



DOSSIER: PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

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After nearly forty years of service in German public broadcasting ...

...and being quite familiar with the situation in Europe and other parts of the world, I am acquainted with the incessant question: "Do we really need public broadcasting?" This question is particularly relevant in today's digital media world of the euphorically called Information Age that provides all the stupendous facilities for total information and entertainment to each individual in the global village. Based on my professional experience the answer is quite simple: "Yes, even more so than ever."

Public broadcasting is, and remains, a cornerstone of social communication, the decisive medium and factor for social integration, culture and national identity. No one can deny it. Nevertheless, public broadcasting is the object of a permanent, endless and useless

dispute about its very existence; it 'enjoys' the distinction of being the beloved enemy of free marketeers who dislike nothing more than a real competitor. The ferociousness of these continuous attacks is the best evidence about the real competitiveness of public broadcasters, their relevance in the market. Wherever public broadcasting has succeeded in undergoing a process of revitalization and wherever it has used its traditional and distinctive values to enter the competitive market, it has maintained or regained recognition and impetus. The consequence of new technology has made public broadcasters lose their monopoly and they have had to share their audiences with commercial competitors. But wherever the public broadcasting remit has been upheld, the audience has appreciated the advantages of broadcasting to the general public, to everybody in society, and that it is a public responsibility. They have come back to public broadcasting after having run through a Klondike-phase of curiosity, fed up relatively soon with all the triviality and trash they were confronted with on the new commercial channels.

A EURO

Albert Scharf
Honorary President, European Broadcasting Union

Quality and ambition

Proper performance means not only quality, self-restrained impartiality, professional integrity, reliable continuity but also entrepreneurial ambition, creativity, competitiveness and courage that exists here more than in any other segment of the ever promising world of the media.

The market alone, by all experience and contrary to Adam Smith and his Mancunian-liberal disciples, does not provide what public communication needs. A commercially structured market offers services under commercially viable conditions only. The only criterion for commercial broadcasters is: does the offered product sell? Is the service profitable for the owner and shareholder? Programmes which are not profitable will not be made available or they will disappear from one day to the other – regardless of their relevance for the tide of public opinion.

Public broadcasters have to base their programming on quite another criterion: is it of relevance to society, for public discussion and is it part of the process of forming public

opinion? Maintaining and guaranteeing this process, which is of constitutional importance in free and democratic societies, keeping this process alive and versatile with continuity and strength, is the constant role of public broadcasting. This role is directly related to the democratic, social and cultural needs of each society and to the need to preserve media pluralism as a decisive precondition for any other form of freedom. This has been laid down by the Member States of the European Union in a unanimous protocol to the Treaty of Amsterdam, which is the present legal basis of the European Union.

Diversity

Nearly two years ago another important EU-document, the so-called “Oreja Report on European Audiovisual Policy in the Digital Age”, found that public broadcasting has an important role to play in promoting cultural diversity in each country, in providing educational programming, in objectively informing public opinion, in guaranteeing pluralism and in supplying – democratically and free-of-extra-charge – quality enter-

tainment. Public broadcasters are, or should be, the basic suppliers of all audiovisual content relevant to a free and informed society. Basic supply in this sense, however, must not be misunderstood as only a poor and minimalist offer of what does not sell commercially. What is meant by the term ‘basic supply’ is not just bread and water, but a rich, complete menu ranging from breathtaking appetizers to luxurious desserts including manifold main courses in the classical bandwidth of the European broadcasting tradition. This has been confirmed by the German Supreme Constitutional Court with a legislation that emphasizes, protects and finances public broadcasting in a way that enables it to stand successfully against commercial competition. According to the Court, broadcasting is too important for society and democracy to be left to market forces alone. The truth and wisdom of this jurisprudence can be seen right now: in Germany and other European countries commercial broadcasting is going through a less prosperous phase due to rather dramatic losses in advertising revenues and/or miscalculations and bad investments. One of the consequences has been

European

View from the Bridge

the dramatic cut in commercial programming. Thanks to public broadcasting providing a stable and solid source of programming, despite the usual shortness of funds, this has not led to any real or substantial reduction of programmes which would be detrimental to the audience. But this requires a public broadcasting concept that is not limited to a niche existence for the high-brow esoteric few, but caters for the needs and interests of all social groups, attractive to both the masses and the minorities.

Curiously enough, public broadcasters, bluntly blamed in former times for being monopolists, are nowadays the only guarantors of effective competition in most European countries. The veritable market influence and power of public broadcasting counterbalances the result of an irresistible ongoing process of concentration in the audiovisual industry: alliances and mergers form powerful conglomerates in the hands of few, very few, private superplayers who, understandably, act in their own or their shareholders private interest rather than for the benefit of the general public. And if one of these falls into insolvency, as happened to the German media tycoon Leo Kirch, there is just one less in a highly concentrated market, leaving the market to the remaining elitist magnates. One of them, by using his private TV-channels, conquered a whole country, which exemplifies how short the road from media power to political power can be, if media influence is not kept separate from one-sided political interest and if it is not operated with absolute professional integrity – one of the basic virtues of public broadcasters.

