

Eurovision 2026 plunges deeper into political crisis as boycotts multiply

Robert Stevens
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The Eurovision Song Contest has been engulfed by a growing political and cultural storm in the wake of the European Broadcasting Union's (EBU) decision to permit Israel's participation in next year's event.

Major national broadcasters, individual artists and cultural figures across Europe have announced their refusal to participate or expressed public condemnation, turning what the EBU insists is a "non-political" entertainment event into a major flashpoint.

In Italy, workers in the USB union at state broadcaster RAI are petitioning for a boycott. Were their protest to succeed, Italy would follow five other countries—Spain, Ireland, Slovenia, the Netherlands and Iceland—whose broadcasters announced earlier this month they would not participate in the competition.

This followed a meeting of the general assembly the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in Geneva, which took the decision—in the face of demands from a growing number of artists that Israel be excluded—to allow representation from a country which for over two years has waged a genocide against the Palestinians.

Italy, like Spain, is one of the "Big Five" nations providing the largest financial backing for Eurovision, whose status grants the nation's representative act automatic entry to the finals. Their boycotts seriously threaten the event's finances.

The USB petition declares, "Spain, Ireland, Slovenia and the Netherlands have taken a courageous decision: they will not take part in the 70th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest, which will be held in Vienna in May 2026".

Joining them "would show how deeply Italy cares about the values of human dignity, equality and justice for all peoples. Our voice would resonate globally, demonstrating that we do not turn a blind eye to injustice."

Speaking on its behalf, Claudio Ciccone said the position was supported by the vast majority of the population: "The street protests of recent months and the polls have made it quite clear which side Italy is on with regard to the genocide of the Palestinian people."

On December 22, the Eurovoix news website reported that the trio AGRIDOCE—who were in the running as possible representatives for Portugal—would not participate in Eurovision.

The statement of Joana Banza, Margarida Castanheira and Sofia Jorge read, "Over the past few weeks, we held onto hope that circumstances might change and that somehow signs of accountability and justice would emerge.

"However, and unfortunately, the reality remains unchanged: Israel continues to act without consequences proportional to the severity of the humanitarian situation we are all witnessing—and with which we feel the world continues to be complicit.

"We deeply believe in love for music, but we cannot let this situation go unpunished.

"It goes against our values, against what we believe in as artists and as people."

They concluded, "With the information we have and a clear conscience, we understand that if our song wins the Festival da Canção and circumstances remain unchanged, we will not participate in the Eurovision Song Contest."

Their withdrawal means that 13 of the 16 composers and acts who will compete in Festival da Canção have committed to refusing to compete in Eurovision. Eurovoix reported, "To date, Bandidos do Cante is the only act to publicly confirm they will go to Eurovision should they win the Portuguese selection. André Amaro and Sandrino have not stated a position publicly."

The crisis engulfing Eurovision is exemplified by the refusal of many artists in Belgium—where the European Union is headquartered—to participate in the event.

Euronews reported, also December 22, that a "collective of 170 Belgian artists and cultural personalities has denounced public broadcaster RTBF's decision to take part in the 2026 Eurovision Song Contest as Israel is set to compete despite 'its war of extermination' in Gaza."

The group has drawn up a petition stating, "In our view, this constitutes a serious breach of the ethical and moral obligations of public broadcasters."

It denounces Israel for “art-washing”, “using cultural events for political ends”, stating, “for years, the Israeli government has used major artistic and cultural events for propaganda purposes in order to divert attention from its regime of occupation, colonisation and apartheid against the Palestinian people.”

The artists add, “Participating in Eurovision allows Israel to maintain the illusion that it is a modern and exemplary Western democracy, and thus to more easily conceal its criminal actions.”

The escalating cultural boycott of Eurovision for including a pariah state hated globally—against whose wars and genocide tens of millions have protested and demonstrated throughout Europe and internationally—has also seen last year’s winner of the contest, Nemo, return their trophy. Charlie McGettigan, the 1994 Eurovision winner, did the same.

The contest’s organisers have attempted damage control, repeating that Eurovision is “apolitical” and that the rules do not allow for exclusions based on a state’s alleged human-rights record. This rings hollow in light of prior selective exclusions and many politicised interventions, including the banning of Belarus and Russia from the competition.

While Eurovision maintains this stance, they are fully aware that if the contest goes ahead it will face mass hostility, amid a continued criminal offensive against the Palestinians.

Just days after the latest condemnations of Israel’s participation in Eurovision, Benjamin Netanyahu—who leads the fascist regime in Tel Aviv—received assurances from the would-be Fuhrer in the White House Donald Trump that if the remnants of the already virtually destroyed Hamas attempt to oppose the ethnic cleansing of Gaza “there will be hell to pay”—America and Israel would “go in and wipe them out.”

This explains the announcement by the Austrian public broadcaster ORF, who will host Eurovision 2026, that it will not prohibit the Palestinian flag being deployed in the audience nor censor any booing directed at Israel’s performance—which organisers have done during the past two events. Euronews reported the statement of Eurovision Song Contest executive producer Michael Kroen, who declared, “We will not sugarcoat anything or avoid showing what is happening, because our task is to show things as they are.”

But showing things “as they are” would mean the expulsion of Israel from the competition as the architects of crimes of genocide and aggression which bear comparison with those of the Nazi regime.

That many artists and cultural workers are refusing to tolerate the crimes of the Zionist regime or allow their work

to contribute to its whitewashing is to their credit. There is a significant radicalisation underway among artists who are genuinely angered by these terrible events.

In the last days Harry Burton, a Dublin-based freelance storyboard artist and political cartoonist who has produced work for studios and publications in Ireland and internationally said, “Israel should be banned from all cultural and sporting events, not just Eurovision.”

This followed the publication of a cartoon by Burton in the December 6 *Irish Examiner* showing an Israeli singer cheerily performing, flag in hand and clad in blue. At the foot of her dress are red bloodstains and surrounding her, in the darkness outside the spotlight, are the bombed-out ruins and rubble of Gaza.

Last September, the *World Socialist Web Site* noted the decision of more than 4,000 writer-directors, actors and other film industry workers “not to screen films, appear at or otherwise work with Israeli film institutions... that are implicated in genocide and apartheid against the Palestinian people.”

Our comment at the time fully applies to the eruption of outrage over Eurovision:

The steady accumulation of appeals, protests and open letters by thousands of actors, directors and others speaks to genuine anger and a growing radicalization in artistic and intellectual circles. It also hints at a political impasse that needs to be overcome. Protests aimed at government and existing parties, and even the legitimate punishment of Israeli institutions, will not change the ghastly situation. Only the movement of the international working class, coming into action against the capitalist society responsible for these world-historic crimes, can do that. The artists will have to turn their attention in that direction.



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