

European politicians say Israel should be disqualified from Eurovision 2024

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Brussels, February 7 (RHC)-- The organizers of the Eurovision Song Contest are under increasing pressure to exclude Israel from this year's competition as it wages a devastating war on Gaza.

More than 20 politicians wrote to the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) on Tuesday saying Israel's participation in the contest "whitewashes a regime that is carrying out ethnic cleansing in Palestine and committing war crimes and genocide."

European Parliament members and politicians from Spain's left-wing Podemos party are among the signatories of the letter seen by Al Jazeera.

The annual contest is set to take place in May at Sweden's Malmo Arena after Swedish singer Loreen won last year. The politicians behind the letter acknowledged that the EBU, which is a group of public media organisations, wants Eurovision to remain a non-political event.

"However, the Eurovision Song Contest did veto Russia's participation in the contest from 2022 in response to its invasion of Ukraine. Also, in 2019, Iceland was fined by the festival organisers because the Icelandic contestant displayed a Palestinian flag at the Eurovision Song Contest in Tel Aviv," they said.

"Israel's participation is in clear conflict with what the EBU claims to stand for, as it misinforms about Israel and conceals its genocidal behaviour," they added.

Thirty-seven countries will participate this year. Israel became the first non-European country to participate in 1973 and hosted the pop culture event in Tel Aviv in 2019. Entry to the contest is open to all members of the EBU.

Besides the European politicians, musicians in Sweden, artists in Finland, and protesters in Norway and Ireland have sent letters to the EBU urging public broadcasters to exclude Israel from the contest.

Iceland, meanwhile, is reconsidering its participation if Israel is allowed to compete this year.

Eurovision, which began in 1956, is an international music pageant watched and adored by millions of viewers. But this year, some fans said they will join protests against Israel by boycotting the contest and turning off their screens should it be allowed to participate.

"I'm a huge Eurovision fan. It should just be a bit of fun, but we all know behind the glitz and glamour, geopolitical games are at play," Ciara Greene, a Belgium-based fan told Al Jazeera. "Allowing Israel to participate contributes to Israeli exceptionalism and normalises the state's genocidal policies."

In Sweden, home to the 1974 Eurovision winner Abba, famous musicians like Robyn have also signed a letter calling out the competition's alleged double standard. "It's hard to not be political with music," said Ida, a 33-year old student in the Swedish capital, Stockholm. "If Israel were to take part, I think most just wouldn't vote for them and make their displeasure known."

Brian Donnelly, a human rights activist in Ireland, organized a campaign designed to pressure RTE, Ireland's representative broadcaster in the Eurovision Song Contest, into urging the EBU to disqualify Israel. "We heard this strategy worked when Russia invaded Ukraine, but in our case, we have not yet got a reply from RTE," Donnelly told Al Jazeera. "If Israel takes part, it will help their PR campaign of normalising what they're doing to the Palestinian people."

Claire Charles, a marketing manager from France, said Israel's inclusion was a sign of "Western hypocrisy." "All these public institutions are useless. Western governments are useless. Murder and occupation and war and genocide continues to happen," she told Al Jazeera. "Excluding Russia last time reveals the blatant racism of not excluding Israel this year."

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