasingly approaching culture as a valuable resource which has the potential to enhance resilience and recovery from crises in an EU context and beyond. In view of that, this paper indicates that from UNESCO's conceptual point of view, culture – if managed through crisis-resistant cultural policies – has the potential to confront crises. Apparently, this view springs from the awareness that culture, beyond the tangible, also inevitably encompasses the intangible dimension which is shaping individual and collective realities. Therefore, it can be asserted that culture – in the broadest sense of its meaning – contains a limited, but still not-fully-acknowledged potential to maintain the wellbeing of societies and their members when they are challenged with crises. Nonetheless, recent UNESCO (2015) and COE (2022) documents signify that the potential of culture in mitigating crises is gradually being recognised at the level of relevant international organisations in the cultural field. In a view of that, this paper further indicates that evolving EU approaches towards culture are reflected in the Union's evolving cultural policy which is characterised by both internal and external aspects, as well as by its cross-sectoral dimension – and as such, can be viewed as a valuable resource in fostering socio-economic wellbeing and advancing the external position of the EU. Therefore, provided reflections on cultural actions within the EU's cultural policy and beyond that are related to recent crises (i.e. the migration crisis, the Coronavirus crisis, and the Ukraine crisis) further confirm that, even though in a limited-yet-still-evolving manner, the EU is increasingly approaching culture as a valuable resource in meeting crises. In other words, the EU's response to recent crises through its cultural actions (e.g., by promoting intercultural dialogue in the context of the migration crisis, as well as by supporting the recovery and resilience of the cultural and creative sector due to the Coronavirus crisis's negative effects, and by providing prompt support to Ukrainian CCS stakeholders in the midst of a war), demonstrate that culture has been recognised at the EU level as an important resource which has multi-faceted potential

in dealing with the Union's internal and external challenges. Indeed, it can be expected that this potential will be recognised even more in the near future.

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