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Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – AgoraEU

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Reference document: Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the 'AgoraEU' programme for the period 2028-2034, and repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/692 and (EU) 2021/818

COM(2025) 550 final

I. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AMENDMENTS

Amendment 1

Preamble, Recital 2

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
Culture and media and promotion and respect of Union values are all crucial components of a free, fair, diverse, inclusive and cohesive Union. Citizens' participation and engagement, in due respect of Union values, constitutes the basis of the democratic life of the Union, with media playing a crucial role in shaping public opinion and free debate. Audiovisual works and all other forms of cultural and creative expressions, including cultural heritage, are essential to Europe's diversity and to forging societal resilience and mutual understanding among European citizens and communities.	Culture and media and promotion and respect of Union values are all crucial components of a free, fair, diverse, inclusive and cohesive Union. Citizens' participation and engagement, in due respect of Union values, constitutes the basis of the democratic life of the Union, with media playing a crucial role in shaping public opinion and free debate. Audiovisual works and all other forms of cultural and creative expressions, including cultural heritage, are essential to Europe's diversity and to forging societal resilience and mutual understanding among European citizens and communities. ***Promoting these values is a joint responsibility of all levels of government in the EU and requires meaningful participation and the incorporation of lived-experience of underrepresented groups, such as but not limited to women, young people, persons with disabilities, ethnic, national, linguistic or sexual minorities, people living in disadvantaged territories and other marginalised groups.***

Reason

Applying the principle of subsidiarity.

Amendment 2

Preamble, Recital 7

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
The cultural and creative sectors, including performing arts (such as theatre and dance), literature and book publishing, music, visual arts, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, architecture, archives, libraries and museums, crafts and design (including fashion design), serve as 'public good', generating meaning and embodying the values of the	The cultural and creative sectors, including performing arts (such as theatre and dance), literature and book publishing, music, visual arts, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, architecture, archives, libraries and museums, crafts and design (including fashion design), serve as 'public good', generating meaning and embodying the values of the

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
Union. They are also a great asset for the Union and its regions, attracting sustainable tourism and projecting the image of a dynamic continent on the world stage. The Programme should take into account, on the one hand, their intrinsic and artistic value, as well as, on the other hand, their extrinsic social and economic contributions, including to social and territorial cohesion, well-being and health, growth and job creation, competitiveness, creativity and innovation.	Union. They are also a great asset for the Union and its regions, attracting sustainable tourism and projecting the image of a dynamic continent on the world stage. The Programme should take into account, on the one hand, their intrinsic and artistic value, as well as, on the other hand, their extrinsic social and economic contributions, including to social and territorial cohesion, well-being and health, growth and job creation, competitiveness, ***sustainable development, meaningful and quality employment,*** creativity and innovation. ***The Programme should therefore work in close partnership with the Member States and the local and regional level based on the principles of partnership and multilevel governance.***

Reason

Bigger emphasis on the importance of meaningful, fulfilling quality jobs instead of economic growth/competitiveness.

Amendment 3

Preamble, Recital 8

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
The cultural and creative sectors are however fragmented along national and linguistic lines in the Union. They also face multiple challenges, such as attacks on freedom of artistic expression, precarious working conditions, digital transformations with the rise of artificial intelligence, and the need to adapt to climate change. The Programme should help those sectors respond to such challenges, untap their full potential and project themselves resolutely into the future while ensuring the widest participation, including from local and regional actors, through various channels and formats***.***	The cultural and creative sectors are however fragmented along national and linguistic lines in the Union. They also face multiple challenges, such as attacks on freedom of artistic expression, precarious working conditions ***of artists and cultural workers***, digital transformations with the rise of artificial intelligence, and the need to adapt to climate change. The Programme should help ***support*** those sectors respond to such challenges***, including the responsible use of artificial intelligence***, untap their full potential and project themselves resolutely into the future while ensuring the widest participation, including from local and regional actors, through various channels and formats***;***

Reason

Clarifying the workers who are at risk of precarious working conditions and potential challenges.

Amendment 4

Preamble, Recital 10

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
The Programme should also give financial support to the European Heritage Label and the European Capitals of Culture actions, that celebrate and preserve Europe's rich	The Programme should also give financial support to the European Heritage Label and the European Capitals of Culture actions, that celebrate and preserve Europe's rich

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
cultural diversity and heritage, connecting it to the local level and contributing to culture-driven development strategies.	cultural diversity and heritage, connecting it to the local ***and regional*** level and contributing to culture-driven development strategies.

