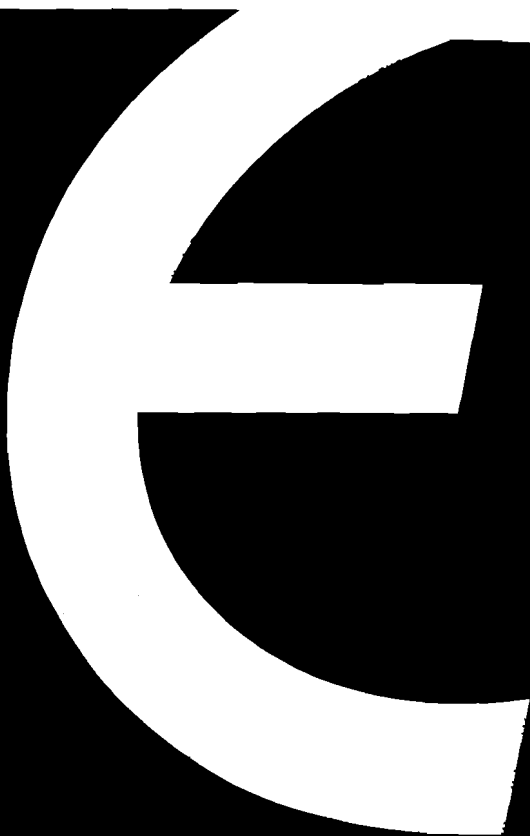


# Towards a European television policy



## European File

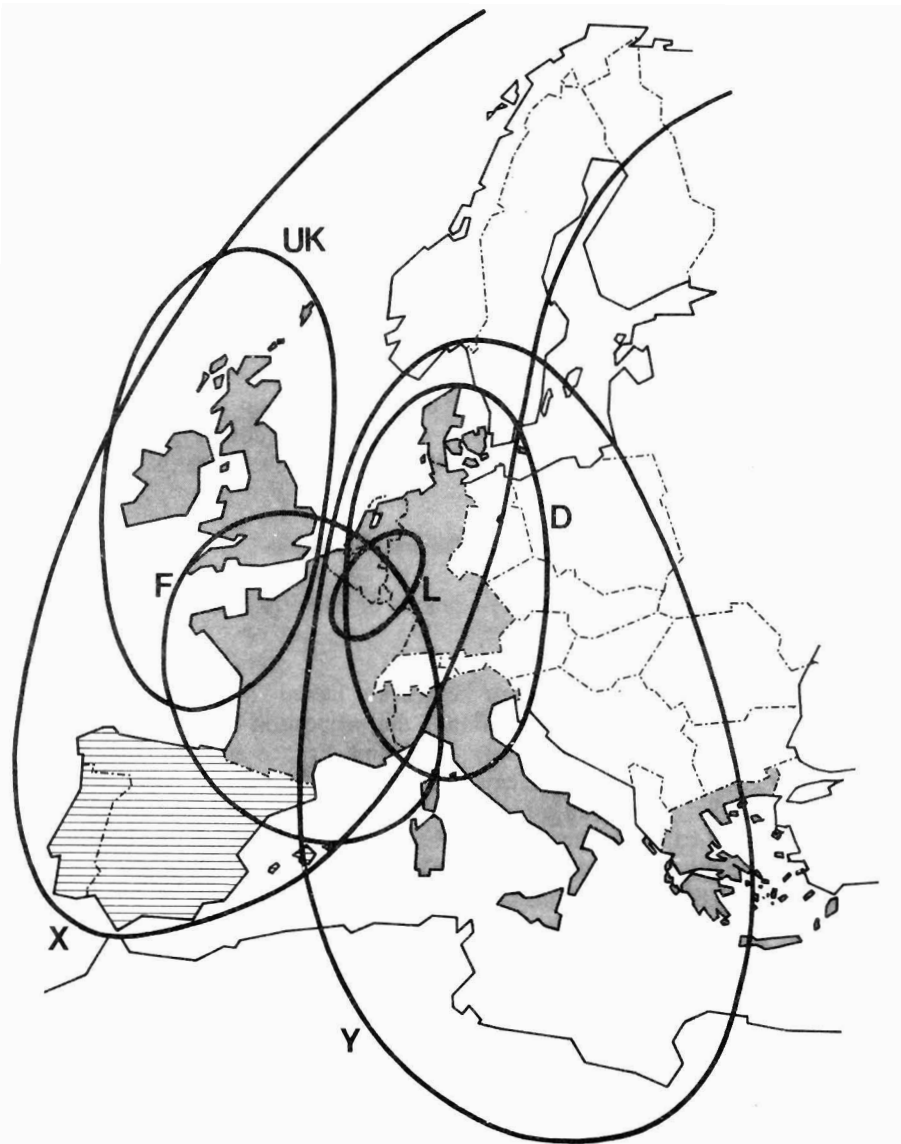
**T**ens of millions of Europeans already receive up to a dozen national or foreign television channels by cable daily. A few million tune in to programmes broadcast by satellite, such as Sky Channel, an independent British undertaking, or TV 5, a joint initiative by francophone national television stations. But this is only a beginning. It has been estimated that by the end of the decade, viewers in most European countries will be able to watch, apart from their usual stations, up to five satellite TV channels, 30 national stations transmitted by cable and a host of other programmes broadcast from countries throughout the continent. By the 1990s, at the touch of a button, millions of Europeans may be able to choose between an English soccer match, a French news programme or an Italian documentary, with translations into their own language, at the touch of a button, either on sound or through teletext subtitles.

