



## BRUSSELS FILM FESTIVAL 2010

Belgo-Dutch film “C’est déjà l’été” wins Special Film Award for the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion

**The Brussels Film Festival 2010 Award for the best movie covering the topic of poverty and social exclusion goes to the Belgo-Dutch production “C’est déjà l’été” produced by the Dutch film director, Martijn Maria Smits.**

**The film was selected by the Brussels Film Festival as the one, from all those of the festival, doing most to sensitise the public about the issues of poverty and social exclusion. This Special Film Award category was offered as part of a partnership with the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.**

The Award will be presented to Martijn Maria Smits by the European Commission at a special ceremony in Brussels, on Monday 28 June, at 19h30. “This film is tremendous insight into the troubled lives of people who face poverty and social exclusion,” comments the European Commissioner Lázló Andor responsible for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion. “It is a reminder to all of us of the hidden areas of society for which we have responsibility. In this European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, it is a good example of how the medium of film can reach out to people and raise awareness about problems in our society.”

“C’est déjà l’été” is the first feature by the Dutch film director Martijn Maria Smits and tells the story of Jean, an unemployed Belgian steelworker and his two aimless teenage kids. The French-language fictional film portrays the everyday torment of this socially deprived family in the Belgian area of Seraing. To highlight the sense of despair of the family, Smits utilises shots of endless unemployment lines, interspersed with grainy stock footage of smokestacks belching black smoke, smoldering factories, and barbed wire fences. The colour tone of the film is foggy green. Benjamin, the teenage son, spends his days wandering along the polluted river, babysitting his sister's child, and lying in his bed staring at the ceiling.

Martijn Maria Smits spent six months living in the industrially depressed area of Seraing before starting on the film. He explains: “this is a story about the wasted life of the young son Benjamin. It is a reminder of what is lost when society abandons sensitive youth like him. I hope that this film makes some contribution to sensitising people to the problems in our society and the people with something to offer whose lives are just wasting away.” The European Year 2010 is also highlighting these people. Statistics<sup>1</sup> show that, in Belgium, as many as one out of seven people is at risk of poverty and one out of six in average in the European Union.

Martijn Maria Smits studied Audio Visual Arts and Photography in Antwerp, Belgium. In 2006 he graduated as a documentary film director from the Dutch Film Academy with his prize winning short “Otzenrath”. In 2009 he won the golden Calf for Best Television Drama at the Nederlands Film Festival Utrecht for his short film “Anvers”.

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<sup>1</sup> European Union – Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, 2007.



The Dutch film director is currently living in Buenos Aires, where he is working on his next project about slum dwellers who make their living by sifting through the garbage, looking for material they can sell.

**For media enquiries, kindly contact:**

Written press:

Pamela Woolley  
+32 (0)2 550 00 86 (Brussels)  
pamela.woolley@ketchumpleon.com

Audio-visual press

Julie Kovatchev  
+32 (0)2 533 95 44 (Brussels)  
jko@mostra.com

**For media inquiries linked to the European Commission's action, kindly contact:**

Commissioner Andor's Spokesperson

Cristina Arigho  
cristina.arigho@ec.europa.eu

Commissioner Andor's Press officer

Maria Javorova  
maria.javorova@ec.europa.eu



## **Background: the need to combat poverty and social inclusion**

Each year, the European Union chooses a theme of general interest aimed at raising public awareness of, and drawing governments' attention to the related issues. Poverty and social exclusion were chosen as the focus of the European Year 2010 because of their relevance and their importance.

The social protection systems in the European Union are among the most highly-developed in the world and yet, today, too many Europeans still live in poverty. The forms this takes are complex, but certain figures speak for themselves:

- More than 84 million people live below the poverty line (set at 60% of their country's median income). That represents 17% of Europe's population.
- One European in ten lives in a household where nobody works.
- For 8% of Europeans, having a job is not enough to avoid poverty.
- Some 19 million children live under the threat of poverty and are disproportionately affected.

## **Objectives of the European Year:**

- To recognise the fundamental right of persons affected by poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity and to take an active part in society;
- To promote public support for social inclusion policies and foster commitment by all public and private actors;
- To promote a more cohesive society, where it is recognised that society as a whole benefits from the eradication of poverty;
- To renew the pledge of the EU and its Member States to combat poverty and social exclusion, and involve all levels of authority in the pursuit of that aim.

## **Actions:**

Throughout 2010, a variety of more than 1000 activities have been/are being organised including awareness campaigns, innovative initiatives, creative solidarity schemes, meetings, discussions and conferences, and competitions which highlight achievements and successful experiments related to poverty and social exclusion.

These events involve a wide range of actors, including civil society organisations and those defending the interests of persons living in poverty, as well as the social partners, local and regional authorities.

At national level, programmes have been developed for adapting the policy guidelines defined at European level to the issues and specific characteristics of each country. These programmes are published on the EY2010 website. The individual activities are identified and carried out locally.

**For further information:**  
[www.2010againstopoverty.eu](http://www.2010againstopoverty.eu)