



Greece Sweetens Production Incentives as Struggling Country's Economy Rebounds

Christopher Vourlias | August 23, 2019



It's taken the better part of a decade for Greece to show signs of recovery from the crippling crisis that almost pushed it out of the Eurozone. Now, with the economy slowly on the mend, the government is doubling down on efforts to jumpstart the local film industry, giving a dramatic overhaul to the incentive scheme it introduced last year.

In a further move to sweeten the deal for foreign productions eyeing the sun-splashed Mediterranean nation, the government has raised the cash rebate from 25% to 35%, scrapped the cap to €5 million (\$5.6 million) and lowered the minimum qualifying spending for TV series to €30,000 euros (around \$33,500) per episode.

According to Vasiliki Diagouma of the National Center of Audiovisual Media and Communication (EKOME), the government body tasked with administering the incentive scheme, the changes were in swift response to the overwhelming feedback from foreign producers looking to lens in Greece. "They saw that we were ready to raise the bar, and we did it," she says.

Competition from its Mediterranean neighbors might have also played a part. Cyprus introduced a 35% cash rebate last fall in an effort to woo foreign productions to the island nation, while

Malta — which has hosted a number of major Hollywood productions, including "Game of Thrones" — raised its own rebate to 40% in January.

Greece has approved nearly 70 applications for the rebate in the past year. A handful of high-profile projects have wrapped, including the John David Washington starrer "Born to Be Murdered," a political thriller directed by Ferdinando Cito Filomarino and produced by Marco Morabito and Luca Guadagnino; and director Michael Winterbottom's "Greed," a satire starring Steve Coogan, which will have its world premiere at the Toronto Film Festival.

Winterbottom and Coogan returned to the country with Rob Brydon in June for "The Trip to Greece," the fourth installment in their acclaimed comedy franchise. "The Durrells," ITV's hit adaptation of author Gerald Durrell's memoir trilogy, also has returned to the island of Corfu for Season 4.

In a country known for bureaucratic logjams, the Greek government seems determined to keep the film industry running smoothly. A network of 13 regional film offices is being set up by EKOME to assist shoots in the most far-flung corners of the country. Diagouma also stresses that the rebate "has been designed in a way that it moves fast, and that it services producers in the most efficient way."

"Eden," a six-part miniseries about the refugee crisis commissioned by ARTE, was the first foreign production to apply for the rebate. Eight months after the Greece-Germany-France co-production wrapped, the offset had paid out in full. "Everything went very smoothly," says Marc Jenny, of Lagardère Studios' Atlantique Prods.

Jenny credits the Greek government for facilitating a difficult shoot that included more than four weeks of filming inside a refugee camp. "It went really well, even if what we had to do was not that easy," he says. "It was my first experience [in Greece], and I have to say, now I recommend everybody to go there." ■