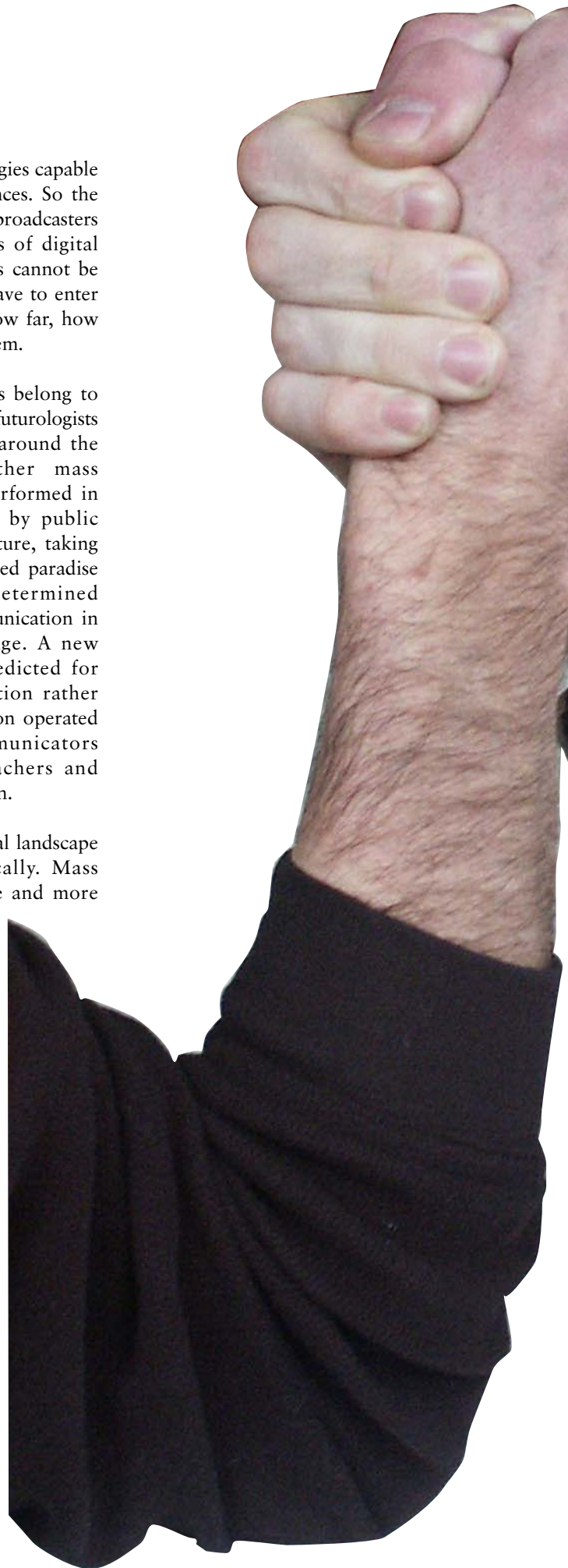
New technology

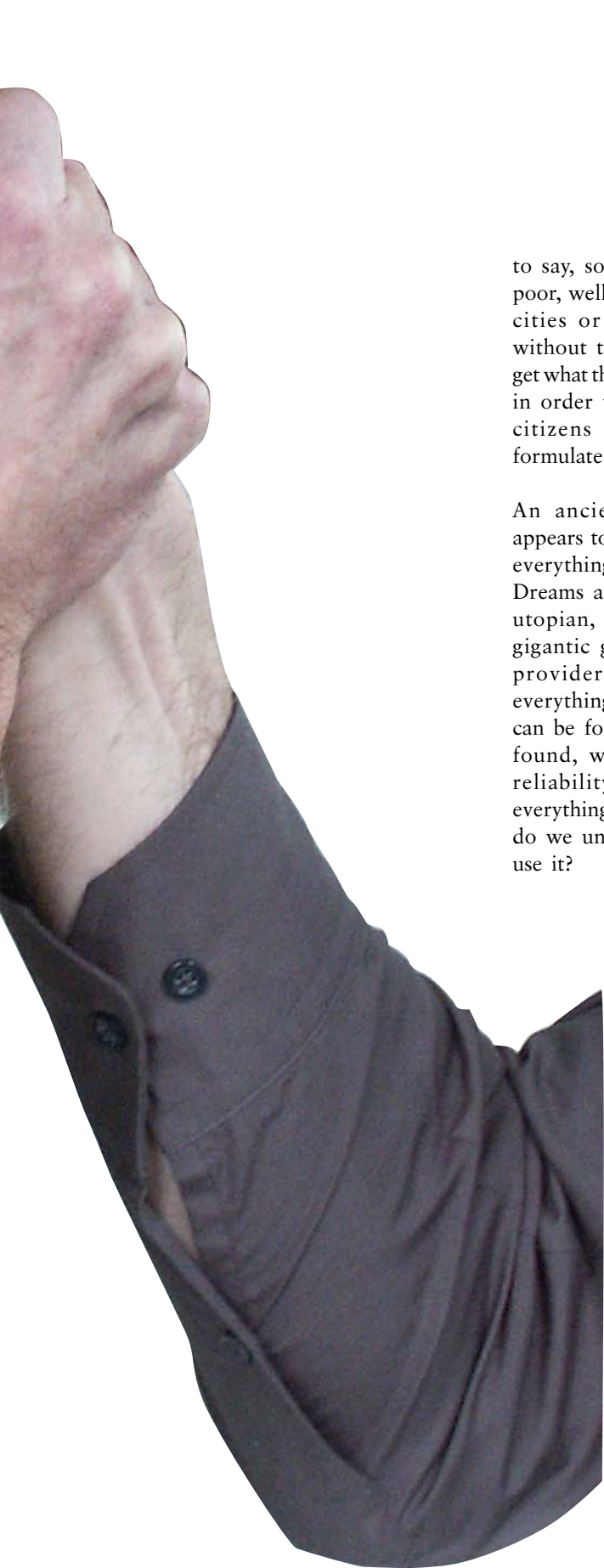
In order to fulfil their public mission properly in a fast-changing audiovisual environment, public broadcasters must be allowed to use and

