The European Year of Cultural Heritage marks a new era in EU politics, with better understanding of the importance of culture, says Silvia Costa.

The European Year of Cultural Heritage has three main goals. First, to feed into the European cultural agenda 2019-2021. Second, for culture to have greater weight in the 2019-2027 long-term programme. Last, for investment in culture within the EU budget to be increased by 0.15 per cent, so that it accounts for at least one per cent of the budget.

We want to revive European cultural policy, which has been lacking in recent years, and help revive Europe at the same time. While it may seem natural for Europe to dedicate a year to its culture, this is the result of a long journey.
Securing this Year of Culture took considerable work and a strong alliance between the 2014 Italian EU Council presidency and Parliament’s culture committee. Together, we have overcome significant resistance and marked a clear shift in Europe’s central role in cultural policy.

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The Year will officially be launched at the European Culture Forum taking place in Milan on 7-8 December. This will provide an opportunity for all operators and associations to come together along with regional and municipal authorities, as the Year unites different public stakeholders, and - we hope - private ones as well.

They all share the belief that if Europe wants to communicate with the world, it needs intercultural and interreligious dialogue at different national and cross-border levels.

Cultural heritage is a sustainable resource for growth. Although the word ‘culture’ is not mentioned in Juncker’s 10 priorities, this Year marks the beginning of a European space for culture, with stronger backing than before.

The European Year of Cultural Heritage demonstrates that an EU that is still heavily focused on technology and the economy has decided to tackle cross-border challenges with a tool characterised by peace and dialogue - culture.

As we develop the programme for the Year, we continue our various cultural battles - for example, the classification of the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage as a crime against humanity, especially in conflict zones. We hope that 2018 will be the year when Europe makes a decisive step forward on this incredibly important point.

This Year will not end in 2018. Rather, it will help build a solid foundation for a European space of culture beyond 2018, and it will help us regain a sense of European identity and pride.

This is also the purpose of European cultural diplomacy, which focuses on three key areas: cultural heritage, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and cultural businesses as resources and drivers for sustainable development, democracy, solidarity and peace.

Together, these important outcomes mark the beginning of a new political era in Europe. It is now understood that without a cultural and educational dimension in European politics and without considerable investment in Europe’s defining values communicating with the world and in the riches of cultural diversity, Europe will not be a player on the world stage.

To sum up what this work means, I would like to borrow the words of Wim Wenders who, when talking about Europe’s cultural heritage, asked himself, “Who will protect us from today’s dangers? Our shared heritage will. Only Europe can save, protect and feed the heritage that is under its own roof”.

**About the author**
Silvia Costa (S&D, IT) is a member of Parliament's culture and education committee.
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