

OPEN LETTER TO URSULA VON DER LEYEN, PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION:

Filmmakers Call to Restore the Cultural Dimension of European Audiovisual Policy

25 September 2024

Subject: Request for a meeting on the urgent need to bring back cultural diversity as a priority in European audiovisual policy

Dear Madam President,

We, European filmmakers, and signatories to the Filmmakers' Declaration¹, are writing to request an urgent meeting on the protection of cultural diversity in the European audiovisual policy agenda at a time of critical change for European culture and particularly for audiovisual creation.

We urgently require a redefinition of the priorities and scope of intervention of the Commission's Directorates-General and the Commissioner in charge of culture. The audiovisual sector needs to be part of a strong portfolio dedicated to culture, so that European cultural policies remain ambitious, independent, and no longer weakened by specific industrial interests. We are in no way contesting European industrial interests, because we know how thriving and full of opportunities our sector is, but to disproportionately support economic objectives at the expense of cultural objectives would be a service to non-European competitors.

European audiovisual policy and discussions on key legislative texts such as the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the Geo-Blocking Regulation, the Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market and the EU AI Act, directly affect the future of cultural diversity in Europe and freedom of artistic expression within the European film and audiovisual industry.

Storytelling for the screen is a powerful part of European culture, as demonstrated by European cinema's rich history and thriving economy. Thanks to regulation aiming to promote European works, as well as the success story of Creative Europe – MEDIA which supports co-productions, development and distribution, the European film and audiovisual sector has been able to flourish, producing works that enrich public debate and allow the sector to remain competitive internationally.

Yet, in a notable shift from the previous mandate, the European Commission has prioritised over the past five years industrial and digital policy objectives – relegating the European audiovisual sector and its cultural dimension to a secondary concern.

This approach may have benefitted specific corporate interests in the audiovisual or tech sectors, including non-European. But it does not provide a sustainable environment for the European

¹ La Déclaration des Cinéastes <https://tinyurl.com/nhfrpdnn>

audiovisual ecosystem in all its diversity and does not consider the scope and depth of the challenges faced by culture and creation, particularly in our sector, in today's Europe.

The rise of global entertainment in the audiovisual sector is leading to increased standardisation of singular cultural and artistic expression, which is likely to be accelerated by the uptake of AI. In parallel, control of the media, cultural institutions and state funding of the arts can be observed in an increasing number of Member States. These trends, which filmmakers are confronted with across Europe, signal serious threats to freedom of artistic expression, which is the bedrock of European living cultures. Article 167 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) rightly asserts the role of the European Union in the area of culture, including supporting creation in the audiovisual sector as well as respecting and promoting the diversity of its cultures. This approach is fundamental for the future of European democracy, at a time where audiovisual creation is under unprecedented pressure across Europe.

In this context, it is crucial that the new European Commission, under your leadership, urgently reaffirms a clear cultural policy objective in a refocused European audiovisual agenda. The future of European unique and diverse cultural identity is at stake.

To achieve positive results, it must aim to foster the diversity of cinematographic and audiovisual creation in Europe, while striking the necessary balance between economic and cultural objectives.

We are requesting an urgent meeting with you, Madam President, to allow us to express our concerns directly and to discuss the necessary measures to ensure that decisions taken at European level continue to support a free, independent, robust and diverse film and audiovisual industry.

We remain at your disposal to coordinate a suitable date for this meeting, and hope that this dialogue will be constructive for the future of European cinema and audiovisual creation.

Respectfully yours,

European Filmmakers represented by

100autori (*Italy*)

ACCIÓN – Asociación de Directores y Directoras de cine de España (*Spain*)

AIDAC - Associazione Italiana Dialoghisti Adattatori Cinetelevisivi (*Italy*)

ANAC - Associazione Nazionale Autori Cinematografici (*Italy*)

Association of Producers and Directors of Montenegro (*Montenegro*)

Azerbaijan's Film Directors Guild (*Azerbaijan*)

BVR – Bundesverband Regie (*Germany*)

Croatian Film Directors' Guild (*Croatia*)

DACIN SARA (*Romania*)

Directors Guild of Cyprus (*Cyprus*)

Directors' Guild of Poland (*Poland*)

DSR – Directors Guild of Slovenia (*Slovenia*)

DSR Screenwriters (*Slovenia*)

Dutch Directors Guild (*The Netherlands*)

Estonian Filmmakers Association (*Estonia*)

FERA – Federation of European Screen Directors

Greek Directors Guild (*Greece*)

L'ARP – Société Civile des Auteurs, Réalisateur et Producteurs (*France*)

La SRF – Société des Réalisatrices et Réalisateur de Films (*France*)

LARS – Luxembourgish Association of Directors and Screenwriters (*Luxembourg*)

Norsk filmforbund (*Norway*)

Polish Filmmakers Association (*Poland*)

Scen & Film (*Sweden*)

Screen Directors Guild of Ireland (*Ireland*)

Swedish Film Directors (*Sweden*)

WGI - Writers Guild Italia (*Italy*)