acquire all new technologies capable of reaching their audiences. So the question whether public broadcasters should use applications of digital distribution technologies cannot be taken seriously – they have to enter into this new world. How far, how deeply is another problem.

But don't such thoughts belong to yesterday? The eloquent futurologists on media conferences around the world wonder whether mass communication – as performed in an exemplary manner by public broadcasters – has a future, taking into account the promised paradise of abundant, self-determined information and communication in the glorious Digital Age. A new information age is predicted for individual communication rather than mass communication operated by professional communicators behaving like the teachers and principals of their nation.

No doubt the audiovisual landscape has changed dramatically. Mass communication is more and more supplemented by new and user-friendly tools of individual communication. I say 'supplemented', not substituted. For what will probably be a long time in the foreseeable future, all these new commodities will be of a complementary nature. While concentrating on the core task of mass communication, public broadcasters will also have to use the new instruments of distribution and communication. Amidst the abundance of information and entertainment that grows daily, public broadcasters have to ensure that their clients, that is





to say, society as a whole, rich or poor, well-educated or not, living in cities or remote areas, with or without technical skills manage to get what they need from today's world in order to remain knowledgeable citizens informed enough to formulate their own opinions.

An ancient dream of mankind appears to be coming real: to know everything. But is this really true? Dreams are dreams, they are often utopian, reality is different. The gigantic global net of knowledge providers gives us access to everything. But do we know what can be found, and where it can be found, what is its relevance and reliability? And even if we find everything we want and need – what do we understand and how do we use it?

A German philosopher, Jürgen Mittelstraß, puts his sceptical doubts in the sentence: “We, the users of global information systems, are giants by information, but dwarfs by knowledge.” The individual, spinning in a worldwide web of billions of bits and bytes, might by the end of his surfing adventures be overwhelmed, alone, lonely, lost – the victim of worldwide disillusion.

Global village?

For a huge majority of people around the world, even in technologically developed and advanced societies, the ‘global village’ established by digital technology, is as distant and strange as ever. What counts for them is content relevant to them, relevant to their environment, to their daily lives. What they ask for is orientation and transparency in the jumble of information gathered from distant sources. What they need is a wide base of information that is relevant to where they live. The new information age tends to split and fragment society in information-haves and information-have-nots, depending on personal interest and/or financial resources for paying for all these miraculous but expensive worldwide offers and links.

It remains the task of public broadcasting to serve the general public in their environment, to give the information and orientation that their audiences need. That's why public broadcasting is not at all outdated, it is more necessary than ever. It has to be strengthened and developed; it has to be defended against all attempts to abolish what is of such utmost importance for society and the world.

vision

Donald McDonald
Chairman, Australian Broadcasting Corporation of public broadcasters

You can only predict things after they have happened.

I'm not a clairvoyant, so does my vision of public service broadcasting in the 21st century hold true? If anything has been proven by our experiences during the last decade, it is that our predictions should be less confident.

Nor is there a simple narrative for such a complex beast as public broadcasting. We have different histories, cultures and media environments.

We are united by a set of common privileges and responsibilities – responsibilities which can sometimes seem a burden of conflicting expectations. However, I am certain our experiences during the last decade are very similar.

Though sometimes mocked, our mission to inform, educate and entertain is still at the heart of all of our activities.

We entered the new millennium with a sense of crisis, competition and confusion. Even though public broadcasters have been through

difficult times, it still hasn't been easy for us.

I have been Chairman of Australia's national public broadcaster, ABC, since 1996 and I've seen a few predictions come and go during that time.

Earlier last decade, it was said that pay-TV was growing so fast that it would blindside and marginalize free-to-air broadcasters, including public broadcasters. The reality is that, in Australia, it has reached just 22% of households, and though still growing slowly its balance sheets have been written exclusively in red.

ABC saw in the new millennium serenely, there was no chaos. Our organization continues to re-invent and reform itself, constantly adapting to the change that is all around it. It now has the largest audience shares in its history, despite the arrival of that great experiment nearly two years ago, and the cause of our own Age of Anxiety: digital television.

