



Press Release

29 November 2024

COUNSEL OF THE MANY: Taking action against right-wing extremism

28 November in Berlin: Results and outlook

Under the motto *COUNSEL OF THE MANY – Taking action against right-wing extremism*, civil society actors, artists, academics, politicians, committed individuals and activists from all across Germany and Austria came together on Thursday, 28 November 2024 at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin. The event was organised by the nationwide alliance DIE VIELEN (“THE MANY”) and took place in five cultural institutions in Berlin: Akademie der Künste, GRIPS Theater, HAU Hebbel am Ufer, the Humboldt Forum and the Maxim Gorki Theater. During the course of the fully booked-out event, more than 400 participants discussed the urgent need for action against right-wing extremism and far-right parties.

In light of recent election results by the far right and the general anti-democratic developments of recent years, and with a view to the upcoming 2025 parliamentary elections in Germany, discussions were held about the range of different approaches and strategies. Panel discussions, keynote speeches, artistic contributions and working groups focused on the central question: What to do? How can THE MANY act and operate together in order to protect and strengthen our democracy and the democratic public sphere?

The event made it clear that it is not enough to look at political, cultural, legal or social aspects in isolation. In accord with the “Shield & Shine” campaign, the day’s proceedings showed that democracy can only be effectively defended if shared public institutions and spaces – whether in parliament, in political parties, in civil society or in the cultural sphere – take action jointly, in close cooperation and coordination with each other. Because it is not just culture and the arts that are vulnerable and that are under attack – in the history of the Federal Republic, democracy itself has never been jeopardized to the extent that it is today.

The MANY participants are convinced that a strong commitment on the part of culture and the arts is necessary for a vibrant democratic society. At the same time, there is an urgent need for political action: It is essential that reforms are brought about to non-profit law and the neutrality requirement for theatres, museums, cultural venues and associations committed to combating right-wing extremism. What is needed is empowerment, alliances, synergies and increased cooperation between rural and urban areas, as well as between diverse civil society initiatives.

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In order to effectively defend democracy and artistic freedom, it is important to take action against social polarisation. Spaces must be created for diverse positions, plurality of opinions must be accepted and differences tolerated – but only as long as these are not driven by far-right, racist, antisemitic or otherwise discriminatory motives. As part of the effort to combat such inhumane ideologies, and in the spirit of a combative, defensive democracy, Article 21 of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic – the ban on anti-constitutional parties – was also discussed as a last resort in the context of the current political situation. What became unmistakably clear in the course of the day's proceedings is that the involvement of the arts and culture is inextricably linked to the defence of their freedoms.

The COUNSEL OF THE MANY is a model: The first COUNSEL in Berlin focused on providing impetus and building networks to facilitate committed and long-term action against right-wing extremism in strong alliances at local, regional and international levels.

At a time of growing individualisation and polarisation, cultural venues such as theatres, museums, libraries, music clubs or socio-cultural centres – as gathering places of the MANY – promote togetherness and exchange with an aim to strengthening existing and creating new alliances for a resilient and defensive democracy. The model of THE COUNSEL is being carried into cities and regions by the MANY.

Let us create open spaces for cohesiveness and against hate!

WE ARE MANY – EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US.

THE MANY

COUNSEL OF THE MANY – Taking action against right-wing extremism

DIE VIELEN/THE MANY in cooperation with the Akademie der Künste and Burg Hülshoff – Center for Literature (CfL), Deutscher Bühnenverein, Deutscher Kulturrat, Fonds Darstellende Künste, Maxim Gorki Theater, GRIPS Theater, HAU Hebbel am Ufer, Initiative kulturelle Integration, Kampnagel, Kulturforum der Sozialdemokratie, Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss and MANY more

Programme of the COUNSEL on 28 November 2024 [here](#)

Press photos [here](#)

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Statements

from the COUNSEL OF THE MANY – Taking action against right-wing extremism
28 November 2024 in Berlin

Anh-Linh Ngo, Vice-President of the Akademie der Künste

“Freedom of the arts is a cornerstone of democracy because it creates spaces in which exploratory thinking and speaking are possible within broad horizons. Repressed issues can be processed, conventions can be broken and the circle of topics and actors can be expanded. This openness is essential to the liberal nature of democratic societies. Artistic freedom, however, is increasingly coming under threat. The polarisation of society plays into the hands of both right- and left-wing extremist movements: On the one hand, positions are controlled and contained through scandalisation, resolutions and restrictive funding policies; on the other hand, opposing positions are suppressed through cancel culture and boycotts, through censorship or by shouting them down. These illiberal developments jeopardise the ability of art to facilitate open debate and promote social cohesion; as such, they must be firmly rejected.”

