

Dear colleagues,

We are reaching out as a regional network for cultural cooperation, gathering 40 members - organizations, cultural centers, and independent media from 8 countries in Southeast Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Slovenia, North Macedonia, Serbia).

We are deeply involved in addressing the recent developments in Serbia, particularly the detention and entry bans imposed on colleagues from Croatia, Slovenia, North Macedonia, Romania, and Albania. As you may be aware, on January 21, 2025, in Belgrade, several individuals—citizens of these countries who work in the civil sector and independent culture—were detained while participating in the Erste Academy program.

These individuals were held at a police station and interrogated for several hours. They were subsequently forced to sign a document stating they had 24 hours to leave Serbia and were banned from entering the country for one year, under the accusation that their presence posed a threat to national security.

This concerning repressive measure comes at a time when mass student protests and faculty blockades are happening in Serbia. In addition to the youth and students that are facing various forms of repression on a daily basis, including physical violence, independent cultural and civil society organizations in the country are also under pressure, as they aim to support the demands for justice, safety, and freedom. At the same time, the regime is actively running a campaign against the concept of "foreign mercenaries" allegedly orchestrating unrest and revolutions financed by foreign governments and organisations. For weeks now, there has been a systematic witch hunt targeting different groups of foreign nationals visiting Serbia, including journalists, students, writers, and free citizens, whose personal details and names are being exposed in tabloids. This is an attempt to downplay and discredit the actions of Serbian citizens who have risen up against the years of terror imposed by the corrupt and criminal regime of the SNS. We recognize this escalation of repression as an attempt by the authorities to intimidate all participants in democratic initiatives, stifle regional and wider cooperation, and sow unrest and fear among neighbors, colleagues, friends, and citizens.

Importantly, these measures also raise serious concerns regarding the mobility rights of cultural workers and their alignment with the fundamental principles of European cultural cooperation, especially considering the numerous EU-funded cooperation projects currently being implemented by civil society organizations in Serbia.

In light of the serious situation in Serbia, where professionals in civil society and independent culture are being directly targeted, we respectfully request your

support. We kindly ask for your assistance in raising awareness of this matter within your network and with the relevant EU institutions.

In order to better understand the full scope of the consequences these repressive actions by the Serbian government might have on the civil society sector in Serbia, the SEE region and abroad, we have reached out to EACEA for further information on the total number of ongoing Creative Europe projects in Serbia. We also initiated the process of organizing a thematic event at the European Parliament, in collaboration with Members of the European Parliament from Croatia and Slovenia.

Your support in advocating for the lifting of entry bans on our colleagues and in preventing similar actions from occurring in the future would be invaluable.

For further information and updates, as well as if you wish to cooperate with us on this matter, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Kooperativa - Regional Platform for Culture