



**dr. Milan ZVER**

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*Ljubljana, 27 October 2020*

*Ms Sabine VERHEYEN  
Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education*

Dear Ms Verheyen, Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education,  
Dear Sabine,

I would like to take this opportunity to refute the misleading and factually inaccurate claims in the letter that was sent to you by a Slovenian NGO, Mirovni inštitut (The Peace Institute) titled "reaction to the attack on civil society and independent culture in Slovenia."

The text comes in two parts. First part states vague claims of authoritarianism, which are hard to refute since the text provides no specific examples. It claims that "judiciary and independent state bodies are under attack", even though the European Commission's 2020 Rule of law report found no evidence for such claims.

The text falsely accuses the "ruling party" of developing a parallel system of media, with the financial support of Hungarian businessmen. While it is true that two media outlets in Slovenia are owned by Hungarian owners (Nova24TV and Planet TV), the text fails to mention that both are relatively obscure and together constitute far less than 10% of the **media landscape, which is otherwise completely dominated by media tycoons connected to and actively involved in left-wing politics.**

All three largest printed daily newspapers are ran by left-wing business tycoons. RTV Slovenia is politically controlled by Social democrats, while its journalists generally belong to the far-left Levica party. The largest commercial broadcaster (Pop TV) is connected to the former left-wing Prime Minister Marjan Šarec, one of its primetime journalists even deflected into politics becoming a Member of the European Parliament with his LMŠ party.

The centre thesis of this text, however, is that the government is harbouring "peculiar hostility" towards NGOs and that it is evicting them out of a building in Ljubljana in the middle of the Corona crisis.



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This is a reaction to a legitimate and legally sound decision by the Ministry of culture to turn its very own building at Metelkova 6 in Ljubljana into the Natural history museum (the current Museum location lacks adequate space to store its priceless collection of artefacts). As a result, **about twenty NGOs** that are situated at that address (**out of more than 27.000 Slovenian NGOs**), will have to change their offices.

During the Corona crisis the NGOs, as well as culture and arts sectors in Slovenia were generously supported by the current government and the Ministry of culture. NGOs were eligible for the same help as private companies, they were entitled to reimbursement of workers' salaries if they were temporarily out of work. Every self-employed artist was eligible to 1.750 euros in three months as well a total write-off of all wage taxes. The government also financed programs and projects of NGOs in the cultural sector, which were not executed due to the epidemic. Moreover, the 2021 budget for culture was increased to a record-breaking 2.2% of GNP.

Since 2003 the NGOs residing in the Metelkova 6 building received millions of euros from the government. The NGO that sent you the letter, Mirovni inštitut (The Peace Institute), received 4.9 million euros from the government. Other major NGOs that are situated at that address received 11.1 million (Vertigo), 4.4 million (Maska), 1.7 million (Zavod SCCA), 2.3 million (En Knap), 1 million (Društvo NSK) and 925.000 euros (Vitkar).

The Metelkova 6 building was part of an old Yugoslavian army complex and is dating back to 19th century. It is the only building where no substantial maintenance was done while all the other buildings of the complex were renovated and turned into state-of-the-art museums. The plan to renovate the building is decades old since the building is structurally unsound and dangerous for its residents as well as passers-by. In fact, the last two ministers of culture (both belonging to Social democrats, who are now part of the opposition) started official proceedings to turn the building into a natural history museum.

The NGOs occupied the building in 1997 as a temporary solution but **they have been residing there, rent-free, for two decades** even though they are, as mentioned, being generously financed by the taxpayers. These premises are not crucial to NGOs' existence nor are they a god given or constitutional right. The position of the Ministry of culture (whether lead by left or right-leaning ministers) has always been that the Ministry will sooner or later use the building for one of its own public



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institutions (museums, galleries, libraries etc).

**In fact, there are hundreds of NGOs in Slovenia, which do not have such privileges,** nor are they privy to millions of taxpayer euros, like the NGOs in question, which are all elite, well-organized institutions with ample funding and strong personal and institutional networks. The Ministry of culture has been receiving exasperated emails from other NGOs and similar associations asking **why only these specific NGOs are privileged to reside in an elite part of Ljubljana, rent-free, while others are not.** Not to mention that some NGOs sublet their spaces to other organizations without the consent of the owner.

It is extremely dishonest to claim that the NGOs are being thrown out of the building "during the Corona virus crisis". The Ministry merely sent a proposal for an amicable termination. If a consensual agreement cannot be reached **the tenants still have a full year to move elsewhere.** It is true that renovations will only start in 2023, but the building is not safe to inhabit, which was confirmed by a professional commission contracted by the previous left-leaning government.

To sum it up, there is no conspiracy of a centre-right government. In fact – the current Slovenian coalition is not a homogenous coalition but is an amalgamation of two right and two left-leaning parties which have a very favourable attitude towards NGOs. The claims that this routine course of action is "an attack on civil society and independent culture intended to prevent the functioning of a critical public" is simply outrageous.

The Minister of culture assured me that he is open to discussions with any high member of EU institutions to explain every aspect regarding the Metelkova 6 building. With documents and facts, not with slander and what could – paraphrasing Justice Peter Mahon - only be described as an orchestrated litany of lies which the Mirovni inštitut (The Peace Institute) produced.

*Milan Zver, MEP, Member of the CULT Committee*

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