

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on:

- the ‘Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning a proposal for a programme in support of the audiovisual industry [Media plus (2001-2005)]’,
- 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 Council decision 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)’

(2000/C 317/19)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning a proposal for a programme in support of the audiovisual industry (Media Plus -2001-2005) (COM (1999) 658 final);

having regard to 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) (COM (1999) 658 final — 1999/0275 COD);

having regard to the proposal for a Council Decision 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) (COM (1999) 658 final — 1999/0276 CNS);

having regard to the decision taken by the Council on 6 March 2000, under Article 150 and the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to consult the Committee of the regions on this matter;

having regard to the decision taken by the Bureau of the Committee of the Regions on 2 June 1999 to instruct Commission 7 ‘Education, Vocational Training, Culture, Youth, Sport and Citizens’ Rights’ to draw up the relevant Opinion;

having regard to the draft opinion adopted by Commission 7 on 5 May 2000 (CdR 19/2000 rev. 2 COM-7/021) (rapporteur: Ms Kemp UK/EPP),

unanimously adopted the following opinion at its 34th plenary session of 14 and 15 June 2000 (meeting of 15 June).

1. The Committee of the Regions’ views

1.1. The COR welcomes Media Plus as a follow-up programme to Media II which expires on 31 December 2000. It further welcomes the 29 % increase in the Budget for this Media Programme to EUR 400 million.

1.2. The COR recognises the continual need for European film, television and multimedia industries to become more competitive and to create a more favourable environment for European audiovisual companies and organisations.

1.3. The COR welcomes the strong potential for growth identified in the Media Plus programme and the opportunity

to create more than 300 000 extra highly qualified jobs in the audiovisual industry by 2005. An important function of the Media Plus programme will be to ensure there is sufficient skilled labour to fill these new jobs.

1.4. The fragmentation of the audiovisual industry should be considered as a weakness and COR believes this area needs further development initiatives. The COR believes there is a need for increased networking and cooperation between those involved in the audiovisual industry.

1.5. The COR welcomes the focus on support for SMEs within the audiovisual industry and welcomes the attempts to increase productivity and profitability.

1.6. The COR recognises the importance of opening up new and diverse distribution channels for producers and therefore welcomes the emphasis given to the distribution of European audiovisual products.

1.7. The COR welcomes the opportunity that Media Plus offers to provide a rapid response to the dramatic speed with which technological changes are occurring particularly in the audiovisual and communication industries.

1.8. The COR welcomes the commitment that the Media Plus programme gives to Lifelong Learning. The continual training and skilling of people working within the audiovisual industry is paramount to maintaining the competitive edge of the European audiovisual industry.

1.9. Media Plus seeks to promote EU wide vocational training. However, the programme does not address the issue of comparability of qualifications across the EU member states, or the identification of pan-European training providers. This aspect should not be overlooked, given the vital need for proper basic and further training throughout working life, in the absence of proper training facilities and specialist teaching centres funded at EU level.

1.10. The COR believes there is a need for increased networking particularly between trainers and believes this area needs further development initiatives.

1.11. The COR recognises that Media Plus will encourage knowledge and understanding of the cultural diversity which exists within EU member states and regions.

1.12. The COR welcomes the Media Plus aim of enhancing the potential of countries or regions with a low audiovisual production capacity and/or with a limited geographic and linguistic area. This support should be welcomed as an important contribution towards preserving Europe's cultural diversity.

1.13. There is a need for EU regulatory bodies to ensure that there is a continual discussion across member states to address issues of quality within the audiovisual industry. See for example the Green Paper on 'Convergence of the telecommunications, Media and Information technology Sectors, and the Implications for Regulation' ⁽¹⁾.

1.14. The COR recognises that the growth of new digital services as outlined in Media Plus have implications for regulation and copyright. COR therefore supports the proposed Directive on Copyright and Related Rights in the Information Society and protection of minors as outlined in the 'Principles and Guidelines for the Community's Audio Visual Policy in the Digital Age'.

1.15. The COR welcomes Media Plus' support for audiovisual festivals. However, the COR is concerned at the emphasis on large scale festivals rather than encouraging smaller regional festivals. These smaller festivals have always provided a training-ground for young people — both professional and amateur — who can inject the kind of improvements which European audiovisual production needs, especially as regards creative input.

1.16. The COR believes there is a need to ensure that there is adequate publicity and information about Media Plus made available to the public, regional authorities and commercial bodies.

1.17. The COR welcomes the importance placed upon the preserving of the cinematographic heritage.

1.18. The COR recognises that access to European audiovisual material for those with a disability is of prime importance. It calls for an increase in the production of audiovisual material that can be used by people with disabilities, together with the dissemination of projects guaranteeing access to the main audiovisual services, especially in the information field.