Reason

Clarifying that not just EU, national, local, but also regional level is important in the Programme.

Amendment 5

Preamble, Recital 13

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
News media outlets and journalists across the Union are under increased pressure, notably due to the rise of global online platforms, shifting consumption habits and growing spread of disinformation. These challenges impact news revenues and distribution, undermining the viability and public trust in news media outlets, and limiting citizens' access to diverse, professionally produced European journalistic content. The Union should support a viable, independent and diverse information ecosystem, protect journalists under threat, promote media freedom and pluralism, and reinforce the integrity of the information space, by promoting measures and enhancing cooperation aimed at tackling disinformation and supporting digital and media literacy, including for young people.	News media outlets and journalists across the Union are under increased pressure, notably due to the rise of global online platforms, shifting consumption habits***, the*** growing spread of disinformation ***and misinformation, as well as global political problems, including emerging authoritarian tendencies that may have an impact on the independence and freedom of the press. Particular attention should be paid to the protection of journalists at risk, including those working at local and regional level.*** These challenges impact news revenues and distribution, undermining the viability and public trust in news media outlets, and limiting citizens' access to diverse, professionally produced European journalistic content. The Union should support a viable, independent and diverse information ecosystem, protect journalists under threat, promote media freedom and pluralism, and reinforce the integrity of the information space, by promoting measures and enhancing cooperation aimed at tackling disinformation and supporting digital and media literacy, including for young people.

Reason

Draw attention to the specific situation journalists at risk are in, but without reference to situations not clearly defined, without common definition.

Amendment 6

Preamble, Recital 15

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
The protection and promotion of fundamental rights contributes to the construction of a more democratic Union. Non-discrimination is a core principle of the Union enshrined in Article 19 TFEU and in Article 21 of the Charter. Working towards an equal and discrimination-free society contributes to untapping the potential of individuals in their diversity and to cultural, economic and social growth. It also helps to address important root	The protection and promotion of fundamental rights contributes to the construction of a more democratic Union. Non-discrimination is a core principle of the Union enshrined in Article 19 TFEU and in Article 21 of the Charter. Working towards an equal and discrimination-free society contributes to untapping the potential of individuals in their diversity and to cultural, economic and social growth. It also helps to address important root causes of

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
causes of violence against vulnerable groups, which in turn is a frontal attack on equality. Therefore, the Programme should promote actions to address all forms of discrimination and intolerance, namely direct and indirect discrimination, paying attention to the specific forms of structural and intersectional discrimination, with a view to supporting relevant Union policy frameworks. The Programme should support actions to prevent and combat all forms of xenophobia and racism, antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, interphobia, intolerance and discrimination based on gender identity, intolerance towards persons belonging to minorities including Roma, as well as hate speech. The Programme should also contribute to enabling the Union to deliver on the commitment taken as Party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted on 13 December 2006[1] to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities.	violence against vulnerable groups, which in turn is a frontal attack on equality. Therefore, the Programme should promote actions to address all forms of discrimination and intolerance, namely direct and indirect discrimination, paying attention to the specific forms of structural and intersectional discrimination, with a view to supporting relevant Union policy frameworks. ***Actions supported by the Programme should explicitly address structural and intersectional discrimination and promote gender equality and LGBTIQ equality across all strands.*** The Programme should support actions to prevent and combat all forms of xenophobia and racism, antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, interphobia, intolerance and discrimination based on gender identity, intolerance towards persons belonging to minorities including Roma ***and ethnic, national and linguistic minorities***, as well as hate speech – ***explicitly, across all strands, addressing inter alia structural and intersectional discrimination***. The Programme should also contribute to enabling the Union to deliver on the commitment taken as Party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted on 13 December 2006[1] to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities.
[1] OJ L 23, 27.01.2010, p. 35.	[1] OJ L 23, 27.01.2010, p. 35.

Reason

Highlight discrimination against marginalised communities, with a focus on intersectionality.

