

**Conclusions of the 2nd Audiovisual Conference of the Euro-Mediterranean
Partnership,
“A framework for the dialogue of images”
Rabat, 14-15-16 September 2000**

16 September 2000

I. Introduction

The second Audio-visual Conference of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership entitled « a framework for the dialogue of images», the principle of which was approved by the decision of the Euromed Committee of 13 April, was held in Rabat from 14th to 16th September 2000, under the Royal Patronage of His Majesty the King Mohammed VI.

This conference was organised, at the initiative of the European Commission, by Audiovisual Eureka, in partnership with the Moroccan Ministry of Communication, with the support of the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the aegis of the French Presidency of the European Union. It brought together the Mediterranean Partners and the Member States of the European Union.

This meeting was a follow-up to the intergovernmental conference on Euro-Mediterranean audio-visual co-operation, which took place in Thessaloniki on 15 November 1997 at the initiative of Italy and Greece. The European Commission had, in response to the expectations and suggestions expressed by the participants, proposed a framework for co-operation, the Euromed Audiovisual Programme.

The objective of the Rabat Conference was to go into more depth regarding the operational aspects of this co-operation, in particular, in the perspective of the second phase of the Euromed Audiovisual Programme.

It also had the mandate of approaching questions of organisation and structures, in accordance with the conclusions of the second Conference of the Ministers of Culture and cultural Affairs of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Rhodes, 25 and 26 September 1998) which invited the Commission to «*encourage regular exchanges of information as well as co-operation on the subject of regulatory and auto-regulatory questions in the audio-visual sector*».

The Rabat Conference brought together more than two hundred and fifty political, institutional and professional heads of the audio-visual sector coming from the 27 Euro-Mediterranean Partners. They debated upon three themes :

- ❶ How to organise structural and regulatory matters to accompany a rapidly expanding audio-visual market ?
- ❷ The allocation of resources to the audio-visual sector : how to maximise public and private financing ?
- ❸ The digital transformation of the Media, the risk of creating new discrepancies or an opportunity for the interpenetration of industries and images ?

The deliberations carried out in parallel in several workshops had the objective :

- 1) to identify reference practices and recognised experiences, in order to favour exchange of expertise and know-how, both on an institutional and a professional level;
- 2) to create bridges and links between the networks of experts and operators coming from the 27 countries in order to promote the launching of new partnerships which would be based upon a community of views and interests, going further than traditional, cultural and geographical, affinities and on the principle of an egalitarian participation;
- 3) to heighten the participant's awareness of the stakes involved in these new forms of co-operation, in particular in the light of the first six projects launched in the framework of Euromed Audiovisual and to outline orientations in the perspective of the launch of the second phase of the Euromed Audiovisual Programme;

It was the opinion of the participants, that the objectives ascribed to this conference were very largely reached, as reflected in the conclusions of the debates resumed below.

II. Summary of the work of the Rabat Conference.

The three workshops lead to a number of orientations and proposals for the deepening and development of audio-visual co-operation within the Euromed Partnership.

The main conclusions are the following :

1. The participants recognise that the emergence of a Euro-Mediterranean audio-visual area, boosted by the Barcelona process, offers completely new opportunities to all of the 27 Euro-Mediterranean partners.

The creation of this area would have not only cultural but also economical and political consequences. Moreover, its development could not only depend on political will alone, but must also be realised through a number of concerted public and private initiatives.

The participants are of the opinion that the European audio-visual policies could offer a useful basis for reflection for the development of this Partnership.

2. The participants expressed their wish for the continuation, development and strengthening, including in budgetary terms, of the Euromed Audiovisual Programme, as they are aware that the audio-visual sector can and must benefit from scale economies induced by encouragement and incentives for production, distribution and promotional activities for works on a Euro-Mediterranean level.
3. The participants call upon the 27 Euro-Mediterranean Partners to rally together in order to rigorously defend cultural diversity in the framework of the negotiations of the WTO.
4. The participants recognise, nevertheless, that certain pre-conditions would have to be satisfied in order to ensure long-lasting and efficient financing for the audio-visual sector, both on a national and trans-national level :
 - the sector needs a legislative and/or regulatory framework, in the two-fold aim of ensuring that general interests are defended and to face up to market insufficiencies and imbalances, with the concern of preserving cultural diversity;

