

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001592/26
to the Commission
Anna Maria Cisint (PfE), Silvia Sardone (PfE), Isabella Tovaglieri (PfE)
(17 April 2026)**

Subject: Suspension of EU funds at the Venice Biennale because of the Russian Pavilion

The Commission has suspended some EUR 2 million for the Venice Biennale in funding allocated to the Venice Biennale, citing the Foundation's decision to allow the Russian pavilion to participate in the International Art Exhibition. This decision, made in the name of protecting European values, intervenes in an internationally prominent cultural event and raises questions about the role of EU institutions in the artistic choices of independent entities. At the same time, an apparent inconsistency is evident, as countries with controversial political systems — such as Syria (ranked 162nd in the Democracy Index), Iran, the 'warlord' regime (152nd), Saudi Arabia (147th), China (142nd), and Cuba (135th) — have not been subject to similar measures or restrictions within the framework of cultural initiatives supported or allowed at EU level.

In the light of the above:

1. Does the Commission consider direct intervention in artistic and organisational decisions by an independent institution such as the Venice Biennale to be compatible with the EU's principle of cultural neutrality?
2. Why are similar measures not taken against other countries involved in international disputes, thus mitigating the risk of EU funds being applied in a selective and politicised manner?

Submitted: 17.4.2026

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Virkkunen on behalf of the European Commission
(23 June 2026)**

Culture promotes and safeguards democratic values, fosters open dialogue, diversity and freedom of expression, and should never be used as a platform for propaganda.

The decision by Biennale to allow Russia to re-open its national pavilion is not compatible with the EU's collective response to the Kremlin's war of aggression.

In particular, it is not compatible with the sanctions regime ⁽¹⁾, which aims to safeguard the protection of the principles of rule of law, democracy and media pluralism. By not respecting EU sanctions, Biennale undermines EU values.

While the Commission does not fund Biennale of Arts, Biennale benefits from a contract under Creative Europe MEDIA, under which it commits to ensure the respect of basic EU values and professional standards.

As a result of the decision on Russia's participation in Biennale of Arts, the Commission has informed Biennale of the intention to suspend or terminate the contract.

In response to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the EU has massively expanded its sanctions, adopting unprecedented measures with the aim of weakening Russia's economic base, depriving it of critical technologies and markets, and significantly curtailing its ability to wage war.

The Commission monitors the implementation and enforcement of EU sanctions by the Member States. It is in direct contact with the Italian authorities to understand how compliance with Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 has been ensured.

⁽¹⁾ Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.