

Our Joint Czechoslovak Standpoint

Punishing the organisers of the exhibition *Private Nationalism* in Košice by cancelling the subsidies due to the artwork of one of the participating artists is undemocratic and in the context of contemporary art it is also an utterly tawdry measure. What's more, it was taken based on a grossly misleading interpretation of the work of art which quite needlessly instigates nationalist tendencies in the discussion about the relationship of Czechs and Slovaks as well as the relationship between the Czech and Slovak Republic.

Ministry of Culture, SR: No Stepping for Public Money

The core of the dispute is the installation of artist Dalibor Bača titled CZ_SK_HU_D_PL at the exhibition *Private Nationalism* in Košice, which consisted of **placing a monumental Czechoslovak flag on the ground of the gallery**. The exhibition was held from 27th March - 30th April in the Hall of Art in Košice.



The photos of Bača's artwork from the exhibition somehow got to the ambassador of the Czech Republic in Slovakia Livia Klausová which misinterpreted the meaning of it as "placing the Czech flag on the ground at the entrance door instead of a rug" and on 18th April 2014 she addressed a mass complaint interpreted in such a manner to the institutions which were to financially support the realisation of the exhibition such as the Government Office of the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, Visegrad Fund and the Representation of the European Commission in Slovakia. Also, she states in the letter that she "had no opportunity to see the exhibition in person".

On 15th May 2014 the Committee for National Minorities and Ethnic Groups as an expert body of the Government Council published the resolution no. 47 in which they "reject any disrespectful use of national symbols of any state (...) and therefore condemns pseudo-artistic demonstrations which would disparage any nationality."

On 15th June 2014 SME daily published the information that the Slovak Ministry of Culture cancelled the allocation of subsidies for the *Kassák Centre for Intermedia Creativity* for the *Private Nationalism* project while the questions were shrugged off by a single sentence:
"There will be no stepping for public money."

Absurd and Dangerous Mistake

The interpretation of Dalibor Bača's work as "the Czech flag instead of a rug" or in the manner that "there will be no stepping for public money" is an absurd and dangerous mistake.

As this explanation:

- ignores alags of former Czechoslovakia and today's Czech Republic
- points to a low degree of awareness and professional competence to bring up any evaluating opinions towards the author, his work and the exhibition it was exhibited at,
- grossly and unreasonably accuses the artist together with the curators and organisers of the exhibition of the defamation of the national symbol of the Czech Republic.
- represents exactly the kind of (private) nationalism which the exhibitions criticises.

It is striking that the decision of public bodies of SR concerning the exhibition *Private Nationalism* is based on such a gross mistake and it is pitiful that the consequence of such a mistake is the injustice performed by the state. It is literally absurd as well as dangerous when combined with political power that both these reactions – of the ambassador of the Czech Republic and public bodies of SR – represent the kind of (private) nationalism which the exhibition in question criticises.

Artwork

The author's intention was by no means a defamation gesture in relation to the Czechs nor Czech Republic. According his own words his intention was something completely else - to bring into the discussion about the split of Czechoslovakia "a voice which points to the historical context and reminds us of the painful side of our recent common past and perhaps would be a contribution towards the continual coping with it." Furthermore, Bača in his statement explains that "the Czech Republic has appropriated the common historical image by using the Czechoslovak flag" and forms a question which was a direct stimulus for the work: "Is it right to appropriate the historical visual identity which was commonly shared?"

For the installation in Košice he therefore used a historical Czechoslovak flag which as a dealing with the questions of the history of Czechoslovak state and its split in his long-term project "In Search of Czech Patriots under the Czechoslovak National Symbols". Last time he tackled the issue in his public space installation in the area of Ján Palach Square in Prague in November 2013.

Dalibor Bača explains the placing of the flag right at the entrance to the gallery with the following words: "I am interested in the viewpoint of an individual, so I created an "obstacle" out of the Czechoslovak flag. The gallery visitors are thus put into the situation when they are forced to evaluate the current state. Everybody has an encoded instinct of how to behave towards the national symbols."

In other words, Dalibor Bača works in his artwork with a symbolical message of the flag laid on the ground as the defeated flag assuming that Czechoslovakia as the state was defeated by two nationalisms, which is why his flag on the ground is fully grounded. The gallery visitors are confronted with the question how to react to the symbol of the defeated state.

Call

By realising the meaning of an open and transparent competition for the form and future of democratic institutions and we hereby protest against the doing of public bodies of SR which led to cancellation of already approved subsidies for the exhibition *Private Nationalism*. This case (once again) demonstrably shows the cancellation of the decision of professional committees and at the same time points to the political control of an independent decision mechanism of subsidy allocation. It is particularly bewildering that it took place during the period when the Ministry of Culture of SR is in a final stage of preparations to establish the *Fund for Art* as a separate and independent institution for subsidy allocation. Additional cancellation of the subsidy for an approved project poses a serious threat on credibility of the whole Ministry of Culture's intention with the *Fund for Art* and it signalizes the nature of its "independence".

In view of all these circumstances we, representatives of Czech and Slovak cultural life, hereby protest against the decisions of the Minister of Culture SR and Government Office of the SR and express a deep concern over the nationalist tendencies which were in place after the controversy caused by the Embassy of the Czech Republic and the following action of public bodies of SR.

Action

As a protest against these decisions and solidarity action with the artist and his work, exhibition and its organisers, we decided to formulate and publish the joint standpoint. Together with it we shall install a (after the fashion of the Dalibor Bača's work installation in Košice) in all the galleries, museums, private premises as well as public institutions both in the Czech Republic and Slovakia receptive to our joint standpoint for one day on 25th June 2014.

18th June 2014

Initiators:

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Institutions:

Nová synagoga / Kunsthalle Žilina
Slovenská národná galéria, Bratislava
Galéria umenia Ernesta Zmetáka,
Nové Zámky
Stredoslovenská galéria v Banskej Bystrici
Banská St a nica Contemporary,
Banská Štiavnica
Tranzitdisplay, Praha
Galerie Michal, Ostrava
4AM Fórum pro architekturu a média, Brno
Nadácia otvorenej spoločnosti, Bratislava
At Home Gallery, Šamorín
Dům umění, Brno

Centrum pre filantropiu, Bratislava
CEE Photo Fund
Na peróne, Košice
Tabačka Kulturfabrik, Košice
Galerie Jáma 10, Ostrava
Galéria Krokus, Bratislava
Galéria HIT, Bratislava
Galéria plusmínusnula, Žilina
OZ Fundament
A4 - Priestor pre súčasnú kultúru, Bratislava
KC Dunaj, Bratislava
Make Up Gallery, Košice