

## **Leonidas Christopoulos: "With our eyes on the future, we are working towards 2030"**

*Leonidas Christopoulos, CEO of the Hellenic Film & Audiovisual Centre (EKKOMED – Creative Greece) speaks exclusively to CINEMA, shortly after the "danger signal" sent out by 1896 important professionals of the audiovisual sector in Greece.*

The meeting with Leonidas Christopoulos on Friday 6 June at EKKOMED's new headquarters in the centre of Athens had been finalised for days. Although the issues of delays in the repayments of film projects, which was raised in [a recent Variety article](#), the persistent demand for an increase in the amounts of selective programmes, the obstacle of bureaucracy and the staffing of the organization were on the agenda, current events gave a new twist to the discussion.

A few minutes before my entrance to the Deligiannis Mansion, 1896 cinema and television professionals from all disciplines published (and co-signed) [an open letter entitled "Cinema in Greece - Visibility Zero"](#), sending a distress signal about the manipulations and results of the Ministry of Culture and the EKKOMED administration. Of course, the discussion now had at its core the shaken confidence of professionals active in the audiovisual sector and emphatically demanding solutions.

**The cash rebate tool as an investment incentive has attracted many international productions to Greece since 2018, yet a few weeks ago a recent Variety article mentioned an accumulated amount owed to dozens of productions that exceeds 100 million euros. Is it true that the agency has been in a payment standstill for 4 months?**

First of all, it is very useful to clarify and explain fully what is happening on the issue of payments, as much has been said and written. In just 10 months of operation, from September 2024 to date, EKKOMED has paid **a total of 31 million euros and with the payments we opened on Wednesday 4/6/2025 the amount will reach 50 million euros**. I repeat, only in the 10 months of operation, 50 million euros of payments, either from selective or rebate.

For the first time, the Greek State has a structured plan for the development of the film and audiovisual sector, according to which we have invested, **from 2019 to date, public funds amounting to €186,481,756** for domestic and international productions coming to Greece, of which **€96 million**. The benefits of such a public investment in an outward-looking sector of the creative industry are, I think, self-evident both for the national economy and for employment and workers in this sector.

**Indeed, there was a temporary pause in payments from March 2025** until last Wednesday 4 June, as the transfer of the relevant amounts from the Ministry of Digital Governance, where EKOME belonged to, to the Ministry of Culture had to be completed. This, as you can understand, required ministerial decisions, transitions in information systems and a number of formal procedures that had to be completed. Now, however, the process is almost complete and we have already sent notification to beneficiaries for the first payments since last Wednesday 4/6. Our goal is to have paid a significant part of our outstanding obligations, i.e. the projects that have requested an audit and repayment, by the end of the year.

Specifically, for Greek Cinema, both feature and short films, fiction, documentaries, animation, the amount due is very small as important projects such as "Our Wild Days", "Stray Bodies", "The Slayer", "Meat", "Summer of Carmen" etc. have already been paid in full. Most of these important productions have also received several nominations in the upcoming IRIS awards of the Greek Film Academy and have received state support of 5 million euros. But also important Greek TV productions have received all their money, such as "Wild Bees", "Witch", "Other Me", "Serres", "Sassmos", "Milky Way", "Maestro", etc. Nevertheless, in the next few days, important Greek Cinema projects such as "Animal", "She Loved Flowers More" or "Buzzheart" will be paid in the next few days.

So, although we are listening carefully and we fully respect the concerns of the industry about delays, I think we are a long way from the collapse that has happened in other countries, because not only have the resources been secured, but they are there and will be provided. So it is unfair, I think, for everyone to have a distorted view of the space, either deliberately or unintentionally. It is both unfair and damaging to everyone.

**The article came out a few days after the start of the Cannes Film Festival, did you notice in the following days the caution of foreign producers there? Did the article affect the relations between Greek producers and their foreign partners?**

Personally, I didn't see any caution from anyone. But I would like to note something important which we mentioned in the press release of our response. The Variety reporter asked us for quantitative data and we sent it all to him. Not once, but twice as he asked for additional data which we sent.

