



Commission des Episcopats de la Communauté Européenne
Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community
Kommission der Bischofskonferenzen der Europäischen Gemeinschaft

TELEVISION WITHOUT FRONTIERS

Contribution to the Public Consultation

The Working Group on Information Society, Communications and Media Policy of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) welcomes the opportunity provided by the European Commission to make the following contribution to the public consultation on the "Television Without Frontiers" Directive.

Given the rapid development of new broadcasting technologies and advertising techniques, the increasing overlap between traditional audio-visual media and the Internet, and the ever-growing importance of the media as a whole in our modern, globalised society, COMECE believes that it is necessary and appropriate to review the application of the TVWF Directive and to consider ways in which it might be improved.

Our contribution therefore focuses both on certain provisions of the current Directive and on certain challenges which we believe it should address in the future.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

We believe that in the light of technological developments and changes in the audio-visual marketplace, the time has come to establish a consistent and comprehensive framework for EU audio-visual policy. It may be, for example, that the best response to some of the challenges highlighted by the application of the Directive is not to be found in forms of regulation but through programmes such as MEDIA Plus.

We therefore agree with the Report of the European Parliament's Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport (June 2003) that, *"the principles underlying the Directive, and indeed, those underlying the Community's audio-visual policy, should be set down in a Content Framework Package of graduated levels of regulation, which would provide an overarching framework for the audio-visual sector"*.

MEDIA LITERACY AND THE PROTECTION OF MINORS

The protection of minors and human dignity requires supranational action in a media environment marked by the proliferation of digital, satellite and other television channels, the tendency for even terrestrial broadcasters to broadcast from one country to another, and streaming on the Internet. Yet these very same developments, along with changing standards of taste and decency, greater reliance on self-regulation and the differences in acceptability between cinema, video, television and Internet content, have diminished the

relative importance of a classical regulatory response, such as “bans, censorship ‘watersheds’, regulation and codes of conduct” (COMECE Statement on Media Education, 30 March 2001, 3).

Within that context we believe that media education, both of minors and of European citizens in general, is fundamentally important. The Directive requires producers to provide a minimal level of consumer information in respect of television programmes (Chapter V). This is in line with a consistent demand from viewers that they have access to sufficient information to be able to determine for themselves and/or for their children whether a particular programme is suitable for viewing.

Although self-regulation by the television programme provider must still be maintained, more responsibility has been placed on viewers, making it ever more important that they are properly equipped to make informed judgements about the media content with which they or their children might wish to interact.

⇒ *We urge the Commission to support, at a minimum, an ongoing dialogue between national regulators, media producers, educators and viewers’ representatives to share experiences and information about best practice in the area of media literacy and consumer awareness.*

⇒ *At a more structural level, we urge the Commission to encourage and support national regulators to promote the implementation of national policies aiming at the systematic introduction of media literacy programmes at all levels of the educational system.*

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Cultural diversity is one of the main objectives of the EU Treaties. The audio-visual sector is recognised as key to achieving this objective. In the light of the growing concerns about the concentration of the media in Europe and about the possible restrictions on pluralism and cultural diversity which may result, we believe that any changes to the Directive should be designed to promote and strengthen cultural diversity.

Cultural diversity, expressed through the audio-visual media, enables those who belong to the diverse cultures of Europe, including minority cultures, to feel recognised in society. At the same time the media enable the members of other cultures and social groups to know and appreciate cultures other than their own.

It is not sufficient for cultural diversity to be assured by the “niches” of specialised channels. These have limited audiences; they are usually watched only by the group most immediately concerned. This risks encouraging each cultural or social group to close in on itself, even promoting intolerant behaviour. It is therefore necessary that cultural diversity is given a place on all general interest channels, particularly public service channels.

A major challenge for European societies is the integration of people from non-European countries and cultures. To support cultural diversity one must take into account not only the diversity of European cultures but the diversity of cultures present in European countries.

For the benefit of the process of integration it might therefore be important also to show programmes from, for example, Asian or African countries.

The expression of cultural diversity in the media is therefore an essential condition for social cohesion. In this way, the audio-visual media have a central role in promoting democratic life with full respect for our differences.

⇒ *We support the comments and recommendations made in the Report by the European Parliament's CULT Committee on "Cultural Diversity and European Awareness".*

⇒ *We support the provisions of Articles 4 and 5 of the Directive and urge the Commission to maintain them in the future, whilst taking full account of their importance in terms of promoting integration and social cohesion.*

⇒ *We urge the Commission to encourage in particular the further dissemination of high-quality European programmes aimed at children.*

RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING

The Directive includes a number of provisions which are either directly or indirectly relevant to religious broadcasting. For example, preserving a majority of broadcasting time for works of European origin (Article 4) also has justification in the religious field. The ways in which we live and express our religious convictions, even those with a global dimension, are closely linked to local cultures. In religious broadcasting, it is therefore important and appropriate to give a privileged position to programmes that present an authentically European form of religious practice.

The Directive aims to ensure respect for the broadcast of religious services by laying down strict limits on the use of advertising during such broadcasts (Article 11.5). The separation of advertising from the broadcast of religious services is essential in order to maintain the dignity of the service itself and to prevent unscrupulous forms of advertising.

The Directive also requires that advertising respect human dignity and religious beliefs (Article 12). This is important in order to guarantee social cohesion and tolerance for different religious traditions.

⇒ *We urge the Commission to maintain Article 11.5 of the Directive in any future revision of its provisions.*

⇒ *We also urge the Commission to maintain Article 12.*

Brussels,
11 July 2003