

A Soul for Europe – Jean Monnet House Meeting 2026

7 Chem. du Vieux Pressoir, 78490 Bazoches-sur-Guyonne, Houjarray, France

"Belonging Europe – Identity as Practice"

Strategy Group meeting at the **Jean Monnet House (JMH)** in Bazoches-sur-Guyonne, near Paris, from **20 to 21 April 2026**.

In preparation for the Berlin Conference 2026, this meeting serves as a crucial laboratory to explore our core theme: **"Belonging Europe - Identity as Practice."**

Introduction

"Belonging Europe – Identity as Practice", addresses a pivotal moment in European history characterised by global power shifts and a growing alienation from abstract institutional structures. The conference asserts that fostering a sense of belonging is essential to ensuring democratic stability, extending the concept beyond formal citizenship to include a subjective experience of recognition and empowerment. Emphasising the municipal level, where politics are directly accessible, the initiative investigates how local identities and the *res publica* of cities function as primary points of engagement for citizens to interact with and assess their relationship to the broader European project, particularly amid increasing fragmentation and social differentiation.

A key principle of this vision asserts that a sustainable European identity should be cultivated through authentic practices of belonging, rather than imposed as an overarching narrative. With this event we underscore the significant role of arts and culture in fostering inclusion, offering valuable emotional and sensory perspectives on complex issues related to solidarity and responsibility. By designating cities and cultural networks as pivotal arenas for democratic revitalization, the initiative aims to transition from theoretical discussions on belonging to its implementation in practice. This strategy ensures the integration of diverse regional and social identities into a robust, shared European collective, both emotionally meaningful and accessible through lived experience.

This encounter at the Jean Monnet House, promoted by the A Soul for Europe initiative, is part of the annual Berlin Conference, Berlin Conference 2026 - BC2026, organised by Stiftung Zukunft Berlin and A Soul for Europe, together with other organisations, on 5th and 6th November 2026. The results, conclusions and recommendations of this encounter will serve to feed the debate and the outcomes of the BC2026.

Why this meeting matters: As Europe faces profound changes and rising political alienation, we believe that cities and municipalities are the primary arenas where a credible sense of European belonging is renegotiated. Our gathering is an opportunity to:

- **Engage with MEPs:** Bridge the gap between European institutions and the civil society at the local level.
- **Empower Cities and Municipalities:** Discuss how local authorities and mayors act as catalysts for democratic practice and social identity formation.
- **Mobilise the Arts:** Explore how artists, creators, and cultural institutions act as essential "translators", turning abstract European values into shared emotional and realistic experiences.
- **Redefine Identity:** Reclaim the concept of European identity from exclusive narratives, positioning it as an open and democratic practice.

Programme Highlights (20–22 April):

- **Monday 20th April in the morning :** Arrival and Welcome lunch on the 20th to invoke the "Spirit of Houjarray".
- **Monday, 20 April:** Opening sessions, keynote speeches, and beginning of workshops with MEPs, National and local politicians, artist, intellectuals, cultural sector and the SG on the "Europe in Common" framework, the power of art as political practice.
- **Tuesday, 21 April:** Continuity of workshops and Strategic roadmap for Berlin 2026, network mapping, and a closing inspirational through the historic JMH gardens.
- **Wednesday, 22 April:** Final departures.

Organisational Details:

Accommodation at the Jean Monnet House (30 rooms available) and meals will be kindly provided by the Jean Monnet House from lunch on 20th to lunch 22nd April. Please note that participants are expected to cover their own travel expenses.

English will be the main working language.

A Note on the Significance of Houjarray: The Jean Monnet House is not just a venue; it is the birthplace of the European project. It was here, in the quietude of Houjarray, that Jean Monnet drafted the **Schuman Declaration**—the founding act of the European Union. By meeting in this symbolic space, we honour the "Houjarray method": the belief that concrete, small-scale actions can lead to profound, systemic change. Today, as we face new challenges to the European idea, we return to this source to find the inspiration needed to shape a Europe that is felt, lived, and practiced through culture and community.

Draft Programme

A Soul for Europe – Jean Monnet House Meeting 2026

"Belonging Europe– Identity as Practice"

Venue: Jean Monnet House (JMH), Bazoches-sur-Guyonne, France

Dates: 20th - 21st April 2026

Strategic Pillars for this Meeting:

1. **The Role of Artists:** Creators as "translators" of European values.
2. **The Power of Cities:** Municipalities as the most credible conveyors of belonging today.
3. **Identity Politics:** Positive engagement with European identity to counter extremism.
4. **Cultural Method:** Using arts not as an add-on, but as the core method of democratic engagement.

Day 1: Monday, 20 April – Belonging Europe - Identity, Cities & Cultural Practice

Objective: Deep-dive workshops on the core themes of the Berlin Conference 2026.

09:00-13:00. Arrival of participants

13:00 – 14:00: Welcome Lunch. The Spirit of Houjarray & Opening Circle

- **Welcome words by the director of the Jean Monnet House, Mr. Martí Grau.**
- **Informal introductions** by the organising team (Miguel, Laura, Susana).
- **The Houjarray Legacy:**
 - A reflection on the historical significance of the House, where the Schuman Declaration was drafted setting the stage for our "Belonging Europe".
 - Open discussion about the expectations for the meeting.

