

# “A Clear Attempt at Censorship”

(English translation of Obwaldner Zeitung article published on September 25, 2015)

**Obwalden** The Culture Commission placed in the crosshair of conservative catholic activists - with a petition, they want to prevent the support of a Transgender film.

Filmmaker Florian Halbedl, who emigrated from Engelberg to Canada, submitted an application for his short film *Limina* financial for the support of CHF13,500 to the Culture Commission of Obwalden. However, even before the decision has been made and before even a second of the film has been shot, the project has caught the attention of right-wing, catholic activists. *Limina* deals with the theme of “Transgender” of an eight-year old child, in other words about a person (human) who can't identify with their biological gender. Halbedl's message: “(Social) Gender boundaries in children can be fluid, and we should let them explore these boundaries themselves.” Filming was originally planned to take place in October in Switzerland; however, in mid-August Florian Halbedl changed his plans. “Unfortunately, due to financial and logistical reasons, it's not possible to shoot the film in Switzerland.” It's also difficult because on top of that we would have to work with an infrastructure that is foreign to us. “For a film with a small budget under CHF 100,000, that's a risk that is simply too big,” says Halbedl.

## Catholic Activists are Up in Arms

On September 8<sup>th</sup>, conservative catholic circles started an anonymous petition on the online platform “Citizen Go” to appeal to cantonal government representative Franz Enderli, head of Educational and Culture departments. The unverifiable petition on the website currently has over 12,000 signatures. In the petition gender identity disorders of any kind are labeled as a sickness and a film project like this can only be seen as propaganda of the LGBT-lobby. The petition states that the project, which tries to destabilize the identity of children as boys and girls, and should not be supported under any circumstance – tax money should not be available to controversial and ideologically laden film projects.

“This is a clear attempt at censorship,” says annoyed Florian Halbedl, who hopes that the petition wouldn't have an impact on the Obwalden Culture Commission, a committee made up of seven people: “Religious dogma should not influence decisions about art and films.” Halbedl is especially concerned that the petition underpins “through religious and moralizing ideologies that exclude and stigmatize groups who already face widespread social marginalization and violence on account of their unique identities.”

## Petition Does Not Matter

Cantonal government representative Franz Enderli, who is addressed in the petition, has no knowledge of the activities on “Citizen Go.” “I was not been contacted by the people from the petition and have thus far also not received any mail (email) or phone calls,” he states and thinks that the petition would not have an impact on the orderly process of an application. Christian Sidler, head of the cantonal office for Culture and Sport, however, knows about the petition. Sidler has also received a few reactions over mail (email) and even a phone call. Sidler also stresses that the activists will not have an impact when Culture Commission decides on Florian Halbedl's application at the end of October. “The basis for the decision rests solely on the application. Decisions for support are foremost based on the film's quality and the connection to Obwalden. The fact that the film will no longer be filmed in Switzerland would therefore have a big impact on the decision,” says Sidler which sounds as though the chances for financial support may have been decreased. Sidler also makes it clear that in cantonal support money is not money from taxes, but from the Swiss lottery.

## Who is Behind the Attempted Censorship?

Who exactly initiated the petition is not clear. “Citizen Go” was not available for comment. In a television segment on “Arte” in March of 2015 the website, based in Spain and with apparently over two million subscribers in Europe and North America, was described as spearheaded by extreme-conservative Catholics which continuously launches online attacks on LGBT topics.

Two people, who continuously have expressed their beliefs in regards to topics of this nature, have publicly come out against the film. “Corrispondenza Romana,” an Italian news service lead by 67-year old professor and publicist Roberto de Mattei, who for example has publicly claimed that the contagion of homosexuality caused the fall of the Roman Empire, is cited in the petition. “Corrispondenza Romana” fulminated that *Limina* is “an attack on childhood with disastrous psychological and social consequences.” De Mattei's contributions are regularly translated into German by Giuseppe Nardi on his website “Katholisches.info.” Germany's “Der Spiegel” connected Nardi to the 2012 shutdown of the website related to the “aggressive, homophobic and anti-Semitic scene on the right-edge of the catholic church.” In June, Nardi imputed the filmmakers of *Limina* on his website stating that *Limina* is trying to fight the roots of the “problem” of heterosexuality and therefore rape the nature of mankind.