# Eurovision 2024 rocked by Middle East conflict as protests and political clashes overshadow contest



The Eurovision Song Contest made headlines as it returned this week, following a tumultuous affair in 2024 that highlighted the intersection of politics and entertainment amid the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Traditionally a celebration of diverse musical acts, the competition was deeply mired in controversy in Malmö, Sweden, overshadowed by protests and political discourse.

Critical to the narrative was the call for a boycott of the event based on Israel's participation, a request that resonated strongly with artists and audiences alike. Notably, UK representative Olly Alexander and Irish contestant Bambie Thug publicly dismissed the boycott from various artists and groups, including those from Finland, Sweden, and Iceland. They took a stand for an “immediate and lasting ceasefire” and the safe return of hostages amidst the escalating Hamas-Israel war. The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) maintained its position, asserting that disallowing Israel's participation would contravene its own rules, highlighting a stark contrast with its previous decision to expel Russia after its invasion of Ukraine.

Bambie Thug, an outspoken critic of the EBU, lamented, “Without us there, there would be less voices that are pro." Their sentiments echoed broader frustrations shared by many artists, including 2023 contestant Mae Muller, who called for a ban on Israel's Kan broadcaster alongside various civil society groups.

In tandem with these calls, pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Malmö increased in intensity. Approximately 10,000 to 12,000 protesters, including well-known environmental activist Greta Thunberg, marched through the streets, expressing solidarity with Gaza amid the conflict. Demonstrators carried signs depicting civilians affected by the war, and smoke canisters in the colours of the Palestinian flag were set off as a symbol of protest. The atmosphere was palpable as Israeli performer Eden Golan faced notable backlash, enduring boos during her performance and scrutiny concerning the safety of participants at the contest.

Furthermore, the incident underscored the complexities of trying to maintain a non-political facade in an inherently political environment. After the semi-final, tensions mounted when Dutch contestant Joost Klein was disqualified for what was perceived as threatening behaviour toward a production crew member—a decision met with sharp criticism from the Dutch broadcaster, which deemed the penalty excessive. While the allegations were subsequently dropped, the incident marred the event's integrity and raised questions about the EBU's handling of safety protocols.

The participation of Israeli acts only intensified discussions around the festival's supposed apolitical ethos. Palestinian flags were seen in the audience, contrary to EBU regulations, with Eric Saade, a former Swedish contestant, donning a keffiyeh during his performance—a bold statement met with rebuke from the EBU. Such actions illustrated the struggle between artistic expression and the desire to uphold the competition's traditional neutrality.

Despite the turmoil, Swiss performer Nemo Mettler triumphed to claim victory with their song "The Code," marking a historic win as Eurovision's first non-binary champion. However, the triumph was shadowed by lingering discussions about the event's future and the EBU's role in navigating the interplay of culture and politics.

Looking towards the next iteration of the contest in Basel, the EBU has announced plans for enhanced measures concerning contestant safety and has appointed a new director, emphasizing a commitment to addressing the complexities of participation and expression. Yet, as the legacy of Eurovision unfolds amidst escalating global tensions, the challenge remains: how to reconcile the celebration of diverse cultures with the unsettling realities that underpin these artistic endeavours.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/entertainment/why-was-eurovision-controversial-last-year-JNVB3HXX2VIM3LORBE6O6C6CI4/)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/entertainment/why-was-eurovision-controversial-last-year-JNVB3HXX2VIM3LORBE6O6C6CI4/), [[2]](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/11/eurovision-final-pro-palestinian-protests-israel-participation), [[5]](https://www.wsls.com/entertainment/2024/05/11/eurovision-song-contest-reaches-its-final-with-tensions-around-israel-and-doubt-over-dutch-contender/)
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4. Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/entertainment/why-was-eurovision-controversial-last-year-JNVB3HXX2VIM3LORBE6O6C6CI4/), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/article/2024/may/09/israel-qualifies-eurovision-song-contest-final-protests), [[7]](https://www.euronews.com/culture/2024/05/08/eurovision-song-contest-semi-final-1-kicks-off-with-pop-and-pro-palestinian-protests)
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* <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/11/eurovision-final-pro-palestinian-protests-israel-participation> - Thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters demonstrated in Malmö, Sweden, opposing Israel's participation in the Eurovision Song Contest. The protests were fueled by Israel's military actions in Gaza, with demonstrators chanting slogans and waving Palestinian flags. The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) faced criticism for allowing Israel's entry, leading to heightened security measures during the event.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/article/2024/may/09/israel-qualifies-eurovision-song-contest-final-protests> - Israeli singer Eden Golan qualified for the Eurovision Song Contest final despite widespread protests against Israel's participation. The demonstrations were driven by Israel's ongoing military campaign in Gaza. Golan's performance was met with boos, and the event was marked by political tensions overshadowing the musical competition.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/article/2024/may/10/eurovision-song-contest-malmo-israel-controversy> - The Eurovision Song Contest in Malmö faced significant political controversy due to Israel's participation amid the Gaza conflict. Protests erupted, and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) struggled to maintain the event's non-political nature. The situation led to heightened security and debates over the contest's integrity.
* <https://www.wsls.com/entertainment/2024/05/11/eurovision-song-contest-reaches-its-final-with-tensions-around-israel-and-doubt-over-dutch-contender/> - Swiss singer Nemo won the Eurovision Song Contest with 'The Code,' marking the first nonbinary winner. The event was overshadowed by protests against Israel's participation amid the Gaza conflict, leading to debates over the contest's political neutrality and the EBU's decisions.
* <https://www.apnews.com/article/eurovision-song-contest-semifinal-gaza-protests-21a750c85dade5e3955152fd408b914a> - The Eurovision Song Contest in Malmö was marked by pro-Palestinian protests against Israel's participation. Demonstrators, including climate activist Greta Thunberg, marched through the city, highlighting the political tensions surrounding the event due to Israel's military actions in Gaza.
* <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2024/05/08/eurovision-song-contest-semi-final-1-kicks-off-with-pop-and-pro-palestinian-protests> - The Eurovision Song Contest's first semi-final in Malmö was accompanied by pro-Palestinian protests. Former Swedish contestant Eric Saade wore a keffiyeh during his performance, leading to criticism from the European Broadcasting Union for compromising the event's non-political stance.