

# EU MEDIA POLICIES IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

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## Abstract

The communications sector in general and, in particular, the media within the EU are receiving at least a bivalent treatment. On one hand, they inevitably represent cultural identity, and on the other hand, they must be considered a product of the European market. Community policies in this regard are a result of difficult compromises by power players on international, inter- and intra-institutional levels. Consequently, there is a lack of coherency in the approach and activities, even within the same institution. Namely, six different directorates of the European Commission hold some authority on different aspects of communication, even though media policy is most often initiated not by the Commission or the Council, but by the European Parliament, with the aim of advancing European integration. Significant inconsistencies appear in implementing strategies for dealing with new media channels, as well. The institution that played a crucial role in the not so intensive development of the European community's media policy, especially with regards to broadcasting, borderless television and other audiovisual issues, is the European Court of Justice, through several extremely important rulings. However, the activities of the European Commission were crucial for the swift progress of the plan for liberalization of telecommunications and, particularly, recognizing the early benefits of information society. Evidently, the numerous debates on the information society within the EU are initiated, or, at least, strongly influenced by the expert public. Finally, the influence of some national and international organizations, including the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations, the European Multimedia Forum, the European Telecommunication Standards Institute, the European Broadcasting Union, etc., should not be underplayed. There are serious arguments proving that these organizations are an extremely efficient framework for cooperation and coordination with an inevitable influence on European policy in the media sphere.

## 1. Globalization

An analysis of EU audiovisual media policy, with regards to how it relates to cultural identity, inevitably has to begin with an elaboration of the term and concept

of globalization, which has become central in sociological science in the late XX century. The term globalization was coined towards the end of the 1980s, to address the unorganized, unpredictable and highly complex growth and change of the economic and cultural systems, linked with the debates on world, or global, culture.<sup>1</sup>

Globalization advocates, on one hand, argue that trade and access to international markets are the best way to create wealth, which, in turn, invigorates culture. They maintain that free trade and free markets do not dilute or pollute other cultures, but, in fact, enhance them. As wealth frees the poor from the daily struggle for survival, it allows them to embrace, celebrate and share the art, music, crafts and literature that might otherwise have been sacrificed to poverty.<sup>2</sup> Opponents of globalization, on the other hand, mostly refer to so-called „Americanization“ of the world. They maintain that American culture is encroaching on the rest of the world. This idea, actually, is not new. Fears that American culture might usurp the rest of the world can be traced back to the beginning of the XX century, and the debate actually got heated again in the 1980s, when the popularity of the American television show *Dallas* even sparked so-called „cultural preservation“ movements in Europe.

At the basis of these big changes, of the development of global markets, the transnational corporations and the global culture lie new technologies, communication and the media, combined with a highly sophisticated system of production and consumption.<sup>3</sup> The mass media are seen today, in both scholarly work and in public debates on globalization, as playing a key role of prime importance in enhancing globalization, facilitating cultural exchange and facilitating a multi-directional flow of information, through international news broadcasts, television programming, new technologies, film and music. Up until the 1990s, mainstream media systems in most countries used to be largely national in scope. But, since then, most communication media have become increasingly global, extending their reach well beyond the nation-state.<sup>4</sup>

In relation to this, social scientists have put out the term „hybridization“, which underlines the need to recognize the blending of local cultures with global foreign influences, as opposed to „homogenization“, or simply cultural diffusion of American values.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, some globalization theorists have noted how global communication media have facilitated the emergence of so-called cultural cosmopolitanism. This line of argument goes that the image provided by the media of distant events and ways of life has resulted in a celebration of difference, stimulating a cosmopolitan orientation and the formation of a global civil society, a global public sphere or international community, without, in fact, destroying local ties.

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<sup>1</sup> Kraidy, M. (2002). Globalization of culture through the media. In J. R. Schement (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of communication and information* (Vol. 2, pp. 359-363). New York, NY: Macmillan Reference USA. Retrieved from [http://repository.upenn.edu/asc\\_papers/325](http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/325)

<sup>2</sup> Hjarvard, S. (2009). News Media and the Globalization of the Public Sphere. In S. Thornham, C. Bassett, & P. Marris (Eds.), *Media Studies. A Reader*. (3 ed., pp. 671-689). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Kraidy, M. (2002).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

International flow of information has been largely assisted by the development of global capitalism, new technologies, and the increasing commercialization of global television, which has occurred as a consequence of the deregulation policies adopted by various countries in Europe and in the US, in order to permit the proliferation of cable and satellite channels.<sup>6</sup> It was exactly the evolution of technologies capable of transmitting messages via cable and electromagnetic waves that marked a turning point in advancing the globalization of communications. The launch of the first geostationary communication satellites in the 1960s actually made communication fully global, facilitating the transmission of long-distance communications. Cables, on the other hand, have facilitated the capacity for transmission of electronic information, and all this has been combined with an increased use of digital methods of information processing.<sup>7</sup> The main features of this gradual growing convergence towards the liberal American model are a weakening of government intervention and decline of the role of the state in communications, with a move towards market regulation, commercialization and the predominance of the Anglo-American journalistic professionalism, accompanied by the crisis of the public service broadcasting tradition in Europe.

