

Commissioner-Designate for Culture Iliana Ivanova's Priorities

Key Takeaways from the European Parliament Hearing

A select group of European Parliament members gathered on September 5 for a pivotal evaluation of Iliana Ivanova, who has been nominated as the future EU Commissioner for culture, education, research, and innovation. This critical evaluation aimed to gauge her suitability to take over the portfolio previously held by Mariya Gabriel, who stepped down in May to assume the roles of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister in Bulgaria.

Ahead of her hearing, Commissioner-designate Ivanova presented a compelling vision centered on strengthening European collaboration in research and innovation, both within the EU and with non-member partners like the United Kingdom and Switzerland. Her proposal places a special focus on harnessing the potential of Horizon Europe, the EU's flagship program for research and development.

Here are the key highlights from the discussion, with a special emphasis on culture and innovation.

- **Simplification of Horizon Europe:** Commissioner-Designate Ivanova expressed her commitment to simplifying Horizon Europe, mentioning the Court of Auditors' recommendations, including the use of lump sums. She advocated for simplified cost options as a means to reduce bureaucracy and error rates.
- **Widening Participation:** Discussions touched on increasing the participation of widening countries in Horizon Europe projects. Ivanova suggested expanding existing measures like the Hop-On facility and leveraging the seal of excellence. She emphasized the role of Member States in implementing structural reforms and investments to complement incentives



- **Culture and Creative Europe Program:** Thomas Frankowski, the coordinator of the EPP and the CULT committee, expressed concerns about reducing the budget for the Creative Europe program for 2024, with member countries aiming to allocate only 40 million euros ([Michael Culture co-signed a letter by Culture Action Europe asking for a reconsideration on September 4](#)) The Commissioner-designate emphasized the importance of Creative Europe and its significant contributions to Europe's GDP (4.4%) while consuming a relatively small portion of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) budget (0.15%). She pledged her support for the budget and cooperation with the European Parliament to protect and strengthen the Creative Europe program. The Commissioner-designate also highlighted new opportunities introduced for cultural and creative industries and emphasized the need to support professionals in these sectors, especially after the pandemic's impact.
- **Synergies between Programs:** The discussion touched on the need to enhance synergies between various programs, including Erasmus Plus, Creative Europe, Structural Funds, InvestEU, and more. The Commissioner-designate highlighted existing opportunities for synergies and cooperation, such as the seal of excellence for Erasmus projects and the guarantee facility provided by InvestEU for small and medium-sized enterprises. She also mentioned the [CultureEU information tool](#), which helps identify possibilities for synergies among different European programs.
- **Vocational Education:** A question was raised about strengthening vocational education (education that prepares people to a skilled craft or as technicians) particularly in the context of Erasmus Plus and opportunities for students. The Commissioner-designate acknowledged the importance of vocational education and stated her intention to collaborate closely with Commissioner Schmidt to improve synergies between the portfolio's measures and responsibilities. She mentioned the European Year of Skills as a significant context for this effort.
- **Multilingualism and Minority Languages:** The issue of promoting multilingualism and including minority languages in European programs was discussed. The Commissioner-designate highlighted that minority languages are an essential part of cultural diversity and can benefit from existing measures within Erasmus+ and Creative Europe. She mentioned initiatives supporting bilingual training courses and language preservation. However, due to the practical challenges of accommodating over 60 regional minority languages, she expressed reservations about implementing them uniformly within programs like Erasmus.



- **Research and Innovation in Ukraine:** The Commissioner-designate outlined several initiatives aimed at supporting research and innovation in Ukraine, including the Maria Sklodowska-Curie fellowship scheme, support from the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, and more. She emphasized the need for timely action to help Ukraine recover from the crisis.
- **European Research Area (ERA) Budget:** A question was raised about increasing the budget for ERA and ensuring that young researchers across Europe benefit from it. The Commissioner-designate acknowledged the importance of ERA but stressed that she would focus on preserving the existing budget of Horizon Europe. She suggested that if additional funding were available, it should benefit the entire Horizon Europe program.
- **Discriminatory Proceedings Against Hungarian Students:** The issue of discriminatory proceedings against Hungarian students, teachers, and researchers was raised, leading to their exclusion from programs like Erasmus+ and Horizon. The Commissioner-designate expressed her commitment to being part of the solution and engaging in dialogue to resolve the situation, emphasizing the need for dialogue and cooperation to prevent young people from losing opportunities.

Overall, the hearing showed Iliana Ivanova's "huge knowledge about the portfolio", in the words of Verheyen, Chair of the CULT-committee. With a focus on Research and Education, the designated Commissioner seems to be on the upfront for the hot topics under her scope. The Cultural and Innovation sector will have a lot to work on and advocate for - especially with the latest discussions on the Horizon Europe and Creative Europe programmes. And they will have little time to do so, as the next Commission will be selected after the next European elections in 2024.