

Defend AgoraEU: Invest in European Citizens' Future

An open letter ahead of the European Council, 15 - 16 October 2026

To the Members of the European Council,

As you meet in Brussels to discuss Europe's competitiveness and the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the undersigned **call on you to preserve and defend a robust AgoraEU budget.**

In his United Nations General Assembly Address, President of the Republic of Finland, Alexander Stubb, stated that "the first remedy for a world in disorder is rule of law". The next MFF is the opportunity to shape the Europe we want to build and defend in a context of growing geopolitical challenges, social tensions, declining trust in institutions, and rapid technological transformation.

AgoraEU is central to that task. In this context of growing disillusionment and fracturing communities, **AgoraEU supports organisations and spaces that bring people together across territories, to make their voices heard and participate with equal opportunities and without discrimination.** When people feel that their rights are respected and policies address their needs, grievances and hope for the future, they are more likely to come together around a shared European project in times of uncertainty and change. While the EU Treaties promise rights, equality and wellbeing for all, AgoraEU has the power to help fulfil this promise through artistic and media freedom, culture and the active participation of people living in the EU.

Cultural organisations, films, press and journalism, civil society organisations, and local networks provide this infrastructure, helping people connect, access reliable information, understand and defend their rights, and contribute to decisions affecting their lives. Studies have shown that protection of democracy and fundamental values is cited as the primary reason Europeans trust the EU (42%), ahead of protection against external threats (33%).¹ Similarly, 87% of Europeans agreed that cultural exchange should have a very important place in the EU, helping citizens from different countries to feel more European.²

Securing Europe's future requires more than physical, socio-cultural, digital and security infrastructure. It needs the local networks, skills, creativity, and experiences that enable people to connect, trust each other, and cooperate. **Reliable information and trusted local networks help communities respond to economic and natural disruption, navigate technological change and better navigate a digitalised society, while cross-border cooperation enables them to share practical solutions to better defend our democracies.** The scale of the challenge is clear: two-thirds of Europeans reported encountering

¹ European Commission, *Eurobarometer shows great majority of Europeans see benefits from EU membership and the EU as a pillar of stability and security*, 8 May 2026.

² European Commission, *Europeans' attitudes towards culture*, Special Eurobarometer 562, May 2025.

disinformation at least more than once during the preceding seven days. AgoraEU matters most precisely in remote and economically disadvantaged areas, already affected by news deserts.³

AgoraEU is also integral to Europe's competitiveness agenda. For example, the annual budget for groups working to implement Europe's digital rulebook and safeguard rights online is equivalent to €0.27 per resident annually across the EU countries. **Strong communities, trusted information, cultural vitality and civic participation are foundations for economic dynamism, social stability and long-term growth.** Eurostat recorded 8.9 million people in cultural employment, including journalism, publishing and broadcasting across the EU in 2025, representing 4.3% of total EU employment,⁴ more than agriculture, forestry and fishing (8.4 million in 2023).⁵

Through culture, media, rights and civic participation, AgoraEU strengthens democratic resilience, information integrity, social cohesion and local empowerment; **assets that are essential to Europe's sovereignty, competitiveness and innovation.** This is fully consistent with a modern and effective MFF. The next EU budget must make clear choices about the infrastructure Europe needs to deliver its strategic priorities. **AgoraEU should be one of those choices.**

As you consider the next Multiannual Financial Framework, **we call on the Member States to recognise AgoraEU as critical infrastructure for Europe's collective future.** It should be established as a stable, coherent and sufficiently ambitious framework capable of delivering these objectives and empowering citizens and communities across all regions, and advancing European competitiveness and security through our shared values throughout 2028 - 2034.

Yours sincerely,

Future of Europe Cohort:

Association of European Journalists in Belgium

European Federation of Journalists

Civil Society Europe

Culture Action Europe

European Civic Forum

Centre for Sustainable Media

Centre for Democracy & Technology Europe

Irish Council for Civil Liberties

³ Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), *Uncovering news deserts in Europe. Risks and opportunities for local and community media in the EU*, 28 February 2024.

⁴ Eurostat, *EU cultural sector in 2025: 8.9 million people employed*, 10 July 2026.

⁵ Eurostat, *Key figures on the European food chain*, December 2025.

The Global Disinformation Index