- the Euro-Mediterranean partners underline the necessity of finding a balance and coherence between protection measures; encouragement measures; incentive measures and promotional measures;
 - they are of the opinion that, to attract national or foreign investors, fiscal incentives, upstream or downstream from production, authorised by the Ministries of Finance, could counterbalance the intrinsic weakness of the sector, composed of SME-SMI with little capital of their own;
 - they are aware that, if the profitability of investments is slow coming, the exploitation period of a work is long, which justifies encouraging distribution and promotional activities alongside the more traditional production support. The path followed by the countries of the Union is interesting in this respect;
 - all agree to underline, finally, that the efficiency of the legislative and regulatory framework to be set up depends upon close co-ordination between the Ministries of Culture and/or Communication; Finance; Foreign Affairs etc.. This framework is also made more efficient through the existence of support funds, as well as the setting up of regulatory and control authorities specific to the sector. It also requires the consensus of all of the institutional and professional protagonists, in the name of common interest, on the middle and the long-term.
5. Sharing the concern that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is to be supported by a stable and transparent national regulatory and financial framework, the participants explored various leads regarding the deepening and development of co-operation, supported in particular by the Euromed Audiovisual Programme.

In this respect, they identified the areas which in their view, assume particular priority importance, taking into account the experiences already launched in the framework of the first phase of the Euromed Audiovisual Programme :

a) Training

This sector was recognised as fundamental by the three workshops. The stopping of the MedMedia Programme which was, for the larger part, consecrated to training activities had been prejudicial to the dynamic undertaken and had meant that a certain number of initiatives corresponding to the needs of professionals had been left to lie fallow. The Euromed Audiovisual Programme had indeed integrated a training dimension in the projects selected, but all of the needs identified cannot be considered, taking into account the specificity and the limited number of fields covered by the first six projects already selected.

The participants wished for the sector to be developed according to the following axes :

- 1) organisation of discussions between institutional and professional heads aiming for dialogue, exchange of experiences and promotion of a comparative approach of instruments set up.
Such exchanges will allow, furthermore, the development of a co-operation and partnership network for the benefit of all of the professionals.
- 2) The setting up of training modules inspired, in particular, from the achievements of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union.

- 3) The experience and the training networks developed by the European Union could be exploited. Existing initial and professional training centres should also be supported in the Mediterranean Partner's countries. These centres could be encouraged to develop specialisations in order for them to become 'poles of excellence' which would target the region's professionals.
- 4) Setting up of technical training centres specialised in new technologies in the Mediterranean Partner countries. These centres could integrate networks of experts coming from all of the Euro-Mediterranean Partners, around specific programmes.

b) Development of production projects :

This sector was also underlined by the participants as an area for priority action. It is their wish that the support undertaken be amplified in order to be able to support more projects and in a more significant manner.

The professionals brought together in Rabat were pleased with the initiative undertaken but they questioned the appropriateness of automatically linking the support allocated to training actions, which is not justified in all cases.

c) Support for the co-productions of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

Concerned that the one-off actions already undertaken be included within a structured and long-term framework, the creation of a support fund for Euro-Mediterranean co-productions was recommended by the participants. The implementation of such a fund should take into account the evaluation of the Euromed Audiovisual Programme.

d) Distribution, Promotion, Exploitation

The participants welcome the initiatives already undertaken in favour of the exploitation in cinema theatres.

They recognise that the distribution sector plays a key role in the development of a Euro-Mediterranean image industry. One of their desires is to see specific actions which would aim to encourage the circulation of images between the countries of the Union and the Mediterranean Partners, and between the Mediterranean Partners themselves.

They consider it pertinent that support be set up to encourage distributors to acquire upstream the rights of films from the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

The participants recommend the setting up of measures leading to the promotion of co-productions and broadcasting of programmes from the Euro-Mediterranean Partners, in particular, by the public service television channels.

Furthermore, the participants recognise the importance of including in this action, exchanges of television news subjects and of components of magazines from the Mediterranean Partners. Finally, they draw attention to the need for actions in the radiotelephony domain.

