

# Golden Orange Film Festival cancelled as result of Turkish government-backed censorship attempt

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The Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, scheduled to be held October 7-14, was cancelled amid attempts to censor the documentary *Kanun Hükümü* (*The Decree*, directed by Nejla Demirci) and protests against it. The film tells the story of Yasemin Demirci, a doctor, and Engin Karata?, a teacher, dismissed from their jobs under the terms of the infamous Decree Law.

After the abortive, NATO-backed military coup attempt on July 15, 2016, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government dismissed tens of thousands of people from public office by decree. This sweeping purge not only targeted those involved in the coup, but all political opponents. Most of those dismissed were never prosecuted or were acquitted after trials. However, they were not reinstated but were condemned to poverty and insecurity.

The festival administration first announced that one of the participants in *The Decree* was still on trial and that the film had therefore been excluded from the competition. However, 20 members of the festival's jury protested in a joint statement, saying, "We do not accept this view that looks for criminal elements in films and normalizes censorship." They announced that they would only carry out their duties if the film was reinstated in the program.

Dozens of directors and producers thereupon withdrew their films from the competition, stating that they saw the exclusion of the film from the festival as a clear threat to freedom of artistic expression. Realizing that it would be impossible in practice to hold the festival, the festival management reversed its decision and reinstated *The Decree*.

The defense of democratic rights by a significant section of the cultural community and the fact that the

festival management was forced to back down were unacceptable to the Turkish government. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, one of the festival's supporters, announced its withdrawal from the festival. The Ministry of Youth and Sports said it was taking back the hall it had allocated. Both ministries said that by programming *The Decree*, the festival had contributed "to the propaganda of the terrorist organization FETÖ." The so-called Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO) is named after Fethullah Gülen, the US-based Muslim preacher Ankara blamed for orchestrating the 2016 coup attempt.

Festival director Ahmet Boyacıo?lu then issued a new statement announcing that he had been put under investigation "due to the presence of the film at the festival," that he and his team had received "threats to their safety" and that they had once again removed *The Decree* from the festival selection.

In response, Muhittin Böcek (Republican People's Party, CHP), the mayor of Antalya Metropolitan Municipality, the organizer of the festival, announced that the festival was "cancelled due to a process that was formed and created outside of us." Böcek said officials would organize the festival with new staff, and without any support from state ministries, before the end of 2023.

President Erdoğan also made a threatening statement on Sunday, declaring: "We cannot accept the propaganda of those who try to change the national will, especially through art."

The festival, which began in 1964, has only been cancelled twice before. In 1979, every producer and director decided to withdraw from the festival after the Censorship Board tried to cut parts of three films.

Among the censored films were Yavuz Özkan's *Demiryol* (about striking rail workers) and Ömer Kavur's *Yusuf and Kenan* (about poor street kids), two films about the working class. A year later, the festival could not take place due to the military coup of September 12, 1980.

The latest cancellation comes amid growing social tensions over the rising cost of living, mounting government attacks on democratic rights and the escalation of NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine.

The escalating militarism of the NATO alliance, of which Turkey is a member, also manifests itself in the increasing suppression of basic democratic rights and growing interference targeting culture and the arts, not only in Turkey.

On the day that the Golden Orange Film Festival was cancelled, German Culture Minister Claudia Roth (Greens) announced that the budget of the Berlinale (Berlin International Film Festival), the country's main film festival, would be cut by more than two million euros [\$US 2.1 million].

This means that the number of films shown will be reduced by more than a third. The minister's announcement also forced the festival's artistic director, Carlo Chatrian, to resign. Leading international filmmakers and actors have condemned the cuts for undermining and seeking to influence the festival.

The German government is spending billions of euros on the biggest military build-up since Hitler, while slashing the budget for arts and culture as well as many other areas of society. In addition to next year's cuts to the Berlinale budget, the latest draft for the 2024 cultural budget mandates cuts to the cultural sector of about 10 percent (€254 million).

After her keynote speech at this year's Berlinale in February, Roth joined then-Ukrainian ambassador Andrij Melnyk—an open admirer of Ukrainian fascist, antisemite and Nazi-collaborationist Stepan Bandera—for a showing of the vile pro-NATO propaganda film *Superpower*.

On the other hand, the founder of Pink Floyd, Roger Waters, who opposes the NATO war in Ukraine and condemns Israeli state terror against the Palestinians, faces a massive smear campaign by the imperialist powers, including Germany, and his concerts are threatened with being banned.



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