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Strengthening AgoraEU – Safeguarding Europe's democratic and cultural infrastructure

We are following the negotiations on the European Union's Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028–2034 with great concern. The proposal by the Irish EU Presidency to cut funding for AgoraEU by 30 per cent – from 8.6 to 6 billion euros – compared with the European Commission's proposal would disproportionately affect one of the EU's already smallest funding programmes. A saving of just around 0.14 per cent of the planned total budget would mean the loss of almost a third of the earmarked European funding for culture, independent media and civil society.

AgoraEU is the only European programme that specifically and visibly supports Europe in being what it wants to be – and must be – for European citizens: democratic, open and diverse. The programme promotes cultural cooperation, artistic and media freedom, cultural diversity, active citizenship and cross-border exchange. In doing so, it simultaneously strengthens Europe's social resilience and its capacity for democratic action.

European security and defence capabilities must not be viewed exclusively through a military lens. At a time of increasing social polarisation, growing identity-based division, targeted disinformation and declining trust in state and democratic institutions, Europe must strengthen its social resilience. Culture, independent media and civil society are not merely supplementary elements, but an essential component of European democratic coexistence.

At the same time, we are witnessing in numerous European countries how art and culture are coming under increasing political pressure. Intimidation, political interference and targeted attacks

on cultural institutions threaten artistic freedom. However, this freedom can only endure if its financial foundations are also secured.

The proposed cut would jeopardise collaborations and structures that have been built up over many years. It would weaken Europe's ability to tell its own stories, safeguard cultural diversity, connect people across borders and jointly tackle challenges such as the use of artificial intelligence, the concentration of cultural markets and threats to artistic and media freedom.

Particularly in light of the increasing political attacks on art and culture, such a cut would send a disastrous signal. We cannot defend artistic freedom at European level whilst simultaneously undermining the financial foundations that make it possible in the first place.

We therefore stand alongside Culture Action Europe and more than 1,000 organisations from the cultural, media and civil society sectors across Europe that are speaking out against the cuts.

We call on the German Government to strongly oppose the planned cuts in the ongoing negotiations and to secure at least the 8.6 billion euros proposed by the European Commission for AgoraEU. Looking ahead, we support moving closer to the European Parliament's ambitious proposal.

Minor savings must not lead to significant and long-term damage to Europe's culture, democracy and social cohesion. The defence of our democratic values must also be reflected in our political and financial priorities. What is needed now is a strong AgoraEU that bolsters the cultural sector in Europe so that it is equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

The initiators of this letter

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