Cable and satellite projects are already under preparation throughout Europe. Some are strictly national. Others involve more than one country. The European Community is taking an increasing interest in these developments.

### **The technological challenge and its implications**

Far from impeding one another, the advance of cable and satellite television is mutually beneficial.

- **Cable:** Almost 25% of European homes are linked to tele-distribution networks. In Belgium and the Netherlands the proportion of cabled homes has reached 85% and 65% respectively. Germany, France and the United Kingdom are giving great encouragement to the development of cable networks. Technologically, enormous advances are being made with the switch from coaxial copper cable to silicon-based fibre optic cables, which operate through modulated light rays instead of electric currents. Although more costly at present, fibre optics can transmit many more signals of better quality than traditional cables. The creation of modern cable networks will allow a whole range of new services to be provided in the home, including two-way communication systems: videophones, information on the weather, cooking recipes, theatre times, transport news, reservations, purchases and banking transactions. In other words, we are moving towards a time when the broadcasting – possibly on demand – of radio and television programmes will be just one of the services offered by cable networks. The importance of this service will nevertheless remain unchanged.
- **Satellite:** The use made of these transmitters high above the earth, acting as a kind of mirror amplifying electromagnetic waves, has also extended from telephone to television. The first intercontinental telecommunications satellite 'Early Bird' had a capacity of about 100 watts. The newest examples, launched from 1985 onwards, will pack 3 000 watts and more. These are known as direct broadcasting satellites. Their signals will be received directly in the home through a small dish-shaped aerial about 60 to 90 centimetres in diameter. At



**Reception zones for direct satellite television for**

- The Federal Republic of Germany (D), France (F), Luxembourg (L) and the United Kingdom (UK), with dish aerials 60 to 90 centimetres wide.
- The European Space Agency (Olympus X + Y), with dish aerials two metres wide. The European Broadcasting Union and Italy will each have a channel in the Olympus satellite.

present, it is necessary to use much larger aerials, up to dozens of metres wide. European direct television satellites will orbit at about 36 000 kilometres above the earth, on a fixed orbit above the equator, where they will be able to remain at a constant speed and angle in relation to the ground. Satellites placed in such an orbit will provide a continuous service without the costly and complex systems for scanning and reception needed for other orbits. The exact position allotted to the satellites of each European country – and the five frequencies allocated to each country – were fixed in 1977 by the International Telecommunications Union, a United Nations body responsible for the control of international broadcasting.

How will the broadcasts from these new satellites be picked up? As we have seen, individual reception will be possible, but the 60 to 90 centimetres wide aerials will be costly at first.<sup>1</sup> What is more, reception will be limited to those satellites orbiting in the sector of space to which the aerial is directed. Alternative possibilities include: a collective aerial for a block of flats or a group of houses, with cable links from each home to an aerial about two metres wide; reception by tele-distribution companies, which could relay programmes to their customers at reasonable prices and prevent the countryside from becoming cluttered with thousands of small dish aerials.

