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Europa Nostra Stands with Serbian Civil Society in Defense of Cultural Heritage and Democratic Values

Europa Nostra has condemned mounting pressures on Serbian civil society, highlighting threats to cultural heritage and democratic participation. The organization stands with students, professors, and cultural professionals fighting to preserve modernist landmarks and defend artistic freedom.

In a statement issued today, 31st of October 2025, Europa Nostra expresses unwavering support for Serbian civil society—particularly students, professors, heritage experts, and cultural organizations—who have been protesting since November 2024 against government actions threatening cultural rights, democratic participation, artistic freedom, and heritage protection.

The statement stems from escalating civic protests in Serbia since November 2024, triggered by the Novi Sad railway station collapse that killed 15 people and exposed corruption in public projects. Students, professors, and heritage activists linked the tragedy to broader threats: opaque urban developments violating national laws and the [Faro Convention](#), endangering Belgrade's modernist landmarks.

Key sites include the protected Generalštab Building (facing demolition for a Trump Towers project), Belgrade Fortress (threatened by a cable car), and Belgrade Fair (slated for commercial overhaul). The government responded with repression—dismissing cultural workers, briefly closing the National Theatre for supporting students, and jeopardizing

festivals like BITEF.

The statement is following the [European Cultural Heritage Summit 2025](#), the Europa Nostra General Assembly, and the [European Heritage Hub Forum](#) held in Brussels on 12-15 October, where among else Europa Nostra Serbia and the EU Delegation to Serbia awarded the [2025 Heritage Heroes Award](#) to students of Architecture and Arts Faculties in Belgrade. Serbia also won a European Heritage Award / Grand Prix for the [“The Hedgehog’s Home”](#) exhibition at the Museum of Yugoslavia—celebrating youth engagement with heritage.

Echoing the European Parliament’s October 21 resolution on repression, Europa Nostra frames the struggle as defending Europe’s democratic cultural heritage, urging EU institutions to actively support Serbia’s civil society amid democratic backsliding.

The statement follows:

Democracy is one of Europe’s most enduring forms of cultural heritage. Born in ancient Greece, and gradually developed and strengthened since the Age of Enlightenment, it rests on the ideal that citizens should take an active role in shaping their society, values that continue to guide Europe’s democratic conscience and life inspiring and engaging generations to build fairer and freer societies.

Yet civic and cultural actors in Serbia today face mounting pressure, restrictions, and smear campaigns. Cultural heritage is too often a casualty of opaque political and investment decisions that violate national heritage laws, the [Faro Convention on the Value of Heritage for Society](#), and public commitments to sustainable and transparent urban and rural development.

Among the most alarming examples is the [Generalštab Building](#), a protected modernist landmark in Belgrade, which was included on Europa Nostra’s 7 Most Endangered List for 2025 due to the Government’s plans to demolish it for a Trump Towers real-estate project. The [Belgrade Fortress](#) – also included on Europa Nostra’s 7 Most Endangered List back in 2020, remains threatened by inadequate development projects such as a proposed cable car, while the Belgrade Fair, an exceptional modernist ensemble, faces radical transformation and loss of authenticity driven by private investment.

Equally troubling are the dismissals of cultural workers, the temporary closure of the National Theatre in Belgrade following its ensemble’s expression of solidarity with students, and the

uncertainty surrounding the continuity of Serbia's most important international festivals such as BITEF, one of Europe's most respected theatre festivals for over half a century.

In this reprehensible environment, students and young heritage professionals have become a symbol of integrity, knowledge, civic activism and hope — linking the fight for endangered heritage with the struggle for the rule of law and the respect of the public interest and common good. Europa Nostra applauds Europa Nostra Serbia and the EU Delegation to Serbia for awarding the 2025 Heritage Heroes Award to students of Architecture and the University of Arts in Belgrade for their outstanding efforts to preserve the city's modernist heritage. Furthermore, we are very proud to highlight that this year Serbia won both a [European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award](#) and a [Grand Prix](#) for the exhibition "[The Hedgehog's Home – Imagining a Better World](#)" by the Museum of Yugoslavia – precisely in the category of Citizens' Engagement and Awareness-raising, for a project that focused on young generations and their interpretation of heritage.

To silence or marginalise those who defend cultural heritage is to weaken the democratic fabric of society. Their struggle — and that of many others in Europe's neighbourhood — reminds us that our Union is not only political and economic, but also profoundly cultural and civic; that we are all Europeans, heirs to a shared history that has shaped our heritage and humanity.

Also echoing the [European Parliament Resolution on the polarisation and increased repression in Serbia](#), one year after the Novi Sad tragedy adopted on 21 October 2025, Europa Nostra therefore calls upon the European Union Institutions and its Member States, as well as the wider European cultural community to stand in active solidarity with the citizens of Serbia and to provide pro-active support to all those who, often at great personal risk, defend both democracy and the right to protect our shared heritage.

Image: Courtesy of Europa Nostra Serbia