

Action Agenda 2020/2021

Towards a new Culture of Common Responsibilities for a Europa Bottom Up!

Europe deserves and needs the active co-responsibility of its base, of the citizens, cities, and regions. This co-responsibility is the cause and goal of the European idea and is essential for the success of the European project.

There are reasons why the European Union has been developed primarily "from top down". However, the current situation at the latest shows the value, indeed the indispensability of energies from below and the willingness of people to take responsibility.

The dramatic impact of the pandemic calls for drastic new approaches. It obliges us to reorientate. This also applies to the development of the European Union. This includes taking people's responsibility for Europe seriously and to strengthen a Europe from below.

What is at stake?

We must insist on a new "culture of shared responsibility". Not only because of a conviction of our personal civic responsibility. It is no longer enough just to criticize the lack of public intervention as in the past years.

The requirements on the European Union are also growing. It is remarkable how the need for sustainable strategies and a prioritized climate policy has not lost attention even in the current corona situation. On the contrary, this challenge, which forces us to rethink and take new action, has even become more visible.

Although the increase in more participatory responsibility on behalf of European civil society adds credibility to our democracies, it also reveals a growing failure of the state to shape and support the right conditions for the sustainable development of a united Europe. Just as we - as a civil society- have reasons to take our own responsibilities seriously at last, we must at the same time demand that grassroots initiatives that aim for the success of the European Community project be institutionally recognized in their importance.

The awareness of the responsibility of all of us for the success of a common Europe is not to be equated with a "release" of the European institutions and the nation states. On the contrary: as citizens become more involved in Europe, their entitlement to demand more serious, honest and committed work for Europe from political leaders in the EU and its member states grows. The cultural sector in particular has a key role in society: artists, cultural operators, museums, art houses or even European networks such as "A soul for Europe" are able to devise alternative and speculative forms of social response and thus make a specific and unique contribution to the community.

This necessary contribution to the success of the European project deserves the active appreciation and support of the EU institutions - not only through well-meant praise and recognition, but also and not least through structural and financial assistance.

Creativity for Europe

We did not just talk over the past two years; we have developed the first concrete examples of such creativity at the grassroots for Europe:

- Local history initiatives are working on how to narrate Europe's diverse history together and from bottom up.
- Youth theatres from several European cities are developing joint performances. They do so explicitly as a contribution of cultural productivity for Europe.
- *Further Exempels...*

Cities and regions - the institutional basis of Europe - see themselves as responsible co-producers of Europe. Within the framework of the 'Cities for Europe' initiative and important partners such as the European Festival Association

- festivals organize their events together with their host cities not only in the cities and in Europe, but also together with the cities and for Europe
- European cities exchange ideas and qualify each other regarding their local democratic practice. In doing so, they set an example and a challenge for the democratic culture of Europe.
- the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) use their strategic know-how to jointly develop drafts for a culturally shaped urban development policy in Europe.

This creativity for Europe is a strength that the EU can draw from bottom-up activities. Creativity "for" Europe should also be included in the considerable support the EU provides for creativity "in" Europe.

The conclusions of the European Council of 21 July set the budget for the stimulus package at €750 billion, the distribution of which is to be decided by the Member States themselves. It is therefore up to the Member States to decide on the priorities for the distribution of funding.

Currently, social cultural policies, cultural strategies, creative approaches, and initiatives to promote cultural development too often fall through the cracks in the funding schemes.

This is contrary to the importance of citizens' creativity and grassroots initiatives for the success of Europe. For this is not about the (also still necessary) promotion of "art for art's sake", it is about support for the "cultural for the sake of the common good".

What needs to be done:

1. Members of Parliament have been elected to the European Parliament from their local base. Consequently, they are the right partners for the European bottom-up approach. A group of parliamentarians should therefore be set up in the European Parliament with the task of acting as cooperation and discussion partners for bottom-up initiatives.
2. The Committees on Towns and Regions as well as on Social Affairs and Economic Affairs are the representatives of the European grass roots in Brussels. They should be a joint contact point for supporting bottom-up initiatives in Europe and for communicating them to European policymakers.
3. The European Commission should explicitly entrust one of its Commissioners with the responsibility of communicating with the self-responsible bottom-up initiatives. Marija Gabriel, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, seems best suited to do so, since the most important source of bottom-up potential, culture, falls within her remit.
4. The grassroots activity to strengthen the European project is "Creativity for Europe". In future, the commission's existing support for creativity "in" Europe should be extended to this field of creativity "for" Europe.