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"Thirty per cent? We Won't Consent"

More than 150 people gathered outside the bloc's institutions to protest against Irish Presidency budget plans that would cut AgoraEU, the EU's planned culture, media and civil-society programme, from €8.6bn to €6bn

More than 150 artists, cultural workers, journalists, and civil-society representatives gathered in Brussels' Schuman Square on Thursday to protest a proposed 30% cut to AgoraEU, [according to the organisers'](#) account. [Culture Action Europe](#), [Civil Society Europe](#), the [European Civic Forum](#) and the [European Federation of Journalists](#) (EFJ) organised the rally, in partnership with the [Future of Europe](#) cohort. Many demonstrators wore pink and carried hand-painted signs, and the event was peaceful.

AgoraEU builds on Creative Europe and the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme. The European Commission proposed about €8.6bn. The Irish Presidency's negotiating box, circulated on October 10, would cut that to €6bn, according to Culture Action Europe. The same text trims the EU's overall seven-year budget by about 8 per cent, so the AgoraEU reduction is nearly four times the overall percentage cut.

Protesters say the saving for the overall EU budget is tiny. Organisers put it at anywhere between 0.14 and 0.2 per cent of the proposed EU budget, arguing it would remove almost a third of the money for cultural cooperation, film production and independent journalism.

The Irish Presidency describes its text as a compromise intended to bridge differences between member states. It wants a deal by the end of 2026 so that the necessary legislation can be adopted in 2027 and funding can start in January 2028.

Lars Ebert, secretary-general of Culture Action Europe, called

the proposal “a disaster” as protesters called for reversing the cut, securing at least €10bn for culture, media and civil society and protecting artistic and media freedom, independence and pluralism. “In difficult times, we need to invest in what matters. We need to strengthen what has made Europe known around the world: its creativity, innovation, inventiveness, and the free exchange of ideas across borders. So why is Europe going in the opposite direction? It’s a shameful decision.”

The European Parliament is [calling for €10.7bn for culture and the media](#). Nela Riehl, who chairs Parliament’s culture and education committee, told the rally that culture, media and civil society were being targeted as easy options. ‘They want to defund our democracy. They pick culture, media and civil society because they think they’re easy targets and no one will notice, but this is where democracy lives; if the cuts go through, people will wake up one day and ask: why are my rights not protected? Why has that film festival disappeared? Where has my local publisher gone? It causes enormous damage.’

Renate Schroeder, the EFJ’s director, also stressed that Europe needs a “strong culture & free press! Democracy deserves no less!”

Afterwards, a small delegation gathered to try to deliver a joint letter to representatives of the European Council and the Irish Presidency. More than [1,000 organisations have backed the campaign](#) so far; after the October 15–16 European Council, when it started. EU leaders will meet again in November to discuss the budget.

Read an account of the event by Culture Action Europe [here](#)

Follow the hashtag [#StandUpforAgoraEU](#) on LinkedIn to see posts by different participating organisations

Image by Luis Hidalgo. <https://luis-hidalgo.com/> Courtesy of Culture Action Europe