

Is European audiovisual policy a driver to European identity or a carrier to further globalization?

Culture and audiovisual have to go hand in hand together, they form an inseparable unity. This cannot be questioned, it is a dogma, yet well reasoned. Already in 2001 I was sustaining:

“At the dawn of the third millennium, one of the biggest challenges facing the European venture is that of helping to bring forth active European identity and active citizenship. What Europe still lacks today is an identity and a shared cultural area to which the public could feel a sense of belonging and which would encourage them to believe in the European utopia. Such an ambitious target is vital and requires sufficient time, during which a given (the European) society manages to identify a core of common values among many diverse others which gradually form its specific identity as a whole sustained by their diversities.

Europe can not be reduced to a community of traders; it is also a product of the mind. It is made of stones, paintings, music, books and languages. It is a civilization with roots going deep into the individual cultures of Europe’s nations and regions. It is at a crossroads, but it also forms a single cultural area for a dialogue between cultures.

Nobody questions the fact that Europe’s cultural and linguistic diversity needs to be promoted and safeguarded as one of its most valuable assets. The task is more complex and of utmost importance and delicacy: that of developing a multiple identity with due respect for local, regional and national diversity. In this enterprise, the following factors must be taken into account:

- a. Globalisation, which brings with it the danger of cultural standardisation, is the source of a risk of the European dimension being lost in the « global village » and a risk of retreat into anti-European nationalism and regionalism within the Union.
- b. The forthcoming enlargement will require the restoration of a link of identity common to Europeans in the East and the West, a link which has been loosened by the economic and cultural disparities revealed by the collapse of the communist regimes. It will also pose in acute terms the questions connected with the existence in Europe of a variety of languages and cultures, including the treatment of linguistic, ethnic, religious and other minorities.

c. Keeping the audiovisual within culture interacting with education is crucial:

After all, European Culture and European Audiovisual production are the two sides of one coin: that of European identity. Moreover, since the latter is a matter of “education” i.e. of the way of thinking and of the way of living rather than of the unity of race (Isocrates, Panygerique, IY, 50), audiovisual should be kept as an inseparable part of culture, ensuring thus that technology remains at the service of content and not vice-versa and culture including audiovisual should interact with education in a systemic manner.”¹

And later consistent with the same belief: “The Barroso Commission signaled a new target by re-invigorating the Lisbon goal to make the EU “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic

¹“Culture and Audiovisual”, published in “Unity in Diversity”2001,EQP

growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” by 2010. This is an encouraging message from the point of view that there is at least a clear cut objective that would regroup all efforts for its attainment. This is important. Nevertheless, the question arises whether it is enough or appropriate? Although it is of paramount importance in getting everybody on the same tracks, it may not be sufficient. More is needed and this more goes beyond economics. Competitiveness should not be a target in itself, but the vehicle of other more fundamental and viable objectives². Culture is here key. Quality next to quantity. The European project goes beyond economics. Is competitiveness understood in this way? It remains to be proven. First signs give rise to some doubts. **The switch of audiovisual policy from its mother-home which was Culture for the sake of content, to the Information Society DG where technology comes first is surely not a move in the right direction...**³

In fact, audiovisual policy was since ever in direct synergy with culture. The High Level Group for Audiovisual Policy set up by Commissioner Marcelino Oreja reaffirmed this functional link by concluding that in audiovisual policy “content is the King”. Attempts to transfer audiovisual policy and annex it to Information Society first appeared when audiovisual policy tried and finally managed to rationalize the convergence wave in 1998-1999; they were motivated not only by the policy objectives of Information Society but also by its imperialistic/expansionary wishes. At this critical stage an extraordinary informal meeting of ministers for Culture was convened in Rome in June 1999 with the participation of the incoming President Prodi. It is thanks to this meeting that audiovisual policy successfully resisted against the opportunity driven and abusively named administrative reform that followed and wanted to proceed to the change. In this way DG Education and Culture followed up DG X as far as the audiovisual *acquis communautaire*, i.e. culture and audiovisual together in a systemic/integrated manner, is concerned and Commissioner V. Reding fully adopted the principle and became its defender. In all probability this is the reason why, without any further discussion and consideration, audiovisual policy joined Information Society when Commissioner V. Reding took over the latter. However, if in her person, for the above reasons, audiovisual policy is still able to play its role it has to be reminded that the allocation of policies within the Commission should not be a matter of persons but a matter of objective criteria. Should this not be the case the risk is twofold: a. the unique exercise of the inter-service consultation cannot be effective to the detriment of an integrated/systemic approach that is the inestimable role of the Commission, and b. in the course of time a gradual absorption of audiovisual by Information Society and its predominant IT focus is *ante portas*. Needless to further illustrate the effect of such development on culture, competitiveness, European identity and citizenship, all in all on European integration. Hence, there is an urgent need to restore the community order and re-allocate audiovisual policy to its mother home that is Education and Culture. A European audiovisual policy urgently needs a sign to get globally on its own in a competitive manner.

² "Competitiveness [...] is not an end in itself," explained J.-C. Juncker in his capacity as President of the Council for the 1st semester 2005. "If Europe wants to be strong, she needs three things that go together: improved competitiveness, greater social cohesion and a more balanced ecological environment."

³ "Morale and change in the Union", published in "Everything Flows: Essays on Public Affairs and Cahnge", Landmarks in association with ECPA, 2005, Brussels