Unfortunately, the article did not use any of the official data it received but only personal opinions. I think that when a public body sends you official quantitative government figures you should include them, as has been done in similar publications in the past. This omission makes me wonder if some people want to present things differently for the Greek Film and Audiovisual industry than they are for the benefit of other countries. This was the reason why we decided to publish from our side these data with a corresponding Press Release on the website of the institution, firmly believing in the importance of communicating them to every interested party and showing the true dimensions of the situation based on established data.

In any case, part of my job is to defend the image of Greek Cinema abroad and the workers in the sector.

**However, it's not only Variety. A few hours ago, an open letter co-signed by 1896 Greek film professionals was made public, stating, among other important things, that the amount of selective programmes in our country is 6.5 million for 2025, an amount that ranks us last in Europe in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). What do you say to that?**

As I said, all of us at EKKOMED respect and listen to the concerns of the people and workers in the field whether they signed or not. Personally, I am a person who listens to criticism and tries to incorporate it creatively into the functioning of the new body.

For this reason, it has been decided in the coming days **to open a frank dialogue, a consultation to discuss the future of the selective programmes**. For example, what kind of selective programmes we want, how to support young creators looking for a way out and access to funding, how much money each project will get, how the evaluation should change, what the balance between artistic and commercial criteria should be, etc.

From there, and without any desire to confront people in the field, I would like to present very briefly numbers and data.

In its first ten months of operation, from September 2024 to date, EKKOMED has substantially supported the film and audiovisual sector with over 50 million euros. Specifically, **€11 million** have been pre-approved or approved by the Selective Programmes and the TAA for domestic productions and minority co-productions by Greek filmmakers - i.e. 30% of the total approvals since 2019 (€38 million), **€20.3 million** (€38 million), **€20.3 million (€20.3 million)** and **€20.3 million (€20.3 million)**. **EUR 20,000** have already been repaid through the cash rebate and, after the short pause due to the administrative transfer, the payment process resumed on Wednesday 4 June, with beneficiaries being informed of payments of EUR 18.7 million (EUR 39 million), while **EUR 130,000** have already been allocated or approved for the promotion and distribution of Greek films in the first half of 2025, out of the EUR 250,000 of the total budget (67% increase compared to 2024).

At the same time, the regular budget of EKKOMED increased by 154%, with the collection of 10 million euros from the pay-TV fee that is now attributed to the institution. Thanks to this, the selective programmes for 2025 amount to 6.5 million euros, without extraordinary grants which caused delays and tarnished the image of the space in the past. In addition, 89 pending investment projects were included in the old cash rebate scheme, speeding up the process of submissions, about 100,000 euros were allocated for training and education actions, with the EAVE production workshop in Thessaloniki being a prime example, and strategic international partnerships were signed with the French Film Centre (CNC), INA, Ecole Lumière, while the organisation of the European Film Awards 2027 and the International Centre for Children and Teenage Cinema (CIFEJ) are coming to Athens. In addition, all the necessary administrative steps for the full operation of the new body have been completed.

Finally, I remind you that from 2019 to date, the Greek State has invested a total of €186.5 million in the film and audiovisual sector, €96 million for domestic production (cinema and television) and €54.2 million exclusively for Greek Cinema. Therefore, EKKOMED has not ceased its activity since its establishment in September 2024. On the contrary, it has significantly increased it.

But I will tell you something else that is important. In the interim transition period between the passing of the law (April 2024) and the formal establishment of the HCCME (September 2024), the former HCCME continued to work feverishly to close the pending rebate. Instead, as soon as the law was passed, the HCC management issued a statement freezing all pre-approvals and approvals for the selective programs, for no apparent reason and without any reaction at the time from the field, not even an announcement. But even in this case, following the concerns expressed by the SOPOE and the constructive discussions we had, we moved quickly and in collaboration with the GAO, we secured the resources that the previous CySEC administration could not secure and within days we restarted the selective programmes.