Amendment 7

Preamble, Recital 16

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
The Programme shall be implemented by work programmes referred to in Article 110 Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509. The work programmes shall set out, where applicable, the activities and related amounts of Union support to be implemented through the ECF InvestEU instrument.	The Programme shall be implemented by work programmes referred to in Article 110 Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509. The work programmes shall set out, where applicable, the activities and related amounts of Union support to be implemented through the ECF InvestEU instrument. ***The Programme shall include indicators on territorial participation and funding distribution to evaluate the Programme's contribution to cohesion and multilevel governance.***

Reason

Territorial approach in line with CoR principles.

Amendment 8

Preamble, Recital 21

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
Encouraging citizens to play a more active role in democracy at Union level will strengthen European civil society and foster the development of a European identity. Civil society therefore needs to be supported in promoting, safeguarding and raising awareness of Union values and in contributing to the effective enjoyment of rights under Union law. When Union citizens participate in the democratic life of the Union, they contribute to making a reality representative democracy, a principle on which the functioning of the Union is founded and which gives concrete expression to the value of democracy enshrined in Article 2 TEU.	Encouraging citizens to play a more active role in democracy at Union level will strengthen European civil society and foster the development of a European identity. Civil society therefore needs to be supported in promoting, safeguarding and raising awareness of Union values and in contributing to the effective enjoyment of rights under Union law. ***This encouragement should take place with the active involvement of LRAs in the EU. This should include participatory and deliberative mechanisms at local and regional level, including youth participation and outreach to disadvantaged or marginalised communities.*** When Union citizens participate in the democratic life of the Union, they contribute to making a reality representative democracy, a principle on which the functioning of the Union is founded and which gives concrete expression to the value of democracy enshrined in Article 2 TEU.

Reason

Clarifying the role of LRAs.

Amendment 9

Preamble, Recital 23

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
Civil society organisations, and other civic space actors, such as independent human rights bodies, equality bodies and Ombudspersons Institutions, play a vital role in contributing to the implementation of policy, encouraging people's participation, holding institutions accountable, and driving positive change. The Programme should help ensure sufficient resources and an enabling environment for them to operate independently, freely, safely, and effectively. To this end, Union funding should complement efforts at national level by supporting, protecting, empowering and building their capacity, as emphasised in the European Parliament resolution of 19 April 2018, as well as Council conclusions of 10 March 2023 and 7 March 2025. Civil society also plays an important role in ensuring an effective implementation of Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council by fostering a speak-up culture and a favourable environment for whistleblowers.	Civil society organisations, and other civic space actors, such as independent human rights bodies, equality bodies and Ombudspersons Institutions, play a vital role in contributing to the implementation of policy, encouraging people's participation, holding institutions accountable, and driving positive change. The Programme should help ensure sufficient resources and an enabling environment for them to operate independently, freely, safely, and effectively. To this end, Union funding should complement efforts at national***, regional and local*** level by supporting, protecting, empowering and building their capacity, as emphasised in the European Parliament resolution of 19 April 2018, as well as Council conclusions of 10 March 2023 and 7 March 2025. Civil society also plays an important role in ensuring an effective implementation of Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council by fostering a speak-up culture and a favourable environment for whistleblowers.

Reason

Clarifying that not just EU, national, local, but also regional level is important in the Programme.

Amendment 10

Preamble, Recital 39

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
Since the objectives of this Regulation cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States but can rather, by reason of the transnational nature of the challenges, be better achieved at Union level, the Union may adopt measures, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, as set out in Article 5 TEU. In accordance with the principle of proportionality, as set out in that Article, this Regulation does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve those objectives.	Since the objectives of this Regulation cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States but can rather, by reason of the transnational nature of the challenges, be better achieved at Union level, the Union may adopt measures, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, as set out in Article 5 TEU. In accordance with the principle of proportionality, as set out in that Article, this Regulation does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve those objectives. ***In implementing the Programme, the principles of partnership, multilevel governance and subsidiarity shall be respected, ensuring the meaningful participation of local and regional authorities throughout the programme cycle. Proportionality should also be ensured in administrative terms, through simplified procedures and tailored support for small beneficiaries and grassroots actors.***

Reason

Partnership and multilevel governance to be introduced.

Amendment 11

Article 3(2)(a), add new point after i)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
	(ii) promote the exchange of experience and collaboration of local and regional authorities throughout the EU, including social partners and civil society, to strengthen inclusive cultural participation, to promote European culture and a sense of belonging to the EU;

Reason

Exchange of experience is crucial for interterritorial capacity building.

