

UNIC CONTRIBUTION TO EC CONSULTATION on EU Funds in the Area of Values and Mobility

UNIC is the body representing European cinema trade associations and key operators across 37 territories. We work closely with the European institutions and diverse stakeholders to promote the social, cultural and economic value of cinema exhibition in Europe. As regards this consultation on EU funds in the area of values and mobility, we would like to focus our statement on the MEDIA sub-programme, a true symbol of Europe's attachment to cinema.

All cinemas across Europe – regardless of size or location – make significant contributions to cultural diversity, are essential to the commercial and cultural success of the European film industry and have a powerful social influence. Audiences continue to attach great value to the shared experience of seeing a film on the big screen and are ready to reward creativity as well as the investments made into providing state of the art cinematic experiences. Cinema-going represents the “gold-standard” for film-viewing; watching a film on the big screen allows audiences to truly see films as originally intended by their directors.

At a time when EU leaders are required to navigate a political landscape that is increasingly Euro-sceptic and influenced by major international and institutional challenges, it is essential that Europe takes the right approach to culture and cinema. Cinema – along with the arts and cultural and creative sectors in general – can play a key role in re-establishing a positive and forward-looking narrative for the European project, at the same time strengthening cultural diversity, social cohesion and economic development across all Member States.

Across UNIC territories, more than 39,000 screens create awareness around and interest in European and international films, enabling hundreds of millions of visitors to discuss stories that entertain us, make us think and enable us to reflect on everyday life. They provide an opportunity for people to understand and express their sense of local and national identity and help to recognise, celebrate and share the diversity of European nations and regions. This creates a sense of belonging to a shared space and, in this case, a European spirit.

Cinemas also represent an economic success story in Europe. In 2017, cinemas across UNIC territories accounted for over 1.3 billion admissions and €8 billion of box office revenue – a quarter of the global theatrical market for films - confirming once again the importance of Europe as a key building block of the global film business.

We therefore believe it is now more important than ever to strengthen the MEDIA sub-programme. An ambitious proposal that avoids any possible cuts to the MEDIA budget in the next programming period (2020-2027) should be put forward, as it is clear that such restrictions would negatively impact both Europe's cultural diversity and the economic growth of the European audiovisual sector.

Above all, the Creative Europe MEDIA programme aims to increase the pan-European circulation of and access to cultural activities and services, as well as to promote the competitiveness of the creative industries. The Programme's support strategy is based on the ambition that these objectives can complement rather than compete against each other.

However, UNIC believes that the programme could strike a better balance between these two objectives by supporting the distribution of more films that audiences really want to see on the big screen and the production of works that have a clear audience in mind. The programme should also provide opportunities for market-oriented entities and enhance networking activities with key companies in Europe to share best practice and know-how in the sector.

Given cinemas' positive impact on the circulation of non-national European works – a key objective of MEDIA - support for the theatrical distribution of European audio-visual works is vital. First and foremost, we would like to highlight that greater circulation of audiovisual works does not necessarily imply greater levels of consumption and the focus should not only be on production and access to works but also on improving promotion and marketing efforts which are essential to build audiences and ensuring the success of a film throughout its different release windows.

Therefore, greater support should be provided for the promotional and marketing costs related to the release of films in cinemas in order to enable the growing number of films produced in Europe to be noticed.

Cinemas represent the best means of providing films with exposure, enabling them to reach audiences successfully. Therefore, in addition to its backing of the Europa Cinemas network - a flagship initiative of European cultural policy which reflects the crucial role of theatres in helping local films attract a wider international audience - we believe that MEDIA should recognise the cultural and economic contributions of cinemas that are not part of the network.

This would build upon the market-oriented approach to networking mentioned earlier, in the interest of facilitating greater innovation, experimentation and collaboration across the wider cinema landscape and between companies of all sizes. The programme could for example launch a specific call or project which would enable existing EU-funded networks to seek advice from, or involve professionals from, major European distribution and exhibition outfits who are not currently part of the programme.

That said, it is equally important that independent distributors, producers and cinema operators should also be encouraged and supported to attend industry events that go beyond film festivals, such as CineEurope, the premier get-together of the cinema exhibition community in Europe, or national fairs and conferences dedicated to cinemas such as Deauville (France) or Karlsruhe (Germany). Often, these cinema exhibition events provide more training and networking opportunities than the big festivals.

Such exchanges offer professionals the means of keeping on top of the technological and innovative opportunities that are constantly unfolding. One such area, the use of adaptable and cloud-based data analytics solutions to significantly grow the audience share of local and non-national European films, is also an opportunity that European support programmes – including MEDIA itself but also the possibilities offered by synergies with programmes such as Horizon 2020 - should also carefully evaluate.

In addition, and as the future growth and sustainability of our sector depends on the ability of cinemas and their partners in film distribution to attract retain and grow attendance among young audiences, we believe that further MEDIA support to media literacy and research projects around young people would also help, retain and grow cinema attendance among young audiences.

Furthermore, as diversity stretches far beyond national boundaries and cultural differences, support for gender balance is most certainly an area in which funding schemes could improve to the benefit of the European project. More should be done to enable women to make their way in the sector, throughout the film value chain, to ensure that the European cinema landscape is as representative and diverse as possible.

To conclude, it is now more important than ever to ensure that schemes such as MEDIA are strengthened, that synergies with other relevant funding programmes are built and any budgetary cuts avoided. On the contrary, we strongly urge any budgetary proposals to be ambitious, in order to reflect and support the substantial investments made by cinema operators, both cultural and economic, across Europe.