In this way cable can help satellite television to reach more homes and cable companies will be assisted by satellite to offer a more varied range of programmes. This kind of interdependence already exists with current telecommunications satellites. The possibilities for direct reception by individuals or groups offered by satellite television are less attractive in flat, small and heavily populated countries where cable is cheap and easy to introduce. But direct reception will be a great advantage in other areas. Direct satellite television will extend the range of available station frequencies by using long wave bands which are not suitable for ground transmissions. Satellite signals will also be easily received in all parts of an extremely large catchment area. As a result it will be possible to broadcast to the 'grey areas', such as hilly and little populated districts, which can only be reached through ground transmitters at present, through costly booster stations and for which a cable network would be too expensive. Such areas are found not only in the European Community but also in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Pacific. It is for these markets that American, Japanese and European aerospace and telecommunications firms will eventually be competing.

The economic potential of this new stage in the development of television is enormous. Two examples are:

- Aerospace industry: the industry has estimated that by the year 2000 the European space telecommunications sector, including radio and television broadcasting and ground equipment will be worth several tens of billions of

---

<sup>1</sup> At least 225 ECUs. One ECU (European currency unit) = about £0.60, Ir. £0.72 or US \$0.76 (at exchange rates current on 8 November 1984).

ECUs a year. The company Arianespace, which manages the European Ariane missile, forecasts about ten satellite launchings a year up to the end of the century.

- Advertising and broadcasting: here, also, the outlook is encouraging. The first direct television satellites, capable of beaming programmes into people's homes, will allow each television station in Europe to reach an audience of several hundred millions. The implications are obvious enough for receipts from advertising, subscriptions, rentals or fees for hiring a decoder which will give access to programmes.

The march of new technologies in this area does, however, pose two important challenges to the Community:

- The increasing internationalization of broadcasting has created the need for harmonization in two areas, technical and legal. In the technical field, the continent remains divided between the rival Pal and Secam television systems. This discourages mass production, blunts the competitive edge of European manufacturers and increases the price of televisions for consumers. In the legal field, a whole range of national regulations control broadcasting activities and create unjustifiable barriers to cross-frontier transmissions within the Community.
- An increase in the number of broadcasting channels and stations and the length of hours of transmission also calls for action to encourage the production of new programmes. Most Community countries will have 30 television stations — possibly by the end of the 1980s — transmitting 10 hours of programmes a day. A European Commission report has estimated that the demand for programmes will total between one and one and a half million hours a year, including between 300 000 and 500 000 hours of cinematic programmes such as films, telefilms, series, soap-operas and documentaries. Even allowing for the purchase of half this material outside the Community and 25% repeats, there will remain a demand for between 75 000 and 125 000 hours of new programmes generated in the Community each year. Production in the four largest Member States varies at present between 1 000 and 5 000 hours a year. An enormous expansion in programme production is clearly needed. This is a major opportunity for the European industry but also a serious danger. If it fails to keep up with the demand, this gigantic new market will be taken over by American and even Japanese competitors, thereby compounding their economic and cultural penetration of Europe.

The progress of international broadcasting and the preservation of European cultural identity will play an increasingly important part in the construction of the European Community. Television is a sunrise industry. It is also one of the principal means of expressing the rich diversity of European cultures, as well as transmitting information, ideas and opinions. Television can make a major contribution to the promotion of a sense of common historical, cultural, economic and political destiny amongst Community citizens.

There is no specific reference to television in the Community treaties. But the Community can and must act in this area on the basis of the common market laid down in the Treaty of Rome for commercial goods and services, including social or cultural services. The Treaty therefore forbids any restriction on the free transmission of radio and television broadcasts from one Community country to another. It also gives companies the right to broadcast their programmes to other member countries, and viewers and listeners the right to choose a station in another Member State. Exceptions to this principle are allowed only for strict reasons of public order, safety or health. This covers measures to protect children and adolescents, limits on the broadcasting of advertising across national boundaries and other restrictions relating to copyright laws.

