



Federation of European
Screen Directors

Fédération Européenne des
Réalisateur·euses de l'Audiovisuel

STATEMENT

FERA board unanimously endorses AG DOK protest on the debate around the Berlinale leadership and Freedom of expression and art

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Today, in light of the recent turmoil surrounding discussions at the Berlin International Film Festival on art, politics, freedom of expression, and the broader direction of film festivals, the Board of the Federation of European Screen Directors ([FERA](#)) unanimously endorses the [below statement issued by our member, the German Documentary Association \(AG DOK\)](#), protesting on the debate around the Berlinale leadership, freedom of expression and art.

The discussion was sparked during the Berlinale 2026 official opening, when jury President Wim Wenders [started a lively public debate](#) by rejecting the notion that artists and cultural institutions must actively take political stances.

On 21 February, the Berlinale jury awarded the Golden Bear to İlker Çatak's *Yellow Letters*, a film exploring totalitarianism. Several other prize-winning films also addressed overtly political themes. Explaining the jury's choice, Wim Wenders said: "[We didn't award you for good intentions, but for a masterful language of compassionate film-making](#)".

In the wake of these events and the debate they generated, the German Federal Government is [now considering the future direction of the Berlinale](#) after they were criticised at the awards ceremony by some of the directors of the winning films.

FERA believes that film, like any other form of art, must remain free to retain its power, even when we disagree with the opinions or messages it conveys. As Festival Director Tricia Tuttle says "Artists are free to exercise their right of free speech in whatever way they choose."

For the above stated reasons, the FERA Board unanimously endorses the following statement from our German member AG DOK:

Statement of protest by documentary filmmakers on the debate around the Berlinale leadership and Freedom of expression and art

As documentary filmmakers, we are following with great concern the recent public statements by Germany's Minister of State for Culture and Media, Wolfram Weimer, which suggest the possible dismissal of the leadership of the Berlin International Film Festival.

The reason given appears to be political statements made during the Berlinale award ceremony. We see this as an alarming signal regarding the relationship between politics, culture, and freedom of public expression.

The Berlinale has always been a place of artistic engagement, social debate, and democratic diversity. Film — especially documentary film — thrives on reflecting, questioning, and making political realities visible. If political reactions to statements made by filmmakers or award winners are to result in institutional consequences, this creates the impression of political pressure on cultural spaces.

Freedom of art is not a privilege but a constitutionally protected right. It explicitly includes uncomfortable, controversial, and critical positions. Threats of structural or personnel interventions in response to political statements undermine trust in the independence of cultural institutions. Such a development would not only affect the Berlinale but would also send a signal far beyond Germany — especially at a time when increasing restrictions on artistic freedom can be observed worldwide.

We therefore call for a clear separation between political evaluation of individual statements and the institutional integrity of an international film festival. Criticism of content is legitimate and part of democratic discourse. However, political influence on personnel decisions in the cultural sector must not occur as a reaction to artistic or social positioning.

As filmmakers, we stand for open dialogue, nuance, and artistic freedom. We expect political decision-makers to protect these fundamental values rather than relativize them through implicit pressure. The strength of a democratic society is shown by its ability to tolerate dissent — even on the stage of a film festival.

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About Us

Founded in 1980, FERA serves as the independent voice of European screen directors in Brussels. Bringing together 46 member organisations from 31 countries, it represents over 20,000 active directors across film, television, and streaming - recognised as primary audiovisual authors. FERA advocates for their cultural, creative, and economic interests at both national and EU levels.

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