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Viewers into Europeans?: How the European Union Tried to Europeanize the Audiovisual Sector, and Why It Failed

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Abstract: From the early 1980s, the European Commission and Parliament made a series of attempts to use television as a tool to foster a European identity in audiences and strengthen popular support for European integration. In this paper, I first examine their efforts to help set up a pan-European multilingual television channel in order to confront the audience with non-national (and thus supposedly European and “Europeanizing”) programs. Second, I trace their attempts to foster the Europeanization of the audiovisual productions sector by, in the first instance, subsidizing multinational co-productions. I show that in both areas those efforts have largely come to nothing. They stumbled over the resistance mounted by some national governments and/or were frustrated by continued audience preferences for national as opposed to foreign or non-national television programs. All this, I contend, points to the underlying difficulties of trying to promote among mass publics a cultural form that stands divorced from their respective national contexts, be it through television or other means, and it hints at the formidable obstacles that hinder the European Union’s attempts to forge among Europeans a shared identity beyond the nation-state.

Résumé: Dès le début des années 80, la Commission européenne et le Parlement européen tentèrent à plusieurs reprises d'utiliser la télévision comme moyen d'encourager une identité européenne chez les téléspectateurs et de les motiver à appuyer l'intégration européenne. Dans un premier temps, j'ai examiné leurs efforts pour aider à lancer une chaîne de télévision multilingue paneuropéenne. Le but de cette chaîne était de présenter aux téléspectateurs des émissions dénationalisées (et ainsi censées être européennes et «européanisantes»). Dans un deuxième temps, j'ai étudié leurs tentatives pour favoriser l'eupéanisation du marché audiovisuel, essentiellement en subventionnant les co-productions multinationales. Dans ces deux domaines, ces efforts n'ont pas abouti à grand-chose. Ils se sont heurtés à la résistance dont ont fait preuve certains gouvernements nationaux et/ou ont échoué du fait que les téléspectateurs continuaient à préférer les émissions de télévision nationales plutôt que des émissions étrangères ou dénationalisées. Tout cela, je l'affirme, indique les difficultés sous-jacentes auxquelles on se heurte si l'on essaie de promouvoir parmi les publics de masse une

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forme de culture qui est séparée de leurs contextes nationaux respectifs, que ce soit au moyen de la télévision ou par d'autres méthodes. Et cela donne un aperçu des obstacles énormes confrontant l'Union européenne dans ses efforts de forger parmi les Européens une identité collective au-delà de l'état-nation.

Introduction

Compared to items such as agriculture or the single European currency, audiovisual policy has always occupied a relatively low position on the policy agenda of the European Union (EU).¹ Nonetheless, from the early 1980s the European Parliament and the European Commission tried to initiate a range of measures relating to broadcasting and the audiovisual productions sector. These have encountered varying degrees of success, and attracted varying amounts of public and scholarly attention.

The EU has paid the comparatively greatest attention to those audiovisual activities that have the most direct bearing on its traditional core mandate of forging a single market on the inside and a unified commercial policy towards the rest of the world. The most prominent and most written-about of those is the Television Without Frontiers (TWF) Directive, first adopted in 1989 and slightly amended in 1997. The directive abolished most legal barriers to the transmission and reception of television signals between the member states. Moreover, it imposed an (albeit non-binding and highly controversial) quota regime which was intended to aid European producers by curtailing the inflow of audiovisual material from overseas, and which the Union has thus far managed to uphold during world trade negotiations against fervent opposition spearheaded by the United States (see Collins, 1994a, 1995; Schlesinger, 1996, 1997).

In this article, however, I leave aside the TWF Directive and the related quota row in order to concentrate on a *second category* of audiovisual policies, and attempted policies, by the European Union. For the most part, these have been pursued more discreetly than the TWF agenda and have attracted less public and scholarly scrutiny. At the same time, they have a far more proactive and interventionist flavour. And they show that in designing its audiovisual agenda the Union was driven as much by social, cultural, and political motives as by purely economic ones and, in particular, that it sought to use audiovisual policy as a tool to engender in viewers a European identity and thereby strengthen popular support for integration. In the first part of this paper, I look at Commission- and European Parliament-driven attempts to promote a pan-European television channel in order to confront Europeans with non-national (and thus presumably European and "Europeanizing") programs. In the second part, I turn to efforts by the European Parliament and the Commission to foster the Europeanization of the audiovisual productions sector by, in the first instance, subsidizing multinational co-productions. They hoped that a "mixing and mingling" of national audiovisual formats would, over time, lead to a partial cultural denationalization—or at least a "compatibilization" of sorts—of these formats, widening the market for European audiovisual producers and nurturing a European identity in viewers.

I show that by the end of the 1980s the European Union had achieved little in both fields. A pan-European television channel, established with Commission support in 1985, faltered after barely one year of operations. The reasons for its failure were a widespread audience aversion to its attempted non-national programming format and the refusal by many national governments to secure the Union-wide distribution of its signals and adequate funding. Similarly, initial proposals by the Commission for the European Union to subsidize multinational co-productions were blocked by many member-state governments. What audiovisual measures they did adopt in the end amounted to little more than attempts to boost the production of domestic output and its circulation throughout the Union. But these did little to overcome the cultural and linguistic obstacles which continue to tie many producers to their national markets.

As was suggested, the European Commission's and Parliament's attempts to partially Europeanize the audiovisual productions sector and, still more so, to promote a pan-European television channel have thus far received relatively little attention. This is one reason why it is worthwhile to spend some time discussing them. The second reason is that what happened in those fields from the early 1980s onwards conveys some broader lessons. For those concerned with the role of mass communication in socially and culturally fragmented political systems it offers an interesting case study of how, in a contemporary context, audiovisual policy was used as a presumed tool to achieve wider social, political, and “identitive” ends, and of the formidable difficulties that stood in the way of such an undertaking. Students of European integration, for their part, can find in the story of the EU's largely unsuccessful attempts to partially Europeanize the audiovisual sector some important clues as to the obstacles that face attempts to forge among Europeans a shared identity beyond the nation-state.

The European television channel

The idea for a European television channel has its origins in a motion for a resolution tabled in the European Parliament in 1980 (European Parliament, 1980). Claiming that “reporting of European Community problems by national radio and television companies and the press . . . [has] been inadequate, in particular as regards integration,” it called for the “establishment of a European radio and television company with its own channel.” Mirroring national public service broadcasters, this channel was to cater to a general public and feature programs in “politics, education, cultural information, entertainment and also advertising.” It was to broadcast multilingually so as to appeal to the widest possible audience across Europe. The motion was adopted by the European Parliament in 1982, giving rise to a European Parliament resolution similar in content and wording (European Parliament, 1982).²

In 1983, those demands were taken up by the Commission in an interim report to the European Parliament titled *Realities and Tendencies in European Television: Perspectives and Options* (Commission of the EC, 1983). While the report also dealt with issues relating to the free “flow” of television signals across the Union and support mechanisms for European program productions, it gave

“first consideration to the practical possibilities of getting a European television programme onto the screen. . . .” As had the European Parliament before it, the Commission called for a programming mix of “news, politics, education, culture, entertainment and sport, in which the European viewpoint would be based on the ideals and realities of the cultural unity of Europe.” It also indicated that it was willing to give financial support to a pan-European channel which offered such programming.

Such repeated pleas by the European Parliament and the Commission on behalf of a pan-European television channel helped give the impetus for two concrete projects in the 1980s. The first was the Eurikon experiment in 1982; the second was Europa TV some three years later.

