

**FREIE
REPUBLIK
WIENER
FEST
WOCHEN**



30 May – 1 June



Theater Akzent

CONGRESS I
CULTUREWARS



**THE CONGRESSES
OF VIENNA**

As a hybrid of stark realism and social sculpture, Milo Rau's theatrical discourse formats create 'a forum far removed from political trench warfare' (SRF). They are exercises in democratic practices and yet remain stage events.

210 years after the famous Congress of Vienna, which established a new authoritarian order in Europe, *The Congresses of Vienna* will place the discussion of socio-political issues at centre stage and (very probably, like *The Vienna Trials* last year) become the controversial talk of the town. *The Congresses of Vienna* will renegotiate the red lines of cancel culture and the entanglements behind #MeToo. Set between theatre and debate, they give a close-up and multivoiced take on the complex of love in its political and interpersonal sense. In essence, they confront the relationship between art, power and abuse. This 'collective psychological process of communication' (ORF) will culminate in decisions about what real change might look like.

🗣 German

🎧 With simultaneous translation into German and English

♿ barrier-free access

📍 Theater Akzent

📅 Fri, 30 May
7.30 pm, opening session

📅 Sat, 31 May
11 am–2.30 pm, session 1
3.30–7 pm, session 2

📅 Sun, 1 June
11 am–2.30 pm, session 3
from 3.30 pm, final meeting and decision announcement

**"CANCEL CULTURE IS A SYMPTOM.
IT ARISES WHEN POLITICAL
COMMUNICATION TAKES ON A LIFE
OF ITS OWN – AMPLIFIED BY
DIGITAL MEDIA"**

– Harry Lehmann

**"CANCEL CULTURE IS A SYMPTOM
OF AN AGE OF SUPERFICIAL SELF-
RIGHTEOUSNESS"**

– Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

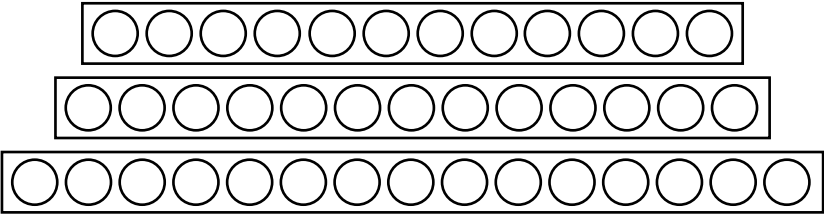
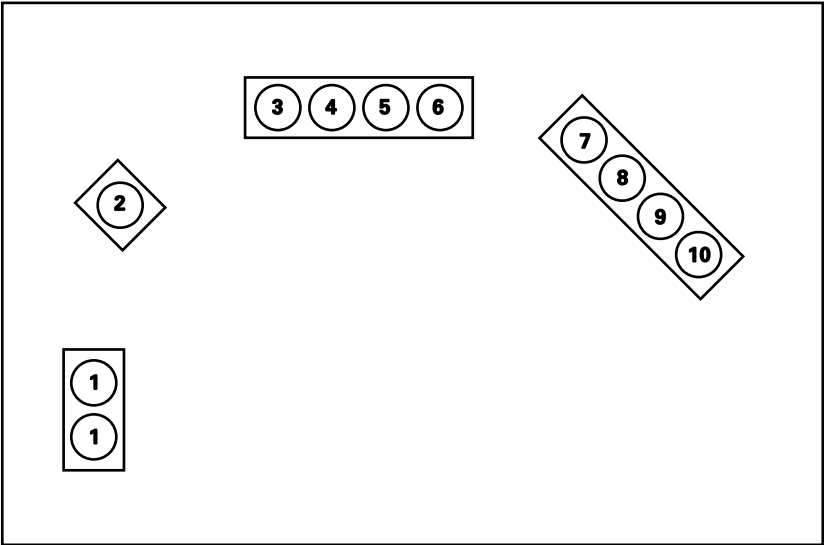
Concept, Direction Milo Rau **Dramaturgy, Research** Natalie Assmann **Dramaturgy, Casting** Robert Misik **Direction assistance** Nastasia Griesse **Video concept** Moritz von Dungern **Video direction** Jens Baudisch **Stage Design, Props** Anton Lukas, Constanze Bieber **Awareness** Anna Schall

executed by the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

A project by the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

By Milo Rau in cooperation with Robert Misik, Natalie Assmann and the Council of the Republic

SEATING PLAN CONGRESS HALL



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- 1** Translator’s quay
- 2** witness box
- 3-6** Jury
- 7** Lead investigator
- 8** Legal assistance
- 9** Live-blogger
- 10** Assistance to the Congress Chair
- 11** Council of the Republic, Respondents and experts

