

Culture Action Europe appeals for the European Elections 2014

Europe faces challenges today that cannot be compared with earlier decades: people live longer, natural resources fade, jobs are scarce – and there is no going back. Since 2008, Europeans have been told that we are living a crisis, the worst since 1929. Each year, we have been told that it will get better. Each year, reality proves differently.

The reality in Europe is not appropriately described as a crisis. Rather it must be seen as a transition, from one world order into another one. Either this transition will lead Europe to growing inequalities or to a new social agreement based on sustainability and the fulfillment of human rights for the current and future generations. The shape it will take depends on choices we make now. Europe has all necessary assets, tangible and cultural, to build a sustainable future: we must invest in them now.

Social, not economic, growth must be the priority for contemporary Europe. Enhancing people's cultural competence, our capacity for cooperation and critical thinking, our openness to diversity, our curiosity: all of this is essential to develop a society where rights, responsibilities and shared well-being can grow. The Arts and Sciences powerfully contribute to such capacities.

It is time for decision-makers and citizens alike to form a broader discourse on the future of Europe, underlining cultural development as a strategic necessity. The democratic gap in decision-making must be filled. The 2014 elections are an opportunity to reconnect institutions with European citizens. Only 33% of EU citizens trust the European institutions, according to a recent opinion survey led by eurobarometer. This is a crisis of legitimacy. It is a failure.

People's hopes, fears and priorities deserve answers that cannot be subordinated to the demands of financial markets. We must develop a political project based on culture and learning, an appropriate response to our political, social and economic emergency. We don't need more consumption in Europe. We need ethics and quality in all aspects of life.

Europe faces rising nationalism, even racism. The European project must not fail to meet this challenge. An attractive and serious alternative must be formed to engage Europeans. A narrative of inclusion and shared space must be designed.

This is a cultural mission. Local governments are in the frontline and major allies in this endeavour: their voices must count in the decision-making of a fully democratic Europe.

Therefore, Intercult together with all members and supporters of Culture Action Europe, throughout Sweden, the Nordic region, the EU and beyond, appeal to future Members of the European Parliament (MEPs):

- To present, through concrete programmes, a real vision for Europe and a credible political project, proposing candidates with ethical and cultural engagement.

- To address the role of culture in particular during the campaign, insisting on its necessary contribution to sustainable development and actively fostering a debate on the cultural factor.
- To personally commit to defending values that impact the citizens' lives directly: the freedom of expression, the right to participate in the cultural life of the community, intolerance for any form of discrimination, equal access to education and public health services and increased investment in environmental protection.
- To promote the institution of a **cultural impact assessment**, initiated prior to adoption of any policies in fields like education and learning, urban planning and architecture, civil rights and heritage.
- To integrate civil society into the process of the European decision-making, by ensuring a higher level of transparency.
- To operate for the good of all European citizens and, when necessary, show independence from the national special interests.
- To push for a revision of the Europe 2020 strategy, putting well-being and social capital at the centre of a strategy for a sustainable Europe.
- To support cultural and artistic circulation throughout Europe
- To actively oppose erosion of the role of the public sphere, especially in the fields of culture, arts, education, science/research, citizenship, and human rights - all fundamental European values to be invested in.

Since 1992 Culture Action Europe (CAE) is the leading European network in the field of culture. CAE gives voice to more than 80,000 organisations brought together by its 115 members active in all cultural and artistic domains: museums, libraries, architects, writers, festivals, opera houses, research, cultural centers, theatres, orchestras, including both organisations representing employers and organizations representing cultural workers.

CAE aims at putting culture at the heart of the public debate and decision-making at every level – both local and European - as an essential component for sustainable societies to the benefit of present and future generations. We encourage a democratic development of the European Union, as the first and most ambitious attempt to establish a new form of democracy based on a cultural of complex identity rather than the hegemony of a single language, culture or religion.