Eurikon

The Eurikon experiment was conducted under the auspices of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU),³ with the participation of 15 European broadcasters and the European Community (see Collins, 1993b; Negrine & Papatthanassopoulos, 1990; Zimmer, 1989). Of the participating broadcasters, five (from Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, and the U.K.) contributed programs. Eurikon entailed the production of an experimental television program which, over a period of five weeks, was distributed in closed-circuit format to “invited guests of the participating broadcasters and to panels recruited for the purpose of audience research” (Collins, 1993b, pp. 165-166). Eurikon featured news, documentaries, sport, “light” entertainment, “serious” music, feature films, and religious as well as children's programs. About one third of all programs were produced specifically for Eurikon. Each of the contributing five broadcasters assumed overall responsibility for one week of transmissions. They tried to fill programming slots in their respective week in the first instance with their own productions, and for the remaining slots solicited material from the other four.

Eurikon was never intended to be a permanent European television channel. Instead, it was designed as an experimental prototype. It was to provide its initiators with first-hand experience in pan-European broadcasting, and help them evaluate the feasibility of a “real” and permanent pan-European television channel in the future. Of particular interest to audience researchers was the acceptability of foreign programming formats to national audiences and the effectiveness and audience acceptance of multichannel audio and teletext subtitling in different languages (Collins, 1993b).

From the perspective of the European Parliament and the Commission, the Eurikon experiment yielded disappointing results. For the most part, audiences reacted unfavourably to Eurikon's output, finding it hard to comprehend and relate to. In addition to cultural barriers there were linguistic ones as Eurikon's dubbing and subtitling provisions were deemed unsatisfactory. Reactions of this type prevailed throughout the duration of the Eurikon experiment, even though each of the five weeks featured different programming and scheduling formulas. To further complicate matters, while viewers from different countries were united in their

dislike for Eurikon's programs, the precise reasons for their dislike tended to diverge along national lines (Collins, 1993b).

Not least because of such a heterogeneity of audience criticisms and preferences, Eurikon provided few positive clues that could have aided the design of a permanent European television channel as it was envisioned by the European Parliament and the Commission. Indeed, the main lesson which flowed from the Eurikon experiment was that the cultural and linguistic obstacles to successful pan-European broadcasting were potent. They seemed likely to face any potential future pan-European broadcaster as well.

Europa TV

After Eurikon it took another three years for the first publicly funded and truly pan-European television channel to take to the air. Europa TV, which started its transmissions in October 1985, was founded after protracted negotiations involving the governments of the member states and their respective national broadcasting organizations. In the process, some major European public service broadcasters, such as the BBC and France's Antenne 2, decided—or were made to decide by their respective national authorities—not to participate in the project.

In the end, Europa TV came into being as a consortium of five European public service broadcasters from Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, and Portugal. It was to be financed through contributions from the Dutch government, the European Commission, the participating broadcast organizations, and, as was hoped at the time, through advertising revenues (European Cultural Foundation & the European Institute for the Media, 1988; see also Dill, 1989). Its initial three-year budget was 35 million Swiss francs.⁴

In many respects, Europa TV lived up to the expectations that had previously been spelled out by European Parliament and the Commission for a pan-European channel. It aspired to be pan-European not only with regard to its geographical reach but also its programming content. Its programs, which consisted of news, drama, sport, music, and shows for children, “was intended to meet the following criteria: it had to be European, complementary, independent, universal and original . . . [and it was to reflect] European culture and . . . [contribute] to it” (European Cultural Foundation & the European Institute for the Media, 1988, p. 99). Though it also featured “domestic” programs obtained from the participating national broadcast organizations and national productions bought on the open market, Europa TV's mission included the production and transmission of programs in a non-national format and the reporting of news and current affairs not from a national but from a “European point of view.” Its news team, for instance, “was carefully structured to avoid the dominance of any single national group” and a “non-national perspective was encouraged by all available means” (Maggiore, 1990, p. 71). This was aimed at by, among other things, making sure that events were covered by a national of a country other than the one in which they took place.

To overcome language barriers, Europa TV's visual image was transmitted alongside several sound channels. Facilities for simultaneous translation (in

English, Dutch, German, and Portuguese) enabled audiences to receive the channel in their native tongue. In addition, subtitling in different languages was provided through teletext.

After an initial phase during which Europa TV had only been available in the Netherlands it expanded its reach to 4.5 million households across Europe. This included access to 1.5 million households in Portugal where it was transmitted terrestrially (Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 1990). Europa TV's initiators predicted this expansion to continue at a rapid pace which would soon allow the channel to reach over 30 million homes and conquer a sizable audience share in the process (European Cultural Foundation & the European Institute for the Media, 1988). And, as the European Parliament and the Commission hoped at the time, in thus demonstrating the viability of trans-European broadcasting, Europa TV would assume a broader significance by inducing commercially operated broadcasters to follow into its pan-European footsteps.

Yet things turned out very differently for Europa TV. In November 1986 it was forced to cease operations, barely over one year after it had come into existence. The causes of this failure merit some closer attention.

Why Europa TV failed

The most immediate reasons for Europa TV's demise were financial. After its first year of operations, the channel had already exhausted its initial three-year budget (Zimmer, 1989). In the end, even a £720,000⁵ emergency grant by the Commission could not save Europa TV. At the time of its closure, its debts had accumulated to the equivalent of £3.7 million (Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 1990).

These financial difficulties could in part be traced to the failure by the participating broadcasters (and often indirectly by their respective national governments) to ensure that Europa TV could operate on more than a minuscule fraction of the funding that many domestic public service broadcasters use up annually. Moreover, during Europa TV's preparation phase and throughout its short life the authorities in some participating countries and/or their respective broadcasters were engaged in a range of quarrels and put forward demands which further reduced the channel's economic viability. A good example was Portugal's insistence that Europa TV broadcast not only in English, German, and Dutch, but also in Portuguese. Given that Europa TV's signal was distributed widely in Portugal this seemed fair enough, but at the same time raised expenditures for translation facilities and multiple soundtracks to the point where they ate up half of Europa TV's budget (Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 1990). A further blow came when Belgium refused to carry Europa TV on its cable system. By doing so, it prevented the channel from reaching the sizable Dutch-speaking market in that country and thereby reduced its potential to attract advertising revenues (Lange & Renaud, 1989). Furthermore, even though Europa TV had its operational headquarters in the Netherlands and received subsidies from the Dutch government, the latter refused to exempt it from a rule prohibiting foreign channels distributed in the Netherlands from carrying subtitles so as to help protect Dutch broadcasters from foreign competition (Zimmer, 1989). This hampered Europa TV's appeal to those

Dutch viewers who would have preferred subtitles to (often poorly perceived) dubbing, and thereby lowered its economic viability still further.

In addition to suffering financial difficulties, Europa TV was plagued by administrative problems throughout its short life and by a general lack of direction and leadership. At the root of this were rivalries between national broadcasters and their refusal to delegate to the EBU the powers it would have needed to effectively take charge of the channel. All the while their *own* willingness to take full responsibility for running Europa TV often remained scant. This was evident not only in the limited funding they provided to the channel, but also in their frequent failure to fill the programming slots allocated to them. Overall, even though they themselves had brought Europa TV into being, it appeared that the participating national broadcasters generally refused “to regard Europa as their own offspring” (European Cultural Foundation & the European Institute for the Media, 1988, p. 99).

Yet, more than any other factor, it was Europa TV's lack of appeal to its potential audience (due to the limited distribution of its signals, at any rate scarce) which sealed its fate. This was at the bottom of its failure to attract advertisers and thereby become economically viable. Indeed, so low was Europa TV's attractiveness to viewers that even after it had begun to offer commercial slots *free of charge* in an effort to bring itself to the attention of potential advertisers, few made use of the offer (Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 1990).

How to account for Europa TV's low popularity? Quite possibly, its cultural and educational aspirations combined with its modest funding were by themselves sufficient to ensure the channel's wanting attractiveness to a mass audience. But beyond this, it was Europa TV's attempt to appeal to an audience as culturally and linguistically fragmented as the West European one which posed a major stumbling block. This can be inferred from the Eurikon experience, which demonstrated just how powerful a range of cultural and linguistic obstacles hamper the feasibility of non-national broadcasting in Europe, and is further born out by the fact that Europa TV's fate resembled that of commercially operated pan-European satellite broadcasters in the 1980s, even though these boasted a more solid financial backing and decidedly fewer cultural and educational ambitions than Europa TV.