THE CONGRESSES OF VIENNA

CULTURE WARS

CONGRESS I

OPENING SESSION

FRI, 30 MAY, 7.30–10 PM

OPENING SPEECHES

In the opening speeches, the themes that will be central this weekend are introduced: cultural scholar Elisabeth Bronfen, a member of the jury of this *Vienna Congress*, provides an overview of the history of “cancel culture” and the culture wars. Author and director Mateja Meded and journalist Ulf Poschardt will deliver antagonistic opening speeches. Meded shatters the narcissistic male cliques with

the “ugly truth,” while Poschardt, in turn, will polemically hold up a mirror to those he refers to as the left-green “bourgeoisie of crap.” Discourse researcher Ruth Wodak will speak about the current attacks on the academic system in the USA. The head of the investigation presents the weekend’s negotiation program, and the four-member jury is briefed on their duties.

SESSION 1

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION OR INCITEMENT? CANCELLING, POLARIZATION, AND FREE SPEECH IN THE FACE OF THE WAR IN GAZA.

SATURDAY, 30 MAY, 11 AM TO 2.30 PM

Since the massacre of 7 October 2023 by Hamas and the subsequent war of Israel against Palestine, we have also been witnessing a global war of opinions with vocal supporters and parts of the public sphere cheering their teams on like in the stands. Almost everything about this

debate is controversial: the history that preceded the current escalation (where some see the original wrong in ‘Zionist colonialism’, others see it in ‘Palestinian terrorism and antisemitism’), the main responsibility for the escalation, even what is happening at all. For some the Hamas attack is an act of resistance, for others it is a terrorist-genocidal massacre. For some the war in Gaza is Israel’s self-defence, for others it is a genocidal campaign.

Is there anything we can agree on about all this? Are there any hard facts that everyone can subscribe to?

And what does international law say about the 7 October attacks, what does it say about the right to resistance, occupation? What does it say in the Law of Armed Conflict and the Convention on Genocide, which are being called up by those who are decrying what is happening in Gaza as genocide?

This is, of course, not just a meeting of opinions, but one of competing traumas: the Jewish and the Israeli trauma of anti-semitism, persecution, massacres and the Shoah that was reactivated by 7 October and the Palestinian trauma of the Nakba, (der 'great catastrophe', which is the original expulsion from the Palestinian territories) and the endless horror in Gaza.

As a result, attempts are repeatedly being made to exclude everyone who does not share the same opinion from debates and to discredit them. Followers of the pro-Palestinian solidarity movement try to prevent events and defame critics as 'accessories to genocide', while the pro-Israeli side seeks to discredit all critics of the Israeli course of action as antisemites. Does this pose a threat to freedom of opinion? Are politics restricting the discussion of Israel, Palestine and the war in Gaza too much in Austria and Germany, so that freedom of opinion is limited in a way that contravenes basic liberties – even by government offices (such as was proposed in the debate about the anti-semitism clause in German federal and provincial parliaments)?

Or does the opposite apply: Is it, in fact, more important than ever that we approach the state of Israel with particular sensitivity and that we are particularly careful about antisemitic biases in Germany and Austria in light of our history? Should we by common consensus give no room to voices of the BDS movement and comparable positions – at least in publicly funded art institutions? And why are the very protagonists who are touched by events in multiple ways and open for discussion, those who are able to recognise the suffering of the other side, under particular pressure? Why are those the very voices that are 'cancelled' by both echo chambers?

SESSION 2

THE 'CASE' OF ULRIKE GUÉROT – CANCELLED BY THE LEFT?

SATURDAY, 30 MAY, 3 PM–6 PM

The second session of the Congresses revisits the bitter conflicts around the Covid measures and around the Russian invasion of Ukraine by way of a fitting example: The 'case' of Ulrike Guérot. The political scientist Ulrike Guérot became an established star of the 'Querdenken:innen' opposition movement with books, interviews and notable talk-show appearances during the Covid pandemic. She opposed lockdowns and other Covid measures and criticised the publicity around and pressure for vaccination. After the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, she opposed weapons deliveries to Ukraine and accused the West of having provoked the war, claiming that it was the EU who was warmongering rather than Putin and the Kremlin. Others were irritated by these statements by the University of Bonn professor. 'We, the AStA [the students' union] of the University of Bonn, want to distance ourselves from her opinions and demand that the University of Bonn take a position and also distance itself from Prof. Guérot.' The student union claimed that the statements made by Guérot during her appearances were never of a purely private nature, but would also be taken for the University of Bonn's position by the public. That in turn, they said, was damaging to the university. Guérot eventually lost her post as professor on grounds of plagiarism, as explained in a statement: 'Last year, Prof. Dr. Ulrike Guérot was publicly accused of having appropriated another's intellectual property without clearly