Media globalization has contributed to the erosion of the power of countries to control, regulate and use their media for educational and cultural purposes within national boundaries, thus profusely altering the very nature of the strong relationship between the media and the state that used to exist.<sup>8</sup> The increase in power of multinational media conglomerates has undermined the state's capacity to subordinate the media to a regulatory regime. In Europe, for example, the state has regulated public service broadcasting in an effort to use the media to enhance the public good and to provide education and culture to wider population groups, regardless of social status or income.

In this context, and as an extremely important aspect of media policy, it is inevitable to mention the concentration of media firms in the hands of a few owners. Their continuous on-line and live distribution of news around the world has become a symbol of a world in which place and time become meaningless. This however, is seen as threatening diversity, impending real competition, forcing smaller players out of the market and contributing to the reinforcement of conservative views of the world, marginalizing dissent or content that does not generate profit, or which is seen as challenging to capitalist values.<sup>9</sup> Thus, competition policy is an inextricable part of EU audiovisual media policy.

## **2. The Public Sphere - International Public Opinion**

All this goes to question the national nature of the public sphere and public opinion. Increasingly, the formation of public opinion takes place across national boundaries, as well. The term „international community“ no longer refers to

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<sup>6</sup> Collins, Richard. (1998). *From Satellite to Single Market*. London: Routledge.

<sup>7</sup> Boyd, Barrett, O. & Rantanen, T. (1998). *The Globalization of News*. London: Sage.

<sup>8</sup> Hjarvard, S. (2009).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

some assembly of state leaders or elite; rather, it increasingly refers to a less tangible and much more volatile group, mostly as a result of extensive media coverage of world events. At least in certain extraordinary occasions, a transnational, even global, public sphere has emerged as a forum for political discussion and opinion formation.<sup>10</sup> Some of these have included, of course not limited to, French nuclear testing in the Pacific, suppressing the student demonstrations in China, the death of Lady Diana, Heider's participation in Austria's government, and more recently, Muslim extremism and the war against Jihad. During events like these, a series of interactions in different countries are activated and connected, mostly as a result of intense media coverage. The aggregation of public opinion during this process takes place both nationally and transnationally, and the media representation of this transnational public opinion acquires its own momentum.<sup>11</sup> However, the existence of a truly global public opinion, as opposed to international public opinion related to specific events, is problematic to some extent, as there is no institutional authority towards which this phenomenon's energy would be directed.

International news agencies, like Reuters, AP, UPI, AFP and Tass, have been assigned a role by media scholars of having contributed to spreading a global agenda.<sup>12</sup> These agencies dominate the global dissemination of news and information, and numerous media outlets around the world depend on them for international news. The news agencies are seen as central to the globalization thesis, due to the construction of international agendas that influence national governments. However, even though the major news agencies act on a global scale, they are not global media in the same sense as some of the big media enterprises are today. They are international agencies originating in a specific country, and their sole task is to provide news to be disseminated through national news media. They are not media with an audience of their own.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1970s, through various forums, the most important one of which was the UNESCO General Conference in 1973, Third World countries started asking for a radical overhaul of the global communication system in the direction of overcoming the cultural and information dominance of the US and some other Western nations and their corporations, with the aim of achieving democratic communications and free flow of information. This became to be known as The New World Information and Communication Order debate, and much of it is still going on today, with intensified calls to revive it.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Servaes, Jan. 2003. The European Information Society: A Wake-up Call. In J. Servaes (ed.), *The European Information Society: A Reality Check*, 11-32. Bristol, Portland, OR: Intellect.

<sup>12</sup> MacGregor, P. (2013). International News Agencies: Global Eyes That Never Blink. *Journalism: New Challenges*, 35-63.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Pauwels, C. & Burgelman, J.-C. Policy challenges to the creation of a European Information society : a critical analysis. In : Servaes (J.) (Ed.). *The European Information Society. A reality check*. Bristol and Portland (OR), Intellect, 2003, pp. 59-85.