While this may yet occur, we still seem a long way from that promised oblivion.

I do think we sometimes underestimate the time it takes for a

society to absorb serious cultural change, how long it takes for the effects to be widely felt. Which reminds me – Australians have not yet converged either, and are still dedicated to different screens and different machines for different content.

Contradictions

During these past six years we seemed to have so often looked at public broadcasting in the clarifying light of imminent loss – and it has firmed our resolve. These past six years have also provided an awful lot of hindsight – and hindsight at this point seems far more reliable.

Having said that, I am confident that this is relevant to other public broadcasters as well. I'd like to mention some of the contradictions engaging us today.

“You turn on the television . . . that's the major culture. That's what most people love.” Arthur Miller, *The Times* (London), 15 October 2002. Just as it is within the power of history to say what will be lost and what will live on, so it is with the stories about ourselves. If we are to have a cultural memory, we had better ensure we're getting it right with television.

Television is the most popular media, far surpassing the press and radio. It is the way in which most people get their nation's stories. It is perhaps one of the most influential teachers we have.



Local content – stories about ourselves – presents some perplexing contradictions for public broadcasting television.

It's often been the experience of ABC, particularly with drama productions, that the more faithfully our own culture is reflected in a production, the less chance it has of being sold to other markets.

Yet often the public broadcaster producing expensive comedy and drama is up against an expectation that though culturally unique, these programmes nevertheless might recoup some of their costs through sales to foreign markets. The rise in localism in other countries means of course, a shrinking market, less funds available to import foreign programming, which means adding to the dilemma.

It's not often that the sheer novelty of a foreign culture is enough to see it succeed in foreign markets. A programme might get lucky: a story that is culturally specific might have universal appeal.

Cultural references

For instance, a breakaway hit in Australia at the moment is *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. Replete with specifically Greek elements, it is underpinned by the eternal archetypes of family – and people are responding to it accordingly.

The hugely successful *Moulin Rouge* of recent times was directed and written by Australians, with Australian actors, crew and cinematographer, and filmed in Sydney – yet the only Australian culture in it is found in these production sources.

Other productions were less fortunate. Last year ABC produced a remarkable series, *Changi*, about the prisoner of war experience of Australians during World War II, and

the subsequent aftermath of that experience, the toll it took on survivors down through the years. It was a story of enduring courage on an epic scale in which national identity was being revealed in every scene.

And the cost of dealing with Australian culture so intimately was, of course, seen in the reduced possibility of foreign sales. Yet as a public broadcaster there was no choice.

“Once a technology enters human life – whether it be fire, the wheel, the automobile, radio, television or the internet – it changes it in ways we can never fully understand.” John Gray, *Straw Dogs* (Granta Books, London 2002) p.18

The digital model mandated by Australia's federal government was high-definition television. With its drawing power largely confined to better pictures and sound it does not have much of an advantage over existing television sets, and therefore has not been much of an inducement to buy new ones.

It was suggested that the uptake of high-definition digital television might be slow. Clearly, this has been correct. Less than 1% of Australian households have taken up digital television in almost two years.

Though ABC was not convinced that better pictures and sound would be enough we did, however, get behind that decision to carry the nation towards digital. However, our support was limited as we were not appropriately funded for digital programming.

Massive public and private investment – estimated at \$1 billion – and a huge infrastructure are sitting idle. We are keen to see that investment realized.

Within its existing means, without extra funding, and with an eye to

future audiences for a future technology, ABC launched Australia's first new digital channels – ABC Kids and Fly (for teenagers). We believe these will help people see the difference and the possibilities of digital, and increase its value in the eyes of potential audiences.

For many Australians – let alone the staff in television retail outlets – talk about analogue/digital is irrelevant as long as there is no content.

ABC believes that a focus on interactive programming on our digital channels will galvanize the entire digital broadcasting sector – by giving it meaning and making it live for audiences.

Interactivity

ABC has begun numerous trials of interactive programming. We may perhaps be too impatient. I am reminded of the theatre manager who asked a director how he might shorten *Waiting for Godot*. The affronted director suggested a change to the play's opening as a possible solution: ACT ONE, Scene 1 – Enter Godot.

Interactive content adds so much to a programme through extra value of archival material, interviews and more detailed information.

ABC will be seeking appropriate funding through its triennial funding negotiations with Government to cover the extra cost of providing this additional programming. As the trusted national public broadcaster, ABC can help educate Australian audiences about interactive services, and play a research and development role within the Australian industry.

Chaos

Around the world there are similar questions about the digital future, and switch-off dates for analogue. The decision-making process

sometimes seems a tawdry chaos of public policy vacillation or error.

In Germany, the conversion to digital is being driven by public sector leadership and money. The UK is again trying to accelerate conversion, this time by allowing the major public broadcaster to lead the way to digital terrestrial broadcasting with Freeview.

Freeview is a particularly interesting experiment, being a partnership between the BBC, Crown Castle and Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB: £99 for a set-top box, and 30 digital TV and radio channels free for life. That's today's digital TV, UK-style. Who would have thought ten years ago that the most powerful competitor to public broadcasting would be in business with the BBC?

