

Good morning Mrs. President Verheyen, thank you for his willingness to make Europe known to citizens. Culture is a fundamental part of the life of Europeans, the pandemic has hit the sector in particular, how has the European Parliament moved to help operators in the sector?

We as European Parliament are very aware about the power of European culture and we have been always at the first line to aid. Still, especially in the beginning of the pandemic the European Union failed the sector. Freelancers and authors, for example, had hardly been able to benefit from the aid programs, as they had low operating costs, but also normal living costs, which were not covered by the previous credit programs. The cultural and creative sector in the EU, especially individual creators and SMEs were being decimated by the crisis. We in the CULT Committee saw the necessity for additional EU action for these ravaged areas in April 2020 already. The changes to the Structural Funds rules agreed by the European Parliament before the summer of 2020 helped to unlock additional financing. Projects dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic qualified for 100% financing and thematic concentration rules have been loosened, so funds can be more easily channelled to where they are needed most. We always emphasised that this money must reach the cultural and creative and media sectors quickly by responding to the specific business models and their particular needs. Furthermore, the Parliament has adopted several Resolutions and positions on the Recovery of European culture, trying to help the sector by adopting specific policies and recommendations and, maybe in the short term most important, asking the Member States to allocate and dedicate money from the recovery fund towards cultural and creative sectors and industries. I am very happy that the European Parliament negotiated that finally, the budget for the Creative Europe programme for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) has been considerably increased from 1.46 to 2.2 bn. Since Creative Europe is the only EU programme that provides direct support to the cultural and creative sectors and industries across Europe, this is a milestone we were able to achieve, and we can support a lot of cultural projects in the next 7 years. For the EP and the sector, this is a huge success. After demands from the European Parliament, the Commission, together with the European Investment Fund, have identified a set of adaptations to the Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility (CCS GF) to allow for more flexibility in repayments of loans, to give more security to the financial institutions and to continue the build-up of portfolio of loans. Those modifications should make CCS GF more flexible and adapted to response to the current crisis.

The Commission has launched the “Creatives Unite” platform, what exactly is it about?

The European Commission set up two platforms to help share challenges and solutions at the EU level in relation to the COVID-19 impact on the cultural and creative sectors. The platform for EU Member States, launched 24 April 2020, allowed the representatives of EU ministries of culture to exchange good practices. The second platform, Creatives Unite, launched 5 May 2020, helps people in the cultural and creative sectors share information and solutions more easily. It gives access in one single space to the multitude of existing resources and numerous relevant networks and organisations as well as offers a curated space to co-create and upload contributions towards finding solutions together. The platform is within the framework of the Creative FLIP Pilot project co-funded by the European Union.

The 2021 Lux Prize had to adapt to the restrictions imposed by Covid-19, what are the main changes you had to make?

The biggest change is probably the missing screenings for a broad European audience of the films beforehand. Our idea is that people can watch the films and then vote online in order to make the award one of all Europeans. Now we are one year into this pandemic and European cinemas stayed closed for most of it, many films were held back in order to premier them once they could actually be shown in cinemas. We tried to adapt by screening only but it is just not the same. Normally, I would have organised a "European Film Sunday" in my constituency Aachen and showed all three finalists. It has become a dear tradition over the last couple years. Furthermore, we only have three finalists instead of the planned five this time. In addition, to give the creators time to show their films and to adapt to a changed schedule of big events like the Oscars, the time for voting is prolonged and the award ceremony will take place in June. I hope that we can have some form of solemn presentation within the plenary of the European Parliament by this time.

Is the collaboration in the award with the European Film Academy set to last over the next few years?

From now on, we want to share our journey with new partners. We want to share our LUX Award with more and more Europeans. We want the European citizens to be a part of the award and vote with us on the films. We also want to share a larger variety of films with the audience. We are excited to share our commitment and passion for European culture with more people than before. With partners like European Film Academy, Europa Cinemas and with the help of Creative Europe, we developed a new and truly pan-European Audience Award. The award will have a new Title. It is quite long, but it will include all the partners. From now on it will be "LUX - the European Audience Film Award by the European Parliament and the European Film Academy - in partnership with the European Commission and Europa Cinemas". Since this name is admittedly very long and complicated, we call it LUX Audience Award for short. Such an ambitious project cannot be implemented without the support of partners in the film industry sector. We are happy to have a strong European partner at our side with EFA.