### 3. Information Society

Both theory and research have vindicated the aggressive underlining of the social role of the media in the process of information dissemination and forming public opinion. Sociologists have named this new societal state as information society.<sup>15</sup> In many ways the European plans to build an Information Society emerged as a reaction to Japanese and American initiatives, as European policies on ICT were actually lagging behind the policies of its main global competitors.<sup>16</sup> This situation has changed slightly since the beginning of the 1980s, when it became clear that information and communication would be one of the main technological factors and markets for the future. Parallel to this followed a radical change in policy orientation. Starting from the Green Paper on Television Policy (Television without Frontiers) in 1984, the area of communication became gradually more or less totally liberalized.<sup>17</sup> The goal of the Directive was to ensure for TV the same freedom of communication across the member states enjoyed by print media, and to lay the foundation for a single market in media goods and services. The clause which caused the most controversy was that at least 50 percent of European content except news and sports was required, but only „where practicable“. The basic message was that communication is a good/service and should be able to move, be sold and purchased freely within the EU. EU policy has, since then, focused on removing barriers that hinder competition and the creation of an internal broadcasting and telecommunications market. Since 1998, the whole ICT field became deregulated.<sup>18</sup>

The information society actually became a discourse to integrate some seemingly disparate European ambitions: competition policy, competitiveness, maintaining cultural diversity and subsidiarity. These are actually the main pillars of EU's audiovisual media policy.<sup>19</sup>

The „Audiovisual Media Services Directive“ of 2007 amended the „Television without Frontiers Directive.“ The goal of the „Audiovisual Media Services Directive“ was to create an effective single European market for audiovisual media. It includes all audiovisual media services, and „reaffirms the pillars of Europe's audiovisual model which are cultural diversity, protection of minors, consumer protection, media pluralism and fight against racial and religious hatred“.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Edelstein A., Bowes J. & Harsel S. (eds.) (1978) *Information Societies: Comparing the Japanese and American Experiences*. Seattle: School of Communications, University of Washington.

<sup>17</sup> Pauwels, C. & Burgelman, J.-C. Policy challenges to the creation of a European Information society : a critical analysis. In : Servaes (J.) (Ed.). *The European Information Society. A reality check*. Bristol and Portland (OR), Intellect, 2003, pp. 59-85.

<sup>18</sup> Webster, F. (2010). The information society revisited. In L. Lievrouw, & S. Livingstone (Eds.), *Handbook of new media: Social shaping and social consequences of ICTs*, Updated student edition. (pp. 443-458). London: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446211304.n24>

<sup>19</sup> Digital Agenda for Europe. „New „Audiovisual without Frontiers“ Directive“. [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item\\_id=234](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=234).

<sup>20</sup> Donders, K., Loisen, J. & Pauwels, C. (2014) *Introduction: European Media Policy as a Complex Maze of Actors, Regulatory Instruments and Interests*. The Palgrave Handbook of European Media Policy, pp. 1 - 16, eds. Karen Donders, Caroline Pauwels, Jan Loisen, published by Palgrave Macmillan.

The first initiative of the European Commission in its „information society planning“ of the 1990s was the White Paper „Growth, Competitiveness and Employment“ of 1993, prepared under the chairmanship of Jacques Delors, former French socialist finance minister, based on a concern for job creation and equal opportunity, combined with a focus on Europe's competitiveness in the world economy. This White Paper was followed, in 1994, by a much more neo-liberal account, dubbed the Bangemann report, compiled on a Council initiative under the direction of former German minister Martin Bangemann. This report focused more on the issues of liberalization of telecommunications and the primacy of the private sector in the development of an information society.<sup>21</sup>

The development of EU information society policy has been characterized by an oscillation between broader social concerns and a more technology and market-oriented focus. In 1995, for example, a high level expert group and an Information Society Forum were established to analyze the social aspects of the information society, which resulted in the policy report titled „Building the European Information Society for us all“, which was a stray from the dominant debate on issues relating to the technological and infrastructural challenges and the regulatory economic environment.

