

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3173/00
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to the Commission

Subject: Measures to restrict the support arrangements for film and television production and distribution

At the recent seminar held at the Lumière Institute in Lyons on 11 and 12 September 2000 under the auspices of the French Presidency, the Commission Directorate-General for Competition, represented by one of its officials, formally announced the future assessment criteria applying to national support systems to promote the film and audio-visual industry. The criteria will apparently be as follows: 1. the State aid granted to any work may not exceed 50% of the total; 2. a producer will be obliged to invest at least 20% of the funding outside national territory. Furthermore, it seems that the concept of State aid is being interpreted in such a way as to cover every investment undertaken by the State, and hence including even the investment requirements that might be imposed on public-service corporations by law, with the result that investment in that category will be taken into account when calculating the total amount of aid subject to the 50% threshold.

These measures, if they were in fact to be implemented, would pose a serious danger to the European film and audio-visual industry, which is already in difficulty, especially in small countries constituting national markets and language areas of limited size. What is at stake, therefore, is the future of European culture and the policy in support of cultural diversity in the Union. An approach along the lines described above, moreover, is inconsistent with the repeated assertions that the audio-visual sector is strategically important both for economic development in general and for European cultural policy.

In the light of the foregoing, can the Commission confirm the formal statements by its official and say what it will do to ensure that the audio-visual sector is recognised for the purposes of the single European market specifically as a cultural industry, following the precedent already set at international negotiations? In particular, will it accept the obligations laid down by law to invest in the production of audio-visual works and make exceptions to allow for the intrinsic language implications of national audio-visual markets, bearing in mind that the sector in question has a key role to play in safeguarding and fostering Europe's diverse identities and cultures?