1.19. The COR welcomes the basic principle on equal opportunities and would encourage any initiatives to achieve a more equal gender balance.

1.20. The Committee notes that Culture is now included in the provision of Structural Funds. Article 2 notes that the Fund will participate in the financing of '... cultural investment, including the protection of cultural and natural heritage, provided that they are creating sustainable jobs'. COR Opinion on Culture 2000 (CdR 227/1998 fin) stressed that 'Culture as an asset in local and regional development should be accorded a higher profile in projects receiving Structural Fund aid'.

1.21. The COR notes that the Media Plus programme does not highlight opportunities that may be available through the promotion of bi-media organisations and activities.

2. The Committee of the Regions' recommendations

2.1. Media Plus should have a greater emphasis on disseminating information. There needs to be greater dissemination of information regarding initiatives supported by the programme and those participating in Media Plus funded activities.

2.2. The COR further recommends that the dissemination of information regarding EU wide distribution opportunities be given a high priority.

⁽¹⁾ COM(97) 623 final, 3.12.1997.

2.3. Local Authorities should instigate greater collaboration between the different strands of the audiovisual industry possibly through the promotion of regional consortia made up of those involved in the training, funding, production and distribution of the industry.

2.4. There is also an opportunity to develop a Media Plus websites that could include databases of training opportunities, distribution channels and audiovisual organisations through to examples of finished productions funded by the Media Plus programme. These websites could be formulated through Media Desks and Regional and Local Authorities to create an EU wide website.

2.5. Media Desks set up under Media II should be developed through the Media Plus Programme. The COR recommends encouragement should be given to increasing the number of Media Desks throughout the EU. Local Authorities and specialist agencies should work with Media Desks to ensure local industries are aware of the support available through the Media Plus programme.

2.6. The COR recommends that Media Plus promote the dissemination of good practice in regard to promoting co-operation between organisations and the development of European audio-visual products.

2.7. The COR recognises the need for standardisation of vocational qualifications across EU member states. If this does not already exist, there needs to be an initiative to establish standardisation.

2.8. There should be greater development and promotion of EU wide training programmes together with greater development of EU wide training bodies and initiatives. There is a role for Local and Regional Authorities to encourage the establishment of a network of European film and television schools to link centres of excellence as recommended by the Birmingham Conference held in April 1998 under the Media II programme. The training programmes should focus on quality and incorporate a dimension which clearly reflects the EU's stand on respect for democracy and human rights.

2.9. The criteria for intensive training measures that 'a majority of the participants are of a nationality other than that of the country in which the training is taken place' is considered to be too ambitious and a disincentive for training providers.

The COR therefore recommends that the criteria be amended, by substituting 'region' for 'nation'.

2.10. The COR recommends that the Media Plus programme includes a mechanism for the funding of small regional festivals with the participation of a reduced number of member states perhaps requiring participants from 8 regions across 3 member states rather than participants from 8 member states as currently suggested in the programme. The COR also believes there should be clear criteria for the funding of these festivals.

2.11. Media Plus should ensure that the design of audiovisual media takes particular account of persons with disabilities.

2.12. The COR recognises that access and awareness of audiovisual products by the general public is an issue. Libraries, Community Centres and other Municipal buildings offer great opportunities to raise awareness and offer public access to audiovisual material, both past and present. The COR recommends that consideration is given under the Media Plus programme for the funding of IT in public buildings to facilitate this and proposes pilot projects are considered to disseminate best practice.

2.13. The COR recognises the contribution of the audiovisual industry to local and regional development and in view of the new provision on culture in the new regulations believes there is a case to enable support to be reinforced through Structural Funds. For example, Structural Funds could be deployed to help build digital infrastructures in countries or regions with a low audiovisual production capacity.

2.14. The COR recommends that consideration is given for the funding of measures which are complimentary to existing local and regional audio visual programmes but provide added-value above and beyond existing provision.

2.15. The COR recommends that there are clear criteria published in respect of the monitoring and evaluation of individual initiatives funded by the Media Plus programme.

2.16. The cross-over between the Media Plus programme and other existing relevant Commission Communications such as the 'Principles and Guidelines for the Community's Audio Visual Policy in the Digital Age'⁽¹⁾ need to be explored in greater detail so that greater synergies and complementarity can be found without supplanting existing initiatives or duplicating what is already being done.

⁽¹⁾ COM(1999) 657 final.

Brussels, 15 June 2000.

*The President
of the Committee of the Regions*
Jos CHABERT