I say this because neither as Secretary General of Digital Governance, nor as President of EKOME, nor as CEO of EKKOMED, I have never stopped listening to the concerns of the people of the sector and solving together the problems that arise.

**Of the tools to support the extroversion of professionals in the sector and domestic films, only 100,000 are earmarked for the distribution of Greek films and 150,000 for their presence abroad.**

Indeed, that is how much has been approved in the two relevant Actions of the Extroversion Programme 2025. However, it is already higher than the money allocated last year.

In 2024, the CySEC gave a total of 150,000 for the promotion and distribution of Greek films. EKKOMED raised these figures for 2025 to 250,000, a 67% increase. Why? Because we thought that was a good increase and we could move at those amounts. I'm not saying it's a lot, and that's why from 2026 we will try to increase it, recognizing the importance of supporting the distribution of Greek films in theatres and also promoting them on their festival circuit abroad.

In addition, this year's Extroversion Programme in the first half of 2025 for promotion has given or approved about 130,000 euros.

Let's not forget that the Extroversion Programme supports several actions that are essential for the film industry, such as the regional and international festivals of the country, the domestic and international training workshops such as the one that EAVE will hold in Thessaloniki, the Owl of Athens Film Office, the Stratos Stasinou Awards for animation and of course the Greek Film Academy, a very important institution that has been supported with more than 100,000 euros of public funding in the last 5 years. We are working with the same body to enable the funding of actions it plans to carry out in the context of the European Film Awards 2027.

All of the above require a unifying and constructive cooperation between EKKOMED and the field in order to be able to secure and increase the funds for these actions every year.

**What amount can be added to the selective? There is a commitment to increase the funding for the selective programmes to a total of 15 million.**

Selective programmes for development and production are different from those of extroversion. We want to increase the amounts for both and that is what we have proposed. The commitment is to the EKKOMED's effort to increase these amounts. As we committed that the 2025 \$6.5 million would not include the projects in the last cycle of 2024 and we did.

Beyond that, the increase or not has to do with the fiscal capacity of the State in general, especially when you have many and varied needs in different groups of the population or in other important areas of daily life.

Our commitment is to continue the effort to make even more money in the industry because this is positive for the Greek economy. And that means ensuring that we as the State and EKKOMED ensure that the benefits of all this public money that has been given since 2019 to domestic audiovisual production, which amounts to 96 million euros from both the rebate and the selective ones, will reach the workers of the sector, that is, the directors of photography, directors, technicians and other contributors of an audiovisual production, as I hear their concerns and I am particularly concerned about them.

**Since you mentioned it a little bit earlier, what is the total amount of money that is involved in Greek film productions?**

The total public expenditure given to Greek audiovisual production since 2019 is **96 million euros**, both from selective and TAA and from the rebate, 1/3 of which have been given from the summer of 2023 onwards. This amount does not include the legal commitments of the State with the rebate inclusion decisions which amount to 85 million euros. And I mention this because on the basis of these decisions there is lending from banking institutions and there is a flow of money into the industry. Together they add up to **181 million euros**.

As for Greek Cinema in particular, from 2019 onwards, 38 million have been given from the selective programmes and the TAA and another 16,081,853 from the rebate. Total: **54 million euros**. If we again take into account the legal commitments of the State with the rebate inclusion decisions, which amount to 9 million euros, the total amount reaches **63 million euros**.

The overall implementation rate of EKKOMED's legal commitments, which means repayment or a decision to join, hence bank lending, is at 80%.

Therefore, I think that the similar and such strong public support for the domestic audiovisual sector from 2019 to date has never been seen in any other period, despite any delays that may arise from time to time.