We always talk about Hollywood, but it is true that the European Parliament is the only one in the world that awards a prize to cinema, as recalled by President David Sassoli in his video message sent to the Venice Film Festival. A European response to the overwhelming power of American productions?

We are proud of our European cinema. It will never be just one uniform mass. It will always be diverse and at the same time connecting. Culture differentiates us, but at the same time makes us one. It is a bridge between our sometimes very different countries in the EU. The Lux Prize is a perfect example for this phenomenon. It shows perfectly the immense potential of cinema to communicate common European values such as equality, freedom of expression, environment and democracy. At the same time, the films mirror the unique technique of their countries. We are very aware about the power of European cinema as a mirror to express and reflect the state of our societies and communities. The LUX Award has been evolving steadily since its inception 13 years ago. It has always been a pioneer and innovative project of the European Parliament in building

bridges between sectors that sometimes use different languages. LUX has helped crossing the path between our political activity and the creators and authors in Europe, emphasizing the need and importance of keeping a constant dialogue. Until now, LUX filmography has emotionally echoed our political work on environment, migration, fighting poverty and inequalities as well as on democracy and pluralism. It is our way to celebrate European cinematic narratives and storytellers, our creative industries and the cinematic assets of such a diverse continent. By awarding the LUX Prize, the European Parliament has been supporting the sector since 2007 and specifically promoting the distribution of European films. In this way, the language and distribution barriers that still exist in the European film industry could be overcome for many films.

“Another round”, “Colectiv” and “Corpus Christi” are the three finalists for the Lux 2021 Award. They tackle important issues such as addiction, corruption and the strength of independent journalism, redemption; what are your thoughts on this year's selection?

The nominated films for the LUX Audience Film Award are always of high artistic quality and are amazing representatives of European cinema. They deserve our attention because they touch the European audience in a special way and always make us think. Each one addresses a relevant topic for our society. I am all the more pleased that all three finalists from this year are also Oscar nominated films. Both "Another Round", a Danish, Dutch and Swedish co-production by director Thomas Vinterberg, and "Collective", a co-production from Romania and Luxembourg by Alexander Nanau are nominated for the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film this year. In total, the LUX finalists have four nominations this year. And the third film in the running for the LUX Audience Award, "Corpus Christi," a co-production from Poland and France by director Jan Komasa, was also nominated for this Oscar last year.

My inquiries on European cultural sites have highlighted the great suffering of private museums, at risk of closure or loss of cultural heritage, forced to sell it in order to survive. What does the NextGenerationEU foresee for the renaissance of the cultural sector?

We made sure that the cultural and creative sector is explicitly mentioned in the plans for European recovery programs. NextGenerationEU will immediately address the socio-economic damage created by the pandemic. At the same time, it is our chance to start building a more resilient, sustainable and healthier society, capable of better facing future global health and economic threats. I am happy that the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly in favour of a Motion urging Member States to include the CCS in their National Recovery Plans on 17 September 2020. President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen also acknowledged the role of art and culture in NextGenerationEU in her State of the Union address on 16 September 2020. With CCS being among the 14 sectors most affected by the ongoing pandemic. They should be able to profit from the Recovery and Resilience Facility, REACT-EU, InvestEU, and the EAFRD. Member States will have to include CCS as a sector that is entitled to profit from financial support. It is of utmost importance that stakeholders do not stop to lobby in the member states. The sector is economically essential and there will be no real recovery for Europe without it. In addition, some member states have reacted to the critical situation of the sector with their own national actions. In Germany there was for example the rescue and future program NEWSTART CULTURE. Culture

sites could apply for funding for digitalisation. The goal was to make cultural objects visible and more accessible in the "German Digital Library" (DDB) so that even in the crisis people could enjoy it.

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