Just like Europa TV, those commercial channels had started out with the aim of providing a linguistically fragmented audience across Europe with at least partially non-national programs. Instead of adopting Europa TV's failed strategy of offering multiple sound channels, they broadcast in English exclusively and sought to specialize in programs for which linguistic elements seem less significant, such as music and sport.⁶ Yet, echoing the fate of Europa TV, these channels perished or, alternatively, were forced to refocus on a predominantly domestic audience in order to become economically viable. This, for example, was the case with Super Channel. In 1989 it lost an average of £1 million per month. Its major pan-European competitor at the time fared equally poorly: Sky Television had lost, by varying accounts, between £10.2 and £14.6 million in the one year up to

June 1987 (Collins, 1989). It, too, had little prospect of acquiring a sufficiently large audience share to survive as a pan-European channel in the long run. Both broadcasters subsequently relinquished their pan-European aspirations and concentrated on the British market, after which their financial lot improved.⁷ The Swiss-based European Business Channel, which had started operations in 1988 and offered financial news to a pan-European audience, encountered an even harsher fate: in 1990, large financial losses forced it to close down permanently (see Noam, 1991).

A good way to illustrate the difficulties inherent to the quest by Eurikon, Europa TV, and their commercial would-be pan-European counterparts to appeal to an audience as culturally and linguistically fragmented as that in Europe is through the often-cited concept of “cultural discount.” It denotes why “a particular program rooted in one culture, and thus attractive in that environment, will have a diminished appeal elsewhere as viewers find it difficult to identify with the style, values, beliefs, institutions and behavioural patterns of the material in question” (Hoskins & Mirus, 1988, p. 500). The concept of “cultural discount” is applied most commonly to cross-national situations, that is, to capture the reduced appeal of audiovisual output produced in one national cultural setting and consumed in another (e.g., Finnish films shown to Greek audiences). Yet, in principle, it is equally apt to capture viewers' resistance to programs in a non-national format, a format to which Eurikon, Europa TV, and their commercial pan-European counterparts aspired. To the extent that this non-national format is dissonant with the particular cultural habitus of the viewers in question, its overall attractiveness to those viewers is reduced.

In 1988, after Europa TV's demise and the poor showing of commercially operated pan-European channels, the European Commission openly pondered whether it should help fund a renewed attempt to set up a pan-European broadcaster, “provided it combines the following characteristics: a broadcasting organization which is multinational within Europe, multilingual broadcasts; a multinational audience within a wide European area; European programme content” (Commission of the EC, 1988b, p. 4). Until the launching of Euronews in January 1993, however, Europa TV's fiasco spelled an end to further attempts at non-national broadcasting in Europe.⁸ Instead, the Commission downscaled its audiovisual ambitions to more modest endeavours. For example, it started to hand out several audiovisual prizes, established a training centre for European journalists, and helped organize exchanges of junior television reporters (Maggiore, 1990). Moreover, it sought to promote the Europeanization of the market for audiovisual productions. Before examining this area of policymaking, however, I briefly turn to Euronews, the most recent attempt to set up a multilingual pan-European television channel.

Euronews

Euronews was established in January 1993 as a consortium between (mostly public) broadcasters from Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, France, Belgium, Finland, Monaco, Cyprus, and Egypt. In 1995, the French telecommunications group

Alcatel-Alsthom bought a 49% stake in Euronews' operating society which was later acquired by the British ITN, thus placing it on a kind of semi-commercial footing.⁹ Based in Lyon, Euronews is distributed via cable and satellite, and also serves as a "test pattern substitute" throughout the night for some domestic broadcasters. It broadcasts in English, French, German, Spanish, and Italian.

Euronews, like Europa TV, was designed to cater to a culturally and linguistically fragmented audience. In most other respects, however, it bears little resemblance to the European Commission's and Parliament's earlier plans for a pan-European channel, and it has equally little in common with Europa TV. In the first place, rather than seeking to attract a general audience through a wide range of programming types, Euronews limits itself to news and current affairs programs. Second, Euronews does not, for the most part, attempt to repeat Europa TV's failed strategy of seeking to cover national events from an elusive "European point of view." Instead, the bulk of its programming input—mainly news footage—comes from the participating national broadcasters, and Euronews then produces multilingual soundtracks to accompany it. Euronews' own productions are largely limited to the coverage of European institutions and some EU-related events. Moreover, Euronews has come to feature regular Commission-sponsored programs about EU policies and institutions (such as consumer protection, the single currency, or the role of the European Parliament). These often straddle the boundary between neutral information on the one hand and "infomercial"-type self-promotion on the other.¹⁰

In short, Euronews is pan-European with regard to the audience it seeks to appeal to and its geographic reach. Unlike Europa TV, however, it is above all a forum for the dispersion of nationally produced news footage throughout the Union, not for the development and diffusion of a non-national audiovisual format. If judged by its programming output, Euronews is more a plurinational than a non-national or denationalized broadcaster.

Attempts to Europeanize the audiovisual productions sector

For the European Commission and the European Parliament the promotion of pan-European television channels was important but not the only way in which they hoped to instrumentalize television to foster a European identity in mass audiences. To the same end, they also sought to encourage the partial Europeanization of the audiovisual productions sector in Europe. Together with the envisioned rise of pan-European television channels this would lead to what in Community jargon was often referred to as a "European audiovisual space" or a "Europe of viewers."

Europeanization and Americanization in European Community rhetoric

In almost all the Commission's and the European Parliament's official pronouncements on the issue, hopes that a partial Europeanization of the audiovisual sector in Europe would foster a European identity in audiences surfaced in one form or another, yet they were often overshadowed by arguments of a different kind. These revolved around the assumed relationship between internal economies of scale,

quantity and quality of output, and Europe's external competitiveness, especially vis-à-vis the United States.

Typically, the Commission's and the European Parliament's chain of reasoning went as follows: Linguistic and cultural barriers between the member states had kept the "cultural discount" attached to audiovisual exports from one member state to another so high that national producers had remained tied largely to their home markets. This, in turn, deprived them of sufficiently high economies of scale to bring the quantity and quality of their output up to a level where they could successfully compete against audiovisual producers from, primarily, the United States, both inside the Community and worldwide. While enjoying a globally dominant position, the United States had also conquered a relatively large audiovisual market share in Western Europe, especially in fictional programming. In part, this owed to the fact that among European audiences U.S. productions often carried a lower "cultural discount" than those from many other European countries.¹¹

Indeed, it was the theme of Europe's reliance on programming imports from overseas which became a central plank in the Commission's and the European Parliament's audiovisual rhetoric from the early 1980s onwards. It was portrayed as a threat to what was referred to more or less interchangeably, and with more regard for subtle ambiguity than conceptual consistency, as national cultures, European culture, or European cultural diversity. On top of all this, it was portrayed as costly in economic terms. In 1986, for example, the Commission warned that "[the] economic and cultural dimensions of communications cannot be separated. The gap between the proliferation of equipment and media and the stagnation of creative content production capacities is a major problem for the societies of Europe; it lays them open to domination by other powers with a better performance in the programming content industry" (Commission of the EC, 1986, p. 4). Similarly, in 1988 it cautioned that "while satellites are getting ready to overwhelm us with hundreds of new television channels, Europe runs the risk of seeing its own industry squeezed out and its market taken over by American and Japanese industrialists and producers. . . . [A] European response is required. . . ." (Commission of the EC, 1988a, pp. 5-6). And Jacques Delors, in his first speech to the European Parliament after taking office as Commission President in 1985, proclaimed that

the culture industry will tomorrow be one of the biggest industries, a creator of wealth and jobs. Under the terms of the Treaty [of Rome] we do not have the resources to implement a cultural policy; but we are trying to tackle it along economic lines. It is not simply a question of television programs. We have to build a powerful European culture industry that will enable us to be in control of both the medium and its content, maintaining our standards of civilization. . . . (quoted in Collins, 1994b, p. 90)

Leaving aside the question of its factual merits, the Commission's resort to the "cultural defence" argument, which was echoed in calls by the European Parliament for a greater audiovisual role for the Community¹², was tactically astute.