Amendment 12

Article 3(2)(c)(iii)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
(iii) contribute to enhancing democratic participation and upholding the rule of law ('democratic participation and rule of law').	(iiii) contribute to enhancing democratic participation and upholding the rule of law ('democratic participation and rule of law')***, with a particular focus on strengthening local democracy***.

Reason

Local democracy is crucial, not just country or EU level.

Amendment 13

Article 4(b)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
improving access to and participation in culture and cultural heritage for all, notably for young people, and strengthening social resilience and social cohesion, in particular intergenerational fairness, equality and diversity, through cultural engagement;	***Ensuring affordability and*** access to and participation in culture and cultural heritage for all, notably for young people***, low-income groups and persons with disabilities***, and strengthening social resilience and social cohesion, in particular intergenerational fairness, equality and diversity, through cultural engagement***, particularly at local and regional level***;

Reason

LRA focus.

Amendment 14

Article 4(d)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
strengthening the capacity and skills in the cultural and creative sectors to drive innovation and competitiveness and to navigate the green and digital transitions, including through support for networks of cultural and creative organisations, training and peer-learning activities;	strengthening the capacity and skills in the cultural and creative sectors to drive innovation and competitiveness and to ***actively contribute to and shape*** the ***demographic,*** green and digital transitions***, including by supporting environmentally sustainable cultural practices, climate-responsible production and dissemination methods, and also resource-efficient mobility of artists and cultural professionals, and actions contributing to the Union's climate objectives***, including through ***support for resource-efficient mobility of artists and cultural professionals,*** support for networks of cultural and creative organisations, training and ***peer-learning*** activities***, with particular attention to addressing territorial disparities and strengthening access to culture across regions***;

Reason

Refocuses the text on tangible added value for citizens by prioritising access to culture, skills and mobility and strengthens the territorial dimension, while removing climate-specific language not directly relevant to the objectives of the initiative.

Amendment 15

Article 4,), add new point after d)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
	(e) supporting preservation and transmission of living heritage and traditional crafts through capacity-building support, mentoring schemes and

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
	cooperation with vocational education providers, ensuring meaningful participation of culturally diverse communities and equitable territorial access.

Reason

Living heritage and traditional crafts embody Europe's diverse cultural knowledge, fostering education and social cohesion. Their explicit recognition ensures fair, accessible support for practitioners, strengthening intergenerational continuity, especially in regions with demographic challenges.

Amendment 16

Article 5(c)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
building audiences for European audiovisual works, including through a network of European cinemas, festivals and outreach campaigns, and addressing in particular young Europeans and underserved communities;	building audiences for European audiovisual works, including through a network of European cinemas, festivals and outreach campaigns, ***networking and support for local and regional film festivals and also audiovisual festivals,*** and addressing in particular young Europeans and underserved communities;

Reason

Local and regional issues to be in the focus too.

Amendment 17

Article 5,), add new point after e)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
	(f) supporting local and regional media production and journalism through dedicated, territorially-calibrated funding for public service broadcasting, independent journalism and print media in smaller towns and rural regions where commercial viability is constrained by limited market size.

Reason

Local and regional media sustain informed citizenship and democracy, but their viability varies across the EU. In small towns and rural areas, weak economic bases create 'media deserts' that harm civic life. Targeted, proportionate funding is vital to maintain pluralistic information ecosystems.

Amendment 18

Article 7

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
(a) promoting equality, and preventing and fighting against discrimination on the grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, and all forms of racism and intolerance;	(a) promoting equality ***and inclusion*** and preventing and fighting against discrimination on the grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, and all forms of racism and intolerance***, including those against ethnic, national, religious or linguistic minorities.***

Reason

The protection of minorities should be indicated in the text without the need for other forms of clarification. Initially these were covered by the amendment for Article 8 of the proposal.

Amendment 19

Article 8, (a)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
preventing, responding to and fighting at all levels all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, domestic violence, and violence against children, young and older people, LGBTIQ people, persons with disabilities and other groups at risk;	preventing, ***including at local and regional level,*** responding to and fighting***, through an integrated and rights-based approach and*** at all levels***, the root causes and results of*** all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, domestic violence, and violence against children, young and older people, LGBTIQ people, persons with disabilities***, ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities*** and other groups at risk; ***promoting social, economic and institutional accountability, equality and empowerment at all levels;***

Reason

Prevention and response to violence must also take place at the LRA level. Greater emphasis should be placed on addressing root causes to prevent it effectively and promote accountability, shifting commitment from individuals to a stronger institutional level.

