Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the 'Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the implementation of a programme of support for the European audiovisual sector (MEDIA 2007)'

(2005/C 164/09)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Having regard to the Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the implementation of a programme of support for the European audiovisual sector (COM(2004) 470 final — 2004/0151 (COD),

Having regard to the decision of the Council of 9 September 2004 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265(1) of the Treaty establishing the European Community,

Having regard to the decision of its Bureau of 27 January 2004 to instruct its Commission for Culture and Education to draw up an opinion on this subject,

Having regard to its draft opinion CdR 303/2004 rev. 1 adopted on 7 December 2004 by its Commission for Culture and Education (rapporteur: Mr Theodóros Georgákis, Mayor of Ilioúpoli (EL/PES)),

adopted the following opinion at its 58th plenary session on 23/24 February 2005 (meeting of 23 February)

1. The Committee of the Regions' views

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1.1 **endorses** the unification of training, development, distribution and promotion activities under the umbrella of the new MEDIA 2007 Programme, as this will guarantee and strengthen continuity in organised action aimed at developing and strengthening the European audio-visual area;

1.2 **welcomes** the proposed budget for implementing the programme, which amounts to €1,055 billion, pointing out the need for this to be maintained at high levels in order to cover the greater needs of the 27 countries (25 Member States plus Bulgaria and Romania) participating in the programme. The markets concerned are essentially 'three-speed' markets with considerable disparities as regards the development of the audiovisual sector, which can vary from a high level to none at all. The increase in the said budget is a further acknowledgement of the important role of the audiovisual sector as a vehicle for the spread of cultural values in the building of a common European identity and awareness on the part of European citizens;

1.3 **endorses** the establishment of the principle of 'positive discrimination' in favour of countries with a small capacity for audiovisual production and/or a limited geographical and linguistic range, with a view to levelling out the inequalities and imbalances in comparison with countries having a high production capacity. The idea of encouraging 'audiovisually weak' countries, such as the new Member States and other countries whose market has limited dynamism, such as Greece or Portugal, must inspire the whole MEDIA 2007 Programme. This policy will contribute to maintaining cultural diversity and inter-cultural dialogue at European level;

1.4 **recognises** the need to increase the competitiveness of the fragmented European audiovisual sector and at the same time to strengthen the productive structures of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which in practice form the backbone of the European market;

1.5 **shares** the Commission's view that there is an urgent need to simplify the bureaucratic procedures and mechanisms for submitting proposals and creating cooperative links in the European audiovisual sector. Also of particular importance is transparency in the procedures for selecting candidates. Assessment of the candidatures submitted must always be accompanied by a justification to ensure such transparency;

1.6 **endorses** the encouragement of mobility on the part of students and professionals working in the European audiovisual field to enable them to exchange valuable experience and to benefit from the knowledge and training of countries which are advanced in the communications field. Such mobility has special importance for the new Member States of the EU, but also for countries with a limited linguistic and geographical range where the audiovisual sector is not particularly developed;

1.7 **agrees** with the support for dubbing, sub-titling and the creation of multilingual copies of European audiovisual works with the aim of defending cultural diversity. The digitalisation of those works is also very important.

2. The Committee of the Regions' recommendations

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

2.1 **points out** the need for greater emphasis to be placed on the role played by local and regional communities in creating the European identity. In the specific field of audiovisual work, regions throughout Europe can, with the proper support, constitute a driving force for original creation and maintenance of cultural diversity, and do their bit to help the competitiveness of the European market;

2.2 **calls** for Article 6 of the programme, concerning promotion of audiovisual works, to include a specific reference to the particular role which the regions and local communities are called upon to play with their special programmes and activities in the effort to increase the competitiveness of the European market. It would also be useful to assist and update the 'media desks' which operate at regional level and which are particularly useful for informing European citizens about developments in the audiovisual sector;

2.3 **recommends** financial support for, and organised communications promotion of, regional and local audiovisual festivals, which play their own important role in creating and developing the European identity, enriching its composition and character with the unique cultural, historical and linguistic features of local communities and societies. Another step in this direction could be providing incentives for the making of more films in small towns and regions of Europe;

2.4 **emphasises** the need for realisation of the measures mainly aimed at young people, who are essentially the future of the European audiovisual sector. The promotion of the works of new European creative artists and the support for festivals for a young public envisaged in the programme are steps in this direction, but are not enough. Among the proposed measures are encouraging mobility of young people in Member States to enable them to get to know the European market, and informing and training them on the basis of the current reality and objective needs of this market;

2.5 **underlines** the need for implementation of the measures intended to improve training in the professions of the audiovisual sector, particularly in countries and regions with a low audiovisual output and/or with a limited geographical and linguistic range. In the countries in question this sector is barely developed and the need for up-to-date training remains considerable. Apart from distance learning and the encouragement of exchanges, it would be worthwhile to refund travel and participation costs for students taking part in training programmes and conferences organised in countries which have an audiovisual tradition;

2.6 **recommends** incentives to promote business cooperation between companies operating in the European but also in the global audiovisual area, not only in the production sector but particularly in that of distribution. As has become clear from relevant studies as well from actual conditions, the weakness of the distribution system constitutes the basic obstacle to the circulation of European films on the international market. According to the results of the recent research carried out by MEDIA Salles, covering all the films distributed in America and Canada from 2001 to 2003, films originating from western European countries were doing worse and worse at the box office. By contrast, European co-productions showed a steady increase year by year — the same box-office trend as with American co-productions — where Americans are the main producers — with European countries;

2.7 **appreciates** that Community support, apart from providing incentives for development of the audiovisual sector in the stages preceding and following production, must ensure transparency at all stages of the procedure and must lay down rules to guarantee the quality of the works produced;

2.8 **takes the view** that, in the context of the new strategic objective laid down in Lisbon, emphasis must be placed on social cohesion, encouraging the contribution of audiovisual media to combating social exclusion and discrimination, to the social integration of specific population groups and economic migrants, and to questions of gender equality;

2.9 **believes** that encouragement must also be given to special measures and the production of works directed towards sensitive groups of citizens such as those with disabilities and elderly people, and questions relating to the re-integration of people who have found themselves on the margin of society for various reasons.

Brussels, 23 February 2005.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Peter STRAUB