First, it sought (and succeeded to some extent) to shift the terms of the audiovisual debate away from the question of European identity construction on the inside (too outspoken a commitment which left the Community vulnerable to accusations of wanting to disseminate “cultural propaganda,” “flatten national identities,” and overstep its constitutional prohibition from pursuing cultural policies) to that of Europe's position in relation to the outside world. This was generally seen as a less sensitive area for the Community to concern itself with, not least because it could be linked to questions of trade policy (where the Community enjoyed legal competences under its founding treaties) as well as economic and technological competitiveness.¹³

Second, the move to focus on Europe's audiovisual standing in relation to “other cultures” had some significance on a discursive level. It allowed the Commission and the European Parliament to try to remove the notions of “European culture,” “European civilization,” and the rest from the realm of contested concepts and move them into that of seemingly self-evident social and historical facts. This, in turn, reinforced a rhetorical trend that was very much evident in their attempted justifications for cultural policies beyond the audiovisual sector—a trend as part of which “the notion of ‘European identity,’ . . . became progressively transformed and reified, and then presented as a fixed, bounded and ‘natural’ category, through successive policy initiatives” (Shore, 1993, p. 788). Ostensibly targeted at European culture *protection* against alleged cultural predators from overseas rather than at European culture *construction*, the cultural and audiovisual initiatives in question could be made to enjoy a seemingly greater normative validity and to appear to suffer from fewer manipulative connotations.

There is a final reason why the Commission's and the European Parliament's resort to the “resistance to American cultural hegemony” theme in the context of the audiovisual debate was astute: It came at precisely the moment in time when that very issue had evolved into a central plank of French cultural policy, and had also started to resonate with some southern member states which had sided with French calls for protectionist quotas in the context of the Television Without Frontiers debate. France's commitment to the cause was epitomized by French culture minister Jack Lang's often-cited call for a crusade “against financial and intellectual imperialism that no longer grabs territory, or rarely, but grabs consciousness, ways of thinking, ways of living” (quoted in Tracey, 1988, pp. 16-17). By turning that very theme into a rhetorical pillar for its own audiovisual proposals, the Commission and the European Parliament could, at the very least, hope to enhance their appeal to the French government. And, as is shown below, it was indeed France, of all the member states, which became the staunchest and most consistent backer of an audiovisual involvement by the EU.

Proposals leading up to the MEDIA program

As far as its “software” aspects are concerned, the audiovisual sector generally fell within the competences of the national ministers of culture. These had started to meet more or less regularly in the early 1980s. Yet, when it came to audiovisual policy, this initially produced little more than vague declarations of intent from

which no concrete commitments could be extrapolated. Whenever the Commission (backed by European Parliament resolutions [e.g., European Parliament, 1983, 1985] and, from within the ranks of the member states, most staunchly and consistently supported by France) managed to put more concrete proposals on the ministers' table, agreement remained wanting. This occurred, for example, in April 1985, when the Commission issued a proposal for a Council regulation on a "Community aid scheme for non-documentary cinema and television co-productions" (Commission of the EC, 1985b). Its declared aim was to "increase the number of mass-audience cinema and television co-productions involving nationals of more than one Member State." To this end, it would have created a system to aid such co-productions through grants and loans, covering production as well as distribution costs.

But the Commission's proposal to aid co-productions was staunchly opposed by several member states. Germany, for one, objected that it was too expensive, yet was also driven by Länder hostility to the prospect of a Community encroachment into their constitutional competences, which include cultural policy in general and broadcasting in particular. The Danish government, traditionally the staunchest critic of the Commission's and the European Parliament's cultural ambitions, rejected it on the grounds that the Treaty of Rome did not allow the Community to pursue cultural policies even if these were adopted under a largely economic guise. The Thatcher government in Britain rejected any Community intervention in the field and instead "argued in favour of letting market forces have their way and of encouraging the television organizations [of the member states] to work together" (Wedell, 1986, p. 284).¹⁴

In late 1985, the Commission resubmitted its earlier proposals for an audiovisual support scheme (Commission of the EC, 1985a). In line with suggestions by the European Parliament they now included support for co-productions involving partners from countries whose languages were not widely spoken as one of the "objectives" that were to guide the distribution of aid. This, however, did little to appease those member states that had opposed the Commission's audiovisual plans from the outset (see Collins, 1993a). As a result, the Commission's proposed Community-aid scheme for non-documentary cinema and television co-productions received its definitive burial.

This renewed setback prompted the Commission to subject its audiovisual wish list to a more thorough revision and to come up with proposals that would stand a greater chance of being accepted by the member states. This it did in 1986, when it presented a communication to the Council for an "Action programme for the European audio-visual media products industry" (Commission of the EC, 1986). This laid the foundation for the MEDIA program which was passed later that same year.

The MEDIA program

The MEDIA (Mesures pour encourager le développement de l'industrie audiovisuelle) program started at the end of 1986, initially comprising a range of pilot projects. For these the Community provided "seed money" (generally up to 50%).

This amount was to decrease over time as they would attain financial self-sufficiency (see Maggiore, 1990).

In contrast to the Commission's unsuccessful proposals in previous years, MEDIA was aimed primarily at enhancing the circulation of national audiovisual productions between the member states, not at encouraging transnational co-productions. For the Commission, "[t]he top priority [of the MEDIA program] is the creation of a European film distribution system, which will make it easier for national productions to move more freely throughout the Community" (Commission of the EC, 1987, p. 14).

Concrete measures taken under the MEDIA umbrella included a European Film Distribution Office (EFDO) to give loans to low-cost European feature films which had to be distributed in at least three different member states, and a scheme called BABEL (Broadcasting Across the Barriers of European Languages) to refine dubbing and translation techniques. Also included were EURO-AIM, which offered assistance to independent producers in marketing their output, and an initiative to promote cartoon productions.

During its initial pilot phase, MEDIA's funding was extremely modest. Its total budget in 1987 amounted to 1 million ECU.¹⁵ It rose to 5 million in 1988, 7.5 million in 1989, and 10 million in 1990 (Maggiore, 1990). In 1990, MEDIA was finalized and renewed for a period of five years. Its funding rose to a more respectable 200 million ECU for the period, that is, to 40 million ECU per annum on average (Council, 1990).

By that time, moreover, MEDIA had come to encompass a range of additional elements. They included the SCALE (Small Countries Improve their Audiovisual Level in Europe) program which sought to foster joint audiovisual projects involving countries of small demographic and/or linguistic size. Also included were measures to support documentary film makers, the restoration of cinematographic works, the distribution of films on video cassettes, and a "European Film Academy" based in Berlin (see Commission of the EC, 1992). In addition, the 1990 MEDIA program featured the GRECO (Groupement européen pour la circulation des oeuvres) project to promote independent European producers on the international market, and a "Euromedia-guarantee" scheme. It also provided credit guarantees on bank loans for European co-productions.

The 1990 version of the MEDIA program calls for two observations. First, MEDIA's level of funding remained modest in relation to the generally very high financial stakes involved in the audiovisual sector. Indeed, some single Hollywood films have incurred production costs which far exceeded the annual budget for all MEDIA programs combined. Another way of moving the modesty of MEDIA's funding into focus is to translate it into a per-capita basis: it amounted to no more than 0.13 ECUs per Community citizen per year. Second, apart from the "Euromedia-guarantee" scheme (and to a more limited extent the SCALE program), the additional measures it contained were still mostly geared towards boosting the circulation of audiovisual output throughout the Community. Measures to subsidize transnational co-productions, the centrepiece of the Commis-

sion's earlier audiovisual proposals which had been rejected by the member states, played only a relatively minor part in the MEDIA program.