Amendment 20

Article 10, (a)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
cross-sectoral cooperation and innovation across the cultural, media and civic fields, and protection of the integrity of the public discourse, thereby bolstering democratic resilience, societal preparedness and cultural and civic engagement;	cross-sectoral cooperation and innovation across the cultural, media and civic fields, and ***promotion*** of ***transparency and plurality in*** public discourse***, while fully respecting freedom of expression and media freedom***, thereby bolstering democratic resilience, societal preparedness and cultural and civic engagement;

Reason

Clarifying the text.

Amendment 21

Article 11, (4)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
The financial envelope referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article and the amounts of additional resources referred to in Article 12 may also be used for technical and administrative assistance for the implementation of the Programme, such as preparatory, monitoring, control, audit and evaluation activities, corporate information technology systems and platforms, information and communication activities, including corporate communication on the political priorities of the Union, and all other technical and administrative assistance or staff-related expenses incurred by the Commission for the management of the Programme.	The financial envelope referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article and the amounts of additional resources referred to in Article 12 may also be used for technical and administrative assistance for the implementation of the Programme, such as preparatory, monitoring, control, audit and evaluation activities, corporate information technology systems and platforms, information***,*** and communication ***and dissemination*** activities, including corporate communication on the political priorities of the Union***, and also on the opportunities offered by the Programme***, and all other technical and administrative assistance or staff-related expenses incurred by the Commission for the management of the Programme.

Reason

Clarify the proposal based on the outcome of the stakeholders' consultation.

Amendment 22

Article 16

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
(4) Award procedures affecting security or public order, in particular concerning strategic assets and interests of the Union or its Member States, shall be restricted in accordance with Article 136 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509.	(4) Award procedures affecting security or public order, in particular concerning strategic assets and interests of the Union or its Member States, shall be restricted in accordance with Article 136 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509. ***Eligibility and award procedures shall ensure a fair geographical balance and facilitate access for local and regional authorities and smaller operators, including through appropriate capacity-building measures.***

Reason

Territorial balanced practice needed.

Amendment 23

Article 17

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
The Programme shall be implemented by work programmes referred to in Article 110 Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509. The work programmes shall set out, where applicable, the activities and related amounts of Union support to be implemented through the ECF InvestEU instrument.	The Programme shall be implemented by work programmes referred to in Article 110 Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509. The work programmes shall set out, where applicable, the activities and related amounts of Union support to be implemented through the ECF InvestEU instrument. ***The Work Programmes should be based on***

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
	systematic engagement of key stakeholders and also the local and regional authorities. The Programme shall include clear goals regarding territorial balance of support and participation, social inclusion and the allocation of financial resources to evaluate the Programme's contribution to cohesion, equality and multilevel governance.

Reason

Territorial approach in line with CoR principles.

II. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR)

1. stresses that a comprehensive understanding of European culture and identity should also take into account the historical impact of Europe's colonial foundations and their lasting social, cultural and economic consequences, including their role in shaping cultural production, knowledge systems and global inequalities; underlines the importance of fostering critical historical awareness, intercultural dialogue and inclusive narratives that reflect this responsibility;

2. appreciates that the new programme, conceived in a genuinely holistic manner, preserves and explicitly highlights in its very name the historical origins of European democracy, the public sphere, civic equality and the European way of thinking. These foundations of our contemporary world were first shaped in world history in a single city – Athens – and in a single place: the agora. This symbolic reference in itself underlines the central and distinctive role of local and regional authorities as the primary spaces where democracy is lived, practised and renewed;

3. believes that the AgoraEU Programme represents a major legislative opportunity to ensure that local and regional authorities are recognised as implementing partners in upholding EU values, promoting cultural diversity and strengthening democratic engagement and equal opportunities;

4. calls for the Programme to clearly define and operationalise the concept of European added value, including its territorial dimension, in order to ensure that Union funding is directed towards actions that cannot be sufficiently achieved by Member States, regions or cities alone and that generate measurable benefits at European, national, regional and local level, while promoting social inclusion, democratic participation and equal opportunities across all territories;

