

**OPEN LETTER TO THE EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT FOR
TECH SOVEREIGNTY, SECURITY AND DEMOCRACY OF THE
EUROPEAN COMMISSION, HENNA VIRKKUNEN
ON BEHALF OF EUROPE'S CULTURAL HERITAGE SECTOR**

Dear Executive Vice-President Virkkunen,

Our culture and history are the foundation of our European way of life, as President Ursula von der Leyen rightly acknowledges in the Commission's 2024–2029 political guidelines. Beyond its immense intrinsic value, our cultural and creative capital fuels innovation, enhances competitiveness and can be a strategic asset for Europe's global leadership in a shifting digital landscape. As the European Commission and the Member States finalise the Digital Europe Programme (DEP) Work Plan 2025-2027, **we, the undersigned, urge you to prioritise its only earmarked cultural investment: the [common European data space for cultural heritage](#)**. Currently, underfunding risks weakening its potential to drive a value-based, competitive and collaborative digital future in Europe.

Over the past months, we, along with other leading cultural heritage institutions and networks —representing over 3,000 organisations— have expressed our concerns to the Commission regarding the significant underfunding of the data space and the complete lack of funding for supporting projects in the Work Plan. Ministers of Culture and Member States' representatives in the DEP Coordination Committee have also raised this issue, yet it remains unresolved in the latest proposal text. **As the only cultural initiative within Digital Europe**, this comes at a critical moment when the EU should be increasing, not decreasing, its investment in culture and innovation.

Culture is the space where we negotiate how we live¹. We fully support your mission to harness Europe's strengths to secure technological sovereignty. As tech giants scale back on diversity, inclusion, and equal access to reliable and balanced information, we uphold Europe's cultural heritage as both a reflection of our history and values and a path for shaping our future on our own terms. In a volatile digital landscape, fraught with global political challenges, Europe must take a stand and the time to act is now. We must build innovative, competitive data infrastructures and services, rooted in

¹ Cultural Deal for Europe annual policy conversation 'Culture: The Compass for Europe's Future' held on 4 February 2025 by major cultural and heritage networks.

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democratic values, in human rights and for the public interest. The data space is a unique opportunity to realise this ambition.

The foundation of Europe's competitiveness lies in its people. As the [Competitiveness Compass](#) shows, Europe is home to world-class scientists and vibrant cultural and creative industries. Digital culture fuels these sectors through the reuse of heritage data — from education and research, to entertainment and tourism, where 40% of all travel is motivated by culture, as well as other industries. This presents the EU with an opportunity to lead in a sector of significant competitive advantage — culture and creativity — while fostering innovation both within and across sectors.

The data space for cultural heritage —Europe's most advanced data space to date— can serve as a blueprint for less mature data spaces. Over the past decade, with the vital support of the EU and Member States, our sector has developed standards and frameworks based on open, interoperable and democratic principles. We have built a rich, high-quality and multilingual collection of over 59 million digitised objects from cultural institutions across Europe and a vibrant global network of professionals with the potential to further expand and re-use this data offer in the future. This forms the foundation of the data space, ready to scale its impact and drive experimentation with advanced technologies like AI — one that is both cutting-edge and value-based. With the data space, cultural heritage stands at the doorstep of transformative change — yet, investment must match the scale of this ambition.

We applaud the European Commission President's clear determination to make it easier for people —especially younger generations— to access and benefit from Europe's rich cultural heritage. The data space holds immense potential to equip Europe's next generation of citizens with critical thinking, which is vital in today's fight against misinformation and central to our joint work on safeguarding democracy and security.

Therefore, we, a pan-European community of 32 organisations and networks, call on the European Commission to increase funding for the data space to ensure it thrives, benefiting the heritage sector, citizens and businesses across Europe. **In these turbulent times, championing a European digital model is not just an economic imperative — it is crucial for Europe's future as a cultural and democratic powerhouse.**

We rely on your support to ensure the sustainability and growth of the data space as a critical step in fulfilling this commitment.

SIGNATORIES (In alphabetical order)

1. 4CH - Competence Centre for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage
2. AI4LAM - Artificial Intelligence in Libraries, Archives, and Museums
3. AIT Angewandte Informationstechnik Forschungsgesellschaft mbH
4. AIT Austrian Institute of Technology
5. APEF - Archives Portal Europe Foundation
6. Austrian National Library
7. Bibliothèque nationale de France - National Library of France
8. Creative Commons
9. Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek (DDB)
10. DFF – Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum
11. Europa Nostra
12. Europeana Aggregators' Forum
13. Europeana Foundation
14. Europeana Network Association
15. German National Library - Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
16. KB - National Library of the Netherlands
17. Leiden University Libraries
18. Michael Culture Association
19. Musiikkiarkisto – Music Archive Finland
20. National Archives of Finland
21. National Library of Serbia
22. National Library of the Czech Republic
23. Network of European Museum Organisations - NEMO
24. Open Future
25. State Archives of Belgium
26. Statens Museum for Kunst - National Gallery of Denmark
27. Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SPK) - Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation
28. The Conference of European National Librarians (CENL)
29. The National Library of Finland
30. The Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision
31. Time Machine Organisation (TMO)
32. TU Delft Library