The preceding observation is important. It suggests that the Community's very Europeanization objective had undergone a profound redefinition. According to the definition which had dominated the Commission's earlier audiovisual proposals, and had been rejected by the member states, Europeanization was seen to entail, in the first instance, a measure of cultural harmonization or denationalization—or at least a “compatibilization” of sorts—of different national programming formats, and a corresponding harmonization or “compatibilization” of viewing preferences (though the Commission and the European Parliament both were careful never to use such terms). To bring this about, these proposals had sought to promote, in the first instance, audiovisual co-productions involving producers from as many member states as possible. Co-productions were expected to have a harmonizing effect because they entail a “mixing and mingling” of national audiovisual formats. Moreover, they are produced from the outset for consumption in several national markets where, in order to maximize their audience appeal, they must seek to minimize the “cultural discount” attached to them. According to this logic, once a nation-transcending audiovisual format had come into being and audiences had grown amenable to it, national producers would be able to market their output Community-wide, and pan-European channels would be assured of a sufficient quantity of suitably Europeanized programming input. Moreover, even those viewers that remained tuned to their *national* television channels exclusively would be exposed to a “European dimension” more frequently, as these channels would come to feature a greater share of non-national programs. And underlying all this was the hope, expressed in various ways throughout the European Commission's and Parliament's pronouncements on the issue, that such a “European dimension” in audiovisual content would somehow act as a carrier of “European values” and shared reference points and, as such, foster in audiences a European identity and support for European integration.

In the *second definition*, which notably informed the MEDIA program, in contrast, Europeanization constituted above all a process of making audiovisual productions from one member state more attractive to audiences in other member states *without*, at the same time, inducing a partial cultural levelling of national programming formats. To be Europeanized, in other words, was to make the *market available to audiovisual producers* rather than focus on the *style and content of their productions*. This was to be achieved with the help of, for example, better dubbing and subtitling techniques, as well as Community-sponsored audiovisual distribution networks and marketing schemes.¹⁶ All the same, the Commission and the European Parliament frequently implied that even measures of this kind could strengthen popular support for integration. By making the Community's constituent populations more visible to and more knowledgeable of each other they would stimulate improved mutual perceptions and ultimately more favourable attitudes towards European integration at large. That way they would

complement many other circulation-enhancing measures, ranging from educational exchanges to town-twinning schemes and grants for literary translations, which the Community had initiated since the early 1970s in the belief that “the peoples of the Community do not yet know each other well enough” (Commission of the EC, 1977, p. 21).

Audiovisual initiatives beyond MEDIA

Apart from the MEDIA program, the late 1980s saw the initiation of a range of further audiovisual initiatives at the European level. The two most important of those were taken outside a Community framework, yet provided for its participation in one form or another. This allowed the more enthusiastic member states (led by France) “to `end-run’ the veto over cultural initiatives enjoyed by single Member States within the Community and to establish outside the Community programmes and policies impossible to achieve within it” (Collins, 1994b, p. 97).

Into this category of initiatives belongs the Audiovisual Eureka program. It was launched in 1989 at the initiative of the French government. Audiovisual Eureka's original charter of participation was signed by 26 countries, including some from Eastern Europe. In the meantime its membership has grown to 33 countries with the Council of Europe and the Commission as associate members. It receives some Community funding and the Commission supports its small secretariat. Audiovisual Eureka's clout is severely limited by the fact that it has no funds of its own to hand out. Instead, its role is largely restricted to that of a “marriage bureau” of sorts. It brings together companies in the audiovisual sector that wish to collaborate on specific projects, including co-productions and distribution arrangements. Audiovisual Eureka has a strong technological focus and seeks to promote, for instance, the use and development of new production techniques. This brings it into overlap with the “technological Eureka” program which runs parallel to it (see Audiovisual Eureka Internet homepage, URL: <http://www.aveureka.be/homepage.htm>; “Joint Declaration,” 1990; Collins, 1994a; Commission of the EC, 1994b). Audiovisual Eureka's sister organization is the “European Audiovisual Observatory,” founded in 1992 under the auspices of the Council of Europe. It constitutes a kind of clearing house for information relevant to firms in the audiovisual sector and it, too, aims to foster co-operation between such firms.

Another French initiative outside a formal Community context was the Eurimages program, which was initiated in 1989 based on the Council of Europe's Cultural Convention. Most EU member states (with the notable exception of the U.K.) participated, joined by a range of Council of Europe members that did not belong to the EU. Eurimages' declared aim is to support “the co-production, distribution, broadcasting and exploitation of creative cinematographic and audiovisual works” through a range of financial incentives (Collins, 1993a; Council of Europe, 1988; European Cultural Foundation & the European Institute for the Media, 1988). Thus far, Eurimages has come to the aid of some 655 full-length feature films and documentaries, ranging from *Astérix et Obélix contre César* to a documentary about the conflict in Northern Ireland. To the extent that Eurim-

ages fosters transnational *co-productions* it clearly goes farther than most parts of the MEDIA program. At the same time, however, Eurimages' funding has remained so modest that its overall impact on the European audiovisual sector can be judged negligible. Until now it has expended a total of 1.125 billion French francs. This amounts to little more than 100 million francs (i.e., about Cdn.\$24.5 million) per year on average (see Eurimages Internet homepage, URL: <http://culture.coe.fr/Eurimages>).

Audiovisual policy in the Maastricht Treaty and after

If the 1980s were the formative stage of the Community's audiovisual policies, the 1990s have thus far seen little more than a continuation of the pattern established in the preceding decade. Existing support schemes were renewed and in some instances expanded. Yet little was added that would have enabled the European Parliament and the Commission to advance their audiovisual agenda more successfully than they had hitherto been able to.

On the constitutional front, the most important development in that decade was the Maastricht Treaty. It was signed in 1991 and came into force in 1993 after an arduous and crisis-prone ratification process. The Maastricht Treaty contains a new Article 128¹⁷ which gives the Union, for the first time, a limited constitutional standing in the realm of cultural policy. The audiovisual sector is explicitly mentioned as an area of possible Union activity. However, according to the treaty, the Union can act only upon the unanimous consent by national governments, and then only to take "incentive measures" or "adopt recommendations" (neither of which are legally binding) to promote what the treaty describes as the "flowering of the cultures of the Member States while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore." This is deliberately ambiguous language and it is not clear how precisely it circumscribes the type of measures that qualify to be taken under the cultural provision of the Maastricht Treaty. In any event, of critical importance is that the Maastricht Treaty subjects cultural policy to the unanimity requirement. It means that all audiovisual proposals remain vulnerable to the objection by any single national government (see Bekemans & Balodimos, 1992; Blanke, 1994; Sandell, 1996).

For its part, the Commission has invested a large portion of its audiovisual energies since the Maastricht Treaty in a sheer endless stream of reports; memorandums; position, strategy, and green papers; impact and feasibility studies; and the like in the hope of turning the limited audiovisual mandate which the Union obtained in the Maastricht Treaty into tangible *policies*. Many of those Commission pronouncements now centre on the objective of creating a "European information area," a term that, by the mid-1990s, had replaced the earlier concept of the "European audiovisual space." Most contain similar findings and recommendations: They conclude that the measures taken thus far (mainly under the MEDIA umbrella) did not have the expected impact upon the European audiovisual sector. While cultural and linguistic barriers between the member states remained strong, most audiovisual producers continued to be tied to their national markets and thus

deprived of sufficient economies of scale to successfully compete against their U.S. counterparts. To remedy the situation, the Commission advocates a strategy that revolves around the same mix of measures it already tried to promote throughout the 1980s: a more aggressive financing of audiovisual distribution networks, the improvement of dubbing and translation technologies, and the promotion of transnational audiovisual co-productions (see, for instance, Commission of the EC, 1994b).