I have not forgotten Rupert Murdoch's MacTaggart lecture at the Edinburgh Television Festival in 1989, which expressed the view that public broadcasting was elitist and out of touch with what people really wanted.

However, there's a certain volatility to these alliances. They are very deftly and rapidly rearranged. A short while ago, I sensed an emerging dispute between the public broadcasters in the UK and BSkyB.

Currently the Australian competition regulator is engaged in a review of a possible merger between the leading pay-TV operator, the leading telco, and the second largest pay-TV operator – a merger which offers in return the digitization of the pay-TV platform, and a second chance to boost digital uptake (and pay-TV).

Needless to say, monopoly issues concern the regulator.

Public broadcasters also have concerns about the digital platform that we believe are best addressed by regulatory bodies and Parlia-

mentary legislation. The major regulatory issues for the Australian public broadcasters will not surprise you. They are:

- guaranteed free carriage (must carry);
- appropriate placement in electronic programme guides (EPGs).

We are opposed to paying a commercial platform operator to ensure the public is able to access the public broadcaster just because we have limited funds.

If public broadcasters are carried, we cannot allow them to be shunted off to some dark and distant recess of the EPG. In Australia, we are talking about a public investment in television of almost 50 years.

The choice of public broadcasting must be available for everyone, everywhere. A community with a full range of interests must have guaranteed access to the full range of programming – which can only be ensured through the public broadcasters.

Not everyone recognizes their lives or their interests in programming provided by the pay platforms. Whatever broadcasting means Australians choose to be informed, educated and entertained; the public broadcaster has to be there, making a difference.

“For ours is a constitution which does not imitate those of others, but rather sets them an example.” Pericles from *The Pelican History of Greece*, A.R. Burn (Viking Penguin Books, New York 1965) p.113.

When founding public broadcasting, John Reith (first Director General of the BBC) brought into being not just something that did not exist before, but something he could not have imagined.

Public broadcasting would be unrecognizable to him in its many current manifestations, having grown and changed in step with the world around it. Importantly, its original spirit has lasted.

We still have a need for radio and television and new media content – independent of commercial and political influence, which asserts our individuality.

The commercial sector is actually very good at giving people what they like. Public broadcasters have to develop and diversify to respond to the new interests of its target groups.

Programming that might trouble a firmly held belief, and change the way we view the world rather than simply confirm it is still required.

I spoke before of the danger of predictions. Yet I feel certain that further into this century public broadcasting will be as dynamic as it is now, and undoubtedly gripped as always by threats – though we are unable to imagine what they might be at the moment.

We will not yet be looking at it as a museum piece or some pleasing archaeological reconstruction born of the illusions of the 20th century. Like democracy, it may never be perfect but it is as close as we get to what's best, mixing the energy of the popular with the possibilities of the good.

And while its contradictions are many, the hopes of public broadcasting still outnumber them. It has not lost its gift or its nerve, nor lost sight of those tremendous possibilities that Reith dared to dream up in the gloom of a London winter over seventy years ago.



In 2000, things began to change . . .

. . . at Telewizja Polska (TVP). This has led to fundamental changes in all areas of the company's operations: catching up on the many years of delay and adapting the company's operations to market requirements. The time has now come to face the challenge of the rapid development of new technologies, including the digital revolution and globalization of the economic and communications sectors. We would like to continue to set the programming and technological standards on the Polish media market. Our strategic objective for the next few years is to transform TVP into a multimedia broadcaster while also remaining the largest television producer in Poland.

Over the last two years, there have been far-reaching organizational changes in TVP. The company's strategy has been adapted to face the challenges of the market. We spent

almost \$25 million on film production in 2001 and this expenditure is increasing each year. The change in strategy resulted in the modification of TVP's internal regulations. We are now allowed to produce and sell to other broadcasters a concert or any other television format, along with technical and production services. These new provisions have redefined the role of the public service broadcaster.

Agreements with other market players have been forced on us to some extent by the market. Since the 1990s a new social order has been evolving in Poland and the systematic transformations that have taken place mean that TVP must now work with its competitors. Just like the rest of society, TVP has been supporting the development of pluralism in the Polish media, which in consequence has led to the development of competition. However, people

connected with public service broadcasting, including myself, have also been taking part in the drafting of a law which guarantees the development of the private sector in Poland.

Not everyone finds this easy. Out of necessity but also of its own volition, TVP is an institution that tries to help everyone who is unable to find his or her place in a Poland that has undergone major transformations over the past 13 years. We see our role as going far beyond the traditional definition of the public service broadcaster.

Telewizja Polska is changing its strategy in the area of cooperation with commercial competition. The most characteristic example of this 'new approach' is the joint purchase of large sports events. For the first time in its history, TVP purchased the rights to the World Cup from a private broadcaster. Our objective was to create the opportunity for the largest possible group of supporters to watch the most important matches of the World Cup. We have been transmitting Poland's football

TVP

Robert Kwiatowski
President, Telewizja Polska

changing its role

matches for very many years but this time around our discussions with the commercial station, Polsat, on the acquisition of the rights to the World Cup were a matter of national importance. The president, prime minister and the chairman of KRRiT (the National Broadcasting Council) appealed for an agreement to be concluded. We were finally able to achieve this and we did everything in our power to satisfy Polish supporters.