identifying it as such during her employment at University of Bonn. The university's relevant committees have examined the matter and consider it confirmed (with reference to the publication period since her joining the University of Bonn in September 2021 and with reference to an earlier publication that was relevant for the appeal process). The committees did not agree with Ms Prof. Dr. Guérot's rebuttal (among others) that the publications in question were not scholarly publications. The university rectorate has thus taken the necessary employment law steps.' Guérot takes the view that this was just an excuse to get rid of her because of her undesired opinions. Guérot's fellow campaigners voiced their criticism that there is already a broad movement that demands that those who disrupt must go. This spring, Guérot and her fellow campaigners started the 'European Peace Project' that demands a security architecture 'with and not against Russia' and declares 'this war to be over'.

This raises a question: What is the meaning of adherence to facts and neutrality in the humanities, which *per se* work with theories, so that it is possible – even expected – for extremely antagonistic stances to be maintained at the same time? Do the standards for scholarly work also apply to manifestos and pamphlets? What happens when the logic of activism and social media hypes and excitement cross over into the field of scholarship? What happens when scholars become activists and other activists in turn intimidate scholars? Doesn't the freedom of scholarship also entail representation of outlier and minority positions?

SESSION 3

ATTACKS ON ARTISTIC FREEDOM – CANCELLED BY THE RIGHT

SUNDAY, 1 JUNE, 11 AM–2.30 PM

The third session of this Vienna Congress will close the circle of culture wars and ‘cancel culture’. It addresses the way in which the freedom of the arts are under threat in our neighbouring countries Hungary and Slovakia. In Slovakia, the climate for the arts has drastically changed since a populist-authoritarian government has taken over. The serving minister of culture, Martina Šimkovičová, has dismissed the director of the National Theatre, the director of the National Gallery and the head of the National Museum. She has sued Michal Hvorecký, one of the most renowned writers in the country, for having called the ultra-right politician a ‘neo-fascist’. In theory, he could be sentenced to up to five years imprisonment. Theatres being brought into line, museum directors replaced, the large institutions taken on the short leash of the government, plus the Pride Parade being banned: such is the situation in our neighbouring countries Slovakia and Hungary. Michal Hvorecký, a writer of novels, sounded out the authoritarian foreboding early on: for example, his celebrated book *Troll* paints a dystopia of troll armies poisoning entire societies on the internet. Slovakia’s prime minister Robert Fico called him a ‘troublemaker and rowdy’. Hvorecký said that what was happening in Slovakia was an ‘absolute catastrophe’. He added that SNS, the minister of culture’s party, ‘is not just a nationalist party, it represents a nativist ideology, supports conspiracy theories and understanding for Putin.’ In Hungary, minister of culture János Csák puts

people who ‘strengthen national appreciation’ in charge even of small theatres and pushes those he considers proponents of the ‘Brussels ideology’ out of their posts. Cancelling is taking place on a grand scale: left-wingers and liberals have to leave, conservative and right-wing protagonists come in – or even just friends of the given ministers. This right-wing ‘cancel culture’ is tightly bound up with the same ideological culture wars that are also being fought out in Austria and Germany. It is the advancement of a cultural policy that is dedicated to ‘national culture’, ‘pride’, ‘patriotism’ and ‘national sovereignty’ and that explicitly opposes ‘leftist woke’ culture and ‘Brussels liberalism’. Does this contravene the European basic rights of ‘freedom of the arts’, such as is proclaimed succinctly in Article 13 of the European Union’s Charter of Fundamental Rights: ‘The arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint.’ From what point on is the freedom of the arts under threat? Conservative voices argue, for example, that freedom of the arts is non-negotiable, but that whoever depends on state funding has to accept that the guidelines for the choice of artistic directors, decision-makers, etc. change when governments change – and that this is not undemocratic but the very essence of democracy.

CONGRESS STAFF

Amina Aziz (jury member), is an author and journalist, is the editor-in-chief of Missy Magazine. She studied Islamic Studies in Hamburg, Damascus, and Tehran, and has worked in political education as well as in the political sphere on academic topics including feminism, racism, and Islamism.

Sabine Bouysy (assistant to the conference management), Council of the Republic

Elisabeth Bronfen (jury member) is a literary scholar and author. She was a professor at the University of Zurich and currently holds a professorship at New York University.

Jan Fleischhauer (jury member) is a journalist and author. He worked for a long time at Der Spiegel and is currently, among other roles, a columnist for the magazine Focus.

Monika Mokre (jury member) is a political scientist who worked for many years as a staff member at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. She lives in Vienna.

Marco Otoyá (assistant to the conference management), Council of the Republic

Sandra Pelzmann (deputy conference director) is a university lecturer at the Institute of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna.

