

Polish Filmmakers Association – Union of Polish Screenwriters

The Union of Polish Screenwriters is a part of The Polish Filmmakers' Association, which is the largest audiovisual organization of film professionals in Poland. It exists since 1966 and has 1786 members, among them directors, screenwriters, cinematographers, sound engineers, film editors, animators, costume and set-designers, producers, production managers, critics, even stuntmen. Screenwriters participate in and benefit from the lobbying activity of the Association. The Union of Polish Screenwriters – revived in 2008 - counts currently 68 members but by being a part of such a big organization we feel stronger than this number could suggest. And we are accepting and actively recruiting new members.

In 2009 the Polish Film Institute that co-finances practically all of the film production in Poland, has decided to improve and to reform its operational programs/schemes after three successful years. The very major proposed changes were announced in September 2009 and opened for consultation by the Filmmaking community. The PFI aims at more efficient programming of our local films and to actively play the role of a market regulator by setting proper standards especially in the development process. The very main change is the organization of the funding schemes not by the type of funding (development, production) nor by film kind (feature, doc, animation), but by four film categories (and therefore screenplay types): 1. auteur cinema (festival arthouse), 2. Historical 3. Films for child and family audiences 4. Movies aiming at mainstream commercial success. All film kinds and funding will be organized under these 4 categories. The two first types have a very high allocation with the commercial films receiving the smallest amount. This is to display the priorities of the PFI.

The new operational programs aim at creating a direct link between an individual screenwriter's script grant with later awarded development funding and hopefully with production funding schemes – in an aim to raise the efficiency of the monies spent. A sort of a project route. This comes from the Institutes justified disappointment with the past results of the screenplay grant and project development operational schemes.

Additionally – also in an aim to raise the funding’s efficiency and award it to genuinely trustworthy professionals (what unfortunately has not always been the case) – more is required from the screenwriter in the application process. Currently the screenwriter can receive a grant only after presenting (besides the treatment and scene samples) a letter of intent by the future director and - in case the “commercial movie” category - even a contract with the prospective producer. The new system of schemes raises the amounts of money paid to the screenwriters – in an effort to set a good standard on the market – but at the expense of the number of grants awarded to the screenwriters. Needless to say all of the above is a well meant by the PFI departure from FSE’s Policy on Effective State Aid for Screenwriting and Development. Polish screenwriters would be foolish to protect the status quo of the past genuinely unproductive screenplay and development grants. Changes generate a degree of hope. The Union of Polish Screenwriters was very active in the process of consulting these controversial changes. We were listened to, some of our propositions were taken into consideration – such as a separation of funding for screenplay development and project development. We seek advice from our European colleagues in order to generate arguments in the continuous lobbying process – as the Polish Film Institute is open for input and willing to constantly reform itself. Members of the Screenwriters’ Union will be a part of the Filmmakers – Polish Audiovisual Producers Chamber of Commerce – PFI negotiating triangle to oversee to results of this reform.

Beside our lobbying campaign: The Union of Polish Screenwriters has launched its website on www.scenarzysci.org.pl It has become more and more popular site for writers, with a very active advertisement board and a lot of useful information.

The last year’s edition of the co-organized by the Union - ‘Script Forum – Professional Screenwriters’ Conference’ (July in Warsaw) was a big success. The 2009 slogan was “Creativity has its prize”. The most powerful decision makers in the audiovisual sector were present and so was our special guest David Kavanagh, who presented new ideas concerning the financing system for writers with a focus on the literary/screenplay development system. We voted publicly the Manifesto: the effect – unanimously YES. We are now preparing for the current edition of Script Forum. We will continue to train the local industry on the topics of development. A separate day will be devoted to the qualifications of an evaluating experts

and the evaluation sheets. Christina Callas kindly accepted our invitation to be this year's speaker.

Polish delegates participated in the World Screenwriting Conference in Athens. We were inspired to hear about the goals and functioning of more established Unions/Guilds, made vital contacts and resolved to better prepare Polish screenwriters for the new media environment.

This year we plan to launch the Greatest Polish Scripts collection. It will be a modern and interactive edition in order to raise the audience awareness and the prestige of the profession. We are very curious to find out about the experiences of the fellow European guilds on publishing screenplays.

The Union of Polish Screenwriters in collaboration with Writers Guild of Great Britain is preparing Polish versions of the useful brochures "Working with writers" and "Writing film". We are using a translation of the British original but also adapting it to local realities. This is done to set proper standards and customs on the market.

The expert system of the PFI and the Regional Film Funds as well as the methods by which screenwriters in Poland are evaluated will now be the focus of our lobbying activity. Input by our European colleagues is more than welcome. It is essential.