

EU's next long-term budget (MFF) Response to consultation

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Introduction

Pearle*- Live Performance Europe is the European federation regrouping through its members over 13,000 organisations and companies in the music, performing arts and live event sectors.

Pearle* welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034, which aims to become a simpler, more focused, and responsive budget that reflects European strategic priorities.

This paper complements our response to three (of the seven) public consultations: single market, competitiveness, culture and education.

We particularly call on the European Commission to reaffirm the essential role of culture in the European project and to ensure that EU financial instruments provide the necessary support for the sustainable development of the cultural and creative sectors and industries, including through cross-border and cross-sectoral cooperation, artistic mobility, its pivotal role in and for society, and the access to funding to assure the green and digital transition.

In line with the broader cultural sector, **Pearle* therefore supports the proposal that 2% of the overall MFF be allocated for culture, with allocations across key pillars of the EU budget: the Competitiveness Fund, National Plans, and External Action.** This investment would reflect the proven economic, social and democratic value of culture and reinforce the EU's strategic priorities.

Comments

I. EU funding for the single market, and cooperation between national authorities:

We encourage the Commission to consider the **facilitation of cross-border artist mobility for cultural professionals and of cultural services.**

The live performance sector is inherently international, relying on the circulation of artists, technicians and stage materials. Yet, mobility within the EU remains hindered by legal and administrative fragmentation, which creates disproportionate burdens for cultural organisations and professionals. We call for:

- Funding under the MFF that supports the development of interoperable digital tools and systems to enhance administrative cooperation, streamline procedures, and reduce regulatory complexity across borders, especially in the areas of social security, posting of workers, and cross-border artist taxation.

- Stronger cooperation between Member States' authorities to simplify procedures and reduce regulatory divergences, thereby incentivising initiatives of member states that ease compliance of rules by businesses. This includes easing cross-border mobility for cultural professionals and services by promoting coherent frameworks and reducing administrative fragmentation, both within the EU and in relation to key international partners.
- Funding allowing businesses to transition digital work processes and reporting tools to comply with rules, standards and reporting conditions, as those comprise proportionally high investments for SMEs (especially micro- and small enterprises).

II. EU funding on Competitiveness

We encourage the Commission to consider **improved access to funding and infrastructure for the live performance sector**.

The MFF should ensure that investment tools and national reforms reflect the needs of cultural organisations, particularly when funds are delivered through national plans or structural instruments. **Pearle* supports:**

- Assigning 2% of National Plans' funding for culture, building further on the positive precedent of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, thereby focusing funding geared towards initiatives in the most labour-intensive sectors.
- Inclusion of culture in regional infrastructure strategies, with support for sustainable renovation of venues, green transition of smart touring models, and digital capacity for live performance.
- EU funding programmes can acknowledge the specific research and innovation base of artistic creation processes by foreseeing specific support for R&D in this area. EU funding programmes should also foster collaboration between artists, organisers, and venues, recognising that sustainable artistic careers and cultural diversity depend on supporting the full ecosystem behind live events.
- Targeted investment of EU funds to research innovative production methods to advance the digital and green transition in the cultural sector, and the necessary support for skills development and training of the workforce.

Such support must remain accessible to both small and micro-enterprises, and large institutions, and accompanied by simplified application processes and guidance. Cooperation between larger and smaller players and joint initiatives could be encouraged.

III. EU Funding for cross-border education, training and solidarity, youth, media, culture, creative sectors, values (democracy, equality, rule of law, fundamental rights), and civil society.

The programmes on the respective policy priorities are essential pillars of the European project, as they support, strengthen, and contribute to the core European values of democracy, citizenship, artistic-academic-media freedom, social cohesion, inclusion, diversity and equality. In this regard, these programmes are conditional and necessary to complement the strategic priority of defence and for the EU to deliver on its goals.

In particular, **we encourage the Commission to preserve and strengthen Creative Europe**, which remains the only EU funding instrument exclusively dedicated to culture. It must continue as a standalone programme with a clear, visible and accessible budget line. In parallel, **Horizon Europe must continue to include a dedicated cluster for culture, creativity and an inclusive society**, ensuring that research and innovation in the cultural and creative sectors are supported with due regard for their specificities.

