

Artistic Freedom Initiative and Open Culture! release Slovakia report, "Early Warning: The Politicization of Slovak Arts and Culture"

New Report Exposes Fico Administration's Takeover of Arts and Cultural Institutions

New York, New York – April 9, 2024 –A report released today by [Artistic Freedom Initiative](#) (AFI) and [Open Culture!](#) documents the ruling coalition government's sixteenth month-long effort to wrest control of national Slovak cultural institutions by purging expert staff and replacing them with political loyalists, breaking down institutional transparency measures, and expressing an intent to block arts funding and performance opportunities for LGBTQ+ and other marginalized artists.

In *Early Warning*, 19 Slovak artists and cultural workers – including the ousted directors of the National Slovak Theater and the Institute for Cultural Policy – provide detailed accounts of the alarming transformation of the cultural sector in Slovakia under the new leadership at the Ministry of Culture. Their testimonies detail the Ministry's campaign to use arts and culture as a political tool for the ruling coalition government, including by replacing the staff at seven museums and performance centers, dissolving two cultural institutions, dismantling two vital funding mechanisms for the arts, and censoring LGBTQ+ and minority representation in arts and culture. These efforts violate Slovakia's international legal obligations to protect and respect artistic freedom and the right to participate in cultural life.

"Artistic freedom is under assault in Slovakia. In 2024, Slovak cultural institutions bore the brunt of that force, but the effects of the suppressive measures are already spreading to individual artists who report rising censorship," said Irene Pavesi, report author and Senior Officer of Research and Policy at AFI.

The report's findings underscore the rapid evolution of the situation in Slovakia, raising an urgent alarm about the need for protective mechanisms to safeguard artistic freedom. The dismantling of safeguards for artistic freedom, combined with a rhetoric that excludes progressive and minority perspectives, paints a worrying picture for the direction of cultural policy in Slovakia. These developments mirror the cultural policies enacted by Viktor Orban's FIDESZ party in Hungary and the previous PiS administration in Poland, suggesting a regional trend towards illiberalism.

"The spread of illiberalism in Slovakia signals a broader erosion of democratic norms in Central Europe, potentially undermining EU cohesion and emboldening illiberal tendencies across the region," warns Sanjay Sethi, AFI's Co-Executive Director.

As artistic freedom continues to come under attack in Slovakia, the authors of *Early Warning* call on the international community to act. The report concludes with a set of recommendations aimed at the Slovakian government, including:

- Restoring the independence of cultural institutions
- Ensuring fair and transparent funding and hiring practices
- Reforming recent legislation to align with Slovakia's democratic commitments

The report will be presented for the first time during the Open Culture! international conference in Bratislava on May 29–30, 2025, at the Old Market Hall.

Early Warning is accompanied by the release of a limited audio series of the same name. This three-episode series captures the key findings of the report and features the voices of several Slovak artists and cultural workers who were interviewed for the report. The audio series is available on AFI's website and on Spotify for Podcasters.

About [Artistic Freedom Initiative \(AFI\)](#) :

Led by immigration and human rights attorneys, Artistic Freedom Initiative (AFI) provides pro bono immigration representation and resettlement assistance for international artists at risk. Dedicated to safeguarding the right to artistic freedom, AFI was founded on the notion that artists are uniquely situated to positively and powerfully effect change, provided their voices can be heard. As artists are increasingly censored, imprisoned, restricted from moving freely across borders, tortured, or even killed, it is more critical than ever that we safeguard the right to artistic freedom and zealously champion the courageous artists who exercise it. To this end, AFI directly assists artists who have experienced persecution, censorship, or other restrictions on their freedom of expression, and supports artists who have demonstrated a commitment to advancing progressive social change and fundamental human rights. Since 2017, AFI has taken on over 1670 legal cases involving artists at risk. For more information please visit: www.artisticfreedominitiative.org

About [Open Culture! \(OK!\)](https://platformaok.sk/) :

Open Culture! is a non-partisan, grassroots civic initiative of the cultural community from across the Slovak Republic. It brings together representatives of institutions established by cities, municipalities, and state administration, as well as non-established organizations and independent cultural workers. Its long-term goal is to highlight broader issues in cultural policy and connect individuals from various cultural sectors across Slovakia. It is committed to opposing any political interference in culture that occurs without discussion with representatives of the cultural sector and professional consideration. The platform represents a network based on solidarity, mutual support, sharing information, and specific skills. The members of Open Culture! work together to create a sustainable and diverse cultural life in all regions of the Slovak Republic. For more information please visit: <https://platformaok.sk/>

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