5. calls on the European Commission, in this spirit and also in light of the increasingly widespread internal and external threats affecting European culture and values, and the European intellectual and democratic space, to ensure that, in the next multiannual financial framework, the financial resources earmarked for AgoraEU are commensurate with the level of ambition of the programme and sufficient to preserve in real terms, taking into account inflation and the programme's expanded objectives; stresses that any strengthening of AgoraEU should be ensured through adequate overall MFF resources and, where appropriate, a reinforced system of own resources, and not through reallocations from cohesion policy or other key social and cultural investment programmes;

6. calls for the European Commission, taking into account the structural and territorial inequalities observed under previous programmes, to engage in targeted consultations with Europe's regional and local authorities and civil society organisations. This is essential to ensure that the programme effectively contributes to the achievement of its objectives in all regions. Experience clearly shows that regions which fall outside the focus of public policies are significantly more vulnerable to the spread of extremist views and to heightened risks of political instability; this is especially important where socioeconomic inequalities, poverty and social exclusion undermine trust in institutions and fuel polarisation;

7. underlines that this programme represents the very soul of the next multiannual financial framework and embodies the shared European value base and spirit, so it recommends that access to its sources be ensured for applicants from all Member States without undue restrictions. In this context, it stresses that in order to guarantee access of local and regional authorities and other local and regional eligible organisations to the Programme, even in the context of political challenges or disputes at member state level, support should be designed to reach beneficiaries without interference or obstacles posed by member state related issues, in full respect of rule of- law, conditionality and the protection of EU values;

8. recommends that, for the implementation and dissemination of small and micro-level actions, appropriate tools be put in place that also provide for capacity building and mentoring, including through local and regional support structures. Furthermore, in order to ensure a territorially balanced implementation of these initiatives, it calls for the introduction of effective governance frameworks that are sufficiently flexible and that duly take into account the specific characteristics and needs of the local and regional context;

9. regrets that, compared to previous regulations, the current proposal does not include an indicative list of measures or actions. It underlines that such an element is essential to ensure clarity and transparency, allowing targeted actors to prepare in advance and to engage meaningfully with the programme. At the same time, it considers that the inclusion of an indicative list would help to prevent the risk of subsequent interpretations diverging from the programme's original objectives;

10. encourages the cross-border cultural creation, cooperation, participation and accessibility, and cross-border circulation of a diversity of cultural works. Furthermore, supports the flexible use of framework, cascade and joint programmes, designed to respond to common needs that are present across territories – such as those of European art cinemas, theatres, music halls and similar cultural venues – while at the same time contributing to the reduction of territorial imbalances. Such approaches should be capable of accommodating territorial specificities, the capacities and needs of target groups, and the most up-to-date techniques available, based on proven and evidence-based practices;

11. calls on fostering transnational town and city twinning networks, cross-border municipal partnerships and sister-region initiatives to promote direct democratic participation, cultural exchange and inter-communal solidarity, with dedicated funding for sustained multi-annual cooperation;

12. underlines that innovation, culture and cultural heritage, including heritage protection, are all equally important policy areas. While the development of synergies between them is to be encouraged, it stresses that sector-specific social, business and service innovation must also be clearly supported and not limited solely to technological innovation, not least given the cultural and creative sectors' role in driving socially and environmentally sustainable approaches to the green and digital transitions. At the same time, it considers that these fields – in particular cultural heritage and heritage protection – should also be addressed as distinct policy strands in their own right, reflecting Europe's long-standing global leadership in this area, including across the diverse forms of its built heritage;

13. with particular regard to local and regional media production and the press – including print media and broadcast television and radio, with a specific emphasis on public service broadcasting – it calls for the introduction of dedicated, earmarked support schemes that are proportionate to the importance of these functions and commensurate with their essential role;

14. proposes that, in order to improve territorial balance and to contribute to a stronger recognition of the value of culture within territorial and local development strategies, the programme should provide targeted support for locally implemented, subsidiarity-based initiatives. In cases where a city, area or region has a well-developed, participatory, culture-based development strategy – comparable, for example, to European Capital of Culture cities or the European Heritage Label – particular support should be made available, including through CLLD or LEADER local action groups in rural and urban areas. Such an approach would strengthen the place-based character of the policy, enhance its alignment with territorial realities and mobilise local communities and their resources in support of the programme's objectives;