The significance for the Community of new developments in television was underlined by the European Parliament in its resolutions of 12 March 1982 and 30 March 1984. The Parliament said that the internationalization of television called for a Community policy which would prevent distortions and irreversible imbalances. Community institutions must share in the key decisions on the future of television in order to prevent damage to the interests of Community citizens. They must also ensure that the development of television leads to an increase in audiovisual information on Community problems and deepens the mutual understanding of the peoples of the Community. Following these Parliament initiatives, the European Commission published two reports, one, in 1983, on the current situation and trends in European television and one, in 1984, on the creation of a common broadcasting market, covering both satellite and cable television. On 22 June 1984, the first formal meeting of Community ministers for cultural affairs devoted a considerable time to discussion of the future of television.

### **Technical harmonization**

The European Commission has put forward a policy for the whole of the telecommunications industry which calls for common standards, increased industrial cooperation and the opening of public procurement markets to competition between Member States. The Community's Council of Ministers has recently adopted two recommendations to this effect. As the European Parliament pointed out, the standardization of transmission systems is essential to bring about in the medium term a reduction in the price of equipment and a quantitative and qualitative improvement in services. This should also be an industrial policy objective in order to increase the competitiveness of European industry in the face of Japanese and US rivals who enjoy large, unified domestic markets. It would at the same time open the way to a freer trade in television programmes and the creation of future multilingual European programmes. It is a matter of regret that some Community countries appear reluctant to unshackle television companies in the European Radiodiffusion Union who recommended unanimously a switch to a single, more powerful transmission system – the 'C/MAC packets' system – to replace both Pal and Secam.

## **Legal harmonization**

It is clearly impossible to make programmes for a dozen countries while respecting every letter of the often contradictory broadcasting laws of each country. Following a request from the European Parliament, the European Commission's green paper on the creation of a common market for broadcasting makes some preliminary suggestions on the legal consequences of the new audiovisual technologies. Besides proposals intended to enforce directly applicable passages in the Treaty of Rome, the Commission called for a number of common legal decisions.

- Advertising: the importance of television and radio advertising for the economy and consumers is well understood. The coordination of some aspects of national advertising laws must be based on an acceptance of the principle of advertising. It must also lay down restrictions to be applied at Community level. Standard conditions for the use of advertising should be framed in a Community directive which would also recognize the need for a system of control in each country, possibly based on existing codes of conduct and self-regulatory machinery. Television must also continue to respect other European directives, such as the recently adopted measure to protect consumers from misleading advertising.
- Protection of the young: a Community directive is needed to harmonize national rules on the protection of young people. This should restrict or ban programmes which could harm the physical, mental and moral development of adolescents, such as programmes containing pornography, violence or racist views.
- Right of reply: a degree of harmonization is also needed here to give the citizens of each country, as well as foreign viewers and people living abroad, the right of reply and correction. The aim would be to establish more or less comparable rights in all countries for people to protect their good name from criticism in the audiovisual media of other Member States.
- Copyright: copyright laws and the conditions under which intellectual and cultural activities are marketed are subject at present to a variety of national provisions. This state of affairs can lead to infringements of copyright through unauthorized foreign broadcasts and can impede transnational broadcasting. The chief problem is with programmes simultaneously broadcast abroad. A system of licences is needed by which the copyright holder would give up his right to refuse permission for a broadcast in return for a guarantee of a fair payment, probably laid down by convention.

## **Support for programme making**

The scale of the cultural as well as industrial challenge faced by Europe has already been described above. Will the European programme-making industry

achieve the scale necessary for economic survival? If so, can the continent preserve its richly varied cultural identity?

- To encourage European programme-making, the European Parliament has suggested financial aid such as soft loans, tax exemptions and above all a Community fund to subsidize the making of television programmes. An example has been provided in Canada where the Broadcast Development Fund was set up in 1983 to finance up to one-third of the production costs of cinema, theatre or variety programmes. The conditions are that the producer must have a promise of a slot in prime broadcasting time on a Canadian television station and that the programme must be mainly Canadian produced, written, acted, directed and filmed.
- To safeguard the cultural variety of Europe, the European Parliament also called for a cinematic anti-dumping policy and rules setting aside broadcasting time for European and non-European programmes.

At their inaugural meeting in 1984, Community ministers for cultural affairs discussed a number of these problems.

