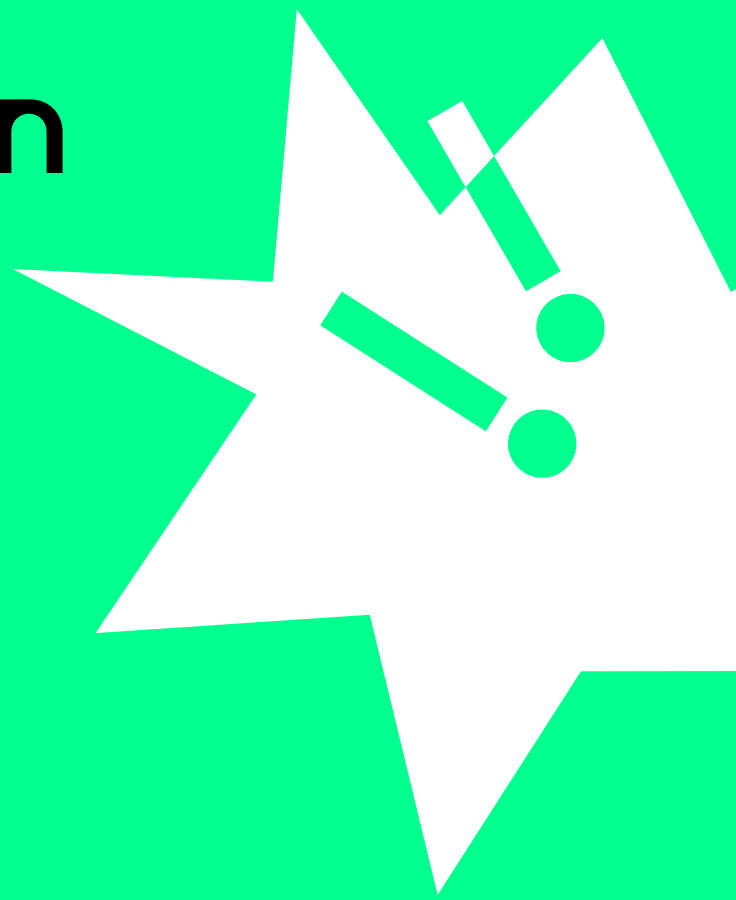


The Bratislava Declaration



Preamble

This Declaration arises from a shared and urgent need to resist the threat to artistic freedom across the Member States of the European Union (EU). We call for a robust legal response to the growing influence of governments that seek to control and interfere with the cultural and creative sectors and undermine internationally agreed human rights standards.

This Declaration is issued during the International Conference OpenCulture! organised by Open Culture! Platform on May 29–30, 2025, in Bratislava, Slovakia. It reflects the lived experience of cultural workers, artists, institutional leaders, and grassroots organisations across the EU who face, on a daily basis, the consequences of rising authoritarianism, censorship, and the erosion of cultural freedoms. The deconstruction of the cultural and creative sectors leads to the deconstruction of our societies.

Background and Rationale

Our coalition of stakeholders in the culture and creative sectors has emerged from long-term discussions, shared struggles, and cross-disciplinary analyses of legislative and policy changes that have led to the systematic disempowerment of arts and culture. The impact of these regressions has been deeply damaging. Cultural institutions face routine political interference; artists and cultural workers are being stripped of their rights, autonomy, and ability to work free from coercion. In several Member States, public funding is being redirected towards individuals and organisations that either accept censorship or engage in self-censorship under the threat of exclusion from financial support. Artistic leaders must be able to run their organisation without interference, and supported by a balanced board.

We can no longer delay in defending artistic freedom as articulated in Article 13 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union. This Declaration serves as a united appeal for the implementation of bold and enforceable protections of artistic freedom across all Member States and draws on the experience of the European Media Freedom Act adopted in 2024. It also feeds into the current EU consultations on the Rule of Law, the Culture Compass and the Democracy Shield.

Call to Action

We, the undersigned, issue the following Declaration as a call to action directed at the leadership of the European Union:

1. We recognise the presence of an acute crisis that threatens artistic freedom and the independence of cultural institutions, within a growing number of EU Member States. The ongoing erosion of cultural infrastructure is profoundly destructive not only to the cultural life in Europe but to the whole European project. We call on the European institutions to urgently acknowledge and address this emergency. Now is the time to act to prevent irreversible damage to Europe's democratic cultural structures.

2. We advocate the right to artistic freedom, where everyone has the right to freely create, interpret, express and share artistic work. It must be upheld without censorship, self-censorship and free from discrimination.
3. We demand arms-length independent evaluation processes in the allocation of public funding, where appropriate rules and measures must be implemented to ensure that such allocation of public funding is clearly and transparently decoupled from the expectation of politically compliant behaviour.
4. We express unconditional solidarity with everyone targeted by state censorship, intimidation, and bullying through political attacks on artistic expression. Artists who build their practice on vulnerability, marginalised experience, and experimentation are particularly at risk.
5. We demand a safe, reliable, and predictable working environment in all areas of the cultural and creative sectors. This means addressing precarious work in the cultural and creative sectors, emphasising equal pay for women, persons with disabilities, and minority groups.
6. We urge the development of a specific EU instrument with a structured approach to addressing artistic freedom within the Rule of Law, entitled the European Artistic Freedom Act, enforcing the protection of human rights in a consistent protection of artistic freedom across all Member States. This must not be understood as a symbolic gesture, but as an essential instrument to safeguard artistic freedom and the Rule of Law across all Member States.

This Declaration is intended as a call to action. We recognise the importance of technical and legal precision and will follow up through a working group formed following this Declaration to develop a legal proposal in consultation with EU institutions.

Adopted in Bratislava, 30 May 2025

Initial signatories

Otvorená Kultúra!

Anténa - sieť pre nezávislú kultúru

Študentstvo za Otvorenú Kultúru! (ŠOK!)

AEC (Association Européenne
des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique
et Musikhochschulen)

ARC Research & Consultancy

Artistic Freedom Initiative

Culture Action Europe

ETC - European Theatre Convention

European Alliance of Academies

ICOM SEE - South East Europe Alliance Opera Europa

NEMO - Network of European Museum Organisations

Resistance Now Together

Trans Europe Halles

Wiener Festwochen

Pearle