Supporters of the Commission's demand for more aggressive measures to "defragment" the European audiovisual market found it easy to bolster their case with concrete figures. By the mid-1990s, 94% of television consumption in Europe still consisted of viewers watching their respective domestic channels with primarily domestic program scheduling (Stewart & Laird, 1994). A large proportion of the remaining 6% was made up of viewers watching domestic channels from neighbouring countries, often in their own language (e.g., Austrian audiences watching German channels, or Italian immigrants in France watching channels from Italy). Moreover, insofar as those domestic channels featured programs that were *not* of domestic origin, these often came from overseas (mainly the U.S.) rather than from other European countries. Figures for film consumption in cinemas pointed in much the same direction. A Commission study found that in 1996 some 16% of cinema tickets sold in the EU were for national films in their respective home markets (or, in the case of co-productions, for films shown in the home markets of the participating countries). A mere 6% of tickets were sold for films from elsewhere in the EU (see European Commission, 1997b). The remaining 78% of tickets sold to cinema-goers in the EU thus were for films originating from overseas, mainly, of course, from the U.S. A study by the European Audiovisual Observatory in 1996 (see European Commission, 1997b) arrived at very similar results. Of the 40 commercially most successful films in the EU, only 10 were European. In fact, apart from *Trainspotting* (which ranked 13th), the first 20 were all from the U.S. In comparison, the most successful films in Europe were "on a par with comedies like *Werner—Das Muß Kesseln!*, *Il Ciclone* and *Les Trois Frères*, having only a limited geographical distribution, which demonstrates the limited market potential for this genre outside national frontiers" (European Commission, 1997b).

Yet, despite the starkness of those figures and the intensity of its pleas, the Commission's audiovisual policy achievements after Maastricht have remained modest. Other than Euronews, which was described earlier (and which at any rate has only a very weak link to the EU), there have been no new attempts to set up another multilingual pan-European television broadcaster along the lines of Europa TV. Even on the audiovisual production front, there were no qualitative leaps, merely a continuation and cautious expansion of existing programs. This is born out by the new MEDIA program (called MEDIA II) which was passed in 1995 and extended into the year 2000 (Council, 1995a; 1995b).

MEDIA II

On the plus side (from the European Commission's and Parliament's perspective), MEDIA's budget was increased to 310 million ECU in total (as opposed to 400 million ECU originally demanded by the Commission). This is about a third more than was spent on the preceding MEDIA program, but still modest in relation to the size of the European market and the high costs involved in the audiovisual production field. Moreover, the new MEDIA program comprises a range of extended support measures. These are divided into three categories: training, development, and distribution.

On the training side, MEDIA II supports projects to train "audiovisual workers" in commercial management and marketing, screenplay techniques, and new production technologies. It also seeks to foster co-operation and the exchange of know-how by encouraging institutions and companies in the training field to "network." MEDIA II's "development" programs subsidize the works of European audiovisual producers. Aid flows to individual productions (feature films, creative documentaries, etc.) that, according to the somewhat vague stipulation in MEDIA II's legal text, are "aimed at the market, especially the European market." Also eligible for support are production companies (rather than merely particular productions) and "industrial platforms" to encourage the networking of companies. Under the distribution heading, finally, MEDIA II encourages the dissemination of films outside their country of origin, for instance through "cooperation networks" between European film distributors, "cinema networks," audiovisual festivals, promotional fairs, and the like. Under the same heading, MEDIA also supports the transnational distribution of television productions. They must involve the participation of at least two producers from different member states and preferably from different linguistic areas (in the form of co-production or pre-purchase agreements), whereas for cinema films no such condition applies.

The audiovisual output supported by MEDIA II in recent years still gravitates towards the "high brow" end of the spectrum, though there have been attempts to aid productions that stand a realistic chance of attaining some mass appeal (see MEDIA II Internet homepage, URL: <http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/dg10/avpolicy/media/news.html>). Among the recent more prominent examples of this is Gillies MacKinnon's *Hideous Kinky* (a British/French co-production which received support from MEDIA II's script and distribution funds). Yet save for a few exceptions, even those MEDIA II-supported productions that *do* attract relatively large audiences have their appeal primarily confined to their country (or linguistic region) of origin. Very few enjoy the pan-European popularity enjoyed by many Hollywood blockbusters.¹⁸

Overall, then, despite the increase in its funding, MEDIA II strongly resembles its predecessors. Its primary objective is still that of increasing the output of nationally produced material and its circulation throughout the Union, not the Europeanization of audiovisual content by directly subsidizing multinational and multilingual co-productions or by other means. Demands by the European Parliament in its proposed amendment to the initial Commission proposal that the new

MEDIA program should embrace measures to “develop the ability of professionals to understand the European cultural dimension to audiovisual works in order to develop their ability to address a European, rather than simply a national audience” (“MEDIA II: Development and Training,” 1995, p. 198) failed to make their way into the final version of MEDIA II.

Apart from securing the renewal of the MEDIA program, the Commission's and the European Parliament's accomplishments in the content-related part of the audiovisual sector have remained modest throughout the second part of the 1990s, even though it was not for lack of trying. In 1995, for instance, the Commission issued a proposal for a European guarantee fund (European Commission, 1995). It was to run parallel to the MEDIA II program and foster the development of fictional works “with considerable European and international market potential” by providing credit guarantees. The proposal was approved unanimously by the European Parliament and (not surprisingly) welcomed by the audiovisual industry with similar enthusiasm. Yet the Council has thus far refused to adopt it. Even some less costly ideas have shared a similar fate. For instance, the suggestion of having the Union sponsor annual “European Oscars,” despite it being a personal favourite of the recent Commissioner in charge of the Directorate General X, has not thus far materialized (Oreja, 1998; for a more general assessment, see European Commission, 1998).

Against this background, the more recent innovations in EU audiovisual policy have largely been confined to a discursive level. The Commission now often treats audiovisual policy—in its technical as well as content-related aspects—as a subsector of what it refers to as the “multimedia” field, which it depicts to involve everything from the Internet to mobile telephones and digital broadcasting. What is more, in the Commission's rendering, “multimedia” is, in turn, only one dimension of the broader group of issues it bunches together under the vaguely defined heading of “information society.” By the late 1990s, “multimedia,” “information society,” and “technological convergence,” along with ubiquitously invoked “networks” and “information gateways,” had all become buzzwords in official Commission rhetoric and had been featured in numerous reports, position, discussion, and strategy papers. Interestingly, the same rhetorical tendency observed earlier applies to the Commission's pronouncements on the “information society” as well: apart from the occasional hint that the Union's involvement in this field could foster “enhanced social solidarity” or help in the “dissemination of European cultural values” (see Commission of the EC, 1994a; European Commission, 1997a), these are treated primarily under economic and technological guises, accompanied by the odd “metaphor of cultural war” (Schlesinger, 1996, p. 10) against the United States.

As has been shown, even their rhetorical incorporation into the “information society” theme has thus far done little to help realize the Commission's aspirations for a unified and internally “defragmented” European audiovisual area. Returning to the definitions worked out earlier, Europeanization has occurred neither in a “strong” sense (i.e., in the form of a partial harmonization of audiovisual for-

mats), nor in a “weak” sense (i.e., through a marked increase in the transnational circulation of nationally produced—and culturally non-harmonized—audiovisual material). Regardless of whether one focuses on its production, “consumption,” or content side, the audiovisual sector in the EU still largely lacks a European dimension.

