



European Parliament

Member of the European Parliament

Ms
Mariya Gabriel
European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Bruxelles

Brussels, 22nd of February 2022

Subject: Worrying development in Slovenian cultural sector

Dear Ms Commissioner, I am addressing you to express your concern and possibly propose action to **help preserve our valuable non-governmental artistic structures that are being put on the brink of existence due to the unapproved funding for their work by the Ministry of Culture.**

Slovenian contemporary artists are potent players and greatly important in the contemporary European landscape. They bring forward internationally acclaimed talents, and they represent Slovenia as a country with a confident, vibrant and reflective arts scene, mostly brought to life by non-governmental and non-profit organisations. Their work accompanied by the work of individual artists carries immense value for the international art scene and is a direct sign of a developed and democratically framed society.

Such cultural structures in Slovenia are Gledališče Glej, Maska, Nomad Dance Academy Slovenija, City of Women, Ana Monro and Delak Institute. The importance of their role in our society is undeniable, as they have helped to shape and professionalise the contemporary art scene in Slovenia as well as internationally by their active engagement on a European cultural, political level. Theatre Glej is one of the rare Slovene contemporary theatres established in 1970 and has more than 50 years of working experience. It is the most experienced structure for this art sector, making way for young art makers and audiences, providing them with the means to raise and develop artistic content and artistic knowledge.

However, in January this year, the Ministry of Culture announced the results of a public tender for four-year funding of such cultural structures, in which all the aforementioned structures were cut out of. As the Glej Theatre has been the oldest independent theatre presenting international connections for the recognition and breakthrough of Slovenian artists and their theatrical achievements at home and abroad, a sudden cut in their funding brings into question the future of work for hundreds of artists and professional collaborators in various projects.

Such drastic cuts, for which the cultural structures were entirely unprepared, paired with an absence of dialogue with the players from the scene, cause irreversible damage to this vibrant and internationally highly recognised scene, discrediting its achievements and endangering any further development. The withdrawal of funding, especially in the context of the long-term reduction of space for the development of professional non-governmental organisations, is being recognised as a direct attack on such structures.

The situation that the cultural sector as a whole has to deal with is a direct result of the ignorance of the current Government and their complete and utter apathy in regards to safeguarding our most valuable cultural institution and creators. Since the beginning of the current Government's mandate, the needs of the cultural sector have been completely ignored by the Ministry of Culture, as they tend to be wholly inactive and disconnected, while the action they do take is mainly harmful.

For instance, the action that the Ministry took is making significant changes to the Rules on Expert Commissions for the cultural institutions and public tenders. 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. By making the changes, they reduced the number of members on the commissions and transferred them from consisting of exclusively experts in the fields to allowing staff members from the Ministry to sit in them and have the majority, which means they no longer represent an expert commission but a politically guided supervisory authority that creates the fate of cultural institutions and art programmes.

In this case, it was such Expert Commission that decided which programme gets the funds in the public tender for public cultural programs in the field of art co-financed by the state for the next four years (2022-2025), and the Ministry argues the funds were allocated to the best-rated projects according to the Expert Commission, which is highly problematic. Especially when you factor in the fact, that the Gledališče Glej got enough points to get the financing but fell through because there are not enough funds in the budget.

Nevertheless, this is not an isolated event. The consequences of the controversial change in the Rules of Procedure and the subsequent non-transparent appointment of the Commissions were also made apparent by the results of the public media tender for 2021 and further proved when several 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.

However, the budget cuts do not end there. As I informed you in the letter in October 2021, they are also proposed in the adoption of the current budget rebalances for the year 2022 significantly reduces funding for the Promotion of cultural creativity, which is a crucial source of funding for a non-governmental cultural organisation which will create a more challenging position for NGOs to get involved in European projects, as they will simply not have a basis from national funding.

It is evident that the current Government intends to discipline cultural organisations that follow the social good and their own editorial policies primarily. Even more so now with the cutting of the budget for non-governmental artistic structures that are notoriously known for politically driven satire, criticism of each Government, brave, daring and exceptional in their artistic pursuits. The Government uses the lack of financing as a mechanism for regulating utterance and creativity of the cultural sector – the one thing they were meant to safeguard.

As we are doing everything in our power to try to stop such events from happening, and we are trying to hold the Minister of Culture Vasko Simoniti accountable for his actions, with little to no success, due to the consistent ignorance towards our warnings, pleas and appeals, **I count on you, Ms Commissioner, to help us ensure that such appalling actions from the Government will not be overlooked.** We need to ensure **the existence of cultural structures that provide cultural expression and promotion of European ideas and values.** They are essential parts of the culture in the European countries, and they deserve to be treated as such. **We need to ensure their sufficient funding, so they can continue to serve their purpose in enriching our common European culture.**

Yours sincerely,

Irena Joveva (MEP)