

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA
STANDING COMMITTEE
OF THE EFTA STATES

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SUBCOMMITTEE II ON THE FREE MOVEMENT OF CAPITAL AND SERVICES

**EEA EFTA COMMENTS ON THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSAL
CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROGRAMME OF SUPPORT
FOR THE EUROPEAN AUDIOVISUAL SECTOR¹**

(MEDIA 2007)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The EEA EFTA States welcome the proposal for the new MEDIA Programme to follow-up the existing MEDIA plus and MEDIA Training.

The EEA EFTA States strongly agree with the Commission to simplify the programme structures and procedures as much as possible. In the light of this, they welcome the establishment of a single integrated programme as well as the creation of an Executive Agency dealing with the management of the future MEDIA Programme.

The core of the success of the MEDIA Programmes has always been the focus on strengthening the competitiveness of the European Audiovisual Industry. To this end, the EEA EFTA States encourage all objectives and actions which help the European Audiovisual Industry to be fit for the market and to increase the audience which will finally be able to watch European audiovisual works. The introduction of digital techniques, better access for the industry to risk capital through improved financial skills and an enhanced distribution and dissemination of the products are the tools for success which according to the EEA EFTA States, the new programme should be focussing on.

Special attention should be given to the transitional period between the old and the new programme. In order for the EEA EFTA states to carry out the formal procedures of incorporating the MEDIA Programme into the EEA Agreement

¹ COM(2004) 470.

without delays, the Commission should avoid any (financial and organisational) gap between the old programmes and the effective start of MEDIA 2007.

The planned increase in the budget of the programme reflects the importance attached to the Audiovisual Industry. However, as the proposed budget would lead to a substantial net increase of the financial contributions of the EEA EFTA States to the EU budget in a period of tight national fiscal budgets, the EEA EFTA States would like to express their concerns as to the budget implications for them.

Positive discrimination for countries or regions with low production capacity and/or restricted geographical and linguistic areas has successfully contributed to the development of a diversified and pan-European Audiovisual Industry and should be maintained in the new MEDIA Programme and even enhanced. In this respect, special scholarships for training activities should also be available to professionals from countries and regions with low production capacity and not only for the new Member States.

I INTRODUCTION

1. The EEA EFTA States have since the very beginning, participated in the MEDIA Programmes. It is beyond any doubt that the MEDIA Programme has had a positive impact on the development of the Audiovisual Industry. The EEA EFTA States therefore strongly support the continuation of the MEDIA Programme 2007 and beyond.

2. With the aim of reaching the objectives of the proposed decision efficiently, the EEA EFTA States take the opportunity to indicate certain amendments to the proposal.

II COMMENTS AND AMENDMENTS PROPOSED BY THE EEA EFTA STATES

A) GENERAL REMARKS

3. The EEA EFTA States agree with the Commission that the audiovisual sector is a vector for the expression of European culture and plays a primary role in building a European cultural identity. The EEA EFTA States take a great interest in contributing to the intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and knowledge among European cultures and therefore are very interested to participate in a Community action which has as its objective to preserve and enrich European cultural diversity and its cinematographic and audiovisual heritage. As a consequence, they generally support the global objectives and priorities of the new MEDIA Programme as described in Chapter 1 of the decision.

4. The EEA EFTA States agree with the Commission's ambition to simplify the programme structures and procedures as much as possible in order to establish an effective support system. In the light of this, they welcome the establishment of a single

integrated Programme (MEDIA 2007) replacing the two existing Programmes (MEDIA Plus and MEDIA Training). They also support all measures which will lead to a simplification of the application forms and procedures, and to more transparency in awarding procedures and the improved exchange of information with applicants. The establishment of an Executive Agency dealing with the management of the future MEDIA Programme is an adequate measure to improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

5. The strength of the MEDIA Programmes is that they have always focused on strengthening the competitiveness of the European Audiovisual Industry. The EEA EFTA States therefore believe in the success of business-minded actions which will professionalize the European Audiovisual Industry. This approach should be maintained.

6. The EEA EFTA States welcome the proposal of the Commission to bring the lifespan of the programme into line with the financial perspective 2007 – 2013. The five year period has in many ways proven to be too short for implementing the programme and to get the industry accustomed to it. However, necessary adjustments to the programme should be possible should the midterm evaluation indicate the need to do so.

7. Special attention should be given to the transitional period between the old and the new programme. Experience in the past has shown that it normally takes up to one year until a new Programme is running smoothly. This is particularly true for participants from the EEA EFTA States as formal procedures of incorporating a Community programme into the EEA Agreement can only start after the decision has been published in the OJ and applications from the EEA EFTA States will only be accepted once the programme has been incorporated into the EEA Agreement. The Commission should therefore avoid any (financial and organisational) gap between the old programmes and the effective start of MEDIA 2007.

8. The Commission's proposal is soundly based on current concerns and priorities, as well as on experiences and evaluations of past and present programmes. The planned increase in the budget of the programme reflects the importance attached to the Audiovisual Industry for preserving and enhancing European cultural diversity as well as the importance of strengthening the competitiveness of the European Audiovisual Sector in the framework of an open and competitive market. The EEA EFTA states support this increased focus on the Audiovisual Industry. However, as the proposed budget would lead to a substantial net increase of the financial contributions of the EEA EFTA States to the EU budget in a period of tight national fiscal budgets, the EEA EFTA States would like to express their concerns as to the budget implications for them.

B) SPECIFIC ISSUES

Special scholarships for training activities should also be available to professionals from countries and regions with low production capacity
(Article 3, point 3 of the proposal; Annex, Chapter 1, point 1.2.5)

9. The EEA EFTA States propose to change the proposed text of Chapter 2, Article 3 Point 3, and amend it with the following wording:

“3. *enable, through special scholarships, professionals from the new Member States **and from countries or regions with low production capacity** to take part in training activities set out in paragraph 1 of this Article.*”

10. The EEA EFTA States furthermore suggest changing the wording in the Annex to the decision, Chapter 1, 1.2.5 as follows:

”1.2.5 *Enable, through special scholarships professionals from the new Member States **and from countries or regions with low production capacity** to take part in training....*”

Operational objective

- *Facilitate the participation by professionals from the new Member State **and** , **from countries or regions with low production capacity** in the ...*”

11. Countries or regions with a low production capacity are particularly disadvantaged as their professionals cannot rely on a highly developed infrastructure in their own country/region. The MEDIA Programmes have essentially contributed to strengthening the Audiovisual Industry in countries with a lower production capacity. In order to be most effective for all countries participating in the programme, the EEA EFTA States suggest maintaining and even enhancing the politics of positive discrimination in the new programme. Consequently, countries or regions with a low production capacity should also profit from a facilitated participation.

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