Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the proposal for a decision on the establishment of the media mundus programme

(2009/C 200/10)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

— welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to set up the MEDIA Mundus programme;

— believes that establishing and implementing a programme to promote broad international cooperation in the audiovisual sector, with the aim of strengthening both cultural and commercial ties between the European film industry and that of third countries, is the right way to address current challenges associated with the change in the international audiovisual sphere;

— notes that local and regional authorities can play a key role in promoting local and regional audiovisual works, effectively strengthening audiovisual production and actively contributing to the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue;

— stresses that the audiovisual sector is not just an industry that is of major importance for development, competitiveness and employment, but is also a crucial sphere that safeguards and promotes local and regional cultural identity and diversity. The nature of the sector also makes it a key factor in the development of Europe social values and the functioning of democratic societies, since audiovisual works can play an important role in forming a European identity.
I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to set up the MEDIA Mundus programme;

2. therefore endorses the European Commission’s proposal 'for a support programme to promote cooperation between European audiovisual industry professionals and industry professionals in third countries for the mutual benefit of all participants';

3. considers that establishing and implementing a programme to promote broad international cooperation in the audiovisual sector, with the aim of strengthening both cultural and commercial ties between the European film industry and that of third countries, is the right way to address current challenges associated with the change in the international audiovisual sphere, especially as a result of technological developments and structural weaknesses affecting the circulation of European audiovisual works in third-country markets, which are preventing Europe’s audiovisual sector from seizing international opportunities and undermining its competitiveness;

4. notes the need for international cooperation in the audiovisual sector and for protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions, as set out in the UNESCO Convention ratified by the European Community together with 13 Member States on 18 December 2006;

5. agrees that the decision of the European Commission is extremely important, given that existing Community programmes in the area of audiovisual support (MEDIA 2007, Euromed Audiovisual II or the EU-ACP programme for cinema) cannot address all the challenges produced by the rapid internationalisation of the audiovisual sector (either because they were conceived for cooperation within the European Union or because they respond to development policy needs rather than industrial policy needs);

6. also considers that the very positive reception by industry professionals, apparent from the open consultation conducted over the internet between 10 April and 25 June 2008, bears out the need to set up the MEDIA Mundus programme;

7. also considers important the fact that — based on the open consultation results — the priorities for action chosen are training, facilitation of co-productions, and distribution of audiovisual works and film literacy;

8. accepts the conclusion of the impact assessment that ‘the creation of a new instrument is the most effective and the most efficient way to meet the general and specific objectives and to respond to the challenges arising from the internationalisation of audiovisual markets’;

Key objectives of the MEDIA Mundus programme

9. agrees that the MEDIA Mundus programme will help to strengthen the competitiveness of the European audiovisual sector in international markets, while enhancing Europe’s cultural and political role in the world; agrees that the worldwide distribution of audiovisual works will be facilitated considerably by broadening consumer choice in this way, but also by substantially strengthening cultural diversity;

10. believes that exchanging market intelligence and expertise will boost both the competitiveness of Europe’s audiovisual sector and that of third countries, while there will be an increase in public demand for cultural diversity;

11. points to the particular importance of the objective relating to facilitation of co-productions, which professionals identified as a priority in the open consultation;

12. also points to the need to put into practice the principle of positive treatment for Member States with a small audiovisual sector; therefore believes that particular attention should be paid to those countries that do not produce a large number of audiovisual works and which face greater obstacles owing to their geographical, linguistic or other characteristics;

13. points to the role of MEDIA Mundus as a means of promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue at European and international levels; and therefore underscores the difference between MEDIA Mundus and other Community programmes relating to the audiovisual sector, which lies in the fact that the objectives of MEDIA Mundus focus on international cooperation aiming to promote the competitiveness of the audiovisual industry at a global level;
14. commends the way in which the programme works, i.e. based on the principle of mutual benefit and project proposals made jointly with professionals from third countries;

15. considers satisfactory the terms whereby only works by consortia receive funding, which ensures an international networking effect;

16. has doubts, however, about the requirement that 'each project needs to have a minimum of three partners';

17. also observes with respect to project funding that red tape and formalities for submitting proposals, for creating and operating of cooperation networks and for reporting, must be kept to a minimum;

18. stresses that complete transparency must be guaranteed in the process of selecting works for funding and that the assessment criteria may have to be refined;

General comments on the objectives of MEDIA Mundus

19. notes that MEDIA Mundus provides an effective response to the problem of fragmentation of the European film industry, promoting initiatives for networking and cooperation between operators in the audiovisual sector; and in particular therefore believes that this programme also provides a good opportunity to support SMEs;

20. consequently considers that it makes sense to focus both on creating specialised jobs and on providing more training for professionals in programming, broadcasting techniques, distribution and international sales, as well as promoting audiovisual works;