Conclusion

By the mid-to-late 1990s, European Commission- and Parliament-driven attempts to partially Europeanize the audiovisual sector have yielded few tangible results. Most of the few initiatives launched either faltered (as was the case with Europa TV) or amounted to little more than attempts to boost the production and circulation of national output throughout the Union. Measures of this type have done little to overcome the cultural and linguistic obstacles which continue to tie many producers to their national markets. As far (but, as is argued momentarily, not *only* as far) as television viewing is concerned, the EU remains very much a “patchwork of publics” (Moeglin, 1992). And the developments traced in this article do little to fuel expectations that this fragmentation is about to diminish anytime soon.

One factor which contributed to the wanting success of the European Commission's and Parliament's audiovisual ambitions was clearly the resistance they encountered from many national governments. Despite rather shrewd attempts by the European Commission and Parliament to wrap them in economic arguments and the “resistance to U.S. cultural hegemony” theme, their initial proposals to sponsor audiovisual co-productions were flatly rejected. Similarly, the stance by many member states towards Europa TV ranged from half-hearted support to outright obstructionism. They also refused to grant the Union a genuine constitutional mandate in the field of audiovisual policy.

By and large, the European Parliament's and the Commission's audiovisual initiatives thus fared little better than their attempts to launch what they hoped would be European-identity-enhancing policies in areas beyond the audiovisual sector. This ranged from efforts to set up a pan-European lottery and “European showrooms” in museums to the envisioned insertion of “European content” into the school curricula of the member states in the form of “European civics,” “corrected” history textbooks, and the like (see, for example, Shore, 1993, 1996; Theiler, 1998). Most of these initiatives, too, were vehemently rejected by some national governments and consequently led to the implementation of few concrete measures.

It would go beyond the scope of this article to trace the origins of this governmental resistance in detail. To some extent, these varied between the different member states as well as between the different issues and proposals at stake. Seen at the broadest level, however, the unabated resistance by many national governments to the European Commission's and Parliament's attempted European-identity-building policies in the audiovisual sector and beyond seems much in line with what some observers of the integrative process have long argued: namely, that a conception of European unification as a *in a social, cultural and* “identi-

tive" sense state-transcending undertaking is not one which is widely shared beyond the confines of the European Parliament and the Commission. It is not, most significantly, shared by political elites in many member states which continue to bear the main responsibility for policy outcomes in the EU (see, for example, Milward, Lynch, Ranieri, Romero, & Sørensen, 1993; Taylor, 1991).

At the same time, the European Commission's and Parliament's audiovisual ambitions were not only frustrated by national governments; they were further hampered by a lack of acceptance by national audiences at large. This was epitomized strongly by the minuscule popularity of the non-national programming formats attempted by Europa TV and its equally unsuccessful commercial pan-European counterparts. It was also implicit in the reluctance of many national audiences to accept audiovisual productions from other member states.

One way to account for this lacking acceptance, it was argued, is with reference to the concept of "cultural discount." Yet beyond this, the very persistence and strength of this "cultural discount" points to a more underlying problem, a problem that, as Anthony Smith (e.g., 1991; 1992) has pointed out, lies at the very heart of the European Commission's and Parliament's European identity and European culture project for whose advancement they saw television as but one vehicle. For despite frequent claims by some "Euro-nationalists"—and in places enthusiastically seconded by the European Parliament and the Commission—that a shared European identity has its roots in a legacy of ancient Greek or Roman civilization, medieval Christendom, the Renaissance period, or a combination of those, more detached accounts generally take a more sober view. Leaving aside the vaguest notions of "Western civilization" and the like, they detect little in the way of a widely recognized European "cultural core" whose relevance would have survived what in many instances amounts to centuries of fervently pursued cultural differentiation along national lines. Shared meanings of sufficient strength and salience to provide a putative European identity with "emotional sustenance and historical depth" have remained equally elusive, at least on a mass level (Smith, 1992, p. 62; see also Cederman, 1996; Obradovic, 1996). I think that the failure of pan-European broadcasting and of attempts to "defragment" the market for audiovisual productions, as this article has sought to trace, is very much in line with this conception. The widely perceived artificiality and hard-to-relate-to character of the non-national programming formats attempted by Eurikon, Europa TV, and their commercial counterparts, and the generally low popularity of domestic audiovisual productions beyond their country of origin (both of which owed not *merely* to linguistic barriers), both indicate such a lack of a shared European cultural habitus.

The most important question to which all this gives rise is what it means for the future of the European project at large. More specifically, one must ask whether, in the long term, European integration in its economic and political dimensions could flourish *without* the parallel emergence among European publics of shared social and cultural reference points—of the overarching signi-

fiers and meanings which the Union's audiovisual policies sought to cultivate, yet whose very absence was at once a reason why these policies fared badly.

Given the *sui generis* character of European integration it is hard to make a prognosis. Nonetheless, I think that judged by its record so far things do not look all bleak for the Union. Even though it failed to “defragment” the European audiovisual market and promote pan-European television channels, “European show-rooms” in museums, and similar things, integration in many *other spheres* continued and in some instances accelerated markedly. The *Single European Act*, the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties, and the recent introduction of a single currency all testify to this. These moves towards closer integration did not enjoy unanimous public support, as the Maastricht ratification crisis testified. Nonetheless, while the Union's public standing has become more shaky in recent years, the notion that *grosso modo* economic and political integration is a good thing has remained solid among most citizens in most member countries most of the time.¹⁹

This co-existence of continued strong social and cultural *fragmentation* with ever-closer political and economic *integration* in present-day Europe might appear as a paradox to some. It challenges assertions, echoed throughout the cultural and audiovisual pronouncements by the European Parliament and the Commission (however cautiously, and however deeply wrapped inside the habitual layer of “unity in diversity” rhetoric) that a reduction in the former is a prerequisite for the latter to thrive in the long term. All the same, there are several ways of making this co-existence seem less paradoxical, and perhaps the most obvious way is by comparing the current predicament of the European Union to the situation in some culturally divided states. As students of comparative politics have long pointed out, some of the most stable multicultural states have at the same time remained among those that are culturally the most divided. In those countries, cultural cleavages between the different constituent segments have stayed unabated, and these segments enjoy far-reaching autonomy in such domains of high cultural and “identitive” relevance as audiovisual policy and education. And it is this very factor that has enabled their members to take part in economic and political integration without fear of losing their separate cultural identities in the process (see, for example, Laponce, 1992; Lijphart, 1977). Too close an analogy between existing multicultural democracies and the EU is obviously problematic and there are many other variables which one would need to take into account. Nonetheless, at the broadest level such reasoning suggests that, for the European Union, a policy of seeking to attenuate social and cultural cleavages between its member populations, through audiovisual and other measures, might not be the *only*—and perhaps not even the *most effective*—way to secure lasting cohesion in the economic and political fields. By extension, it might offer a rationale for why the lack of effective policies of this type has not thus far spelled the end to the European project in its economic and political dimensions, and why it might never do so.

To make a more systematic argument along those lines one would need to grapple with a range of more subtle distinctions. Above all one would need to dis-

tinguish between social and cultural homogenization or assimilation on the one hand and the emergence of political loyalties and identifications that are shared by members of different socially and culturally divergent groups on the other, in the form of some common “civic values,” for example. To claim that the EU would be able to do without the former does not necessarily imply that it could completely forgo the latter, and in the present context this would raise anew the question of whether and how audiovisual and other cultural policies might help foster such shared political loyalties among Europeans. Nonetheless, the basic insight that in the EU a high degree of cultural fragmentation has not thus far prevented a measure of economic and political integration is potentially significant. It could render the European experience relevant for many other culturally fragmented political systems that confront challenges similar to those faced by the EU, Canada among them. And not only could it be relevant for the design of audiovisual policy in those societies, but also for their wider approach to the “cultural” in relation to the “political” and the “economic.”