The promotion of Euro-Mediterranean works was recognised as a determining element in the range of support measures desired.

Initiatives such as pitching, screening; cinema weeks; support for the presence of professionals at markets and at festivals under a Euro-Mediterranean banner, could serve both cultural and commercial objectives.

e) **Investments**

The participants agree on the importance for the Mediterranean Partners to progressively adapt their apparatus of production, conservation, in particular cinematographical, and distribution of works, as well as their cinema exploitation, to the best levels and technical norms.

Actions could be extended to other no less important sectors. Thus, projects for modernising production and post-production studios in the Mediterranean Partners' countries would have a considerable impact, in particular, as far as employment is concerned. The creation of regional or sub-regional poles would, moreover, offer training capacities in situ.

f) **Networks and Partnerships**

The participants consider that it is essential to develop new methods of communication and circulation of information to allow for an active association of all the professionals of the Partnership, both at the identification phase of projects, as well as in their implementation.

In this perspective, professionals would like means to be found in order to cover the cost of this trans-national work.

Associations and networks of professionals could, in this way, constitute useful relays and platforms for the emergence of new partnerships and projects and the promotion of this audiovisual co-operation, under the transparent and open conditions which correspond to the spirit of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

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III. Follow-up to the conclusions of the conference

The participants submit the conclusions of the Rabat Conference to the Euromed Committee, in view of their being taken into consideration on the occasion of the Marseilles Conference.

They would like, in this respect, that the following message be transmitted at the Conference : in the light of the essential role that the audio-visual sector plays in cultural dialogue and the opportunities offered by the digital revolution in the areas of broadcasting and co-operation, it must be conferred a privileged place in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

They hope that the second phase of the Euromed Audiovisual Programme will meet the urgent needs identified and the expectations expressed by all the professionals concerned.

Finally the participants expressed their wishes for a Conference of Ministers competent for this sector, of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, to be held in order to fix at the highest level a global strategy to consolidate the results already achieved and to lay down the bases for strengthening this co-operation in all of the areas approached during this Rabat Conference.

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The debates which took place in parallel during the three workshops of 15th September were summarised in three reports presented at the plenary session of 16th September by each of the respective moderators :

Workshop n° 1 : How to organise structural and regulatory matters to accompany a rapidly expanding audio-visual market?

**Moderator : Jean-Michel Baer, Director, DG Education, Culture,
European Commission**

Workshop n° 2 : The allocation of resources to the audio-visual sector: How to maximise public and private financing?

**Moderator : Dominique Wallon, Chief Executive Officer of IFCIC,
Institut pour le Financement du Cinéma et des Industries
Culturelles (Institute for the Financing of the Cinema and Cultural
Industries).**

Workshop n° 3 : The digital transformation of the Media, the risk of creating new discrepancies or an opportunity for the interpenetration of industries and images.

**Moderator : John Graham, Director of BKSTS, British Kinematographic
Sound and Television Society.**

The three reports are herewith attached in annex to the general conclusions.

Report on the works of workshop n°1 :

What regulatory and structural organisation should accompany a rapidly-expanding audiovisual market ?

This workshop was devoted to **examining the regulatory and financial systems** designed to support the production and distribution of audiovisual works, and to the international context within which these systems are set, notably with regard to international commercial agreements.

Several participants began by emphasising that the Euro-Mediterranean partnership should lead to concrete achievements, to genuinely improve the reciprocal access of the works to the distribution channels, and notably the access of works from the Southern countries to the markets of the Northern countries ; i.e. a better circulation of the works in the common geographical area, assuring better knowledge and greater mutual understanding.

In this perspective, it was recognised that these regulatory systems constitute a powerful lever for encouraging the production and circulation of works.

Nevertheless, the examination which the participants performed revealed profound disparities among the Euro-Mediterranean partners.

In particular, in several countries one noted an **absence of synergy between the systems** intended for the **regulation of television** and those intended for the **promotion of cinema and audiovisual works**.

Yet it appears necessary that the rapidly proliferating television channels contribute to the production of audiovisual contents in the countries where they broadcast their programmes.

The existence of a **legal framework to encourage the production and broadcasting** of audiovisual works would allow each country to have the necessary basis for developing exchanges and the circulation of works among the countries of the Partnership.

