

Endemol into Italy

Dutch conglomerate buys stake in TV outfit

By Marlene Edmunds



AMSTERDAM — Less than a week into 1998, Dutch-based Endemol Entertainment continued a furious buying spree, begun just over a year ago, by acquiring a 45% interest in ARAN, one of Italy's largest independent TV production companies.

The move gives Endemol its first firm foothold in Italy, Europe's fourth-largest television market. Revenue for the successful Rome-based drama, comedy and entertainment production outfit is expected to hit \$25 million in the 1997-98 fiscal year.

ARAN, founded by current managing director Marco Bassetti, supplies programming to both public and commercial broadcasters and produces some of Italy's most successful TV dramas, including "Caro Maestro," a series which brought in a market share of 30% and some 8 million viewers. It is now also being produced in Spain in partnership with Zeppelin, a company in which Endemol also owns a 45% stake.

Majority option

As with most other companies it has snapped up around Europe, Endemol has an option to increase its stake in ARAN to a majority position. "We like to go for a minority stake and convince the management creatives responsible for the success of the companies to stay on," said Endemol spokesman Thomas Notermans. If everybody's happy, Endemol may eventually take a larger stake, he added.

As with its acquisitions in other territories, Endemol Entertainment Intl. will become the worldwide distributor for ARAN productions.

European plan

Endemol announced last October it planned to build a significant presence in Europe's five biggest territories — Germany, France, Spain, Italy and the U.K. The deal with ARAN gives it a presence in four of those countries.

Endemol has been trying to find the right production partner in the U.K. for years, a goal it expects to achieve in 1998, said Notermans.