

## Interview With Renate Roginas And Giorgio Ficarelli Representation Of The European Commission In Romania

Since the beginning of this year, Giorgio Ficarelli, the pre-accession assistance coordinator with the European Commission Delegation in Bucharest, and former Eurimages executive secretary Renate Roginas, have been managing a € 900,000 PHARE Grant Scheme in the areas of training, development and distribution to strengthen the Romanian audiovisual sector « with the aim to promote European cultural diversity and to develop a viable national audiovisual industry. » Apart from preparing the launch of the programme, Giorgio Ficarelli has been involved in other initiatives to boost the circulation of European films in Romania. In May, the European Film Festival (Festivalul Filmului European) was held at cinemas in Bucharest, Craiova, Timisoara, Sibiu and Iasi with screenings of such films as *Grbavica*, *FC Venus*, *Vatel*, *Offset*, *Other Days Will Come* and *Private Property*. This festival also marked the launch of a new open-air venue in Bucharest - the E-Uranus with seating for 600 people and a programme lasting over the summer months.

*How would you describe the current state of the Romanian cinema exhibition and distribution sectors? What are the particular challenges facing these sectors?*

**Renate Roginas:** I would describe the situation as being that of « the dying dinosaurs ». As we all know, the dinos are already dead. Here, their death seems to me to be a never-ending story. Romania Film still owns more than 300 cinema halls (and the attached real estate). But how many of them are active? How many of them are competitive and attractive? The figures are depressing. On the other hand, there are dynamic and entrepreneurial distributors acting in Romania. They travel all over the world to pick up the best, to more or less « pray » that they will find a cinema hall releasing the films (for a week if not less) and they hope to get reimbursed for their investments either by TV sales or DVD distribution, or by creating a library which – at the very end – will hopefully prove to have some value.

Romania Film is about to be privatized, but nobody knows if the transaction will be done as a package deal (a take-over of all of the properties) or if the cinemas will be split into (single) lots.

**Giorgio Ficarelli:** The big boom of private and cable TV and of the video/DVD market in Romania has contributed to the decrease in the population's cinema-going habit, but the main problem seems to be the lack of availability of quality cinema halls. It constitutes a serious handicap for the development of the Romanian cinematography, still having problems to be properly exported outside of the country, even after winning important awards, and not having the possibility to reach a reasonable number of tickets sold within the country.

*Has the PHARE programme implemented particular support measures for cinemas or distributors?*

**RR:** I boosted the original € 250,000 funding, which was reserved exclusively for the circulation of non-national European films in Romania, to € 350,000, and restructured the Grant Scheme by creating two different strands: € 150,000 for the circulation and 200,000 for the improvement of the screening and sound conditions in Romanian cinemas as well as for investing in a better visibility of the cinemas. If you stroll

through Bucharest's streets you may pass by in front of a cinema, but you simply don't see it. And, in some cases, the smell of the old chairs won't allow you to get into that « good feeling » mood for which you had surely paid. Here we are facing yet another problem: tickets are too expensive. However, the approval of the restructuring of the grant scheme is still pending, and I haven't yet been able to invest a single Euro.

**GF:** The key issue is the re-opening of cinema halls with good quality conditions in the different towns of Romania, particularly those where important universities are located.

The experience we made recently during the summer with the open-air cinema « E-Uranus », where good quality programming was combined with a pleasant environment and good promotion (reaching a rate of attendance four times bigger than the country's average) that if good cinema halls are made available, the Romanian public will still be interested in going to the cinema.



Movieplex, Bucuresti (© Stephan Zaubitzer)



E-Uranus, Bucuresti (© Stephan Zaubitzer)