Audiovisual industry: MEDIA II 1996-2000, development and distribution of European works

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Following adoption by the Committee on Culture of the reports on MEDIA II, which would be voted on in the House on 15 June, Mrs ANDRE-LEONARD (ELDR, B) welcomed the new text and stated that "All efforts should be made to promote the expertise of our cinema industry, so that Europe is no longer considered to be the novice in this area, and to prevent our European cinematographic talent drifting toward the USA". The financial envelope proposed for the implementation of this programme was ECU 342 million. Participation in the programme should be open to Cyprus and to Malta, as well as to the CEECs under the PHARE and TACIS programmes. With regard to the implementation and monitoring of the programmes, the Commission would be assisted by an advisory committee (composed of representatives of the Member States and experts). The committee called for the legal basis for the proposal for a decision to be amended (Articles 130 and 128). This amendment would mean that the EP would be called upon to give its opinion by means of the codecision procedure (the current proposal provided for a simple consultation procedure). As regards the rest of the text, given that the main challenge facing the European cinematographic industry was to help European films reach cinema screens, the committee tabled many amendments covering a broad spectrum of topics. The committee felt, in particular, that this programme should cover not only the development and distribution of European audiovisual works but also their screening, with special attention being paid to structures originating in regions with a low production capacity and projects promoting cultural diversity, with particular regard to cinema films. - As regards development, support should be provided first and foremost for production projects developed by SMEs. Projects to conserve and restore films for use on the programme market should also be encouraged. - As regards distribution, with a view to encouraging the setting-up of cross-border structures, aid should be granted to cinemas that promoted the distribution of European works and showed mainly these films, particularly small local and independent cinemas. Support should also be given to the modernisation of existing cinemas. Similarly, Community and trans-European distribution strategies for European films should be encouraged. The establishment of cross-border networks, of both cinemas and distributors, should be promoted with a view to ensuring widespread and simultaneous distribution throughout the countries of Europe and the CEECs. Indeed, Mrs ANDRE-LEONARD considered that the main problem in Europe was the distribution of its own films. These coordinated promotion campaigns encouraged cinemas and distributors to make European cinema more accessible. In order to facilitate the distribution of European films, support should also be provided for the making of copies of films. Access to commercial events promoting European productions should be expressly supported, particularly productions by SMEs and cinema film productions, whilst television companies should be encouraged to distribute works produced in another European country taking part in the MEDIA II programme. Furthermore, a network of European databases and catalogues of archived works should be set up through the creation of centres for the purchase of rights so as to facilitate the distribution of such works. This would ensure the conservation and restoration of collections of European films, which formed part of Europe's audiovisual heritage. Also in the context of distribution, the buying-back of distribution rights should be promoted together with the purchase of rights in groups. Finally, the production of television programmes should be supported, with assistance provided to television channels, and the broadcasting of television programmes in several countries should be promoted. Productions from Member States with a low production capacity or minority languages, or from countries or regions with a limited geographical or language area, should also have greater access to commercial events. As a result, a policy of positive discrimination should be applied in favour of these regions and countries.