The first attempts to come to an agreement with commercial broadcasters took place at the end of the 1990s. The Polish digital platform, CYFRA+, officially inaugurated its activities in November 1998. Telewizja Polska wanted to participate financially in this project but could not because, at the time, the Minister of the State Treasury would not give its consent. Public broadcasters should have a significant influence on the development of the audiovisual sector, including the development of digital services. Such a memorandum of understanding was, on balance, confirmed by the Council of Europe in January 2002.

The current situation of the Polish media market requires that we re-define, to a certain extent, the role and tasks of the public broadcaster. For many years Telewizja Polska has been conscientiously fulfilling its mission by committing itself to significant cultural events. Most



recently, however, we have been going beyond the role of broadcaster and increasingly taking on a role of initiator and animator of significant artistic events. For example, TVP was the co-organizer of the Festival of Four Cultures in Lodz in 2002. The idea behind this was to present four cultures: Polish, Jewish, German and Russian, which were at the centre of industrial power in Lodz at the turn of the nineteenth century and on which the city's culture is based.

Europe

The social situation that exists in Poland puts TVP in a position to help people. Our most valuable commodity which we can share with those in need is broadcasting time, which is used to unite allies and find sponsors for charity and social events. In January, we produced and broadcast for the tenth time the nationwide charity event: the Christmas Charity Concert. Telewizja Polska is the co-organizer and patron of this event which raises funds for sick children. Over the past 10 years we have been able to raise almost \$40 million dollars.

Poland will be a member of the European Union in 2004. Our most important task in this respect is to prepare the citizens to function in an integrated Europe. TVP's public obligations include two interlacing functions: information and persuasion. Since the former appears obvious and does not raise any questions, I would like to discuss the latter. When covering Poland's integration with the EU, it is sometimes difficult to separate information from the interpretation of events. Viewers need reliable information but also analysis and conclusions in order for them to make their own judgements and to fully participate in the accession referendum.

In Poland public service television operates under very difficult social and political conditions. The battle for power, frequent changes in the law and the rapid introduction of the most significant social reforms often result in disinformation in the media. TVP plays an extraordinarily important and specific role amid the hullabaloo and information overload. To most of society, we are reliable and credible and therefore we have been able to maintain a significant role in the Polish media market of today.

For years the Polish viewer has been accustomed to daily contact with TVP. We therefore respect their habits while at the same time we adjust quickly to the new demands that are increasingly made on us.



KOSSO

Fritz Pleitgen

Vice-President, EBU; Director General, Westdeutscher Rundfunk

In Germany, we are very keen on seeing Kosovo develop in a constructive and positive way.

The European Broadcasting Union as a whole shares this feeling.

The EBU is a professional association of all public service broadcasting organizations throughout Europe. Its Members have worked for more than 50 years to develop politically independent, unbiased and reliable broadcast media. They support each other in their daily work with top-quality news networks, transmission infrastructures, coproductions, advice and financial help. In this framework they also initiated RTK's operations in 1999. And we are glad to see what EBU and Kosovan professionals have achieved in such a short time: RTK has become the most accepted and trusted broadcasting station in Kosovo.

As much as we can, we will continue to support this process for the good of all of Kosovo's citizens. But of

course the most decisive factor is always the effort and perseverance of the people themselves.

Suffering

We know what suffering you have had to endure: destruction, death and expulsion. We also know how difficult the process of normalization is after the experience of these years of horror. We hope our own history and experience will provide some guidance to you as you build your future.

In 1945, Germany too was liberated from dictatorship by external forces. One of the most important tools given to us after the Second World War to re-establish democracy was the public broadcasting system. The BBC served as our role model. Public television and radio broadcasting has proved its value time and again, and particularly in periods of crisis. It

continues to make an essential contribution to the promotion and stability of democracy in our country.

The institution of public broadcasting must be independent from State and Government. It is paid for by the public, by the citizens, and it is there to serve them alone. Representatives of all relevant social groups (trade unions, denominations, social associations, cultural institutions, members of parliament, sport associations) serve to monitor the public broadcasting system. It is an effective system of 'checks and balances'. Neither the president, the head of state nor any powerful party has the authority to decide what is or is not broadcast. Only the broadcaster decides on its programming – in accordance with the laws and regulations that govern public broadcasting.

The programming must be responsive to the interests and needs of all citizens in all sectors of society. This means both majorities and minorities. Public broadcasting is a communications platform for everyone. It must not be manipulated by one set of interests to the disadvantage of all others. Credibility is the key factor to its success, and independence is the

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prerequisite for credibility. Without independence and credibility, democracy cannot truly function.

Vigilance

A public broadcasting network must always be vigilant in its responsibility to the public it serves. Its purpose is to expose wrong-doing and negative developments. Naturally, the powers that be in government and society would prefer to have the public see only their good side, but that approach does not provide the complete picture and credibility that inspire confidence. People begin to lose their faith in the political system when they realize that they are being misled.