The European Commission suggests that information society policies should have as basic aims „to improve access to information, enhance democracy and social justice, promote employability and lifelong learning, strengthen the capacity of the EU economy to achieve high and sustainable growth and employment, achieve and enhance equal opportunity between men and women, promote inclusion and support people with special needs and those lacking opportunities to improve their position, and improve quality and efficiency of public administration. One of the reasons for this change of priority is that, in the view of the Commission, liberalization of telecommunications has played out in a satisfactory manner. However, these basic aims remain an expression of a development in the EU information society policy, and it can well be concluded that information society in Europe is a society in formation, far from having fully and completely emerged.<sup>22</sup>

#### **4. Media Regulation and Cultural Identity**

With regards to how media in general are related to the EU itself, media influences the perceptions of the citizens of the EU about the EU; media also affects their level of feeling of belonging to the EU, which is closely related with their level of support to the EU and legitimacy of the EU.<sup>23</sup> Media is one of the most important sources for „images“ of Europe. In fact, media in Europe have been extensively criticized for presenting European integration mostly as a

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Gollmitzer, Mirjam. „Industry versus Democracy: The New Audiovisual Media Services Directive as a Site of Ideological Struggle.“ *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 4:3 (2008).

<sup>23</sup> Castano, Emanuele. „European Identity: A Social-Psychological Perspective“ R. K. Herrmann, T. Risse, and M. B. Brewer eds. *Transnational Identities Becoming European in the EU*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 200.

technical project. Scholars claim that the new Euro-polity can only exist by using the means of communication to make such a collective imagining feasible, and the media have largely failed in this aspect. The lack of a common European language and culture negatively affect establishing European media.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the lack of a European media negatively affects construction of a European identity. Differences in language and culture among the member states make producing advertisements for the whole of Europe very difficult. Moreover, people usually prefer watching national or regional TV channels or read national or local newspapers.

A lot has been going on at the policy level, with efforts to achieve clarity in regulating the communications sector in an integrated way. It has been a struggle to get the member states to allow a transnational organization such as the EU to meddle in what they see as culturally (broadcasting/audio-visual sector) and economically (telecommunications) strategic sectors. The EU has been continually amending and refining its policy instruments in these fields. With a view to the realization of the internal market and mainly by extensive use of Directives, the EU aimed to accommodate pressure from the member states wishing to reserve some control over their own policies.<sup>25</sup> So, although economically unified, the internal market is still, due to this, legally fragmented to an important degree.<sup>26</sup>

The European Parliament (EP) has emphasized the cultural aspects of the audiovisual policy, in contrast to the Commission, which focuses on the economic aspects of the policy. Different perspectives can also be observed among the member states. Member states such as France, Italy, Belgium and Spain focus on the cultural aspects, while several member states such as the UK, Germany, Luxembourg and Denmark focus on the economic aspects of the policy.

The scope of EU's audiovisual policy deals with film and program production, dissemination of audiovisual content through radio and TV broadcasting, CDs, DVDs and the Internet. The audiovisual policy also includes organizing a film festival, subsidizing TV and film productions and setting content quotas for broadcasters.<sup>27</sup> It might well be concluded that the EU audiovisual policy has primarily economic goals, such as enlarging and harmonizing the European media market, encouraging competition, promoting audio-visual industries and new technology. The goals of promoting European self-sufficiency in media and indirectly contributing to the construction of European identity are treated as secondary. The audiovisual policy of the EU was firstly introduced as a Single Market policy, rather than a cultural policy.

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<sup>24</sup> Risse, Thomas. „An Emerging European Public Sphere? Theoretical Clarifications and Empirical Indicators.“ Paper presented to the EU Studies Association Conference(EUSA), Nashville, 27-30 March 2003.

<sup>25</sup> „Communication in Crisis: Europe and the Media.“ European Policy Brief (February 2009; 25 August 2009) [ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/ssh/docs/emediate-bursi\\_en.pdf](ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/ssh/docs/emediate-bursi_en.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> de Smaele, Hedwig. „Audiovisual Policy in the Enlarged European Union.“ *Trends in Communications* 12:4 (2004).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

The idea of a publicly funded pan-European TV channel was first suggested by the EP in 1980, which prepared a resolution on „Radio and TV broadcasting in the EC“. In addition to the promotion of pan-European TV channels, the EP and the Commission also tried to encourage partial Europeanization of the audiovisual productions sector, hoping that this would lead to the emergence of a „European audiovisual space“ or a „Europe of viewers“. Article 128 of the Maastricht Treaty mentions the audiovisual sector as an area of potential EU intervention, but many member states resist EU involvement in the audiovisual policy. Among the member states, France can be considered to be the biggest supporter of the involvement of the EU in audiovisual policy.

