

Culture

The legal basis of the Culture policy is Article 151 of the Treaty establishing the European Community. Language, literature, performing arts, visual arts, architecture, crafts, the cinema and broadcasting are all part of Europe's cultural diversity. Although belonging to a specific country or region, they represent part of Europe's common cultural heritage. The aim of the European Union is double: to preserve and support this diversity and to help make it accessible to others.

These aims were spelt out in the 1992 Maastricht treaty, which recognised formally for the first time the cultural dimension of European integration.

Cultural industries in the EU - cinema and audiovisual, publishing, music and crafts - are important sources of revenue and of jobs, employing about seven million people. The Union has an economic responsibility towards this sector and it aims to ensure the right conditions in which European industries can compete internationally.

Capitals of culture

Each year, one or two cities are selected as cultural capitals of Europe, thereby qualifying for financial support under Culture 2000. This money funds exhibitions and events highlighting the cultural heritage of the city and its region, plus a wide range of performances, concerts and other shows, which bring together players and artists from across the EU. Experience shows the programme has had a long-term impact on the development of culture and tourism of the cities chosen.

The programme was originally scheduled to end in 2004, but such is its success that it has been renewed for a further 15 years. The Irish city of Cork is the first capital of culture of the new series in 2005, following on from Lille in France and the Italian city of Genoa, the joint capitals of 2004. In 2006, the title passes to Patras in Greece.

The gift of tongues

Support for linguistic diversity is also one of the EU's operating principles. With enlargement in 2004, the number of official Union languages has risen from 11 to 20. The EU requires its legislation to be available in all languages and therefore accessible to all citizens. It also guarantees that any EU citizens can write to an EU institution or body and receive a reply in their own language. In the same way, a member of the European Parliament has the right to represent his or her voters in their own language when he or she rises to speak.