I would also like to add that our immediate intentions are to start an open discussion with the Hellenic Bankers Association and with the domestic and foreign funds that finance the audiovisual sector in Greece, in order to jointly evaluate the criteria they use to finance productions based on the applications of the beneficiaries and the decisions of EKKOMED. It is very important to streamline and facilitate the flow of funding from the private sector to the audiovisual sector, especially for the audiovisual sector.

**Also a reasonable request is the staffing of the organisation by audiovisual professionals. Where are the artists? The decisions taken here affect them directly.**

First of all, we should say that EKKOMED is a public organisation and as such it is staffed according to the legislation in force. Within the framework set by the legislation of Law no. 5105/2024, we have hired qualified professionals from various specialties to help us, many of whom have experience in the audiovisual sector, who have replaced EKOMEDE civil servants who have left in recent years. And of

course, let's not forget that artists, creators and people in the field are used to evaluate applications for the body's selective programmes, not to write ministerial decisions, check payment documents behind a desk or answer the phones to interested parties.

On the other hand, if we talk about the Board of Directors, I must say that this is the first time that there is a Board that has a single mission: to approve policies to strengthen the industry, to solve problems arising from the merger of a company (EKOME) and a NPO (EKK) and to promote the growth of the industry through increased funding. I would suggest leaving it to be decided as the time is short, only 10 months, to implement a very important and large project.

And to add one last thing. I don't agree that the decisions that are made are not discussed with the people in the field. There has never been as much consultation and relationship with the unions in the field on their issues as there has been since the summer of 2023. Meetings with the SOPOE or PACT have been and are frequent in order to discuss problems, both at a high and technical level.

**We are at the Deligiorgis Mansion, a symbolic change of venue for the cinema, since this is where the Greek Film Archive was housed for three decades. But if we leave the interesting semantics behind, the monthly rent of 27,600 euros does not create a budgetary cost, but is a respectable amount that could be used, for example, for the production of a short film.**

Here I think we are entering the realm of "populism". I am very sorry that such a public building, with the symbolic significance it has for the area and which does not burden the Greek taxpayer as it belongs to the State, is becoming the focus of controversy. I did not see the same criticism when in 2016 the former CySEC moved from a private building on D. Aeropagitou to another private building in Psychiko.

EKKOMED's aim is for this building to become the home of cinema, to open its doors to host actions, events and creators in the centre of Athens. An important and beautiful cultural space for cinema, like the National Gallery or the EMST for the arts they represent. When producers and directors, Greek or foreign, come to a building that is symbolic and functional for Greek cinema and reflects its importance. In a space that will be directly and easily accessible to filmmakers, especially short films and those who are starting out now. And this is what the new home of EKKOMED ensures.

I have said it before: we must break free from past and miserable perceptions and look to the future. And the future of Greek Cinema must be written in a building worthy of the importance and value of the Greek cinema, which will house actions and workshops that will broaden the horizons of Greek Cinema.

**What are the differences between the new Cash Rebate Greece programme of the new law? 5105/2024 compared to that of 2017? People in the industry say that the new procedure makes the use of the investment incentive extremely difficult and that TV series or the servicing of foreign productions actually benefit. They also point out that funding through NSRF is so rigid that the incentive is described as inappropriate.**

I will answer honestly. Indeed, it seems that while the NSRF can fund domestic productions, its rules and procedures are not in line with the way the film and audiovisual market works. At least as far as state aid issues are concerned because otherwise it can be an excellent tool for building infrastructure or for training and education. And there were similar problems with the resources of the former CySEC Recovery Fund.

However, when someone gives you 100 million you don't say no because then you'll be blamed for not taking it and in any case it's not bad to have a financial tool for anyone who wants to use it even with these rules. At the end of the day, Action B of the NSRF did not prevent or reduce the other financial instruments. It added another one from which many new films will emerge.

There are some issues that, if we can work together to find a way to solve them, feature or short films could help.