We have experienced a convincing example of this in our own country. Germany was divided for decades. In the Western Federal Republic we had an independent broadcasting system. In the GDR in the East, the Communist system dictated what was and was not to be broadcast on television and radio. Technically, broadcast services from both east and west could be received in homes over vast areas of both countries.

The impact was clear to all. No one in the Western Federal Republic was interested in the propaganda-laden programming from the GDR. And

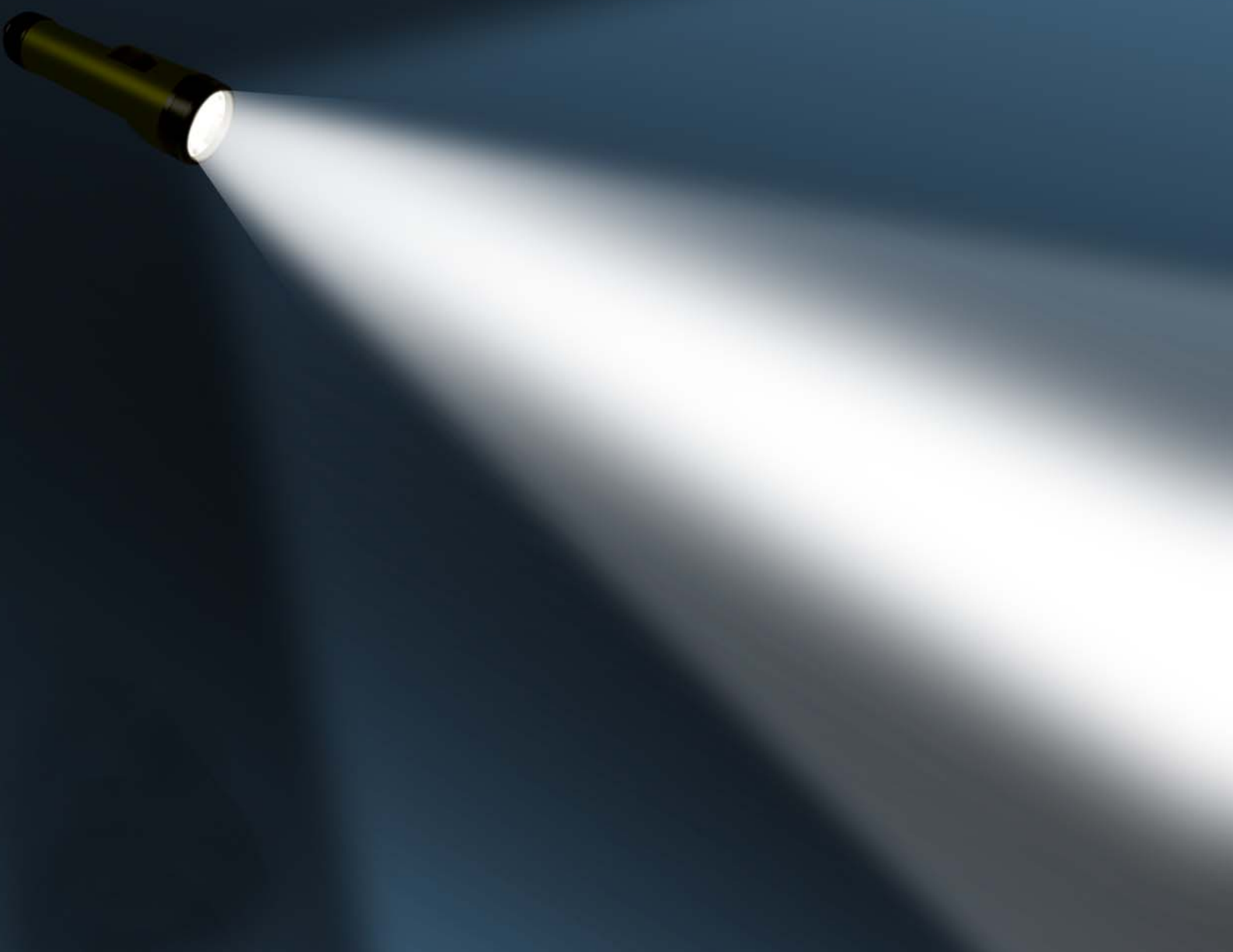
in the GDR almost everyone watched nothing but television broadcasting from the West.

The citizens in the East longed for our political system in the West, even though weaknesses in our system were subject to hefty criticism in some of our own programming. This was one decisive reason why the GDR collapsed. And neither the 500,000-strong heavily-armed Soviet troops, the national people's army, nor the GDR's own omniscient secret police could do anything about it.

Now one might argue that whatever a public broadcaster can achieve, a private broadcaster can do just as well. That is a misapprehension. Private broadcasters have to make money, and their schedule is guided by the bottom line. So they focus on stories that are popular and sensationalist in nature. It cannot afford sustained, wide-ranging and in-depth reporting for purely informational purposes. For this reason, commercial television can only serve to supplement public broadcasting, and the public benefits when there is competition for its attention.

