

## Press Release

### Thessaloniki Press Conference

Within the framework of the 59th Thessaloniki International Film Festival, EKOME President and CEO, Panos Kouanis, gave a press conference to inform film industry professionals about the aims and areas of its activities.

Director of the 59th Thessaloniki International Film Festival, Orestis Andreadakis, welcomed EKOME, hosted by TIFF for the first time and expressed the hope that this collaboration will continue, with his own contribution to this excellent-as he called it- effort.

He then gave the floor to the President of the National Centre for Audiovisual Media and Communication (EKOME) Panos Kouanis, who also thanked the Festival, saying that the trip of EKOME extroversion began in Thessaloniki. "EKOME is an organization whose purpose is to support the audiovisual industry and especially the cinema," he noted, presenting the three main pillars of audiovisual production support in Greece include the cash rebate scheme, the digitisation of audiovisual works and education.

Starting with education, Mr. Kouanis stated that EKOME has already posted an integrated strategy on its official website, while at the same time it is a member of the UNESCO GAPMIL network, which lists 600 members from all over the world. "We are also starting to cooperate with Nu Boyana Film Studios to train young cinema professionals, and we are also working with the Ministry of Education to develop new educational programs," he added. Speaking about the digitisation process, he stressed that the invitation to appoint the technical adviser on the creation of the National Depository for the digitisation of audiovisual works would be very soon announced.

Regarding production, Mr. Kouanis argued that the Greek Cash Rebate has been operating for 7 months with about 30 projects included in the programme, half of which are filmed in Greece. 15 of them have already been officially approved and the rest are in evaluation phase. Mr. Kouanis pointed out that the total invested capital from these productions is estimated at 10 million euros, three of which will be returned to producers in the form of rebate. "These films and TV series are being shot all over Greece, from Chalkidiki to Crete, creating 4,500 new jobs" he added.

Finishing his presentation, Mr. Kouanis underlined that foreigners who want to come film in Greece, ask for four basic things: locations beyond the sea and the sandy beaches which are already known, skilled crews, available equipment and a fast and reliable cash rebate process. Emphasizing once again the need for infrastructure in the country, he referred to the call for tenders for a technical consultant for the establishment of Film Offices in the regions that has already been published "We are investing today and creating for the future," he added.

Mr. Kouanis argued that Greece is a small market that has shrunk even further due to the economic crisis. Now the market is no longer decreasing so a new strategy is needed. "We are now talking about growth, growing up. We have to be ready, otherwise the productions will go to Italy or Malta" he said.

Concerning education, Mr. Kouanis stressed that EKOME cooperation with the University and the Film Department is a foregone conclusion. "It is our job to make the necessary prerequisites for the future generations. For our part, we will do what we can" he said. The purpose of EKOME is to work closely with the Ministry of Education to go one step further.

Mr. Kouanis once again stressed that cash rebate projects are TV series and the rest are feature films. The films are mainly European co-productions, with some co-productions from Australia and America, while about half of the projects that have applied are Greek productions. The total amount of cash rebate is 75 million euros for three years, but Mr. Kouanis noted that it is up to the production and the cinema industry to decide if it will eventually be considered small or large. "It depends on what you shoot. If the episode of a series costs 1,5 million euros, then the amount is not big. Everything is relevant. I think that our country provides a very attractive package for audiovisual production. Our strategy is to support even the lowest-cost productions, so our cash rebate starts at 100,000 euros" he underlined.

Finally, Mr. Kouanis, speaking about Greek production and Greek films, argued that, in his opinion, there are excellent Greek films that can stand their ground in international markets. "Greek cinema existed, exists and will exist beyond EKOME. Everyone has to do their best. We do not expect outside help. Greek cinema has its own history. For our part, there is a group of 20 people in EKOME who work 7 days a week for this. EKOME has the support of the Ministry of Digital Policy, Telecommunication and Media. From the perspective of EKOME, we support Greek cinema from a point of view, however, that is different from that of the Ministry of Culture and the Greek Film Centre. Cash Rebate offers about half of its fund to Greek producers. That is, 1,5 out of 3 million, within 8 months. The crews who worked were mostly Greeks. Film Offices will work to bring not only foreign but also Greek producers. The country must open up. We have to work together, each one from their post to support the Greek director and producer" he concluded.