

## **“The 7th Art: Still an Art?” — Filmmakers from Europe and the United States sound the alarm at Cannes**

### **“Cinema Is Not Content”: Cannes panel calls for urgent protection of artistic freedom and independent creation**

**Cannes, 17 May 2026** — At the Cannes Film Festival, filmmakers gathered on Sunday 17 May for the panel discussion “The 7th Art: Still an Art?”, a timely and urgent conversation on the future of cinema in Europe and the United States amid accelerating industrial consolidation, deregulation and increasing pressure toward standardisation.

Organised by the Société civile des auteurs, réalisateurs et producteurs (L’ARP), the Société des réalisatrices et réalisateurs de films (SRF), the Federation of European Screen Directors (FERA) and the Director’s Guild of America (DGA), the panel discussion brought together filmmakers from both sides of the Atlantic.

Moderated by directors Radu Mihaileanu and Zoé Wittock, the panel featured US director Ira Sachs, Estonian director Anna Hints, Cypriot director Athena Xenidou, Italian director Francesco Ranieri Martinotti.

Throughout the discussion, participants collectively affirmed a powerful message: **cinema, although also an industry, remains above all an art, an art founded on freedom of creation, independence and the diversity of imaginaries.**

Against a backdrop of major transformations in both Europe and the United States, the panel highlighted growing concerns over the increasing reduction of cinema to mere “content”, shaped by imperatives of profitability, platform dominance and vertical integration.

In Europe, speakers warned that ongoing discussions surrounding the future AgoraEU programme risk weakening support mechanisms for film creation and undermining the principles of artistic independence and cultural diversity that have long defined the European model. Participants also stressed that key legislative frameworks underpinning the cultural exception and territoriality principles — including the windowing system — are facing renewed threats.

Speaking about the American reality, Ira Sachs painted a stark picture of the independent film landscape in the United States. According to Sachs, only “4 to 5%” of directors from his generation are still able to make films rather than products. He described an industry increasingly driven by marketability and celebrity attachment, where partnerships with major stars often become a prerequisite for financing and visibility. Sachs also warned of the collapse of

exhibition networks, noting that more than 1,000 cinemas have closed across the United States, severely limiting the ability of independent films to be seen, distributed and discovered.

He further underlined the absence of meaningful public support mechanisms for independent filmmaking in the US, where cinema is largely financed by private wealth and increasingly subject to commercial imperatives. "There is a very strong interplay between what you can sell and what you can tell," he explained, highlighting how filmmakers are often forced into roles of "salesmanship" simply to secure financing and maintain creative activity.

Estonian director Anna Hints shared the perspective of smaller European film ecosystems and stressed the vital importance of European support schemes such as the MEDIA programme. Hints noted that while Estonian Film Institute's total annual support for film development and production stands at approximately €7 million, support from MEDIA has reached €11 million through the 24 years — an indispensable contribution for sustaining the country's audiovisual sector and enabling Estonian stories to travel internationally. Her latest film "Smoke Sauna Sisterhood" which became one of the most successful Estonian film in history and sold to 33 territories, benefited significantly from this support.

Hints emphasised that preserving cinema also requires helping audiences understand how films are made and why independent storytelling matters. "If we want to continue telling important stories, people must understand what cinema is and how these stories come into being," she argued.

Athena Xenidou spoke of two positive pillars in Cyprus promoting artistic integrity in cinema: the Cyprus Film Commission's cash rebate scheme, with an annual scheme cap of €25 million — and the Cyprus Cinema Advisory Committee (SEKIN), a selective funding body under the Deputy Ministry of Culture. Both have been running in parallel successfully for years, cultivating local voices and storytelling and enabling international co-productions, with feature films, animation and documentaries achieving both commercial success and selection at A-list festivals.

Francesco Ranieri Martinotti focused on Europe's immense artistic heritage and warned against the growing risks posed by generative artificial intelligence. While Europe's cultural wealth and creative works are increasingly used to train AI models, he warned that artists remain "extremely weak" in front of global technology giants and stressed that robust regulation is essential to protect creators and their rights.

**All arts are culture and must be treated as such — not merely as industries.** AgoraEU must represent more than a funding mechanism; it must embody a genuine vision for Europe's cultural future.

At a moment of profound transformation for the audiovisual sector, participants issued a clear and united warning: **if cinema loses its independence and diversity, it risks losing its very nature as an art form.**