Alexia Stuefer (investigator) is a criminal defense attorney in Vienna and a board member of the Austrian Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

SPEAKERS, INFORMANTS, AND EXPERTS

Fabian Albrecht was a member of the student parliament at the University of Bonn and a member of the Jusos, the youth organization of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, during Ulrike Guérot's professorship years.

Volker Beck was active in the gay and lesbian movement, served as a Green Party member of the German Bundestag from 1994 to 2017, and is currently president of the German-Israeli Society.

Jaroslav Daniška is a Slovak journalist and TV commentator, and an important conservative voice in his country.

Sláva Daubnerová is an author, playwright, director, and performer. She recently directed Biedermann and the Arsonists at the Lower Austria State Theatre.

Valerie Divine is an artist from Hungary. In 2020, she won the "Drag Queen Hungary Competition" and is known by the name "Queen of Budapest."

Matej Drlička is a Slovak cultural manager. He was director of the National Theatre in Bratislava until he was dismissed by the Minister of Culture.

Najwa Duzdar is an Austro-Palestinian activist and manager of a social aid organization. She is a member of the Jewish-Arab peace initiative Standing Together Vienna.

Heike Egner is a German human geographer and former university professor. As the author of the book *Wer stört muss weg. (Those who disturb must go)*, she wrote about the threat to academic freedom.

Olga Flaum is a member of the Council of the Republic of the Wiener Festwochen. She is a political and legal scholar as well as a specialized trainer in the fields of gender, diversity, and generational management. She is also a member of the association Ministry of Artists.

Ulrike Guérot is a political scientist and was a professor at the University of Bonn starting in 2021. In 2023, her employment was terminated due to alleged violations of academic standards.

Shoura Hashemi is the managing director of Amnesty International Austria. Amnesty International classifies the actions of the Israeli army in Gaza as genocide and has faced accusations of promoting Israel-related antisemitism as a result.

Hamza Howidy is a Palestinian peace and human rights activist. He protested against Hamas in Gaza, was arrested and tortured, and now lives in Germany as an asylum seeker.

Michal Hvorecký is an author, novelist, playwright, and a central voice of Slovakia's democratic civil society. His novel *Troll* has been widely celebrated and awarded.

Boris Kálnoky is a journalist and author. Since 2020, he has headed the media school at the Mathias Corvinus Collegium in Budapest.

Klaus Lederer is a former politician of the German party DIE LINKE and a former mayor and senator for culture in Berlin.

Harry Lehmann is a philosopher at the University of Luxembourg. He is the author of the book *Ideologiemaschinen. Wie Cancel Culture funktioniert (Ideology Machines: How Cancel Culture Works)*.

Lisa Macheiner studied political science in Innsbruck and has been working with aid organizations around the world for many years. She is a project coordinator with Doctors Without Borders and has been deployed to Gaza several times, most recently just a few weeks or days ago.

Mateja Meded, originally born in Yugoslavia, has lived in Germany since 1992. She is an actress, author, and director. At the 2024 Vienna Festival, she presented her performance *Fotzenschleimpower gegen Raubtierkaputtalismus (Cunt Slime Power Against Predatory Capitalism)*.

Ulf Poschardt is a journalist. He was editor-in-chief of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* magazine, later of *Vanity Fair*. He also served as editor-in-chief of *Die Welt* and, since this year, is the publisher overseeing all *Welt* brand products. His polemical essay *Shitbürgertum (Shitbourgeoisie)* sparked intense debates.

Inna Schewtschenko is a feminist and activist, formerly of the legendary group FEMEN. She has lived in exile since 2013. She is of Ukrainian origin and criticizes Western voices that call for "peace" but urge Ukraine to capitulate to aggression.

Ralph Schöllhammer is a political scientist and author, working at the Mathias Corvinus Collegium in Budapest. He lives in Vienna and Budapest.

Sashi Turkof is an artist and former president of the Jewish Student Union.

Peter Weish is a natural scientist, physicist, biologist, and chemist, and was an early critic of nuclear energy. He is a recipient of the Cross of Honor for Science and Art and a co-signer of the manifesto *Network for Academic Freedom*.

Ruth Wodak, born in 1950, is a professor of discourse studies and applied linguistics. She has primarily taught in Lancaster and Vienna. She is an important representative of critical discourse analysis. She has received numerous international awards and honorary titles and is a member of the Academia Europaea and the British Academy of Social Sciences.

Alma Zadić is a jurist and politician. She was Federal Minister of Justice and is currently deputy party chairwoman of the Greens and a member of the National Council.

Peter Zajac is a literary scholar and critic. He was, among other roles, a founder of the "Civic Conservative Party" and served as a member of the Slovak Parliament for several terms.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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