These issues all go far beyond the question of television viewing and audiovisual policy in the EU and they cannot be further examined here. What I hope to have shown is that if patterns of audiovisual production and consumption are treated as indicators of wider social and cultural developments, then the EU's failure thus far to Europeanize those areas could augur the staying power of its member states as socially and culturally bounded and distinct entities. It could also point to the continued elusiveness of a nation-transcending European identity and culture.

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Notes

1. With the coming into force of the Maastricht Treaty, what had commonly been referred to as the “European Community” (EC) or the “Common Market” became part of the newly established “European Union” (EU). Throughout the article I generally use the term “Community” when referring to pre-Maastricht events, and “Union” when talking about developments thereafter. When discussing the Union/Community in a non-time-specific context, I use the two terms more or less interchangeably.
2. In assessing the role of the European Parliament in the evolution of audiovisual policy in the EU it is important to understand that the European Parliament has never played a role akin to that of a “normal” parliament in a typical Western democracy, even after 1979 when it was elected by universal suffrage. Prior to the Maastricht Treaty the European Parliament's role was essentially restricted to that of a consultative body. The Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties have enhanced the European Parliament's powers. Among other things it now has greater budgetary competences and powers in holding the Commission to account, and in various ways it can intervene in the legislative process. Nonetheless, policy making in the EU is still dominated by two main actors. Both have no close “domestic” equivalent, even in federal systems such as Canada. The European Commission, to begin with, is the Union's administrative body as well as the primary originator of legislative proposals. It proposes draft legislation which goes before the Council of Ministers. The Council is composed of ministers from the member states and decides whether to accept a Commission proposal either by unanimity or by qualified majority vote and with various degrees of

involvement by the European Parliament, depending on the issue area in question. Once a decision has been reached, the Commission then is charged with helping to ensure its implementation, though its powers in doing so again vary according to issue area. European Parliament resolutions, for their part, are not legally binding, and can be (and frequently are) ignored by the European Commission and the Council of Ministers.

3. A federation of national public service broadcasters, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) had hitherto been dedicated primarily to the exchange of news footage between its members, the production of shared sports transmissions, and the organization of the annual Eurovision song contest.
4. The Swiss franc was used as Europa TV's accounting unit because the channel's legal headquarters were in Geneva, which also hosts the EBU. Currently, one Swiss franc is worth about Cdn.\$0.92, U.S.\$0.63, and £0.38.
5. Currently, £1.00 is worth about Cdn.\$2.39 and U.S.\$1.64.
6. U.K.-based Super Channel, for example, promised in its press information package to "[take] into account that most viewers are not native English speakers. Presenters speak clearly, comedies and documentaries are selected for their visual content while music and sports programmes have a universal appeal" (quoted in Collins, 1989, p. 365).
7. Although Super Channel continued to be carried on most European cable systems, it closed its advertising sales offices on the Continent (Collins, 1990).
8. A partial exception is the bi-national Franco-German channel Arte. It broadcasts "high culture" programs accompanied by French and German language soundtracks and/or subtitles. Arte, however, is a bi-national rather than multinational channel and the EU is not involved with it.
9. For more details on Euronews, see the Euronews Internet homepage (URL: <http://www.euronews.net>).
10. As Schlesinger (1994) puts it, Euronews' "stylistic constraints and limited resources have led to a rather characterless journalism, heavily tied to pictures rather than analysis, with little that is characteristically European about its news agenda" (p. 42).
11. It has even been argued that the United States has come closer than any country in Europe to developing a pan-European programming format and, more generally, "a cultural form that is the closest to transnational acceptability of any yet contrived" (Collins, 1990, p. 215). It is difficult to establish why, precisely, resistance by English as well as non-English-speaking European audiences to imports from other European countries is often higher than for material produced in the United States. One factor often emphasized is that Hollywood imports generally have had a much longer time of exposure among European audiences than those from other European states. A further reason could be the size and relative internal heterogeneity of the U.S. domestic market. The former ensures sufficiently high economies of scale to allow for the production of more attractive programs; the latter forces U.S. producers to make programs which already carry some measure of cross-cultural mass appeal (Hoskins & Mirus, 1988). Still other explanations emphasize the attraction which American cultural imports have traditionally exercised for European working-class audiences. They preferred U.S. entertainment to the "elitist" and "educational" fare offered by many European domestic producers (see Morley & Robins, 1989). On the singling out by the Commission and the European Parliament of the U.S. in particular as a preferred "cultural other," see, for example, Delanty (1995). For a history of the cultural anti-Americanization discourse in Europe (though in a British rather than a "pan-European" context), see Morley & Robins (1989).
12. In 1985 the European Parliament warned against "an increase in Community countries' cultural dependence" on the United States (European Parliament, 1985); back in 1983 it had cautioned of "a disastrous impact" of such a reliance "in social terms . . . as well as in cultural terms" (European Parliament, 1983).
13. Attempts to draw such a linkage came to the fore, for example, in the Commission's frequent references to the *economic* (rather than merely cultural) costs associated with Europe's reliance on

audiovisual imports from overseas. They were also implicit in its claims that the “software” aspects of television (i.e., program productions) could not be separated from its “hardware” dimension (such as satellite transmission technology and a new high definition television norm). In those areas the EU seemed similarly in danger of losing out to competition from overseas.

14. As is often the case in EU politics, it is difficult to assess the extent to which such opposition enjoyed the tacit support of other member states. Since the countries mentioned (and especially Denmark) seemed so staunchly set against the Commission’s audiovisual aspirations, governments which shared similar reservations could afford to exercise restraint in their display of overt opposition and yet be assured that the Commission’s efforts would remain fruitless. There are, however, indications that such scepticism regarding the EU’s audiovisual Europeanization agenda did indeed extend beyond the ranks of its most explicit opponents. This came to the fore in the widespread lack of enthusiasm for Europa TV as it was discussed.
15. At present, one euro—the successor name of the ECU—equals approximately Cdn.\$1.46, U.S.\$1.01, and £0.62.
16. The precise rationale behind this was that as viewers would find programs from other member states linguistically more accessible (and as a greater quantity of such programs would be offered), they could be enticed to watch more of them. Moreover, once consumption of foreign programs had increased, the “cultural discount” attached to them would further diminish as viewers would gradually become “acclimatized” to foreign cultural formats. By way of such a virtuous cycle, then, the market available to European producers would be enlarged even without a cultural harmonization or “compatibilization” of audiovisual formats. A case could be made that ultimately such distribution oriented initiatives, too, might have some kind of harmonizing effect: Community-sponsored dubbing, subtitling, and distribution schemes would make producers realize that they now had a greater potential to export to other member states. However, to *maximize* this potential they would have to reduce the presence of national particularisms in their output, to the extent that these would impede the work’s accessibility and attractiveness to the different foreign audiences to which they hoped to export. The incentive for national producers to make their programs culturally more generic would be enhanced by the realization that they themselves now faced increasing competition on their home turf from foreign producers, but that they could compensate for a declining market *share* at home by increasing their market *size* through exporting abroad. Their foreign competitors would, of course, be driven by the same logic. This market-driven cycle, then, held out the potential to work towards a gradual cultural levelling of national programming formats.
17. With the subsequent Amsterdam Treaty, this became Article 151.
18. Apart from this, MEDIA II has recently sponsored numerous conferences, colloquia, and “promotional events” abroad, such as the Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Market, a “cartoon movie” fair in Berlin, and a promotional fair for European films in the United States.
19. The key source of comparative data on public attitudes towards the EU are the European Commission-sponsored *Eurobarometer* surveys. These are compiled at regular intervals throughout all the member states. *Eurobarometer*’s sophistication has been questioned from several angles, but offers at least an approximate and broadly reliable insight into the state of popular opinion towards the European Union at any given time. On the impact of the Maastricht Treaty on popular attitudes towards the EU and on the strengths and weaknesses of *Eurobarometer*; see Theiler (1999).

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