INTRODUCTION

THE PLACE OF MEDIA AND CULTURAL POLICY IN THE EU

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The role of the European Union in the sphere of media and culture has known an increasing importance in the last two decades, not only for national markets and societies that are directly associated with the EU polity but also for non EU states influenced by international agreements. As media and cultural policy has attracted the attention of the academy and policymakers, so have the institutions of the EU dedicated resources to the development of policies that target European or EU dimensions of such policies. Most notable difficulties in this process have been questions of jurisdiction – whether the EU does have jurisdiction upon the media and generally cultural sector – as well as philosophical questions about the raison d’être – whether the EU should have jurisdiction in these areas.

The varying perspectives and sociocultural contexts of European states, as well as the complexities deriving from the tensions between traditions of public service, which are regarded inherently ‘European’, and the intensified privatisisation of such culture, including the field of media are some of the problems that are closely related to the directions to which the polity may be developing. They belong to fundamental questions about the nature of governance of the European political and cultural space, affecting one way or another the ways in which European citizens experience their cultures, and that of others, and actively create them. Even more so, policy affects the ways in which citizens, including those of a ‘precarious’ status, nation states and EU institutions relate to one another, to actively construct their living space.
The significance of cultural and media policy cannot be overestimated, as it transcends the fields of technology, politics, economics and social life in a number of ways. Not only have media and culture industries become increasingly central in the economies of European countries, they have also become the terrain of contestation and consensus regarding self-governance and cultural identity. The polity had to deal with these questions in its transformation from an economic coalition to a political and cultural entity. Media and cultural policies are themselves expressions of conflict of economic interests and political ideological positions. They have an impact upon rights, the legitimation of the polity, and the conditions for the materialisation of citizenship. They occupy a peculiar position in the European Union agenda. Not only have they entered the arena of EU jurisdiction under complex and contradictory conditions, but they have also become the terrain where the essence and future of the polity is taking shape. Or at the very least, this is the domain where worldviews about the identity of the EU conflate and contest its present. The historical development of European integration has been characterised by a continuous, albeit neither homogenous nor seamless, integration of national and regional markets, accompanied by the establishment of institutions whose roles and relation to each other – and the member states – has grown more complex as their competencies increased.

These changes have been driven by an economic imperative of market integration, underwritten by a web of international relations entrenched in a Cold War atmosphere based on the politics of fear. On the one hand, the ideology of fear of and threat from a Communist Europe was exemplified in the race to ‘annex’ the coal and steel markets of (Western) Germany to the Western European markets. On the other hand, the fear of another interEuropean war that would break down the social fabric of Europe provided the ideological foundation for the pursuit of peace for Europe through the path of economic first – interdependence. Within this changing climate of international relations, the first attempts of European market integration saw the rise of institutions that by their very definition would proclaim the importance of cultural integration – or perhaps cultural hegemony – for social cohesion in the continent. The European Parliament and the European Court of Human Rights have bestowed the European polity a political and social contract