

**Dear Ms. Mariya Gabriel,
European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth**

Subject: Important information on the reduction of funding for the cultural sector in Slovenia

By sending this letter, I am turning to you in a wish to inform you about the developing situation on the cultural sector in Slovenia. We are all aware, culture is one of the most important aspects of the European Union, as the historical development of culture in individual Member States – as well as the continent as a whole – binds us together. Cultural differences that have emerged have become part of the identity of individual European citizens, that make us differentiate between ourselves, but at the same time those differences unite us through our collective development of common European culture. While the cultural sector has been financially underfunded within the Union for many years, the COVID pandemic only further widened the financial gap. The Union reacted accordingly and while we additionally allocated over 2 billion euros to support the recovery, resilience and diversity of cultural and creative sectors, which is more resources than we probably would have without the pandemic, we are witnessing budget cuts in funding for cultural sector of national budgets of several Member States. Unfortunately, this is also the case in Slovenia. While I am aware that the setting of national budgets is a matter of the Member States, I feel the additional drain on the cultural sector is an extremely important issue and needs to be highlighted, therefore, I would like to inform you about the upcoming financial cuts in the cultural sector in Slovenia.

The state of cultural sector in Slovenia is worrying. The European Commission is already well aware of the developments regarding the Slovenian Press Agency, however, there are several other important processes taking place, which are either aimed at changing the media landscape or at the destabilizing the non-governmental sector. One of those was the adoption of the Rules on Expert Commission, which took place during the pandemic (October 2020) and directly against the position of the National Assembly's Committee on Culture and the decision of the National Council for Culture. The only aspect of the Rules on Expert Commission that the Government deemed important was the financial provision on the rotation of expert panels. While in the past mandate, the commissions were appointed through a transparent public process, sadly, the same does not apply to the current expert commissions. The consequences of the controversial change in the Rules of Procedure and the subsequent non-transparent appointment of the Commissions were made apparent by the results of the public media tender for 2021, and further proved, when a number of local radio stations (e.g. Koroški Radio, Radio Triglav, etc.) as well as specialised media important for culture, such as a magazine Kino, Razpotja, Literatura, etc., or for example, the oldest student radio station Radio Študent, were excluded from the funding.

The current Governments intention to discipline cultural organisations that follow primarily the social good and their own editorial policies, is evident in the adoption of the current budget rebalance for the year 2022. While the rebalancing increases general funding for culture, it simultaneously significantly reduces funding under the heading "Promotion of

cultural creativity” which is a key source of funding for non-governmental cultural organisation (mainly in the performing, visual, intermedia and music arts). The funding is being cut from €6.4 million to €3.6 million, which, in addition to the cuts in many cultural projects also means, it will create more difficult position for NGOs to get involved in European projects, as they will simply not have a basis from national funding. A whole range of parallel processes are also at stake – from the maintenance of professionalism of the sector (funding of professional organisations) to the negative impact on development of staff and audiences.

Similar situation is developing in the area of amateur culture, where the budget is being cut by over a half a million euros. Even though the government explained such cut as a result of successfully implemented project in the year 2021, for which additional resources have been reserved for the following year, these additional funds should be seen as the final, long-awaited normalisation in the sector. By simply looking at the sector, the consequences of long stagnation of funding for amateur culture is evident. Whereas amateur culture used to be one of the key bases of the professional NGO sector in culture, it is now mainly struggling to maintain its project, which is neither sustainable nor developmental.

As a smaller EU Member State, Slovenia should pay more attention to the non-governmental sector in culture, which makes a vital contribution to the preservation of tradition and the creation of ground-breaking artistic practices. Finally, the current reduction of the budget allocated for the cultural sector is not in line with the New European Agenda for Culture (adopted in 2018), which has put as one of the key objectives “harness the full potential of culture to help build a more inclusive and fairer Union that supports innovation, creativity and sustainable jobs and growth”. By cutting national funding for the NGO sector, European cultural objectives are being undermined. The European Guidelines are part of the EU Member States’ consensus on a common future, and any deviation without sufficient justification is a deflection that does not contribute to the EU’s common aspirations.

Yours sincerely,

MEP Irena Joveva