



European Film Academy Guidelines for Free Speech and Creative Freedom

Freedom of speech and creative freedom are fundamental to the work of the European Film Academy, and securing them requires a shared space for experimentation, reflection, trial and error. Our members' professional and personal development involves individual exposure, vulnerability, and working through intimate thoughts and raw emotions, hence requiring them to feel safe. The European Film Academy prioritises the maintenance of safety of its members, so that each member receives an equal opportunity to develop and mature as an active creative professional in society.

Recent political conflicts have resulted in an increase in harsh feelings and political extremism in European societies. In addition to military casualties, war and conflict exact a terrible cost in life, property and mental health from noncombatants in the affected regions, and beyond. These events radicalise the public discourse and contribute to an increase in the frequency and intensity of violent incidents, including racist expressions and harassment, which lead to many people feeling afraid, anxious, angry, grieving and confused. All these emotions are also experienced within the European Film Academy community too, affecting its cohesion and harmony, and reminding us of the fragility of our shared space. Under these circumstances, our ongoing duty to provide an inclusive, creative and productive space for exchange and support becomes extremely complex - and yet even more essential.

The European Film Academy is an inclusive community that represents the sociopolitical and cultural diversity of European societies. The Academy brings together lived realities, diverse identities, complex and contradictory worldviews. Despite the tensions and conflicts that may arise at events the European Film Academy hosts, such as the ceremony of the European Film Awards, or at panel discussions, informal encounters and other events the Academy is co-hosting or directly involved in, maintaining a diversity of participants and a wealth of opinions

is a precondition for enabling us to do our work. It is the European Film Academy's key contribution to the intellectual, cultural and creative life in Europe, and in particular to its community of filmmakers and film-lovers.

Accordingly:

The European Film Academy protects the free speech and creative freedom of all its members, and their right to exercise those freedoms safely in all discursive and active spaces, physical or virtual.

The European Film Academy encourages the expression of a wide range of opinions by its individual members, even if others may find them controversial, unpleasant, objectionable, or annoying.

The European Film Academy does not allow these freedoms to be exploited in order to deny other's individual rights, or to harm the safety of its members.

The European Film Academy denounces all expressions of violence, discrimination, racism, persecution, as well as all forms of harassment or threat against any of its members due to their expressions, whether we find them legitimate or not.

Solidarity, Creativity, and Rules of Discursive Conduct: Q&A

1. How can free speech and creative freedom be maintained in this time of crisis?

To exercise freedom of expression to create and ensure a community environment that facilitates the professional and personal development of all its members, we must act both together and individually to ensure that all our members feel safeguarded and supported. On the one hand, we must develop the ability to contain a complex reality with divergent views, as unsettling and unpleasant as these may be, and on the other hand we must denounce every expression of violence, threat and persecution. **Each member has the responsibility and ability to contribute to such an environment.**

2. What are the dos and don'ts of free speech?

Free speech is the cornerstone of every democracy. It is an essential condition for creativity, expression and academic and artistic work. Free speech applies to both conventional and unconventional opinions, to congenial exchanges as well as harsh criticism, to the pleasant and obvious and to the irritating and infuriating, to verbal, visual and performative expressions. Having said that, note that free speech is not absolute, and that in rare and extreme cases it is weighed down by other values,

particularly when the expression in question constitutes a real and immediate threat to an individual or a community. Therefore,

Do:

- Express a political view.
- Express one's individual identity, among other things using national, religious, or cultural narratives, symbols and representations.
- Identify and empathise with the suffering of innocent people.

Don't:

- Express support for the injuring and killing of innocent civilians
Such expressions represent a severe offense to the dignity of each of the community members and are forbidden by law.
- Act violently, including verbal violence.
- Call for or incite violence - it is forbidden to threaten any person or call for damage to the life and property of individuals or collectives.
- Express support for organisations inciting violence, racism etc.
- Express (any form of) racism and/or incite to (any form of) racism, which includes antisemitism.
- Avoid all generalisations that attribute negative qualities or inappropriate acts to individuals based on collective characteristics such as religion, nationality, or gender, and do not call for action against people based on such collective characteristics.

3. Is it OK to express political opinions within the European Film Academy?

Yes. The space of the European Film Academy is essentially one for asking questions and examining ideas. This is why it must be as free as possible. Within the European Film Academy, a community that strives for innovative and even norm-challenging work, broad and profound thinking, and a discourse capable of containing complexity, diverse expressions and ideas must be enabled. European (and German) law allows members, management and staff to express their personal opinions and discuss politics. Moreover, contents and discussions relevant to the socio-political reality of all countries the European Film Academy considers "European" are of academic value and are sometimes essential in the community's context. In environments where knowledge is shared in the presence of a board or staff member of the Academy, the decision whether to discuss political issues is subject to their discretion.

4. How should I express myself freely and responsibly within the European Film Academy?

We all have the right to express our thoughts and feelings honestly and directly, as long as we do so within the boundaries set forth by European (and German) law. Spaces of expression include all meeting spaces of the European Film Academy: the ceremony of the European Film Awards, board meetings, presentations, networking events, membership platforms and social media.

At the same time, we must be aware that in periods of escalation and tension, there is a tendency to converge into one's original ingroup, to radicalise one's views, ignore nuances, and have difficulty empathising. We must therefore be mindful of the way our messages may be interpreted in various contexts, in various spaces and with different identities, and be prepared to provide explanations as required.

In particular, the nature of communication in WhatsApp groups and social media tends to radicalise statements and foment disagreements and conflicts whilst it is liable to lead to harsh and even illegal expressions. In certain cases, attacking a person verbally on social media may even place their lives in danger. We must be aware of these pitfalls when posting and sharing views and comments and express ourselves in our name rather than under the guise of anonymity, thereby taking responsibility for our words.

5. How to interpret controversial expressions and performances?

The artistic excellence promoted within the European Film Academy encompasses a wide range of verbal, visual, and performative forms of promotion and expression. These include complex, multilayered and sometimes challenging content. The encounter with the diverse outcomes of European cinema invites a broad range of comments and interpretations, according to the various contexts and the spaces where films have been presented. Accordingly, sometimes, artistic work, statements and expressions can make some people feel unpleasant and even be interpreted as violent and threatening.

While recognising the fact that messages may be interpreted in different ways and indifferent contexts, we must assume that others fundamentally mean well, and that they do not deliberately intend to harm us. Whenever we feel discomfort or threat, or encounter what we believe is a call to violence, we must talk with the creator of the expression, share with them the way we interpret their messages, and listen to their explanations.

6. How to respond to an expression that undermines our sense of security?

At times of crisis, verbal, visual, and performative expressions can undermine our sense of safety. When we feel a certain act or expression threatens our safety, we

should respond level-headedly and factually and address the explicit content of the claims and messages, as much as we may find them difficult to accept. We should try and understand the intent, context and background of the expression. If it is possible to address the creator of the expression directly, we should seek clarification with them. In any case, it is forbidden to threaten violence or act violently against another member of the community, even if you find that they have expressed themselves illegitimately. Shaming, vilification, incitement and excommunication are violent, illegitimate acts themselves.

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