

I've been invited here to talk about the European Capital of Culture. Even though I'm not actually going to be an EU citizen for much longer.

That scares me. Doesn't it scare you too? Don't you sometimes think: 'Hang on, we can't carry on like this – we have to change course'?

What has happened to our Union to make one of its members want to leave? How can it be that people are declared criminals for saving other people's lives? How can it be that there are parts of Europe where journalists fear for their lives? How can it be that we need our children to remind us there is no Planet B?

The EU is standing at the edge of a precipice. After decades of existence and of growth, its survival is increasingly in doubt. Here and now, don't we need to be adopting a completely different approach from the one we saw five or ten years ago?

I say Europe's cities must react to the crisis the Union is now facing. Because this competition does not exist in a vacuum. And that's why we also need a radical shift in our thinking. We need to turn everything on its head: it is not the Union that should be coming to the aid of its cities, but the cities that should be coming to the aid of the Union! Which takes us back to the original idea of the competition: strong cities strengthen Europe!

*(Cage passage, short pause, then more quietly)*

I'll try and explain it another way. John Cage – you know him. The great composer. 20<sup>th</sup> century classical music, the piece 4'33" where someone sits at the piano without playing it. That John Cage. Did you know that in 1928, as a fifteen-year-old, he gave a speech at a high-school oratorical contest on the subject of the Panama Crisis. In it, he called for people to pause for a moment and reflect. I've been thinking a great deal about the text of that speech recently; I always imagine he's talking about Europe. And if he was, he'd say this:

'One of the greatest blessings that [Europe] could receive would be to have a great pause in her world of affairs created. For we should be hushed and silent, and we should have the opportunity to learn that: Other. People. Think.'

*(15 seconds of silence)*