Independence

Commercial interests, like political influence, can only imperil journalistic independence. This is



even the case in the USA where powerful corporations are able to obstruct disagreeable television stories. However, since the USA enjoys a strong independent press (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times* to name just a few), such shortcomings in commercial television are easily absorbed by America's general freedom of information and alternative media.

Of utmost importance to the quality of a public broadcaster are the skills and capabilities of its journalists, who must be educated and trained to do their job professionally and credibly. They must be neither arrogant nor intimidated but prepared to report news that may not please some interests.

Enlightenment also means dismantling prejudice, conveying the opinions of others and contributing to mutual understanding. I am well aware that this is particularly difficult in a country with a past such as yours. But without mutual understanding there is only stagnation. Without understanding there is no prosperity and no catching up with the rest of a united Europe. Journalists need to be independent – both on an intellectual and on a

material level. It would be ominous for the entire mission if journalists assigned to a critical story also had to fear for their jobs.

You might be asking yourselves: who is the person telling us all this?

I am a journalist by profession and have been working in broadcasting for 40 years now. As a young man I frequently took assignments as a special reporter and war reporter in Europe, the Near East and Middle East. At the end of the Cold War I was a correspondent in Moscow, working under conditions of semi-censorship. Later I reported from the GDR when Germany was still divided.

I have also worked as a correspondent in Washington. So I have seen both sides of the journalistic coin – both censorship and free reporting. Later, working as a reporter on the front line, I was able to observe and witness the fall of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the entire socialist system. After that, I had a look around the crisis-ridden and war-torn regions from the Caucasus to Sarajevo, Israel and the Palestinian territories. To that extent I feel I can allow myself to make certain judgements as to the effects of broadcasting.

My greatest hope is that the RTK network is playing a valuable role in building up a democratic Kosovo and shall continue to do so in future. We from the EBU are prepared to assist you to that end. But that is merely the beginning.

Destroyed . . .

. . . by 21 years of war, with the press and cultural institutions suffering heavy losses during the terrorist period of al-Qaeda and the Taliban. But further to the Bonn Agreements our country has entered a new phase of life and an Afghan interim administration was formed under the leadership of Hamed Karzai. In seven months this administration has succeeded in establishing relative peace, with the help of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and is rebuilding the destroyed base of the State.

During the rule of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan and the era of occupation under the Soviet Union, the volume of dissemination increased but the press

was under the monopoly of a 'jungle' ideology, freedom of speech and the press did not exist. In 1992, the Mujahidin took over Kabul which led to a power struggle among the various factions that did nothing to help restore democracy and the freedom of the press.

Freedom

This freedom, which the Afghans last experienced in 1965, was not restored until the creation of the Afghan interim authority. The new press law goes beyond the limits of the original 1965 law and allows any Afghan to set up radio and television channels, open a theatre, organize conferences, print publications, etc. Though the Afghans consider this law democratic it has nevertheless been criticized by some international institutions and this has obliged us to review it.

At the same time we are also looking at how to restructure all of the Afghan media in view of the rapid technological advances that are being made, the pervasiveness of satellite and the Internet; and the liberalization, privatization and globalization of media that has made the world a smaller place. Large media companies dominate over smaller ones, international media dominates over national media. On the one hand, we are witnessing the freedom of the press and mass media but, on the other hand, we also notice these radios encroaching on the audiences that were committed to Radio Kabul and Radio Afghanistan. However, as we want our people to have access to radio and television but also encourage the freedom of press and mass media we have decided to make even more changes to the Afghan public service broadcaster.



Abdul Hamid Mobarez
Deputy Minister of Information & Culture, Afghanistan

Our plans for the reconstruction and development of the Afghan media is rooted in the vision of a social and political future that our people deserve and aspire to. This has been promised by the government of a free, independent and united Afghanistan, a government that is the servant of the people and is accountable to them. In a country where there is peace, justice, rule of law and where people can build a modern society, a civil society, a peaceful society in accordance with the principles of Islam, human rights and democracy.

Avid audience

This vision cannot be realized without a free and independent media. Our people have lived through more than two decades of war and poverty. Most of them are illiterate. But they have been avid

listeners of international radio and they are a sophisticated audience. They appreciate and depend on reliable information. The Afghan media will have to match the standards of their international competitors if they are to win the respect and confidence of the Afghan audience. People all over the world – including Afghans – have access to radio, television and international services thanks to modern satellite communications. This massive influx of information cannot be controlled and our media have no choice but to compete in a global market while at the same time promote peace, stability and comprehension not violence and terrorism. We want to present a united front against violence and intolerance.

Foreign TV channels banned

The Chief Justice of the Afghan Supreme Court bans foreign television channels in Afghanistan.

Mowlawi Fazl Hadi Shinwari announced a ban on cable TV in Kabul. A dozen TV channels considered to be "pornographic and anti-Islamic" are available on cable in the city.

The Chief Justice also considers satellite TV and VCRs as having a "negative" influence and believes they should be banned too.



afghanistan

facing the challenges