New Belgian theatrical rating system

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Just a few months before its 100th anniversary, the Belgian Law prohibiting minors under the age of 16 from accessing the cinema will be abolished. This law, which was adopted on 1 September 1920, had been the subject of criticism for quite some time. A long revision procedure was hampered by questions related to the division of competences between the federal State and the communities. This issue was solved in 2014, through the sixth state reform, which transferred the competence for film classification to the communities (the Flemish, French-speaking and German-speaking Communities, and the Common Community Commission of the Brussels-Capital Region).

On 15 February 2019, these communities concluded a cooperation agreement that stipulates that the classification of films that are screened for the first time in a Belgian cinema will be carried out according to the *Kijkwijzer* (Watch Smarter) methodology. This is the classification method which has been applied in the Netherlands since 2002.

The framework that is put in place is a co-regulatory system, which entails that the Communities decide on the methodology and the application thereof, and film distributors and/or producers carry out the actual classification themselves, based on an online scientific questionnaire. An important difference with the previous system is the shift from a prohibition/approval-based system to an information-based recommendation system. Completing the questionnaire (or 'coding form') results in a content classification – information about the nature of content which might be inappropriate for minors, such as violence, fear, sex(uality), drugs and alcohol abuse, foul language, or discrimination – and an age classification – an age category which indicates the age from which it is appropriate to watch a film. The age classification is a recommendation. All classifications will be made public on a website. Complaints regarding classifications can be submitted to the secretariat for the classification of films. Such complaints will usually be addressed through mediation by the secretariat, and, in certain circumstances, by a complaint commission, which will be composed of experts in youth protection or child and youth psychology, lawyers, judges or representatives of civil society organisations.

The new classification system will become applicable from 8 January 2020 onwards. Whereas the cooperation agreement so far only covers films which are

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screened in movie theatres, there is a reference to a possible extension to other media in article 16. So far, however, this possibility has not been taken up by the Communities.

Samenwerkingsakkoord van 15 februari 2019 tussen de Vlaamse, Franse en Duitstalige Gemeenschap en de Gemeenschappelijke Gemeenschapscommissie (GGC) betreffende de classificatie van films, vertoond in Belgische bioscoopzalen

https://cjsm.be/cultuur/sites/cjsm.cultuur/files/public/20190215_nl_samenwerkingsakkoord-classificatie-films.pdf

Cooperation agreement of 15 February 2019 between the Flemish, French-speaking and German-speaking Community and the Common Community Commission (GGC) concerning the classification of films, screened in Belgian cinemas

Kijkwijzer

http://www.kijkwijzer.nl/

Kijkwijzer

https://www.kijkwijzer.nl/english

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