

SCREENDAILY

Eurimages mooted idea of associate membership for the likes of South Africa, Argentina

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Eurimages head notes that non-member UK is "special case."

The Council of Europe's European Cinema Support Fund Eurimages is exploring the possibility of extending membership to countries as far afield as South Africa and Argentina.

Speaking exclusively to ScreenDaily ahead of the last board of management meeting for 2011, Eurimages' president Jobst Plog [pictured] explained that the Strasbourg-based fund had "an interest in working relationships with third countries who are close to Europe and have a European tradition such as Israel, Argentina, Canada and South Africa where you have a certain common understanding about film."

"We have just established a working group to look at how we could become closer to those parts of the world," he said. "We don't have any possibility of integrating them as full members of Eurimages, but one could envisage them having the status of an associate membership."

"For the time being, they can only participate as minority co-producers [with up to 30%], but the idea is to investigate whether they can become majority [partners in a project] with minority European co-producers."

This year had seen Eurimages' membership grow to 36 European countries with Russia joining in the spring and Georgia coming onboard in October.

"The interesting thing about Russia was that they encouraged Georgia to become the next member to join Eurimages and one of its first projects was one with Georgia," Plog recalls. "Things happen within the Eurimages family that would not yet be possible outside."

The first co-production with Russian participation to be supported by Eurimages was the Polish majority co-production *Poklosie (Aftermath)* by Wladyslaw Pasikowski about a peaceful Polish village harbouring a dark secret: the collective murder by the inhabitants of their Jewish neighbours during the Second World War. Apple Film Production is producing with Artem Vasiliev's Metrafilms as co-producer.

At October's board of management meeting in Dublin, Miguel Angel Jeménez's *Chaika – Seagull* was supported with minority co-producers from Georgia (Cinetech - who had already worked with Jeménez on his previous feature *Ori*) and Russia (Ibrus).

This week's session in Paris could see support being allocated by Eurimages to one of its first Russian majority co-productions: Sergey Dvortsevov's second fiction feature project *Ayka (My Little One)* [working title] which is being planned as a co-production between Igor Tolstunov's Profit Kino and Karl "Baumi" Baumgartner's Halle-based Pallas Film.

Speaking at last week's German-Russian Round Table in Moscow, Baumgartner said that German regional fund MDM and broadcaster ARTE were partners on the film which will have a 12-week shoot over a period of 20 weeks at locations in Moscow. As with Dvortsevov's previous film *Tulpan*, The Match Factory will also be handling international sales on *Ayka*.

Plog pointed out that only five member states are missing from the Eurimages family: Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Montenegro, Armenia, and the UK.

"The UK is still a special case," he observed. "Nowadays, they ask us to convince them to step back in and that's not really our job. They should know why they want to join because that's what the other member states do. All of us would be very happy if the British finally found their way back to Eurimages."

At the October board meeting, Plog was re-elected as president for another two years until Nov 19, 2013.

"When I took over as president of Eurimages in 2009, there were numerous underlying problems at the fund," he recalls. "There were various groups working on different ideas for reform and I thought it was necessary that we should have a consensus on a wide basis; I know something about consensus having been the chairman of the German public television network ARD and the president of ARTE. We have changed a lot of things, but we will now wait a couple of years before beginning the next process of reforms, and will do this without any hurry."

2012 will see two changes being introduced to Eurimages' operations.

To begin with, the fund's regulations will allow projects with a non-European director to be eligible for funding.

Moreover, producers from Iceland to Georgia will breathe a sigh of relief at the news that applications can be made electronically online from next year so one will be able to dispense in future with the photocopying marathon always associated with Eurimages applications.

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