Amelie Deuffhard, Artistic Director of Kampnagel:

“Arts and culture hold the potential to open social discourse and make solutions to social challenges tangible. At a time when we are seeing a clear shift to the right, what we need more than ever are favourable conditions that have a lasting effect: Personal responsibility and artistic freedom, trust from civil society and politics as well as reliable financial backing in order to jointly create and maintain resilient structures.”

Jörg Albrecht, Artistic Director of Burg Hülshoff – Center for Literature (CfL):

“Could this be the moment to demonstrate solidarity with those who have long been harassed in the shrinking social state, on the deregulated rental market and under the increasingly relentless asylum regime? Might this be the last chance to stop those who despise democracy and promote disenfranchisement? Would this be the moment for a stage performance of the German Constitution?”

Annemie Vanackere, Artistic and Managing Director of HAU Hebbel am Ufer:

“We are facing threats, both in international and German politics, that cause many of us to feel powerless, fearful and desperate. The stages of the independent performing arts are the places where we can deal with these threats and the impacts they have on us. That is what they are there for: to help us cope with our fear, understand the situation, preserve our humanity and emerge together out of passivity.

Those who tamper with this structure make us as a society desolate, cold and lonely. We urgently need to discuss whether and what political agenda is being pursued.”

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Johannes Kirsten, Head Dramaturg at Maxim Gorki Theater Berlin:

“At the Gorki there are many who look back on a long experience of combatting right-wing extremism and racism, from the artistic director Shermin Langhoff to the majority of our ensemble, from the colleagues to the canteen staff. Take a risk! Let us take this to heart at all theatres! Let us continue to risk being uncomfortable, let us take a stand against the right, and let politicians finally risk enforcing a ban on the AfD!”

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**Olaf Zimmermann, Managing Director of the German Cultural Council and
spokesman for the Cultural Integration Initiative:**

“Artistic freedom is currently facing major threats from various sides. Right-wing populist and right-wing extremist forces are trying to co-opt arts and culture and restrict artistic freedom. But we are also seeing attempts by left-wing extremists to restrict the free practice of art by calling for boycotts. We must decidedly and clearly oppose both tendencies in the cultural sector.”

**Dr. Carsten Brosda, State Minister for Culture and Media, Hamburg and
President of the Deutscher Bühnenverein:**

“Our priority now must be on preserving freedom. The freedom to be able to do something, and the freedom to be confronted with something. It is important for us to realise that a free public space cannot be entirely organised as a ‘safe space’. After all, the dangers of public and artistic interventions are an essential characteristic of free and democratic societies. They can give rise to valuable debates if we as a society assume responsibility for ensuring that they take place in a respectful and enlightened manner. We must defend these freedoms against all attempts to restrict, boycott or co-opt them. In order to achieve this, it is essential that we engage in networking, that we show solidarity, that we are aware of one another and that we take action together. In other words: To be many and therefore to be diverse.”

Claudia Schmitz, Managing Director of the Deutscher Bühnenverein:

“There are not many places left in society where we can spend several hours together with hundreds of people who are for the most part strangers to us, share the same physical and mental space, breathe the same air, reflect on a topic, follow a story, perceive different perspectives and allow ourselves to be affected by them. To have this shared experience of being touched or irritated in a theatre is crucial for acquiring a common frame of reference, and for our coexistence. That is the strength of theatres and orchestras, and that is how they strengthen our democracy.”

Jagoda Marinić, author:

“Initiatives like this are crucial at times when those who are not defending culture are precisely the ones who are supposed to bear the political responsibility for its defence. What’s happening today – and not only in Berlin – is about more than just budget cuts. It’s about the understanding of culture as such. Democratic freedoms are being destroyed by austerity measures and infrastructure is being put at risk. Culture, education, the social agenda and health care are being played off against each other. This day at the Akademie der Künste, and the entire initiative of DIE VIELEN, gives hope because not only is the cultural scene engaged in networking, alliances are also being formed for the joint defence of democratic freedoms.”

Bijan Moini, author and lawyer:

“The best protection for freedom is to use it: take to the streets, speak out, create art, join together, express yourself. Free people are the true bulwark against fascism.”

Holger Bergmann, DIE VIELEN e.V.:

“The MANY represent the utopian space in art that can contribute to changing the world by showing how we could live, what we have to tolerate, where the unknown begins to become familiar – in the radical presence of art that is capable of shocking us, enchanting us and transforming us! ‘It is not as it is! It is what we want it to be,’ writes Wolfram Lotz in his ‘Speech on the Impossible Theatre’. So let us break the normalisation of right-wing extremism by interrupting our everyday routines of art production and performance and creating space for the further development of democracy.”

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