21. also believes that encouraging the exchange of information and technical know-how between professionals considerably facilitates the creation of cooperation networks, enhances access to external markets, and promotes the establishment of long-term partnerships, thus boosting not just the competitiveness of the European audiovisual industry but also Europe's worldwide cultural and political role;

22. believes that MEDIA Mundus will make a decisive contribution to improving the international circulation of audiovisual works, and to increasing public demand for greater cultural diversity in respect of audiovisual content;

23. in this connection points to the benefits of increasing the number of screenings, as well as exclusive first releases of audiovisual works;

24. therefore believes that MEDIA Mundus could serve to encourage cinema owners in Europe and third countries to reciprocally enhance programming and presentation conditions, as well as the screening period, showing of advertisements and the number of screenings of exclusive first releases of audiovisual works;

25. thinks that, similarly, it should be possible to increase and improve the conditions for broadcasting European audiovisual content through third-country channels, and conversely audiovisual content of third countries through European channels;

26. also endorses the priority placed by the European Union on young people as the future of Europe's audiovisual sector: by promoting works by gifted young Europeans, MEDIA Mundus ensures the promotion of new talent, mobility of young people and acquisition of knowledge from the European and international markets, while putting the knowledge-based economy and intercultural dialogue into practice;

27. notes that the role of young creators of audiovisual content again shows that it would make sense for MEDIA Mundus to function in parallel as a training programme, as well as helping to attract even more young people to screenings of audiovisual works;

28. also believes that the audiovisual sector makes a key contribution to Europe's creative and knowledge-based economy, and plays a crucial role in promoting cultural diversity and pluralism;

29. emphasises that the cultural sphere undoubtedly makes a decisive contribution to the success of the Lisbon Strategy goals, but it cannot be seen in one-dimensional terms as a purely economic force because it makes what is regarded as an equally important contribution to culture by creating a dynamic and sustainable environment, which is a precondition for prosperity and human development (1).

The role of local and regional authorities

30. notes that local and regional authorities can play a key role in promoting local and regional audiovisual works, effectively strengthening audiovisual production and actively contributing to the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue;

31. believes that by promoting local and regional producers of audiovisual works, local and regional authorities can also, in conjunction with national production, counterbalance the mass production of films by third countries;

32. notes that local and regional authorities can play a decisive role in both education and training, and in providing financial support for cultural organisations and stakeholders;

33. also points out that in this way local and regional authorities can help to strengthen SMEs, enhancing the competitiveness of the fragmented European audiovisual market and at the same time ensuring the viability of these companies;

34. in addition, believes that local and regional authorities can play an important role both in training young creators of audiovisual content, and in attracting larger numbers of young people to watch screenings of audiovisual works that promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue;

35. therefore considers that local and regional authorities can make a decisive contribution both to the production of audiovisual works at local and regional level, and to the establishment of a strong European identity, especially among young people;

36. believes that by organising festivals, thematic events, and training seminars, local and regional authorities can take important initiatives and play a crucial role in developing the audiovisual sector into a leading factor in the production of culture, framing of a multicultural European identity, and support for film education, especially for young audiences;

37. therefore proposes that it would be useful for the wider dimension of MEDIA Mundus to add a specific reference in Article 7 on the role that local and regional authorities are called upon to play through special programmes and activities in their efforts to strengthen the competitiveness of the European market. By the same token it would be appropriate and very useful to enhance and update the media desks operating at regional level, which are a basic source of information on all developments in the audiovisual field for the general public in Europe;

38. also points out that in direct relation to the above, it would be desirable for local and regional authorities to be more involved in seeking cooperation between networks in the audiovisual industry, and for regional consortia to be strengthened, especially with respect to training, and production and distribution of audiovisual works;

39. stresses that the audiovisual sector, as can be inferred from the above, is not just an industry that is of major importance for development, competitiveness and employment, but is also a crucial sphere that safeguards and promotes local and regional cultural identity and diversity. The nature of the sector also makes it a key factor in the development of European social values and the functioning of democratic societies, since audiovisual works can play an important role in forming a European identity;

Concluding comments — proposals

40. believes this particular programme to be especially important because it combines promoting culture with strengthening competitiveness, i.e. the commercial and economic value of the European audiovisual sector, while giving Europe’s audiovisual industry an international dimension in a way that is much more effective and targeted than MEDIA International, which could be regarded as a precursor to MEDIA Mundus;

41. notes that the programme begins as a short-term venture (2011-2013), and with a limited budget (EUR 15 million, of which EUR 13.5 are earmarked for actions), which means that neither time frame nor resources will allow a large number of initiatives to be developed or actions to be implemented;

42. therefore believes, and at the same time hopes, that the results will be significant and will be considered positive, so that not only is the programme continued but it also receives more funding in the future;

43. underscores the need to focus on the communication strategy of the programme and believes that an equally vital role can be played by local and regional authorities in promoting it. It would be particularly useful for media desks to cooperate with associations and confederations of audiovisual professionals, and to cooperate with ACE (Association of European Film Archives) and FIAF (International Film Archive Federation), as well as national film archives;