In answer to one of the questions posed - how can the Partnership contribute to creating such a basis? - several avenues were mentioned :

- raising the awareness of national authorities to the fact that a balanced Partnership requires the establishment of (television-cinema) support systems in the countries;
- exchanges of information and good practices among the countries and creation of links between the authorities responsible for regulating the audiovisual sector in the countries of the Partnership and at the EU level;
- aid measures for the co-production of works between countries of the Partnership;
- tax incentive measures for the production of works;
- recommendations for the channels to broadcast works coming from Partnership countries ;

The discussion of the regulatory issues expanded to embrace questions of ethics, mutual respect, respect of human dignity, as well as equal treatment of men and women.

The discussion on regulation also showed how regulatory systems can contribute to **safeguarding the cinematographic heritage**. In this regard, one wished that the operators from the South could establish relations with the European networks of film libraries which are developing their co-operation.

Finally, the workshop turned its attention to the **issue of cultural diversity**.

It was strongly emphasised that the existence and development of regulatory and financial mechanisms to support the audiovisual sector should not be put into

question by application to this sector of the GATS disciplines within the framework of the WTO.

The governments of the Partnership must retain their ability to develop the instruments they deem necessary for accompanying their culture, for the creation, production and dissemination of audiovisual works.

It was noted that this position is shared by an overwhelming majority of the Member States of the World Trade Organisation.

Finally, one desired that, within the framework of the Partnership, the participating countries and the European Union be able to contribute to the process of reflection initiated notably by the Council on **establishing an international instrument** which would permit the respect and promotion of cultural diversity, in order that globalisation result neither in a trivialisation of cultures, nor the domination of some cultures over others.

The last message of the participants of workshop n°1 to this conference and to the Summit of Marseilles is that, because of its specific nature and the essential role it plays in the cultural dialogue, the dissemination and acquisition of knowledge, **the audiovisual sector should be given a key place and a driving role within the Euro-Mediterranean partnership**, which must be a real and concrete Partnership.

Report on the works of workshop n° 2

**The allocation of resources to the audio-visual sector :
How to maximise public and private financing ?**

1. With regard to the general context in which the necessary development of the Euro-Mediterranean Audiovisual Partnership must be set, workshop n° 2 first wished to highlight two major (and related) risks as well as a positive perspective which could prove to be of decisive importance :
 - **The continuous advance of the ideology and problematic of radical liberalism**, leaving solely to the market all responsibility for the evolution of a sector which nevertheless – because of what is at stake in a cultural and an identity sense as well as its economic specificities - requires both regulation by and support from the States.
 - **The accelerated concentration of the image and communication industry**, with the progressive elimination of independent producers, distributors and everything they represent in terms of creative potential and pluralism.

On the other hand, the **development of digital techniques and distribution via the Internet** is creating decisive new opportunities which must be seized by the professionals and institutional decision-makers of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership in order to counter the above-mentioned trends.

2. Beyond overall disquieting findings on the situation of the cinematographies and the audiovisual sector of the Mediterranean partners, the workshop analysed **the absence of recognition of the profession and the responsibility of the producer and the independent production and distribution company.**

Enhancement of the producer's legal, professional and economic situation is the key element of an entire policy for developing a viable and creative audiovisual sector.

3. The characteristics of the production of film and television works and programmes (high risks, depreciation of the investment over the long term) necessarily call on **specific financing procedures** which engage the responsibility of the States in the fields of regulation and financing.

All of the European countries have set up specific systems of financing whose overall financial magnitude is growing - including (and even especially) in States which defend generally liberal positions.

The other characteristics of the evolution of the European support systems is the diversification of mechanisms : support funds, subsidies, reimbursable advances, guarantee funds for bank credits, tax exemptions, mixed public and private funds, etc.

This evolution should clarify the decisions to be taken by the Southern Mediterranean States to construct or modernise their audiovisual policies and support systems.

