

YOUROPE e.V. - Breite Str. 18 - 53111 Bonn

To:

EU Delegation in Serbia

Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement (DG NEAR)

Other relevant EU institutions and representatives

Bonn, September 29, 2025

Subject: Call to Defend Core European Values – EXIT Festival, Serbia

Dear EU representative,

As Europe's most important representation of music festivals, [YOUROPE – The European Festival Association](#) is reaching out to raise an urgent concern regarding one of our long-time members and one of Europe's most internationally recognized cultural platforms – EXIT Festival in Novi Sad, Serbia.

For 25 years, EXIT has been a beacon of youth freedom, cultural exchange, and the European values of democracy, openness, and solidarity. Founded in 2000 as a student movement advocating for peace and freedom, it has since grown into one of Europe's leading festivals and a symbol of how culture can drive social progress and international cooperation. They also have been a supporter of YOUROPE's [Take A Stand initiative](#) – the most important campaign for social cohesion in the live music sector – and winning the TAKE A STAND Award at the European Festival Awards 2024.

Today, we learn from our colleagues that EXIT finds itself under severe and systematic repression by the Serbian government. Because the festival publicly supported Serbian students in their call for a freer and fairer society, it has been subjected to retaliatory measures, including:

- Withdrawal of all subsidies at local, regional, and national levels, as well as termination of support from the state-owned telecommunications company that had been the main sponsor for 22 years.
- Intimidation and pressure directed at EXIT and its key people, including direct threats from special police forces.
- Direct pressure on companies cooperating with EXIT.

These measures have stripped the festival of over €1.5 million in support - 20% of EXIT's budget - and put at risk the very existence of an organization that employs 100 young people in Serbia and beyond. Despite these obstacles, EXIT delivered a historic edition in 2025, but only at the cost of depleting all its reserves.

It is important to stress that this repression extends beyond EXIT. We hear reports, that artists who expressed solidarity with students face retaliation: their concerts are being

cancelled, and they are banned from performing in Serbia, where nearly all concert venues are under government control.

This is not just about one festival. It is about defending core European values in the heart of Europe. Freedom of expression, cultural independence, and the right of civil society to uphold democratic principles are under direct threat. If Europe is to remain credible in its commitment to these values, words must now be matched by action.

YOUROPE therefore calls on EU institutions to:

- Express strong support for EXIT and the cultural sector in Serbia striving to remain free, independent, and connected to European values.
- Engage with Serbian authorities to ensure protection of cultural freedom and the immediate cessation of repressive measures against artists, cultural professionals and events like EXIT, as well as their partners.
- Explore concrete financial and programmatic support mechanisms to safeguard the survival of the cultural professionals, artists and frontrunners of European values like EXIT until democratic space in Serbia reopens.

YOUROPE has helped our members tell their story at high level international conferences in the past weeks. We learnt that EXIT has already received invitations to expand globally, across Europe and beyond, but without urgent short-term support, these long-term perspectives may never materialize.

We call on the European Union to act decisively, to show solidarity and defend the principles of freedom, cultural independence, and democracy where they are most endangered.

We all know, when freedom returns to Serbia, it will matter greatly whether Europe stood by its core values, or remained silent in the face of their erosion.

On behalf of Europe's festivals and their millions of visitors, YOUROPE urges you to defend what makes Europe truly Europe.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

With respect,

Holger Jan Schmidt
(General Secretary)

YOUROPE e.V.

The European Festival Association

Breite Str. 18

53111 Bonn

Germany

Chairman: Christof Huber

General Secretary: Holger Jan Schmidt

Registration number: VR 11713