14:00-14:30 Institutional opening

Representative of DG COMM of the European Parliament, some vice-presidents of the Parliament, the Commission and the Cypriot Presidency (tba)

14:30-15:00 Getting to know each other: Speed Dialogue

Objective: To create personal exchanges between politicians (MEPs, local and national representatives) and A Soul for Europe before entering the workshops. Exchange beyond formal roles and enable connections.

Participants engage in a series of short 1:1 conversations.

- 5 minutes per conversation
- Guided question on cards (1-2 cards per conversation)
- Rotation after each round
- Participants are encouraged to speak from personal experience rather than institutional positions

Guiding Questions (examples)

- When do you feel European?
- When do you not feel European?
- When have you recently felt included or excluded?
- Where do you currently see fractures in Europe?
- Where do you experience real solidarity?
- What does Europe owe its citizens?
- What do citizens owe Europe?
- What would need to change for more people to say: "This Europe belongs to me"?
- What does European identity mean for you?

Intended Outcome

- Breaking down hierarchical barriers
- Creating trust and openness before deeper discussions
- Anchoring the workshops in lived experiences of belonging
- Setting a tone of dialogue rather than debate

15:00-16:30 Session I: *Identity as Practice*

Keynote speech – To be defined.

Objective

Dialogue with MEPs, National and local politicians: *To clarify and deepen the understanding of European belonging beyond institutional frameworks, and to explore identity as an active, lived practice that follows the belonging concept.* This session will address also growing distance between citizens and European institutions and integration process, and how culture can contribute to connect institutions and political representatives with civil society at the local level to foster belonging.

Guiding Questions

- *How does European belonging emerge in practice?*
- *When do people feel they belong to Europe — and when do they not?*
- *How does identity relate to belonging?*
- *What does it mean to say: Identity follows belonging?*
- *How can culture contribute to break the gap between EU institutions and its citizens*

Outcomes

- *5–7 core theses on European belonging and the role of culture on EU integration process.*
- *Narrative guidelines to frame the Berlin Conference 2026*

16:30-16:50 Coffee break.

16:50 – 18:30 PARALELL WORKSHOPS

Workshop I: Cities as Laboratories of European Belonging, and the roll of political representatives and institutions as catalyst

Objective: To concretize the role of cities and municipalities as carriers of European identity.

Topics

- Discussion on cities as centres of democratic practice and cultural negotiation.
- Discussion on cities as centres of democratic practice. Exploring the interface between the European idea and social reality.
- Exploring the urban-rural interface and how everyday life in cities shapes European identity.

Guiding Questions

- Where is Europe experienced locally?
- How do mayors convey a sense of belonging?
- Which urban conflicts are also European conflicts?
- How can we better connect cities and peripheries?

Format ideas

- Case studies and practical examples (Warsaw, Paris, Berlin, European Capitals of Culture, etc.)

- Case Studies: Collaboration between local authorities, the European Parliament, and creative sectors. How these actors defend democracy and European values beyond national borders.
- Work on model scenarios:
- “What would a city look like that actively fosters belonging?”

Possible Outcomes

- Concrete fields of action for cities
- Ideas for a mayors’ panel

Workshop II: Art, Culture & Expanding the ‘We’ towards European Identity

Objective: To make arts and culture tangible as a method for fostering belonging.
Topics

- How artists and civil society reclaim “identity”, or contribute to the concept of “identity”, from exclusive narratives. Designing an open, democratic European identity, based on EU values and that embraces diversity as a constitutive part.

Workshop II: Art, Culture & Expanding the ‘We’ towards European Identity

- How does art create emotional belonging?
- How can we expand the “we” instead of narrowing it?
- How can cultural formats strengthen democratic practice?
- How can interdependence become visible and experiential?

Possible Outcomes

- 3–5 concrete cultural formats for BC26
- A methodological guideline for the conference

18:30 End of the first day sessions.

18:30-19:30 Relax and networking

19:30-21:30 Dinner

21:00 Onwards. Final informal talks & relax

Day 2: Tuesday, 21 April – Strategy & Berlin 2026 Roadmap

Objective: Strategic planning, conclusions, and foresight reflection.

07h45-08:45 Breakfast

09:00 - 11:00 CONTINUITY OF THE PARALLEL WORKSHOPS (participants from previous day can choose, if they wish, a different workshop)

11:00 - 11:30: Coffee Break.

11:30 - 12:30: Presentation of main conclusions of the workshops and debate + drafting of main recommendations.

- o Presenting and discussing outputs from Monday's workshops.
- o "Preliminary Outputs and recommendations" to be carried forward to Berlin

12:30 - 14:00 Methodological Lab: The Power of Art

- o Brainstorming artistic formats and narratives for the Berlin Conference. Turning abstract European belonging into a shared, emotional, and realistic experience.

14:00 - 15:00: Lunch break

15:00 - 17:00: Strategy Group (SG) Planning: Berlin Conference 2026

- o Planning thematic tracks for the Berlin Conference.
- o Network mapping: Identifying key artists, civil society leaders, and political stakeholders to involve in the conference preparation.

17:00 Inspirational Experience: Visit to the Jean Monnet House Museum and walk following the steps of Jean Monnet

- o A guided walk through the Jean Monnet House and surroundings. A moment of collective reflection on "Identity as Practice" in the very landscape where the European project was born.

18:30 Onwards: Departure of some participants / Relax and networking

19:30 - 21:30 Dinner

21:00 Onwards. Final informal talks & relax



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Day 4: Wednesday, 22 April – Final Departures

07:45-08:45 Breakfast - Check-out and departure for remaining participants.