



**IMAGE AND IDENTITY OF EUROPE
THE ROLE OF CINEMA AND OF FILM LITERACY**

Speech by

Wim Wenders, President of the European Film Academy

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Good morning.

I'm addressing you as President of the European Film Academy that represents 2400 film professionals from all over Europe.

In May 2009 twenty European filmmakers followed the Academy's invitation to a Think Tank under the patronage of the President of the European Commission, to reflect together THE IMAGE OF EUROPE. It didn't take them very long to identify the deficits of that image: Europe today is perceived by its citizens mainly as a political-technical-bureaucratic structure, a more or less indistinct economic conglomerate.

**The ADMINISTRATION of Europe
has become THE IMAGE of Europe!**

That was a disillusioning bottom-line,
and half the explanation already for the current Euro-scepticism...

The questions of image and identity are inseparably linked.
To know who you are, you have to know what you look like,
and vice versa.
How you see determines how you are seen.

We had a lively conversation with José Manuel Barroso,
who generously joined us to reflect together with us
how this sagging image of Europe could be improved.
The conclusion came from the President himself:

“We have to concentrate more on the emotional side of Europe!”

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You may not be surprised to hear that the 20 film makers assembled at our Think Tank saw their own medium, film, as a solution to the problem, if not to say as the “secret weapon” for achieving this very mission. We considered cinema as one of the most appropriate means to improve the emotional deficit in the reception of Europe.

“**Culture**” as a whole, and in the widest sense, is the glue that forms identity and that determines the **soul of Europe**. And cinema has a privileged position in that realm: There simply is no more efficient and popular way to spread and communicate social, moral and cultural messages: Like no other medium film generates identification and establishes emotional and cognitive connection. Film does not only project pictures, it reflects the very picture of our society, with its values, habits, hopes and fears. More than that: Film shapes these values, forms these habits and influences trends of hopes and fears.

Movies helped to invent and to perpetuate the „American Dream“. They can do wonders for the image of Europe, too. If only Europe would make more use of its very own cinema for its own image, as well as for its identity. If only Europe would not be so shy about its greatest asset: culture, and, yes, film culture!

You go into any of our museums all over the continent and in the morning you’ll meet children, lots of them, learning about art in a highly engaging way. Art, the history of art, is part of our European culture, of course, children learn about it. You go into any bookstore, and you’ll find a multitude of books. National and European books, most of all. Literature, theatre, poetry: all part of our European culture. If our bookstores were filled at 70 or 80% by American books, there would be an uproar, an unbelievable outcry. Same with our concert halls... But: look at movie theatres all over Europe... No outcry. Sometimes half the screens of an entire country are occupied with one American movie. No outcry. Translate that to museums, concert halls, theatre.

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But I'm not here to complain.
 European films are in a remarkable shape, overall.
 Engaging, diverse, intelligent, funny, emotional!
 Just go and see the 3 films for example
 that are nominated for the Parliament's own LUX Prize this year...

National industries have regained a market share
 of about one third or one quarter, depending on the country,
 which nobody thought possible 10, let alone 20 years ago.
 We're making more films than ever in Europe!
 So, no lamenting!
 We can be proud of the past and the present of European Cinema.

I'm here to talk about the future, but in a very specific context.
 I want to talk about children, kids and adolescents.
 Future audiences, yes, but most of all: future Europeans.

For most of these young audiences all over Europe
 the option of European Cinema just does not exist any more.
 For them "the movies" are synonymous with blockbusters.
 A giant global entertainment industry is catering to them
 and very much concentrating on them, with big guns,
 so that our often small, but emotionally rich and nourishing European films have almost
 no chance, at least in their eyes,
 and are becoming a species in danger of extinction.

True, our cinema overall is directed to more adult audiences,
 it is, often, rather slow food than fast food, it is "good food".
 But the fact is: We're losing young audiences!

That does not have to be like that, we think.
 It is indeed unacceptable, when you realize
 that the decline I am talking about is one of education:
 An audience with even a vague knowledge
 of the history and the richness of European cinema
 would and will be able to chose differently,
 would and will make other decisions what it wants to feed on.
 Taste can be taught!

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But: the Seventh Art is playing a minor if not inexistent part in the curricula of our schools!
 Film with all its fantastic possibilities is by far not explored enough for the imparting of cultural and social competence!
 Film is still seen as a commercial product, first of all, and not as a universal language that can be taught and learned.

We are living in an era marked by audio-visual media. Kids are spending every day significantly more time in front of the TV or the computer than over a book. But in striking contrast to this, the visual language still has a complementary status in school, that is to say: **IF** it is offered at all.

I am here today as a representative of the European Film Academy, to appeal to those who have the political power and means to assure to the moving image a higher importance in education than granted until today.