Beyond that, the new cash rebate legislation makes the program more rational and more sustainable so that it does not collapse in the future. In other words, the effort of all of us and those in the industry in 2024 was both to find solutions to the problem of pending claims under the old regime and to make the new regime more friendly, more predictable and more sustainable. I think that is what we are doing. At least for the 55 million in the state budget that is part of the 105 million that will be provided this year by the FTV.

**How do you intend to overcome the bureaucratic obstacles? For example, Laraine's "Maria" affiliation was filed in December 2023 and approved in October 2024, 10 months later.**

There is no need to justify the volume and complexity of rebate applications, especially for foreign productions. And I will not blame the evaluators for the bureaucracy or the investment project operators for the problems that their applications often have. I don't think it makes sense and is not constructive as at the end of the day all eyes are on the head of the agency and rightly so.

So what I have to say is that we need a new evaluation model that is faster and simpler. A model that is not based on Evaluation Committees but on individual, experienced evaluators from either the public or the private sector.

And we will also ask for the creation of a more user-friendly application platform because the current one of the Ministry of Economy and Finance is somewhat unsuitable for these projects, and in order to make any adjustment you have to look for the responsible people in another organization and not in your own. These, if done, will resolve a lot of bureaucratic hurdles.

**In the context of the extroversion meetings, a Strategic Cooperation Agreement was recently signed with the French Film Centre for the provision of expertise to streamline the Greek system. What is the timetable and immediate objectives of the agreement?**

For EKKOMED it is a very crucial, strategically important agreement. Everyone knows the importance of the French Film Centre. I was very pleased when the President of the CNC, Mr Gaëtan Bruel, confided to me on the sidelines of the signing ceremony that the way we set up the EKKOMED in Greece is the way that should be followed in all European countries.

With the CNC we will do a series of actions that include supporting EKKOMED in the public consultation on the selective programmes I mentioned, providing expertise to increase the organisation's revenues, institutional interventions that are necessary for the strengthening of EKKOMED and the field in general and many more actions.

Also, let's not forget other important agreements we have signed with French institutions such as Ecole Lumiere for the training of Greek technicians or INA for audiovisual heritage and digitization of audiovisual archives.

**After the merger of the two institutions, what is the clear national strategy of EKKOMED for the development and strengthening of film production and the international promotion of the country? Do you consider that there have been failures?**

The effective merger was in September 2024 and the key objective for 2025 was to open the new rebate investment schemes and assess how they work, reduce the stock of the old rebate and continue the normal flow of selective. We are on target on all three objectives, which is not to say that there are not or have not been problems. After all, just as with productions, there can be slippages in schedules or other issues, especially when you're working feverishly and on many fronts on something you love and want to do well.

On the other hand, the FTV investment scheme has been opened as of 20/2/2025 and is accepting new applications, while animate and VGD will be opened soon once the relevant ministerial decisions

are signed. We have already paid in the first months of 2025 for the old rebate 17.7 million euros and even in the midst of a merger and we have already sent the notification to the beneficiaries for the next 18.7 million euros. The selective programs have pre-approved or approved 5.8 million from October 2024 to date and another 7 million has been given by the TAA programs. By and large, I would say 2025 is a year of evaluation and corrective action if needed.

In any case, we must keep our eyes on the future and work with a longer-term horizon of at least 5 years, with specific axes and sources of funding for cinema and the audiovisual sector, incorporating financial incentives, education and training, infrastructure, the regional dimension and social cohesion, extroversion and of course technological innovation.

Listening to the concerns of the people in the field, as EKKOMED we say that it is particularly crucial at this juncture for the sector to be united. I believe that it would be extremely important for the sector to create a more solid, institutional and professional representation to the Government of the day in order to more effectively highlight the cultural, artistic and developmental importance of the sector and the benefits that accrue to the country from its strengthening so that it can escape from past, guild-like perceptions that have isolated it and often trapped it in the past. If all this is done, with coherent and consistent steps by all of us, the Greek Cinema sector will emerge as a key pillar of cultural creation and economic development.