4. The **conclusions** and **proposals** formulated by the workshop are situated on several levels :

- *Strengthening of the professional associations and organisations of directors, producers and distributors* to help improve the national public policies.
- The European professional organisations represented in Rabat declared that they were prepared to contribute their support and their know-how to their Southern Mediterranean partners.
- *Development of the South-South Partnership* to encourage the circulation of productions (lifting of fiscal, customs and other barriers), organise co-productions, set up joint actions in term of information, training, distribution and promotion. These partnerships may necessitate inter-governmental agreements, they must also be implemented without delay, whenever possible directly by the professionals.
- In the same way, *bilateral or multilateral North-South partnerships* must be developed in many fields, notably including co-production, reciprocal broadcasting of works and training, between professionals as well as between governments, without entering into competition with the central project of a multilateral Euro-Mediterranean partnership.
- The workshop noted positively the implementation of the first Audiovisual EUROMED programmes. It called for a *follow-up procedure* to be established assuring the greatest possible transparency on their evolution and impact. It must be possible to quickly introduce *improvements and additions* to facilitate their realisation.
- In any event, *the actions must and can be developed in their complementary fields*: the promotion of programs of works, training - notably for script-writing and the professions of production, distribution and operation.

The **MEDIA 2 (and MEDIA +)** programmes concerned declared that they were ready to lend their assistance to this process.

- Finally, *it is essential that the question of more encompassing support to production* be integrated into the next Audiovisual EUROMED call for tenders.
- The workshop supports the proposal of the European Commission to widen the MEDIA + programmes to include countries outside the Union.
- The workshop hopes for a stronger presence of images from the South appearing on the screen of the North, and proposes the relaunch of *bilateral or multilateral co-production agreements* among the countries of the entire Euro-Mediterranean area, and the significant expansion of EURIMAGES to embrace co-productions with Southern Mediterranean countries.

REPORT ON THE WORK FROM WORKSHOP 3

The digital transformation of the Media, the risk of creating new discrepancies or an opportunity for the interpenetration of industries and images

This workshop looked at the transformation to digital, the new risks and opportunities for growth in the audio-visual sector.

Throughout the day the professionals present covered three mains areas:

- **The various costs of going digital**
- **The new ways of consuming audio-visual content**
- **And the potential of the new services**

Existing initiatives

It was felt that existing initiatives to support digital transformation of the media should be encouraged and multiplied and that there should be a strengthening of existing professional networks, to identify technical strengths and weaknesses and encourage participation of strong key players in future Euromed projects.

Uncovered needs

DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL CONTENT:

In the light of the availability of low-cost digital production tools, the workshop expressed a desire:

- to encourage the development of local production that will meet the specific cultural needs of the consumer in the different countries belonging to the Euro-Mediterranean partnership – both in terms of new production and the re-purposing of existing content.
- to encourage the introduction of technology that will facilitate the easy creation of content in Arabic, Cyrillic and Latin languages, for pan-European distribution.
- to explore how new media can assist in bringing together cultures that have become fragmented by inter-country migration in the Euromed area, with a view to encourage better understanding between different cultures.

TRAINING:

Support for distance learning and training initiatives, in particular the free exchange of information and qualified professionals across Euromed frontiers, with a view to improve and unify professional standards in new media.

Regular and industry focused training courses to manage the cost-effective transition between traditional skill sets and the demands of new digital technology. Answering the demand and requirements from the new media industry, for both new graduates and refresher courses for existing audio-visual professionals that could be developed in the framework of centres of digital excellence throughout the EuroMed area.

STANDARDS:

In view of the imminent decisions on Digital Cinema by the SMPTE committee DC28, a recommendation to support the participation of Euromed professionals in the standards committee meeting each month in California, in order to ensure that the specific cultural and technical requirements of the Euromed area are incorporated into final standards for Digital Cinema.

Encourage the adoption of interoperable and open standards for new media exchange in the Euromed group. In particular, setting common standards for sub-titling, multi-language audio and metadata.

Encourage Euromed professionals to form consultation groups and to provide the maximum exchange of information from their respective markets.

Future perspectives and recommendations

To develop mechanisms that allow the better understanding of the countries of Euromed partnership, respecting cultural diversity, diversity of the market and the new markets generated by the new media, developing projects that encourage a maximum of partners.

Set up structured projects for collecting, creating, exchanging and treating content: these initiatives would set up mechanisms to provide original content between the Euro-Mediterranean Partners and encourage networking between them.