

Dear Sirs,

It is with great concern that we follow the current debate in Romania and the international debate that it has caused. Most renowned commentators from the cultural and political scenes, and many quality media, are concerned that the fabulous work of the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI) all over the world, under the leadership of the exceptional Horia-Roman Patapieviçi – and his committed collaborators in the headquarters and in the cities and countries where the RCI is active and successful in creating a modern, favourable cultural portrait of an open, liberal, European and cosmopolitan Romania, through cooperation with artists and intellectuals, cultural leaders and citizens – could be jeopardized severely.

More Europe – external cultural relations is a civic initiative of foundations and cultural institutes aiming at broadly debating the power of culture in European external relations, collecting and spreading evidence of best practices, and building advocacy vis-à-vis governments and EU institutions, in particular the European External Action Service.

In this respect, there is a broad acknowledgement of the importance of bottom-up work, of cultural independence and autonomy – towards a new understanding of cultural relations, instead of diplomacy only. This is why the Steering Committee of More Europe has gladly supported the membership of the RCI to More Europe, and appreciates the event that is being planned in Bucharest, preceded by many other large events in Brussels, Berlin, Paris, Copenhagen etc.

Horia-Roman Patapieviçi earned a lot of respect as president of EUNIC, the network of national cultural institutes that is one of the key drivers of change in this field.

More Europe follows and discusses with concern the testimonies of close observers who criticize the emergency decision taken by the Romanian government to change the status of the Romanian Cultural Institute and its subordination in order to allow for the change of its leadership. Until now the RCI has enjoyed independence under the symbolic subordination to the President of Romania. Close observers also criticize a revival of narrowly defined national interests and “representative culture” – redirecting its activity to the Romanian diaspora etc. – and emphasise the danger of a highly politicized functioning.

There is also a very unusual display of solidarity towards the Institute and against this decision, as well as a public uproar in favour of the Romanian Cultural Institute as one of the public institutions citizens and intellectuals are proud of, since it is perceived as effective, competent and professional. Many artists, civil society organizations and regular people have protested against this decision through online petitions, in articles and public protests, and this uproar has started to permeate also in the international press, in particular through leading Romanian filmmakers. More Europe has received statements by Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu, Corneliu Porumboiu and many more.

What must be of great concern for decision-makers is also the negative effects that this debate has on hundreds of international artistic and cultural organizations, associations and networks in Europe, representing hundreds of thousands of people. They beg the decision-makers to “recognize the excellent, accountable, efficient and effective work that the RCIs have been doing, and to leave their mission, independence and tutelage the way it is now!” They and their audiences “have learned about the beauty of Romanian culture through these Institutes; they have learned about the richness of contemporary thought in Romania and have had the good fortune to ‘discover’ and work with the finest of both young and accomplished Romanian artists...” – all thanks to the independent Romanian Cultural Institutes – despite of far less resources than other State cultural institutes. “This is in a very large part due to the innovative approaches of addressing international cultural markets exercised during the presidency of Horia-Roman Patapieviçi.”

The cultural sector states that “like the Goethe and French Institutes, the British Council and many more, the Romanian Cultural Institutes form a precious neutral space for international cultural exchange, supporting the emergence and development of international cultural collaboration and exchange. Like the other cultural institutes, the RCIs correct stereotypes, support talent, internationalize careers, spread the understanding of the best of their cultures.”

Strong reasons for More Europe to address you, appealing to all those responsible to safeguard what has been achieved by the RCI thanks to its autonomy and cultural independence. This should by no means be endangered through what is perceived as forced emergency-processes that may ‘instrumentalise’ the cultural sphere.

The Romanian Cultural Institute has become in recent years a major partner and player in the European cultural scene. This success was part of the success of the Romanian foreign policy in Europe and should not be jeopardized by shortsighted domestic policies.

Yours faithfully,

Sana Ouchtati

Project Director More Europe

on behalf of the More Europe – external cultural relations Steering Committee