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Letter from Europa

## **Stand by your man**

BVK president Johannes Kirchlechner explains how the German society's support of professionalism and quality has won some difficult battles

As the new president of the BVK, the German Society of Cinematographers, I am delighted to have this opportunity explain to you the issues that our association is dealing with right now and the matters that I, as President, especially care about.

Last year, the BVK's general assembly took a meaningful decision. We changed our name! The BVK – Bundesverband Kamera (Federal Camera Association) was changed to BVK – Berufsverband Kinematografie (Professional Association of Cinematography). It made sense to finally follow the example of international parlance, even though the German word "Kinematografie" may sound antiquated to some.

The new name is telling in terms of the BVK's conception. Very soon after it last changed its name in 1980, the association decided to not only accept cinematographers as members (back then still referred to as cameramen and camerawomen), but also their closest collaborators in the camera department. Subsequently camera assistants and steadicam operators were affiliated step-by-step. This was followed later on by second assistants, operators, colour graders, VFX-supervisors, DITs and recently data assistants, our term for data wranglers. When you look at it from this angle the name "Professional Association of Cinematography" really makes sense in today's industry, as the BVK intends to include and combine all of the different professions that contribute to the cinematographic process. We are trying to ensure that all important aspects of the cinematographic process don't get deprived from our sphere of knowledge and influence.

The decision to use the word "Kinematografie" in the name is a strikingly relevant description for our occupation and profession – it comprises anything that is concerned with the moving image. The plain German word "Kameramann" is a diminutive for a cinematographer or DP, and may have the effect of reducing their contribution to a cinematographic work to just the technical or artisanal handling of a piece of equipment. Instead, it's our intention that the cinematographer's input is regarded as being intellectual-creative in nature, which is then recognised when their vision manifests itself in a coherent piece of work. This awareness of what the cinematographer does, is what we want to introduce into daily German language by replacing misleading terms with apposite ones.

Another important task for us is to help cinematographers be undeniably recognised as the co-authors of a filmic piece of work, and that they (along with all the other co-authors) are granted an appropriate share of the revenues.

At the end of 2012 we negotiated a significant settlement with an important German production company. It stipulates that BVK cinematographers, who shot a movie for the company, get a share of the revenues obtained from that movie. As we see it, the share is still too low and this arrangement only takes effect after the producer has recaptured his own capital contribution. But the real value of this settlement is invaluable for the BVK as an author's association as well as for each individual cinematographer!

Not so many years ago German producers tried to deny cinematographers having co-authorship rights over a filmic piece of work and, therein, to any entitlement to a proportional share of the profits. For the BVK to finally obtain this new proceeding for our members means that cinematographers in the BVK are now recognised as co-authors of a piece of filmic work and that the BVK is authorised to represent them, without our fundamental claim or our legitimisation ever being doubted during the course of any action. Of course, the battle isn't won, but we have accomplished a strategic success in favour of members.

Besides socio-political activities, we keep an attentive eye on technical developments. We make our knowledge available and intervene if something seems to run out of hand. For example, we succeeded in having 16mm film being accepted again in Germany as an appropriate means of acquisition for HD-TV programming. We believed that the people in authority on this matter had taken wrong standpoint about 16mm, and through resolute requests and reasoned argument from our side, the decision was adjusted. We support discussions like this across many different topics, both inside the association and across the industry, and we offer our members a whole array of advanced training, mostly through cooperations with partners.

The BVK is a member society of IMAGO, the umbrella organisation of European cinematographic societies, and takes an active part on the board as well as in on the technical committee.

The BVK is, of course, constantly engaged in various events that involve discussions with regards to content and cinematographic concepts, such as the "Marburger Kameragespräche" (The Marburg Camera Conversations). Alongside that the BVK itself organises events like the "Kameraforum" in collaboration with the HFF Munich High School For Television And Film.

In this respect, I must give special mention to the unique Plus Camerimage Festival Of Cinematography, that our friends from the Tumult Organisation get off the ground every year in the most admirable manner. The festival celebrates outstanding personalities in our trade and honours their achievements. But, above all, it offers cinematographers from all over the world – whether they are old or young, whether they are heroes or hidden champions – the opportunity to meet their peers and enjoy an effortless exchange of experiences and mutual inspiration. You really can join with the global community of cinematographers at Camerimage in a way that makes you very happy, and the BVK extends full its full support for Camerimage and its wonderful possibilities.

As BVK president, whilst it is one of my chief concerns to extend the protection that our community of cinematographers offers, it is also my aim to make its potential for experiencing creative stimulation available to others.

Today, when everybody has the opportunity to make moving images, where almost any stills camera can shoot video, it is imperative to make clear that cinematography is not just about the handling of a device in the first place, but about professionalism and quality!

We are professionals in the way we organise, in our communication, and in the way we interact with our immediate collaborators and the rest of the production team. We offer quality in our interpretation of the subject matter, in our concepts for an appropriate palette of looks, and in how we translate these into suitable moods. And, all this within a given schedule and budget. That is what we always have to keep in mind. I'd like to encourage all of us to stand for this position with self-confidence.

Johannes Kirchlechner  
BVK President