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Are artists free to create and present their work?

The Cultural Council of the Netherlands decided to set up an advisory committee because of growing concerns about artistic freedom in the arts sector in recent years.

Although artistic freedom appears to be well regulated in law, there are signals from the arts sector that security and artistic freedom are sometimes under pressure. In recent years, there has been growing concern about the extent to which artists are free to create and present their work.

For this reason, the [Cultural Council](#) in the Netherlands has set up an advisory committee to investigate the background to the problem and to make recommendations on how artistic freedom can be better guaranteed in practice. The advisory committee has already started its work and is expected to present its recommendations in the autumn of 2025.

Through this process, the Council aims to find out how widespread these concerns are in the sector. And to identify what different stakeholders (such as government, the arts sector and education) can do to better safeguard artistic freedom in practice. As the Cultural Council points out in a statement, "This is essential for an inclusive and pluralistic arts sector. A sector where artists can work freely, where everyone feels heard and seen, and where there is room for different perspectives and ideas".

In order to arrive at its recommendations, the Advisory Council will hold discussions with various parties in the arts sector over the coming months. The advice will be presented by the Council to the Minister for Education, Culture and Science and to the House and Senate. The 'Artistic Freedom Advisory Committee' consists of expertise from producing and programming art institutions, art criticism and science.

Concern for artistic freedom across Europe

Last autumn [Culture Action Europe](#) launched a call to action asking cultural institutions to voice their concerns about growing restrictions on artistic freedom and autonomy. The call to action followed a 2024 survey on the working conditions of arts workers, which found that 34% of respondents had experienced restrictions on their creative expression.

The [IETM](#) (International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts) also expressed concern about the erosion of artistic freedom in Europe, particularly due to increasing political interference in cultural organisations. Citing three separate cases, the network called on the Community to defend the fundamental democratic principle of freedom of expression in the arts.

Last December, 200 prominent cultural organisations from 39 European countries declared that "culture in Europe is in crisis". In an open letter to the [European Parliament](#) entitled "Resistance now, free culture", the leaders of these organisations said that they were alarmed by current cultural policy developments in various EU Member States and joined their voices to express their concern about attacks on artistic freedom, bans, dismissals and budget cuts aimed at greater control over cultural organisations and artists.

The [NEMO](#) (Network European Museum Organisations) Barometer, published in January, highlighted the challenges facing the European museum sector in an increasingly polarised society. According to the barometer, around two out of three museums, national museums and organisations in Europe said they were subject to political pressure. Three out of ten museums felt they could not express their views without being judged.

In the Netherlands, youth performing arts organisations have noticed that some topics are increasingly causing discomfort among audiences, parents and schools. Writers also experience this at book launches or readings, where certain topics sometimes lead to resistance or protest. Various geopolitical tensions and conflicts also make programme-makers wonder what performances they can still show without provoking discussion. According to the Cultural Council of the Netherlands, this can even endanger the safety of creators and increasingly leads to self-censorship and the question: 'Can we really share this topic, this image, this activity with the public?'

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Photo credit: The unnamed