15. emphasises that AgoraEU is evidence-driven and consistent with its policy vision: ensuring that European values and cultural vitality are sustained through strong local participation, accessible funding and multilevel cooperation. By referencing these findings, the CoR reinforces its call for greater involvement of LRAs in programme governance, monitoring and implementation, ensuring that the benefits of AgoraEU are fully realised across all regions and communities of the Union;

16. calls for a strengthened, result-oriented performance framework, including clear, measurable and relevant methods capable of assessing not only outputs but also results and impacts of the Programme at local, regional and national level, in particular with regard to democratic participation, media freedom and fundamental rights and the Programme's contribution to social and territorial cohesion and equal opportunities;

17. calls for the establishment of clear standards and guidance for data collection, verification and aggregation, including at local and regional level, ensuring the quality, reliability and auditability of performance data across all strands of the Programme, including, where relevant and feasible, disaggregation that makes visible participation and access gaps affecting women, young people, persons with disabilities and disadvantaged or underrepresented areas;

18. the selected objective-based consolidation of previous programmes (Creative Europe, CERV+) into the new AgoraEU programme should not undermine the various strands (culture, media, citizens' engagement, equality and rights);

19. welcomes the proposed increase in financing but at the same time underlines that the AgoraEU programme forms part of a larger proposal on the next multiannual financial framework (2028-2034); therefore, the outcome of the negotiations on the budget proposal has a great impact on the final form and content of the programme. It is, thus, vital to avoid reducing its share of the EU budget;

20. underlines that the administrative management procedures of the current programmes (application, evaluation and reporting) are still considered to be highly time-consuming and burdensome by a significant number of beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, including young creators and media professionals, in addition to small-sized organisations and LRAs, especially those from disadvantaged areas; expresses concerns that these requirements may disproportionately exclude potential beneficiaries from disadvantaged backgrounds or under-resourced communities, limiting their ability to access, apply for and benefit from the programmes;

21. stresses the need to ensure artistic freedom and freedom of the media, and calls for renewed and continued support for independent films and productions, building on the successful experience of existing support schemes;

22. to this end, LRAs should be systematically consulted in the shaping, implementation and governance of the measures, priorities, actions designed to provide financing for related sectors across Europe;

23. given the multidimensional nature of regional development and the fact that the Treaties aim for economic, social and territorial cohesion, there is a need to review related EU policies through a local and regional perspective, considering their potential impacts on and implications for creating growth, quality jobs, development prospects, social well-being and equal opportunities for all, and the environmental sustainability and quality of EU cities and regions;

24. local and regional authorities are essential partners in delivering these objectives, as they manage most infrastructure, support related ecosystems and uphold democratic participation through local civic initiatives. In order for the proposal to be consistent with the principle of active subsidiarity, LRAs should be meaningfully involved in programming, implementation and evaluation stages;

25. concurs that the scale and effects of the challenges justify EU coordination, but stresses that proportionality must also be assessed in administrative terms. For small municipalities and grassroots organisations, complex application procedures and centralised management could impose disproportionate burdens. The inclusion of capacity-building measures, simplified grant formats (that proved useful, like two step applications or cascade grants), accessible communication, and AgoraEU contact points – at least at national level, but where appropriate, at regional level too – would therefore ensure that proportionality is respected not only in scope but also in accessibility and inclusivity;

26. expresses concern regarding the planned use of financing not linked to cost as a default funding mechanism, which may weaken transparency, accountability and the link between expenditure and results, particularly for local and regional authorities and smaller beneficiaries, including grassroots organisations, independent cultural actors and civil society organisations in disadvantaged or under-resourced areas, and calls for a case-by-case assessment of the most appropriate funding model, ensuring adequate control and financial oversight;

27. suggests, that for both small-scale and grassroots initiatives and measures, the required own contribution should not exceed 10 % of the total eligible costs. This own contribution should be allowed to be covered through national, regional or local co-financing, in order to ensure accessibility for smaller organisations, informal groups and local actors with limited financial capacity, and to avoid excluding bottom-up initiatives with high social and democratic value;

28. holds the opinion that the AgoraEU proposal to fully align with active subsidiarity and multilevel governance, the CoR recommends amending the draft Regulation to recognise the role of LRAs in the programme's governance; introduce territorial participation indicators; and link evaluation criteria to territorial cohesion and citizen engagement;

