[CH] European Union and Bern Open Negotiations on Switzerland Re-joining the MEDIA Programmes

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In 1991, Switzerland was the first country that was not a Member State of the European Union to join the EU's MEDIA programme, designed to promote the cinema. Following the rejection by the Swiss people of membership of the European Economic Area (EEA) in December 1992, Switzerland was excluded from the programme and as a result Swiss professionals in the cinema and audiovisual sector have not had access to the MEDIA programme since 1993.

In 1993, in order to mitigate the negative effects of this exclusion, the Swiss Federal Council introduced funding for compensatory measures. The funding, renewed each year, is administered by Euroinfo Suisse on behalf of the Office fédéral de culture (Swiss Ministry of Culture). In addition, since the beginning of 2000, Swiss professionals may once again, subject to special conditions, take part in the vocational and continuous training courses of the MEDIA programme.

When the European Union definitively adopted the final mandates for negotiations with Switzerland in Luxembourg on 17 June, Bern announced its intention to rapidly embark on discussions on those matters still pending, particularly Swiss participation in the MEDIA programmes. This was one of the topics not covered in the first round of bilateral negotiations between Switzerland and the European Union.

The first meetings of the Swiss and European delegations were held on 18 July 2002 in Brussels. These discussions covered the methods and conditions for Swiss participation in the MEDIA Plus and MEDIA Training programmes. The delegations also discussed the compatibility of Swiss television legislation with current European legislation; such compatibility is a prerequisite for all future participation by Switzerland in the MEDIA programmes.

By re-joining the MEDIA programmes to promote the cinema, Switzerland hopes to make Swiss/European joint productions easier, and to support training for professionals in the cinema sector and improve access to the European market for Swiss audiovisual productions. It would also promote the common cultural heritage the European cinema constitutes. The Swiss and European delegations agreed to meet in Bern in September 2002 for a second round of talks.

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