

## Bulgarian filmmakers appeal to prime minister

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Continuing concerns about the future of the Bulgarian film industry have led the local community to petition Prime Minister Boyko Borissov [pictured] "to find a lasting solution for the tremendous problems of Bulgarian cinema."

Seven Bulgarian film industry trade bodies and the Art Fest Foundation, organizer of the Sofia International Film Festival and Sofia Meetings, have rallied together to issue an Open Letter to Borissov stating their "great anxiety provoked by the lack of constructive communication with the authorities."

This comes three months after industry protests at changes to the Film Industry Act and subsequent agreements signed in December 2010 by the industry representatives with the legislative and executive authorities to create a Bulgarian Cinema Fund in order to provide the framework for "a national strategy for the development of Bulgarian culture and film culture in particular."

Speaking exclusively to ScreenDaily, producer Vladimir Andreev of Borough Film (*Lady Zee*) explained that the government support for the film industry had been reduced to €5m from the designated €9.5m last year, and this year's budget for support of the Bulgarian cinema also envisaged only €5m.

"If this amount stays the same for next year, the funds will be just for the projects approved in 2009 and 2010," Andreev said. "There wasn't any call for proposals yet for this year, and when the call is published, there are going to be a lot of projects looking for funding."

Indeed, the crisis of public film funding in Bulgaria has resulted in producers having to postpone projects and hold off committing as co-producers to international co-productions. Filmmaker Javor Gardev told ScreenDaily that the reduction in public funding last year meant he had to exit his project *Zincograph* which had been pitched at the Sofia Meetings and Connecting Cottbus and participated in Cannes' Cinefondation L'Atelier. "With the five Bulgarian projects presented at the Sofia Meetings this year, everything is in the dark about the local financing because one can't even say when one can apply," Andreev said.

He added that the Ministry of Culture had last week submitted a "thoughtful" proposal for reforming the government support of the film industry by having a certain percentage of the ministry's budget reserved for cinema. Under the Film Industry Act, the amount made available for film funding was calculated until now according to the average budgets of films produced the previous year. But this new proposal would not motivate Bulgarian producers to attract co-producers to raise the budgets of their films. "Having a percentage means that it wouldn't depend on us how much is made available and the Minister of Culture would be beholden to the Minister of Finance," Andreev said.

In the Open Letter, the signatories stressed: "Hopefully, we managed to persuade you [Prime Minister Borissov] that we are not asking for charity. All we are asking for is European rules and laws in order to solve the problems of the Bulgarian film industry. In the EU – which Bulgaria recently joined – these rules and laws were established a long time ago. Why not establish them in country as well?"

Meanwhile, moves to introduce a tax incentive system to attract film productions to shoot in Bulgaria have been revived this week with an invitation from the US Embassy in Sofia to a group of Bulgarian producers to meet this Friday (March 18) discuss how the Bulgarian film industry could be helped by the introduction of such an incentive.

Nu Boyana Studios CEO David Varod is one of the leading proponents of Bulgaria adopting a tax incentive similar to those operating in other countries around the world. Speaking to The Sofia Echo recently, he said: "We're not asking for money off the total, only off the expenditure in Bulgaria. I won't get the big movies without incentives. Tax incentives bring more work into the country. More producers will provide services and [the] local industry can only benefit from hosting productions."

However, Andreev is concerned that a move to launch a tax incentive scheme could have a further negative 'knock-on' effect for the public support of Bulgarian films. "The Ministry of Finance is very tight about giving away money, and then they will ask where they should take it from. I am afraid that the connection might be made to take it from the subsidy for Bulgarian films," Andreev said.

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