

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends of the European film,

It is a pleasure to welcome you all today at the event of the European Parliament.

Gatherings like this are always special. They are a moment to celebrate the power of film - not only as an art form, but as a catalyst for debate, dialogue, and democratic engagement. Cinema helps us to understand one another. It allows us to see the world through someone else's eyes. And in doing so, it strengthens the very foundation of European democracy: empathy, diversity, and freedom of expression.

This is not abstract. It is lived and experienced every day, especially in Europe's independent film scene, where authenticity, risk-taking, and artistic freedom remain at the core of storytelling.

We meet today at a decisive moment. The audiovisual sector is undergoing a transformation unlike anything we have seen before. Global streaming platforms - mostly dominated by companies from the United States - now shape much of what European audiences watch, how they watch it, and increasingly also what gets produced in the first place. Film and media risk being reduced from culturally autonomous art forms into standardized content, optimized for scale and algorithms.

This concentration of power is not just an economic issue. It is a democratic one.

Because when a handful of players decide which stories are visible, whose voices are amplified, and which languages are profitable, cultural diversity is no longer guaranteed. And Europe's creative sovereignty is weakened.

The European Commission has recognized this challenge and proposed changes in AgoraEU. I welcome the ambition and the larger headline budget. Investing in culture and media is the right signal. But let us also be honest: when two programmes are merged, and we account for inflation, the increase is far less significant than it may appear. And if flexibility in funding replaces clear priorities, we risk losing transparency and direction.

We need clarity. We need proper earmarking. We need strong parliamentary oversight. Culture cannot be at the mercy of politics. It is not a tool to be moved around depending on the political winds of the day. Culture is not decoration.

It is a cornerstone of democracy, and our ecosystem is vulnerable. Europe must not retreat. We must compete but on our own terms and

ensure that our industry remains sustainable and globally compatible.

This means investing not only financially, but also politically. Because the creative sector is one of Europe's greatest assets. Today, 7.7 million people work in Europe's cultural and creative industries, that is nearly 4% of all EU employment. Behind these numbers are artists, technicians, screenwriters, festival organisers, designers, producers - people whose work shapes both our economy and our identity.

Initiatives like the LUX Audience Award show what is possible. It protects European film, builds bridges between countries, and connects politics with society. It reminds us that cinema can unite us across borders and languages. That is the European spirit in action.

And we see encouraging signs at national level as well. For example, after long discussions, Germany is now moving forward with new proposals for film funding, ensuring shared responsibility and long-term stability. This is the kind of commitment we need across Europe.

So, today's discussion is timely and essential. There are no simple answers. But what is clear is this: Europe must shape this transformation, not simply react to it.

Because film is more than business and it deserves policies that treat it as such.

Thank you.