



Europa!

An interview with Christina Kallas, President of the Federation of Screenwriters in Europe (FSE) by Tom Green, published in the magazine of the Writers Guild of Great Britain on 09 January 2012.

How did you come to be involved with the FSE?

I was a member of the presiding board of the German Writers' Guild for many years and one of my fields of action was international collaboration. As a Greek living in Germany and making films all over the world, being engaged in talks with writers from other countries felt like home. When I was asked to also be the FSE delegate for my guild, I said yes. A month later I visited my first FSE General Assembly.

Why do you believe that the work of the FSE is so important for writers?

Because we live in an international world. And it is becoming more and more international. If we think that national legislation is going to protect our rights, then we should think again. Nowadays I even doubt whether lobbying for good European legislation is even enough, which is why I am so passionately engaged in establishing close and continuous collaboration on a global level.

How similar are the concerns of professional writers across Europe?

Very. There are countries which have less problems on one level but more on another. Our biggest common problem is the buy-out contract which seems to have established itself permanently in most of the countries, as well as acceptable minimum conditions for fees and credits. There are other issues: the way state aid is being distributed and accounted for, the transparency and monopoly of collecting societies, the ignorance of festivals, critics and academics in relation to

our profession. And now we have the internet - a new ecosystem which is still in evolution and which may soon be the most important market for us writers.

Could you outline the main work of the FSE?

Among other things: we engage in common campaigns, information exchange and we formulate goals for Europe's writers and pursue them. We lobby at European Union level, we support national guilds where needed or when a problem arises, and we organise conferences to discuss our issues on an international level and decide on common actions.

You've written and produced films across Europe for a number of years - how have things changed for writers in that time?

Apart from the general industry changes affecting writers, I think that things have become much better. Our role is acknowledged, we are being heard and we are much more confident than when I started working or even when I started fighting for writers' concerns ten years ago. And I was pretty aware of the work of my predecessors when I stepped in the ring - there was a desert once where we are now starting to see the first roses. If a previous board member of the WGGB or any other writers' guild is reading this, I want to say, thank you. Volunteering so selflessly your creative time and energy was important and is held dear.

What direction are things moving in for writers, do you think?

This is a very interesting and challenging question. I think that media professions are changing. A writer will not and cannot be just a writer anymore. This is already so in television and a very clear development in the internet - there we have storytellers, filmmakers, creators, writer/producers. None is just a writer. This may be temporary but my gut feeling is that it will stay.

Do you think British writers tend to be less aware of opportunities in other countries than they should be?

I think that British and American writers have the most opportunities because of the English language, which is the lingua franca of our times. But I also think that being connected more and more because of the internet raises the opportunities for all writers. The world which is emerging may be ultimately a better world for writers. By the way, the FSE has just created a page (www.facebook.com/screenwriterseurope) and an open group with the exact intention of enabling better communication between all our writer members. I am confident that such communication may bear fruits in terms of working together, jumpstarting co-productions, creating transnational writers rooms... So anyone who is interested should join.

The FSE and the International Affiliation of Writers Guilds organised the first World Conference of Screenwriters (WCOS) in 2009; was it a success and will it happen again?

It was a huge success. The FSE put itself and its member guilds on the map in 2006 with the First European Conference and the Manifesto of the European Screenwriters. The First World Conference was only possible because of the attention that created. And it was amazing because for the first time we had writers from all over the world in one room - can you imagine the energy and the power? The Second World Conference is already in the works and this time it will involve writers from countries which were not present in the first one - like India - and it will have a much stronger participation from the Latin American guilds. The plan is for the WCOS II to take place in Madrid in November 2012. And of course the focus will be on the internet.

The European Screenwriters Manifesto was launched in 2006 - is it still important now?

Very much so. We have made progress on some of the points raised through the Manifesto, but there is still a lot to be done. The Manifesto was conceived as a very ambitious plan - and ambition means work.

What plans does the FSE have for the future?

We will make waves with WCOS II. Stay tuned.

Professor Christina Kallas, author of five books, among them the acclaimed "Creative Screenwriting. Understanding Emotional Structure", and president of the Federation of Screenwriters in Europe, has contributed to film and screenwriting theory with her emotional structure theory and the improv for writers method, and is credited with writing and/or producing a.o. four feature films, two TV series and a made-for-TV movie.

She has served the industry as the chair of the commission for the financing of script development and a member of the commission for the financing of film production at the German Federal Film Board in Berlin and as the artistic director of the Balkan Fund.

She has taught at the German Film and Television Academy in Berlin, the International Film School in Cologne, the Scuola Holden per le Tecniche Narrative in Torino, the Film Studies Department of the Aristotle University in Thessaloniki and at the NYU. She is currently teaching at the Columbia University Film Program. She is the founder of the Writers Improv Studio in New York.