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# SCREEN DAILY

## Europa Distribution mulls Creative Europe plan in Lyon

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**"No reason to implement revolutionary changes" to existing Media programme says Jakub Duszyński, co-president of independent distributors body Europa Distribution.**

The future of existing MEDIA programme distribution subsidies under the European Union's proposed Creative Europe re-modelling of the scheme was the hot topic at Europa Distribution's annual three-day meeting in Lyon ending on Saturday.

Some 80 members of Europa Distribution, representing 125 independent distributors from 26 European countries, gathered in Lyon at the end of last week (Oct 18-20) for its annual meeting, hosted for a second year running by Thierry Frémaux's heritage-focused Lumière Festival.

"The tension at this year's meeting was that we as distributors realised that the time for discussing the future shape of the MEDIA Programme is coming to an end and that there's no more space for conversation," said Jakub Duszyński of Polish distributor Gutek Film who currently co-chairs Europa Distribution alongside Belgian Annemie Degryse of Ghent-based Lumière.

"We're understanding as time goes on how perfectly shaped the existing MEDIA Programme is and that there is no reason to implement revolutionary changes. We'd love to get stronger support for films but at the same time we think the current mechanisms are also working fine," he continued.

The European Union's Creative Europe plan overhauls the existing MEDIA and Culture programmes which expire at the end of 2013, putting in place a new financial and operational framework for the 2014 to 2020 period.

The MEDIA brand and its existing schemes are expected to remain broadly intact as a distinct funding strand, but the film industry is keeping a close eye on developments.

Talking at the Europa Distribution meeting on Friday, John Dick, head of distribution at the MEDIA Programme, reported on his department's activities in 2012 and also outlined some of the potential changes to the scheme under the Creative Europe framework.

The most contentious proposal revolved around the selective support scheme aimed at groups of five to seven distributors working together for the multi-territorial release of a European film.

Up until now, sales agents have coordinated the group applications for free and the subsidy awards are paid directly to the distributors by MEDIA.

It has been proposed, however, that sales agents also coordinate the payment of the awards. Some sales agents have also suggested they charge a fee for the work entailed in coordinating a selective support application.

Dick said the move would be a cost-cutting, labour-saving measure for the MEDIA programme. "Rather than dealing with 200 separate contracts we would have just 30 grouped contracts instead," he commented.

A number of the distributors at the Lyon meeting raised objections, saying such a move would delay the payment to them. Some even suggested that more unscrupulous sales agents might never make the payment at all – although most at the meeting agreed such cases would be rare.

Dick also said the division of MEDIA's distribution funds would be potentially skewed more to the automatic scheme, based on a distributor's box office receipts, than the selective scheme in the future.

In 2012, roughly €20m was allocated to the automatic scheme and €12m to the selective scheme. Dick said this might be tweaked so that €24m went to the automatic scheme and €8m to the selective scheme. He added it was still unclear exactly how much money would go to distribution subsidies under the Creative Europe framework.

Professionals from the cultural and audiovisual sectors have until October 23 to lobby their MEPs in the Committee on Culture and Education with alterations and amendments to a draft report on Creative Europe first presented on Oct 8.

But many of the distributors at the Europa Distribution meeting admitted to being perplexed by the on-going process surrounding the drafting of the Creative Europe framework.

Europa Distribution policy advisor Ignasi Guardans of Brussels-based agency Cumidia, aimed at helping cultural organisations access EU funding, told them: "The European parliament isn't composed of people living on a space station — MEPs are voted in by people back home. You need to lobby your local MEP and talk to them in terms of job creation and economic growth — concepts they understand... invite them to your film premieres... get them to understand what you do."

Other key topics at the Europa Distribution meeting were the on-going impact of the digital age and the innovative cinema-on-demand and event cinema schemes some distributors are using to attract cinema audiences.

Fabien Riggall, creator of London-based event cinema pioneer Secret Cinema, told delegates about his Arab Spring-inspired screening of *The Battle of Algiers*, recreating the Casbah of Algiers in disused railway vaults under Waterloo Station; a *La Haine* event at a tough London estate following riots across the city in the summer of 2011 and the more recent *The Third Man* run which made more than \$1.1m in ticket sales.

"I'm sure this is only something that works in Britain," commented one distributor in a Q&A. Riggall countered, however, that Secret Cinema was working on similar events to take place in New York, Moscow and Paris in the coming months.

In a separate presentation, Czech distributor Ivo Andrlé of Prague-based distributor Aerofilms, talked about Cinema Royal, a similar initiative, which recently organised an elaborate event screening of *Metropolis* in an electricity plant outside Prague."

Summing up the meeting, Duszynski commented: "The digital transition was also still a big subject for us and we heard some interesting stuff about the potential profits to be had from VOD and SVOD but to be honest, that still remains a fraction of our revenue for most of us... the talks on the event cinema and cinema-on-line initiatives were also interesting but I think the main conclusion we came to is that our core business remains to get films into theatres and spectators in to see them on their own merit."

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