Pearle* supports:

- Increased overall funding.
- Raising the EU co-financing rates to reflect inflation, rising operational costs, and the limited financial capacity of cultural organisations.
- Expanding support for a wider and larger variety of pan-European networks, and providing dedicated or targeted funding opportunities for networks which wish to focus on one goal. EU funding should also provide opportunities to build partnerships beyond the EU to strengthen international cultural exchange. Further develop mobility schemes of cultural professionals and small-scale touring and cross-border projects that foster capacity building and long-term cooperation.
- Reducing administrative burdens by streamlining reporting and introducing two-phase application processes.

We call on the Commission to embed Artistic Freedom into EU funding and governance mechanisms

Pearle* supports the call to embed artistic freedom into the Rule of Law Report and other relevant EU monitoring tools. The respect for freedom of artistic expression, the autonomy of cultural institutions, and cultural rights should be upheld as fundamental principles and introduced as conditionalities for accessing EU funding, particularly within the framework of National Plans and broader compliance with EU values.

This is essential in a context where, in some Member States, national public funding is increasingly being used to apply political pressure and restrict freedom of artistic expression. In such cases, EU funding can play a vital counterbalancing role, offering independent and rules-based support that helps protect pluralism, civil liberties and the right to artistic creation. Making artistic freedom a recognised component of the EU's rule of law and fundamental rights frameworks would not only serve as a preventive measure but also help create a more consistent and principled approach to funding across the Union.

Preserving the independence of cultural actors, particularly when national support is politicised or withdrawn, is key to safeguarding Europe's democratic and cultural diversity.

The MFF should therefore reinforce mechanisms that support cultural operators at risk and ensure that EU funds remain accessible to those working in line with European values, regardless of their national context.

We call on the Commission to strengthen funding for the Erasmus+ programme

In March this year, the European Commission launched the Union of Skills to close skills and labour gaps within the EU and raise European competitiveness.

The Erasmus+ programme is the key instrument for building the European education and training area, supporting the implementation of the European strategic cooperation in the field of vocational education and training. In the cultural and creative sectors, it supports lifelong learning, the development of young professionals and cross-border cooperation. Ultimately, it strengthens a European identity and EU values, which are fundamental in today's political context.

Concretely, projects under Erasmus+ can contribute to tackling the shortage of skilled labour, for instance by developing tools to improve cross-border recognition of competences and vocational education and training, which facilitates recruitment by businesses and organisations across the EU. At the same time, it allows for the development of training to up- and re-skill workers and support career transition, which is of importance to artistic profiles. We therefore advocate for increased funding for Erasmus+ under the next MFF 2028-2034.

Conclusion

As the European Union prepares the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2028–2034, culture must be recognised as a strategic investment and a pillar of the European project. The cultural and creative sectors, and in particular the live performance sector, play a vital role in driving innovation, strengthening social cohesion, promoting fundamental rights, and contributing to the European economy.

Pearle* calls for a dedicated and visible commitment to culture within the next MFF with the allocation of at least 2% of the total EU budget to culture, distributed across key pillars. This investment would reflect the high return that culture generates in terms of employment, GDP, well-being, democratic engagement and international cooperation.

To enable the sector to thrive, the MFF must support cross-border cooperation and artistic mobility by addressing persistent administrative and legal barriers. Funding should be used to develop interoperable systems, support cooperation between Member States, and ensure that professionals and organisations can operate across borders without undue burden.

Pearle* also underlines the importance of safeguarding Creative Europe as a standalone programme with increased funding, higher co-financing rates, and simplified access. It must remain autonomous in its focus on culture and not be subordinated to broader policy goals at the expense of artistic creation.

Finally, artistic freedom must be upheld as a core value across the EU. Embedding freedom of artistic expression and institutional autonomy into funding frameworks and EU governance tools, such as the Rule of Law Report, is essential to protect cultural diversity and pluralism, especially where national funding is used to apply political pressure.

Pearle* stands ready to contribute to a stronger, fairer, and more resilient cultural sector and calls on the EU to ensure that the next MFF provides the tools and funding to make this vision a reality.