

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002305/24
to the Commission
Diana Riba i Giner (Verts/ALE)
(29 October 2024)**

Subject: Measures to protect academic and cultural freedom in Europe from foreign interference

Some of the most important museums in France, including the Musée du quai Branly and the Musée Guimet, made headlines in *Le Monde* and other media recently for changing how the origin of some works and pieces was described, when references to the historical territory of Tibet were changed to the Chinese designation ‘Xizang Autonomous Region’ or to ‘the Himalayan world’. This was denounced as clear interference by the Chinese Government and an attempt to erase and rewrite the history and identity of the different peoples annexed by the People’s Republic of China. It should be noted that the historical territory of Tibet has been occupied by China since 1950. The EP Academic Freedom Monitor 2023 edition highlighted how geopolitical tensions may threaten academic freedom. Similarly, Parliament’s 2022 resolution on the implementation of the New European Agenda for Culture and the EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations denounced the attempted censorship of the Nantes history museum in 2020 as an attempt to violate the constitutional protection of academic freedom and autonomy.

1. In accordance with the Staff Working Document entitled ‘Tackling R&I foreign interference’, does the Commission intend to take any measures to protect academic and cultural freedom in Europe from foreign interference?
2. In light of the current and previous attempts by the Chinese authorities to interfere with academic and cultural freedom in French museums, does the Commission intend to take any action against such interference?

Submitted: 29.10.2024

**Answer given by Mr Micallef on behalf of the European Commission
(17 January 2025)**

The Commission acknowledges the importance of protecting the freedom of arts and sciences in Europe from foreign interference (that goes against the fundamental values and principles of the EU).

In this regard, in line with the Staff Working Document ‘Tackling R&I foreign interference’ ⁽¹⁾, the Commission is committed to supporting Member States and relevant institutions in safeguarding these freedoms.

In particular, the Commission will support Member States by providing guidance, facilitating information exchange, and promoting best practices among national authorities and cultural institutions.

The topic of artistic freedom is included in the current EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 ⁽²⁾. Moreover, the Open Method of Coordination Group of Member States experts published a report ⁽³⁾ in 2023, including specific recommendations to the Member States on how to protect the freedom of artistic expression.

However, the Commission recalls that by virtue of Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), culture remains a competence of Member States.

While the Commission recognises the concerns regarding cases of foreign interference, it is primarily the responsibility of Member States to address specific instances of such interference.

The EU has repeatedly expressed concerns for the human rights situation in Tibet and called upon China to preserve the fundamental freedoms, cultural heritage and identity of Tibetans, in public statements ⁽⁴⁾ as well as in bilateral meetings with Chinese interlocutors ⁽⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁾ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3faf52e8-79a2-11ec-9136-01aa75ed71a1>

⁽²⁾ Council Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022G1207%2801%29&qid=1671635488811>

⁽³⁾ The Status and Working conditions of artists and culture and creative professionals, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/01fafa79-1a13-11ee-806b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

⁽⁴⁾ HRC57 — Item 4 : General debate on human rights situations that require the Council’s attention (24 September 2024), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc57-item-4-general-debate-human-rights-situations-require-council%E2%80%99s-attention_en?s=62

⁽⁵⁾ Press release of the 39th EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, 17 June 2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/china-39th-human-rights-dialogue-european-union-took-place-chongqing_en