



European Economic and Social Committee

**TEN/145
MEDIA-Training
TEN/146
MEDIA Plus**

Brussels, 24 September 2003

OPINION

of the European Economic and Social Committee
on the

Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council modifying Decision No. 163/2001/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 January 2001 on the implementation of a training programme for professionals in the European audiovisual programme industry (MEDIA-Training) (2001-2005)

COM (2003) 188 final – 2003/0064 (COD)

and the

Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council modifying Council Decision 2000/821/EC of 20 December 2000 on the implementation of a programme to encourage the development, distribution and promotion of European audiovisual works (MEDIA Plus - Development, Distribution and Promotion)

COM (2003) 191 final – 2003/0067 (COD)

On 5 May 2003 the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 150(4) and 157(3) of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council modifying Decision No. 163/2001/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 January 2001 on the implementation of a training programme for professionals in the European audiovisual programme industry (MEDIA-Training) (2001-2005) (COM (2003) 188 final – 2003/0064 COD)

and the

Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council modifying Council Decision 2000/821/EC of 20 December 2000 on the implementation of a programme to encourage the development, distribution and promotion of European audiovisual works (MEDIA Plus – Development, Distribution and Promotion) (COM (2003) 191 final – 2003/0067 COD).

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 4 September 2003. The rapporteur was **Mr Braghin**.

At its 402nd plenary session (meeting of 24 September 2003), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 127 votes to one with one abstention.

1. Introduction

1.1 The MEDIA-Training programme is designed to improve the professional skills of people working in the European audiovisual industry through the provision of further vocational training. The aim is to equip these people with the knowledge and skills they need to allow them to take full advantage of the European and international dimension of the market and of the use of new technologies.

1.2 The MEDIA Plus programme is designed to boost the competitiveness of the European audiovisual industry by means of measures to support the development of production projects and companies and the distribution and promotion of cinematographic works and audiovisual programmes.

1.3 The two programmes are due to end at a time of major change in the structure and workings of the EU, marked by enlargement, the intergovernmental conference, European Parliament elections and the renewal of the European Commission.

1.4 It is therefore necessary to establish a legal basis for prolonging the current MEDIA-Training and MEDIA Plus programmes pending the adoption of successor programmes, so as to ensure the continuity of Community support for the sector and avoid any disruption of these

mechanisms, bearing in mind that they further Community objectives which are laid down in the Treaty.

1.5 The Commission proposes to increase the overall budget of the MEDIA-Training programme to €57.40 million and that of the MEDIA Plus programme to €435.6 million.

2. General comments

2.1 The Committee thinks that it would have been better if the Commission had taken earlier action to create the conditions and adopt the measures needed ahead of the discussion and submission of the new multiannual programme for the areas covered by MEDIA-Training and MEDIA Plus, rather than simply prolonging the existing programmes for a year. In this way it could have addressed the various needs and new realities of the audiovisual sector and respond to the constructive criticism the existing programmes have received. For instance, the conception and structure of the programmes need to be revised to meet the challenges arising from enlargement.

2.2 The Committee trusts that the current mid-term evaluation will take account of the suggestions and proposals contained in previous Committee opinions, as well as those made in the present one.

2.3 The level of funding scheduled for 2006 is essentially the same as for the preceding five-year period – indeed, in the case of the MEDIA-Training programme it is actually lower. Even if the sum to cater for the impact of enlargement is added, the total figure is still not enough to meet the needs of a larger number of potential users and the increased opportunities for cooperation.

2.3.1 The Committee therefore hopes that the funds scheduled for MEDIA projects, especially in the training field, will be increased in the EU general budget for 2006-2012 and will be divided up more effectively in the light of the new needs arising from the fact that the audiovisual sector is less developed in the new Member States.

2.3.2 Alongside the support provided under the programme, other financing opportunities (e.g. private funding mechanisms and EIB support) should be used more and geared more effectively to supporting SMEs, particularly the many micro businesses in the sector, with the *Growth and audiovisual: i2i audiovisual* scheme acting as a model.