44. particular emphasis should be placed — if not immediately, then certainly during the next phase of the programme — on the educational dimension of MEDIA Mundus, which should go beyond further training for professionals and be targeted equally at young students. This objective can be achieved both through coordination with other MEDIA programmes and through cooperation with media desks that have developed similar activities for other programmes, university faculties and audiovisual studies departments and film archives which come into contact with students, researchers and professionals in the sector. In addition, educational activities and thematic workshops can serve as an important source of information, as well as a valuable opportunity to meet and get to know professionals from the European Union and third countries.
### II. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

#### Amendment I

**Article 3 (3)**

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<tr>
<th>Text proposed by the Commission</th>
<th>CoR amendment</th>
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<tr>
<td>(3) ‘European works’ means audiovisual works originating in countries referred to in Article 2, paragraph 1, 2 or 3.</td>
<td>(3) ‘European works’ means audiovisual works originating in countries referred to in Article 2, paragraph 1, 2 or 3 with special attention paid to local and regional audiovisual productions.</td>
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**Reason**

The CoR should highlight that regional and local media service providers, as well as public-service operators providing regional coverage, have clear social and cultural responsibilities and a duty to provide a service to citizens. In terms of promoting the European audiovisual industry, with their usually more intensive own-production they can make a more direct contribution to the sector’s development and competitiveness.

#### Amendment II

**Article 5 (2) (b)**

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<td>to improve the competitiveness and transnational distribution of audiovisual works worldwide;</td>
<td>to improve the competitiveness and transnational distribution of audiovisual works worldwide by incentives to promote cooperation between companies operating in the European but also in the global audiovisual area.</td>
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**Reason**

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.

#### Amendment III

**Article 5 (2)**

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<td>(d) Particular attention should be paid to the promotion of linguistic diversity, particularly for less widely spoken languages.</td>
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**Reason**

The existing challenges need to be addressed not only by the EU and the Member States, but also by local and regional authorities. They are concerned when managing their cultural and linguistic heritage, promoting new business models in local creative industries and media, and promoting creative works (co-) financed by local cultural and media institutes/organisations.
**Amendment IV**

**Article 6 (1)**

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<tr>
<td>Strengthen the skills of European and other professionals from countries referred to in Article 2 paragraph 4 to improve their understanding of in particular the operating conditions, legal frameworks, financing systems and cooperation possibilities of their respective audiovisual markets, and, in particular through scholarships, thus facilitate networking and the emergence of long-term commercial relationships and improve the level of information and knowledge of audiovisual markets in order to secure and facilitate audiovisual cooperation between professionals.</td>
<td>Strengthen the skills of European and other professionals from countries referred to in Article 2 paragraph 4 to improve their understanding of in particular the operating conditions, legal frameworks, financing systems and cooperation possibilities of their respective audiovisual markets, and, in particular through scholarships, thus facilitate networking and the emergence of long-term commercial relationships and improve the level of information and knowledge of audiovisual markets in order to secure and facilitate audiovisual cooperation between professionals. The scholarships should recognise the need to increase the competitiveness of the fragmented European audiovisual sector on the global playing field and at the same time to strengthen the productive structures of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) inside the EU which in practice form the backbone of the European market.</td>
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**Reason**

The MEDIA Mundus programme provides strong potential for economic growth and an opportunity to create highly qualified jobs in the audiovisual industry. SMEs should be fully involved.

**Amendment V**

**Article 7 (1)**

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<td>Facilitate the search for foreign partners for European audiovisual works. The programme shall support the organisation of co-production markets and partner search events (pitching), aiming at bringing together possible partners (script writers, directors, producers and distributors).</td>
<td>Facilitate the search for foreign partners for European audiovisual works. The programme shall support the organisation of co-production markets and partner search events (pitching), aiming at bringing together possible partners (script writers, directors, producers and distributors, and local and regional audiovisual industry actors).</td>
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**Reason**

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 help the competitiveness of the European market.

**Amendment VI**

**Article 8 (3)**

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<td>Facilitate the organisation of events and film literacy initiatives, notably aimed at young audiences, intended to internationally promote the diversity of audiovisual works and increase public demand for culturally diverse audiovisual content.</td>
<td>Facilitate the organisation of events and film literacy initiatives, notably aimed at young audiences, intended to internationally promote the diversity of audiovisual works and increase public demand for culturally diverse audiovisual content. Financial support should be explicitly given for the promotion of regional and local audiovisual festivals, which play their own important role in promoting intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity.</td>
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Amendment VII

Article 12 (1)

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<td>The Commission shall be assisted by a committee, composed of representatives of the Member States and chaired by the representative of the Commission.</td>
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Brussels, 21 April 2009.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Luc VAN DEN BRANDE