

Performing Arts All Europe Countries Creative Europe Community

Prominent artists warn that Europe's culture is in crisis

Nearly 200 cultural organisations are calling on the European Parliament to speak out about the attacks, bans, layoffs and cutbacks in the cultural sector across Europe.

"Culture in Europe is facing a Crisis" supports some 200 prominent cultural organisations from 39 European countries and calls on the European Union to act. In an open letter to the European Parliament entitled "Resistance now, free culture", the leaders of these organisations say that they are alarmed by current cultural policy developments in various EU Member States and join 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.

As examples, the letter cites
- Hungary, where "the cultural sector has already been largely brought into line by new media laws and budget cuts".
- Slovakia, with the recent dismissals of the directors of the National Theatre and the National Gallery.
- Bulgaria, where a play over 100 years old, set in a fictional Bulgaria, was staged at the National Theatre in Sofia without an audience on its first night due to attacks by ultra-nationalists who physically prevented the audience from entering the theatre building.
- Austria, where the right-wing nationalist Freedom Party (FPÖ) is threatening to cut funding for "woke" culture, which, according to the letter, "means all culture beyond local music organisations".
- The Netherlands, France and Germany, where governments are pushing for radical cuts in funding for all cultural institutions and efforts that are not "traditional" and "national", as the signatories say.

The initiative was prompted by the violent disruption by ultra-nationalist groups of a premiere by American actor and director John Malkovich at the Ivan Vazov National Theatre in Bulgaria.

“We are aware” the signatories declare, “that one of the principles of the European Union is not to intervene in the

cultural policies of its various member states, but only to support them in “crises and unexpected challenges”, as stated in the EU Strategic Framework for Culture. So let us be clear: culture in Europe is facing just such a crisis.”

This crisis, as defined by the signatories of the letter, has led to the extinction of important areas of European culture and transnational cooperation in the face of radical re-nationalisation. "In the face of looming cuts, we see self-censorship, fear and depression spreading", the signatories support and express their solidarity "with artists who have been dismissed or obstructed in their work, and with cultural institutions across Europe that are threatened with closure or have already been closed".

The letter calls on the European Parliament to take an explicit stand, to address “the acute threat to a consistent European cultural policy” and to speak out clearly about the attacks, bans, layoffs and cutbacks in the individual EU member states. Also encourages harnessing the power of international networking to multiply potential solutions.

Some time ago the IETM has made public its concerns about attacks on artistic freedom and last week NEMO, the network of museums in Europe, reported on self-censorship phenomena, by some of its members to deal with direct or indirect interventions. A similar letter was published in September by Culture Action Europe.

Among the nearly 200 hundred signatories of the "Free Culture" open letter are Milo Rau, artistic director of the Vienna Festival, Vasil Vasilev, director of the Bulgarian National Theatre, Matej Drlička, dismissed director of the Slovak National Theatre, Cláudia Belchior and Heidi Wiley, president and executive director of the European Theatre Convention - ETC, Serge Rangoni, general director of the Théâtre de Liège and Karen Stone, general director of Opera Europa.

Read the full letter here.

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Photo author: Athens Badminton Theater
Photo source

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