2.3.3 A special effort should be made to identify mechanisms for providing tax concessions and creating a venture capital market tailored to the specific features of the sector, which is about to experience major innovations with the move to digital.

3. Specific comments

3.1 The MEDIA desks, which provide the national interface with programme beneficiaries, are crucial for achieving the programme's objectives. Care must be taken to ensure that

the MEDIA desks being set up in the new Member States operate effectively and offer users in those countries appropriate information and services. This could have useful spin-off as regards the search for partners for co-productions and dissemination at European level.

3.2 A further way of promoting European films, both in Europe and elsewhere, is by supporting European film, documentary and cartoon festivals. Such support could be usefully supplemented with the systematic provision of information about these festivals, so as to facilitate the participation of authors and small independent producers, and promotion of their work at both EU and international level.

3.2.1 Festivals are an important means for promoting productions that are not exclusively commercial and often have a valuable cultural content, providing insight into a region's history and traditions. With proper backing, they can raise the profile of regional culture and audiovisual productions that have hitherto been overlooked or sidelined by international distributors. This need is bound to increase with the accession to the EU of countries whose culture and traditions differ from those of the current Member States.

3.3 The Committee supports the idea of turning the technical assistance office into an executive agency. This should make it possible to manage funds in a more flexible and transparent manner. The Committee urges the Commission to press ahead with the study it has launched.

4. Conclusions

4.1 The Committee hopes that the current mid-term evaluation will be followed by a wide debate and possibly consultations with stakeholders, so as to prepare the future MEDIA programme as effectively as possible and to review the allocation of resources as of now, if necessary.

4.2 In the run-up to enlargement, the problem of funding for the audiovisual industry cannot be solved simply by a projection - based on current figures - for an enlarged Union with around 70 million new citizens and a wider development gap in the audiovisual sector. The Committee asks the Commission to take this into account as it draws up its proposals for the future EU budget, in terms of both the scale of funding and its suitability to meet recipients' needs.

4.3 The Committee reiterates and reaffirms some strategic points made in its opinion on the original proposals for the MEDIA-Training and MEDIA Plus programmes, which it adopted on 27 April 2000¹. In particular, the Committee would ask the Commission to take due account of the following points in its evaluation exercise and when preparing the future MEDIA programme:

¹ EESC opinion on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the implementation of a training programme for professionals in the European audiovisual programme industry (MEDIA-Training)(2001-2005) and the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the implementation of a programme to encourage the development, distribution and promotion of European audiovisual works (MEDIA Plus – Development, Distribution and Promotion) (2001-2005) (rapporteur: Mr Hernández Bataller), OJ C 168 of 16.6.2000.

- ensure that the programme complements and is consistent with other Community measures, by adopting a common strategy and encouraging the audiovisual industry to take part in such programmes as Culture 2000;
- provide aid at those stages of the audiovisual chain where intervention can bring greater added value (mainly at the beginning and end of the production process), in particular by facilitating access for SMEs by using more flexible mechanisms and arrangements such as slate funding (support for catalogues of projects);
- give priority to products which can be marketed commercially over an extended period, and take action regarding the length of production rights, as independent producers are particularly penalised here;
- give priority to technological development and innovation and transnational dissemination (in particular with the new Member States);
- set up an information and monitoring system for the new needs and developments of the audiovisual market;
- improve public access to the EU's audiovisual heritage by means of digitalisation and interconnection at European level, particularly for training and educational purposes;
- conduct an appropriate and systematic evaluation of aid, with a view to making optimum use of the financial resources available and meeting the needs of the audiovisual industry as effectively as possible;
- carry out pilot projects: little use has been made of these hitherto, possibly because they have concentrated on technological aspects. They should also focus on content.

4.4 In the training field, the main obstacle is overly rigid implementing regulations and, as already noted, inadequate investment. As the Committee proposed in its earlier opinion, incentives should also be provided for distance learning using new technologies, and coordination should be promoted between vocational training centres and universities, taking care not to distribute aid too thinly.

Brussels, 24 September 2003.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Roger Briesch

Patrick Venturini