Shouldn't the children, who are growing up in a world dominated by images of all sorts, be given a serious chance to learn that grammar and that vocabulary?
 A lot of us are certainly right to worry about the fact that reading books is losing it's attraction for young people, but isn't it even more inconsequent if we are giving up help and instruction how to read images from the beginning, or worse: leave it to groups with blank commercial interests?

We appeal to the EU member states to take the subject of "film education" or "cinema literacy" on the agenda of the council of ministers in charge of education and culture, with the aim to allow film, like art and literature, to become a stable, integrative part of the school curricula and not be treated any longer as a complementary programme.

We are aware of the fact that our vision, in one essential point, does not meet the political reality:
 Education is not a matter of the European Union, but of the members states themselves.

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As a response to our appeal many ministers were keen to let us know that they very much appreciated our request and that we were absolutely right about it. And they all made it clear that in their own country a lot had been done for and invested into film education. Programmes like „Vision Kino“ in Germany, „Lycéens et apprentis au cinéma“ in France, or „Film Education“ in the UK, to name but a few, are doing their important work for many years already with strong commitment and successful results.

But: shouldn't we already be a huge step further ahead? Is it really sufficient to use film education tools on a facultative basis only? If we want to move up to a mandatory basis, we have to invest into the training of teachers, to begin with. In my own country for instance, media education is still only a supplementary course of studies.

The number of films annually produced in Europe has doubled over the past decade: from 600 to almost 1.200! However, while the number of productions is **IN**creasing, the number of films commercially released is **Decreasing**! But, what is decreasing the most: The number of films travelling and crossing the borders.

In 2009, the average share of European films at the box office in Europe was at 26,7%. Not bad, but for the “European cause” this figure is misleading. The biggest share of those 26,7% belongs to national productions of each respective country. A very small, depressingly small percentage is left to the films by our neighbours, to the rest of Europe! That's the bad news.

The good news: local films are becoming more successful. The market share of national films in 2009: in France 45%, in Germany 27%, in Sweden 33%, in Denmark 33%, in the UK 31%, in Italy 30% and so on. An increasing request for national or regional content.

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An interesting turn of events!

Thanks to cheap airfares we are travelling more and more, borders between most countries in Europe have disappeared, but: the films from all these places we are travelling to, are travelling less and less.

That traffic is about to come to a grinding halt.

If we do not react soon and do something, a whole new generation will not only miss an important element of European culture and integration, but also our very own tool for exchange and social mediation. We'll use foreign tools instead, external ones, imported ones, that will even estrange us more from our home continent, our own stories, our own images, our own languages. Our European identity depends on that integration, depends on sharing emotions and common stories, instead of just laws and money!

We need to equip our children with the skills to decode images so they'll still have the taste for their own ones, so we can continue in Europe to produce and project our own imagery, our own image and identity, in the future. Otherwise there won't be the Europe we're dreaming of. There'll only be its administration, until people will get sick and tired of it.

Our European film culture is characterized by something that distinguishes it from the global cinema: It tells - not always, but most of the time - of local and regional stories and conflicts. It is specific, full of local colours and tastes, of accents and languages. It celebrates diversity, even more so: It keeps cultural diversity alive!

It is our deep conviction that a major task for primary and secondary schools is to teach the decoding and the appreciation of this our very own cinema and its history, understanding its amiability and humanity. Europe, the image of Europe, will profit immensely from this.

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Entering cinema or media literacy in our school curricula
will pay back in many ways,
to Europe and to all its national film productions.
The audiovisual industry, after all,
is one of the fastest growing trades in the world.
Images are the weapons of the future.

This public hearing is taking place at a very important moment, when the European Union is drafting the objectives and action lines of the future MEDIA Programme.

A key challenge for this future Programme will be to address the needs of the film and audiovisual industry, so that it responds to current European and global developments, and to find new ways of creating value and of driving revenues. Film literacy must be an explicit part of the forthcoming MEDIA Programme. It needs to be strengthened, for the sake of Europe's self-image as well as for its economic future. These two are linked!

As education remains a competence of the member states, I strongly invite the Members of the European Parliament and the Council to be ambassadors of cinema literacy vis-à-vis the national political and educative authorities.

In addition to this legislative process, the European Film Academy offers to support the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission in a campaign in favour of a Pan-European initiative for film education at school. Such an initiative could be based on a common statement by the Presidents of the three institutions. We have the full support of José Manuel Barroso.

In 1988 the Academy presented the European Film Awards for the first time ever, that same year Europe celebrated its "Year of Film and Television". Since then Europe has changed fundamentally and so has the audiovisual landscape. I think it is high time for a new "European Year of Cinema". It's high time for Europe to take charge of its IMAGE by taking its IMAGES seriously enough to let its children learn to read and appreciate them.

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