- They agreed a resolution which aimed to ensure adequate time for European-made programmes in the audiovisual media. They also agreed to investigate ways of giving international support to the programme-making industry.
- As far as they are competent to do so, the ministers also decided to take steps to ensure a reasonable distribution of activity throughout the audiovisual media. The aim is to cope with the reduction in cinema-going, which could reach catastrophic proportions for film-makers if other forms of compensating revenue are not found.
- To safeguard the rights of programme makers and the future of the European programme production industry from low-price copies of programmes, the ministers passed a resolution which aims to prevent and punish 'audiovisual piracy', or the illegal copying of films and TV shows. The possibility is also being studied of a tax on copying equipment or blank tapes.

Action is also needed to aid those working in cultural activities. From now on the European Social Fund is empowered to finance national training and work creation schemes for those working in the arts. The European Commission is considering ways of improving their social security status.

### **Towards European television programmes**

The Commission and European Parliament already provide a number of technical facilities for televising Community events. In 1984, the Commission helped to stage Euro-show, a pre-election variety programme broadcast by a large number



of Community TV stations, and a series of short cartoons on European subjects. More needs to be done and there is no shortage of ideas.

- A pan-European television programme? The European Broadcasting Union, whose Eurovision system organizes the showing of international sporting events, the celebrated annual song contest and daily news exchanges between stations, experimented in 1982 with a new programme, Eurikon, which was co-produced by a number of stations in different countries and broadcast throughout Europe in different languages. The IBA in Britain, RAI in Italy, ORF in Austria, NOS in the Netherlands and ARD in Germany each organized a week of programmes broadcast by satellite to the 15 EBU countries involved in the experiment, from Finland to Algeria. The programmes were transmitted, however, on a closed circuit and not to the general public, in order to avoid excessively high royalties. In the wake of this experiment, a number of national TV stations are working together to produce pan-European programmes to be transmitted through the European Space Agency's Olympus satellite when it is launched by the Ariane rocket in 1987.

These initiatives have received the backing of Community institutions. The European Commission has pledged its political and financial support for these activities of the EBA and its members, on the condition that the initiatives come from the TV stations themselves and that they bear the bulk of the costs. The European Parliament has even suggested that the Community should pay part of the cost of hiring a satellite channel for this European programme and should offer a number of facilities such as interpretation and technical installations for broadcasts from Brussels or Strasbourg. The Parliament was adamant that the station should offer a complete service (including entertainment, information and educative programmes), that it should be multilingual, should appeal to all European citizens, should adopt a European perspective and should be produced by professionals from a number of different countries.

- A specialized information programme? Both Parliament and Commission have floated the idea of a television station devoted entirely to Community information, on a pattern already existing in the United States. Such a programme would complement the national and pan-European channels and fill unsatisfied political and cultural needs. The channel would mainly be aimed at young people, already reasonably well informed and interested in European news. It could offer compilations and combinations of national and Community news and information, mainly drawn from the material of EBU national television channels.



'If we were beginning the European Community all over again,' said Jean Monnet, its founding father, 'we should begin with culture.' By linking together European culture and the new technologies, which hold the key to future prosperity and employment, a European television policy is now a major imperative ■

---

The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the official views of the institutions of the Community. Reproduction authorized.

---

### Commission of the European Communities

Information offices (countries fully or partially English speaking\*)

**Ireland** 39 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 – Tel. 71 22 44

**United Kingdom** 8 Storey's Gate, London SW1P 3AT – Tel. 222 81 22  
– 4 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF1 9SG – Tel. 371631  
– 7 Alva Street, Edinburgh EH2 4PH – Tel. 225 2058  
– Windsor House, 9/15 Bedford Street,  
Belfast BT2 7EG – Tel. 40708

**Australia** Capitol Centre, Franklin Street, PO Box 609,  
Manuka 2603, Canberra ACT - Tel. (062) 95 50 00

**Canada** Inn of the Provinces-Office Tower, Suite 1110, 350 Sparks Street,  
Ottawa Ont. K1R 7S8 – Tel. (613) 238 64 64

**USA** 2100 M Street, NW, Suite 707,  
Washington DC 20037 - USA – Tel. (202) 862-9500  
– 245 East 47th Street, 1 Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza,  
New York, NY 10017 - USA – Tel. (212) 371-3804

---

\* Offices also exist in other countries including all Member States.

