15 October 2026

AgoraEU under threat: Europe cannot sacrifice culture, journalism and civil society

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The proposal by the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union to cut the AgoraEU programme's budget by a third, presented on 10 October 2026 as part of the negotiations on the future multiannual financial framework (MFF), represents a major setback for the future of European democracy. Cutting it brings negligible savings for the EU budget, but will do serious and irreversible damage to media freedom, the cultural and creative sectors, and civil society, the very areas that underpin the Union's democratic values, especially at a time when they need it the most, and we strongly condemn this cut.

While the European Commission had proposed a budget of €8.6 billion and the European Parliament had advocated a budget of €10.72 billion, the Irish Presidency's proposal would set the European Union on a path towards unprecedented austerity should this decision be confirmed.

At a moment when democratic backsliding, pressure on creators and independent media, and threats to civic space are rising across Europe, AgoraEU cannot be treated as a bloated budget line waiting to be trimmed. AgoraEU already brings two programmes together under one roof and has been given a broader mission. Programmes that, according to the Commission, were already stretched far past their breaking point, turning down excellent applications due to lack of funds. The Irish proposal is only slightly above what the programme's predecessors received combined, which means it barely keeps pace with inflation. AgoraEU is a small programme but a very important one. Its envelope is a tiny fraction of the overall MFF but it has an important mission to support cornerstones of our democracies: namely rights and values, civil society, independent journalism and the cultural and creative sectors.

AgoraEU ultimately appears to be the main target of the cuts envisaged in the future multiannual financial framework. Why should the cultural and creative sectors, journalism and civil society pay such a disproportionate price in European budgetary trade-offs?

The Irish Presidency, whose commitment to journalism, the cultural and creative sectors, and civil society has been consistently affirmed at both national and European level, must now translate this commitment into action. We call on it to urgently review its proposal and to ensure funding corresponds with the Union's cultural and democratic ambitions.

Sincerely,

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