29. stresses the need for clear governance, management and control arrangements within the Programme, including explicit provisions on accountability, transparency and traceability of expenditure, with the appropriate involvement and meaningful participation of local and regional authorities, in order to ensure sound financial management and effective protection of the Union's financial interests, while safeguarding equitable access to funding and preventing structural and territorial imbalances in implementation;

30. reiterates its commitment to pursuing efforts to safeguard democratic resilience, the rule of law and fundamental rights, particularly in view of the growing threats of interference to the European democratic order– including inter alia hate speech, discrimination and political actions against marginalised communities, national, ethnic and linguistic minorities –, and firmly supports all efforts to ensure an open, fair, inclusive and pluralistic political debate;

31. notes that it is imperative to invest in education, awareness-raising, capacity building and training, and stresses the need for support through funding, programmes and initiatives to help local and regional authorities build a culture of the rule of law, democratic participation and uphold the protection of EU values on the ground;

32. welcomes in this regard the intended balance between simplification and policy relevance, as well as synergies and expected coherence in funding actions previously covered by multiple programmes, for instance in support of media freedom and pluralism and the fight against disinformation under the MEDIA+ strand;

33. calls for clear and systematic identification of complementarities and synergies with other Union programmes and instruments, as well as with national, regional and local funding schemes, in order to avoid duplication of funding and ensure coherent, efficient and impactful use of Union resources across all levels of governance, with particular attention to reinforcing access for smaller beneficiaries and groups at greater risk of exclusion from Union support;

34. highlights that, when designing calls under AgoraEU, due consideration should be given to predictable timelines and realistic deadlines, allowing motivated organisations sufficient time to prepare high-quality applications, particularly in cases where organisations may wish to engage meaningfully with multiple calls within the same programme cycle. Clear advance notice of calls and coordinated scheduling would support quality, inclusiveness and effective participation, without increasing the administrative burden;

35. regrets in this regard that the proposed AgoraEU does not take forward funding actions envisaged for initiatives in the sphere of town-twinning and networks of towns which were provided for under the citizens' engagement and participation strand in the Regulation establishing the CERV programme; calls on the European Commission to reinstate and strengthen these actions, including resources for youth exchanges and inclusive participation of smaller municipalities and rural areas;

36. calls on the European Commission to establish dedicated funding streams for structured exchange networks focused on living heritage, traditional crafts and intergenerational knowledge transmission. The Commission should explore synergies with Europa Nostra and the European Heritage Label to amplify impact and ensure complementarity with heritage protection mechanisms;

37. calls on the European Commission to establish dedicated support for place-based, long-term cultural development strategies, including European Capital of Culture programmes and LEADER-type initiatives integrating territorial cohesion, heritage protection and community engagement as alternatives to discrete project funding;

38. calls on the European Commission to ensure AgoraEU work programmes include a clear indication of eligible measures and priorities, and establish baseline monitoring indicators disaggregated by territorial variables (urban/rural, region, disadvantage index) to systematically track funding distribution and identify underfunding patterns;

39. calls on the European Commission to recognise local and regional authorities as primary forums for democratic participation and prioritise investment in their capacity to deliver culture, media literacy, civic education and participatory deliberation that build trust and sustain the rule of law at territorial level;

40. calls on the European Commission to support educational partnerships pairing local media organisations with schools, libraries and civil society to deliver media literacy and critical digital competence training, emphasising rural communities and populations vulnerable to disinformation;

41. calls on the Commission to ensure AgoraEU evaluation committees include representatives with expertise in regional cultural development and rural innovation, recruited proportionally across Member States and representative of urban, rural and border contexts, with evaluation criteria regularly reviewed for systematic bias;

42. calls on the European Commission to ensure AgoraEU funding supports civil society organisations undergoing generational renewal, providing tailored mentoring in governance and institutional sustainability to facilitate knowledge transfer and increase opportunities for young people and women to lead civic initiatives;

43. calls on the European Commission to explicitly recognise cultural heritage protection and preservation - including tangible and intangible heritage, archaeological heritage and archives - as an autonomous priority objective with dedicated funding mechanisms and expertise, not subordinated to creative economy framings.

Brussels, 6 May 2026.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Kata TÜTTŐ