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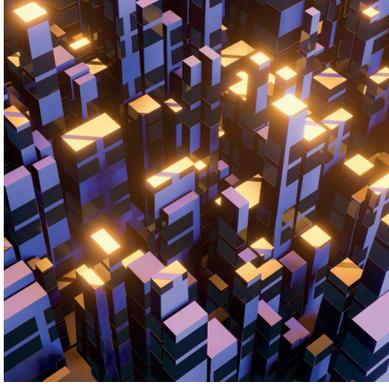


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Project Europe

Peace, culture and solidarity: why be inspired by the founding fathers

The eastern front in flames and the fragility of the continent impose a deep reflection starting from the updating of the architecture conceived by visionary politicians after the end of World War II. Because it is clear that we are facing a European question as such. And the engines of change - and therefore of the overcoming of the status quo - are women and men who, first of all, start from a serious reflection on the ideal presuppositions of our conception of life. Involving young people in particular in the necessary process. Culture in the open field.

Europe is a continent of thinkers, artists and inventors but also of warriors and demagogues. We have great architecture and regional cuisines, but we have also been responsible for the most terrible wars in world history. Then came Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman with their ideas about a European sharing economy, the most creative political project of the twentieth century. They created the European peace machine. Just ten years after the second World War, the winners and losers voluntarily came together to share sovereignty in the production of coal, steel, and nuclear energy, thereby Europeanising the hardware of war and creating the basis for sustainable peace, security, and prosperity in Europe. This was also a response to the challenge from the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact – which, nowadays, is rarely mentioned in the promotional story of the European project.

In recent years, it has become fashionable for politicians and public intellectuals to wonder about the future of the European project. Its founding narrative of peace and solidarity, they argue, was no longer relevant and was no longer understood by young people.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine is reminiscent of the power politics of the 1930s. War in Europe is back and no longer simply a distant memory. Peace and security were important motives for eastern European countries to join the EU. Now, they feel vindicated. Putin has reminded us all that our European narrative is as relevant today as it was almost 70 years ago. We must pursue it as seriously and creatively as the founding fathers of the European project did.

How does one apply this European narrative to the current reality?

Peace and Recovery: Europe's most urgent task is to maintain peace and security across the continent, including at its eastern edge. The European Union must be a peace machine again, do whatever it takes to stop the war and keep it from spreading. The EU should make a concrete peace plan, project hope and opportunity for its current and future members. Immediately Ukraine and Moldova should be included in the EU's 750 billion Euro Resilience and Recovery

Plan, the European Marshall Plan of our times. War and peace in Ukraine are not a regional issue, it is a European issue.

Europe's public space

We need a European digital space that offers a framework for togetherness, for exchange, for real European communication, a public space that can withstand war propaganda, fake news, cyber terrorism and divisive filter bubbles. Putin's propaganda war also shows that it is simply irresponsible to be left to the invisible hand of the market, dominated by foreign tech firms and social media. Europe need a massive investment in the European digital architecture based on democratic values and standards. This is about peace, security, identity, democracy, and the future of the European model. Creating such European digital space should be a creative Airbus moment.

Culture change

Artists and cultural figures are drivers of change. They confront us with our assumptions of what life should be. They provide resistance against the Putin narrative and lies, they keep the connection across polarized lines, they imagine a better Europe beyond war, spheres of influence, polarization and simplistic talk of growth rates. They can help save Europe from nostalgia for 20th-century nationalism. They give hope in times of anxiety. Investing in arts and culture in times like these is an investment in our common futures. Most EU members states have signed up to the Cultural Deal for Europe which commit at least 2% of the EU Recovery Funds to culture and creative industries. This should apply to Ukraine as well.

European experience

We must invest in European solidarity and experiences of all sorts: working together, studying together, playing sports, creating startups and helping each other out in times of crisis. Shared experiences create a sense of belonging, a European sense of purpose separate from big EU declarations. The EU's Erasmus programme, co-developed and managed by the European Cultural Foundation in its first decade, is the world biggest student exchange programme. It should be considered a pilot for a much bigger investment, which goes well beyond students and young people. We need an Erasmus for all. Common experiences build peace and solidarity and they should be open to all people of Europe.

Stars of Europe

We should honour the everyday heroes of Europe and set up a system to recognise exemplary acts of European solidarity, for building European communities and for defending European values. So far there are only national honours systems. Does this mean that there are only national heroes? There is no better time than now to celebrate the everyday Stars of Europe.

Putin's war on Ukraine has reminded us that Europe's founding narrative of peace, security, solidarity and prosperity is as relevant and essential as ever. Instead of looking for the future of Europe at conferences and roundtable discussions, we should return to our original narrative and adapt it to today's challenges.

Europe does not need to search for a new narrative: it is right here, in front of our eyes.



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*André Wilkens is the director of the European Cultural Foundation, based in Amsterdam. In response to the war on Ukraine the European Cultural Foundation has set up the Culture of Solidarity Fund for Ukraine.
<https://culturalfoundation.eu/stories/culture-of-solidarity-fund-ukraine-edition/>*