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**Leading by example? An Assessment of the European Union’s implementation and operationalization of Cultural Diversity objectives at internal and external level**

Identity and diversity have been the cornerstones of national audiovisual policies ever since their inception. Creating cultural narratives on the one hand aim to serve local bonding and to stimulate the expression and sharing of fundamental values and norms within communities. In light of market failures in the production of local audiovisual content expressing cultural identity and diversity, several policies have been set up in the EU and its member states to support local cultural industries. On the other hand, local cultural narratives are also passed on among groups and societies, and contribute to intercultural understanding. Exporting cultural expressions to set up intercultural encounters and dialogue can therefore be seen as another objective of both film and (public service) broadcasting policies.

With the publication of Unesco’s Mac Bride report ‘Many Voices, One World’ in 1980, it became clear however that leveraging the establishment and shaping of the concept of cultural diversity onto the international level created a lot of controversy. The ‘culture as commodity’ approach of the US conflicted fundamentally with a ‘culture as dialogue’ approach usually associated with of Unesco, Canada and some leading EU Member States. The conflict culminated in the US and the UK leaving Unesco in 1984 and 1985. The further struggle over the meaning of cultural diversity and the way to operationalize and implement it then followed separate paths. The culture as commodity view of serving cultural diversity internationally via open markets and free trade was best accommodated in subsequent GATT/GATS and WTO negotiations. Proponents of a cultural dialogue view prefer Unesco as the international forum to discuss cultural diversity in media flows among countries. The closing of the WTO Uruguay round in 1994 made clear that there was no common ground for an ‘exception culturelle’ and initiated a gradual yet irreversible tendency towards liberalization of the audiovisual sector at world level, and pressure on protectionist measures to ensure cultural diversity.

In light of this perceived pressure, Unesco’s Convention on Cultural Diversity was welcomed by many international partners who wish for a counterbalance to developments in the international trade forum. With the US rejoining Unesco in 2003, one may argue that Unesco’s approach towards culture as dialogue was gaining momentum at the international level. The Convention on the promotion and protection of the diversity of cultural expressions was indeed overwhelmingly adopted in 2005, with only 4 abstentions and 2 oppositional votes. Being one of its most important defenders, and almost 10 years after the adoption of the Convention, it is time to take stock. First, we analyse how the EU actually implemented the concept of cultural diversity both internally and externally. Second, we will evaluate the coherence of the EU approach in implementing the Convention and the prospects and pitfalls for increased cultural diversity in audiovisual sectors nationally, in Europe and worldwide. The underlying question is whether we have moved beyond the period of paying only lip service to the concept, and entered an era of true political and legal commitments to its implementation.