The Commission supported the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in developing two pan-European channels: The Eurikon experiment in 1982 and Europa TV in 1985.<sup>28</sup> They collapsed within a year, because neither viewers nor advertisers were attracted by the channels. Therefore, many national governments refused to secure the EU-wide distribution of its signals and provide adequate funding. The Eurikon experiment was conducted under the leadership of EBU, with the participation of 15 European broadcasters and the European Community (EC). Each of the contributing broadcasters took responsibility for one week of transmissions. Eurikon was not intended to be a permanent European TV channel. It was established as an experimental prototype to help its initiators evaluate the feasibility of a real and permanent pan-European TV channel, but the audiences reacted unfavorably to Eurikon's programs.

Later, Europa TV was founded as a consortium of five European public service broadcasters from Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands and Portugal. It was to be financed through contributions from the Dutch government, the European Commission, the participating broadcasting organizations and advertising revenues. The goal of Europa TV was to reflect European culture and contribute to it. Its mission included production and transmission of programs in a non-national format and producing news reported from a European point of view. Its news team was arranged carefully to avoid the dominance of any national group. Facilities for simultaneous translation (in English, Dutch, German and Portuguese) enabled the audience to watch the channel in their native language. Also, subtitling in different languages was provided through teletext. The main reason for the failure of Europa TV were financial difficulties.

Eurosport, which was launched in 1989, and Euronews, which was launched in 1993, have been more successful. However, they have minor roles in terms of audience ratings and they are only accessible via satellite or cable TV.<sup>29</sup> Euronews was established as a consortium between broadcasters from Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece, France, Finland, Belgium, Monaco, Cyprus and Egypt with the financial support of the EU, as a news channel of Europe, and provides world news from a European perspective. It was primarily a French idea in order to prevent the domination of

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<sup>28</sup> Webster, F. (2010).

<sup>29</sup> Servaes, Jan. 2003. The European Information Society: A Wake-up Call. In J. Servaes (ed.), The European Information Society: A Reality Check, 11-32. Bristol, Portland, OR: Intellect.

American culture, and its headquarters is in Lyon, France. The main reason of its establishment was to become „audiovisual arm“ of an emerging Europe.<sup>30</sup> One of its objectives was constructing a European identity and the other one was to compete with CNN. It has between 67-91 million viewers from all over Europe. At the beginning broadcasting was made in five languages at Euronews, but today broadcasting is mostly in English and French. It tries to construct a sense of Europeanness among its viewers. One of the main differences between Euronews and Europa TV is that it does not try to attract a general audience through a wide range of programs; rather it limits itself to news and programs on current affairs. Moreover, unlike Europa TV, Euronews' programs come from the participating national broadcasters. Its own productions are only related with European institutions and EU-related events.

The main exceptions of the unsuccessful international broadcasting are the channels on sports and music, such as Eurosport and MTV Europe. Constructing a pan-European media is a very difficult process, particularly because of the presence of many different languages and cultures within the EU. Closely related to the lack of a pan-European media, the lack of a „uniform journalistic and media culture“ in the member states has also negatively affected the establishment of European media. The organization of journalism, the training of journalists, and historically established ethical standards differ from one member state to another.

## Conclusion

The end of the XX century, on a global scale, marked the formation of a new type of cultural space, founded on the development of technology, media and communication. These tendencies spurred a sociological debate, which defined the concept of an information, or network society, characterized by a new type of services, information distribution systems, merging of media and telecommunications systems, etc. As a result, information society came at the forefront not only in a theoretical sense, but also in the sense of policy making at the government level, exemplified especially in the EU member-states, and the Union itself.

The societal aspects of the development of communication technology, media and media institutions are considered a significant political factor and a new source of political power. Media's aggressive societal role (informing, influencing public opinion) has resulted in some significant political consequences, such as the intensification of the significance of public opinion, the public relations system, the development of new forms of journalist, etc., all extraordinarily important and interesting for a serious analysis.

Given that audiovisual media content is more readily available than ever, EU media policy aims at setting the European standards for these services, so that national borders won't stand in the way of reaching viewers and users. It might well be concluded that the EU audiovisual policy has primarily economic goals, such as enlarging and harmonizing the European media market, encouraging competition,

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<sup>30</sup> Casero, Andreu. „European-wide Television and The Construction of European Identity: The Case of Euronews“ (7 January 2006). [http://www.iua.upf.es/formats/formats3/cas\\_a.htm](http://www.iua.upf.es/formats/formats3/cas_a.htm)

promoting audio-visual industries and new technology. The goals of promoting European self-sufficiency in media and indirectly contributing to the construction of European identity are treated as secondary. The audiovisual policy of the EU was firstly introduced as a Single Market policy, rather than a cultural policy.

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