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# Lessons from History: Reorganization of Broadcasting Systems in Western Europe after WWII

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## The Initial Situation

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- Central and Eastern Europe's broadcasting system underwent significant changes after 1989/1990
- Western Europe had seen a similar challenge after the second World War ended in 1945
  - The broadcasting sector had been exploited for political propaganda during the war
  - Private broadcasters were censored or shut down
  - Public broadcasters were staffed according to political needs
  - This left the system with state monopolies and vulnerable to political influence after the war
- Western democracies were forced to restructure the broadcasting system after the war
  - Which objectives did Western Europe's new media system aspire to? What were the guiding principles for the newly instated regulatory authorities?

## Objectives for Restructuring the Media System after 1945

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- Independence from the state
  - Political influence over the media had been established during WWII, the media **served the political needs of the government**
  - After the war, the media was meant to **serve society's needs**
- Diversity of opinion
  - During the war, the **government's opinion had been disseminated** through the media
  - After the war, a „**marketplace of opinions**“ was meant to be created, a contest of perspectives and solutions
- Federalism
  - During the war, the media systems had been **centralized** to facilitate governmental control
  - After the war, **federalism** was meant to counteract market concentration

- **Examples: Germany, Spain; Exceptions: Italy, France, UK**

## Public Service Broadcasting

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- Initially, states were hesitant to allow private broadcasters to operate
  - Justification: spectrum scarcity
- Instead, public service broadcasters were modelled after the UK's BBC
  - Fiduciary obligation for the public good: information, education, entertainment
- Exclusion from public administration
  - Germany: "Rundfunkanstalten", self-administered, internally pluralistic
  - Italy: RAI was founded in the sixties as a stock company after pressure from the political opposition and decisions of the constitutional court
  - UK: the BBC was established by Royal Charter, securing its independence

## Public Service Broadcasting

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- Limited state supervision and pluralism
  - BBC UK: Board of governors and Ofcom
  - Italy: parliamentary committee and AGCOM, broadcasting time for third parties
  - France: CSA
  - Germany: (internally pluralistic) broadcasting councils
- Independent financing
  - Germany: broadcasting fee, determined by independent commission
  - UK: television licence fee, set by government
  - Limitation of advertisement in PSB
    - Prevention of economic influence/ dependence
- Regionalization
  - Germany and Spain: PBS in provinces/ autonomous regions
  - UK and France: centralized PBS

## Private Broadcasting

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- Commercial broadcasting was seen as an opportunity to (further) diversify opinions
- Risk: Political influence could be wielded in issuing or denying licenses to private broadcasters
  - The regulators responsible for licensing and supervision of private broadcasters were modelled after the US-American Federal Communications Commission
  - Free from administrative directions
  - Independent financing
  - Appointment of members and directors by parliament  
=> no governmental influence
  - Incompatibility rules for members of the regulatory authority

## Private Broadcasting

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- Plurality
  - Externally pluralistic model
  - Prevention of market concentration
  - Independent from the state but subject to economic pressure (financed through advertisement)
    - Programming Principles are meant to ensure continued quality of programmes
    - Quota rules for national and European Works

## Recent Developments

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- The achievements of restructuring the media system have been weakened in recent years
  - Rules on media concentration have become increasingly liberal
  - Supervisory authorities have little actual power and are strongly influenced by economic players
    - Increased lobbying, new business opportunities
  - PBS are often subject to (indirect) political influence
  - PBS' importance and market share is decreasing under pressure from new competitors
    - OTT-services and internet services are often not subject to the same regulation => no level-playing field



## A Lesson Learned or a Lesson Forgotten?

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- Erosion of broadcasting regulation
- Erosion of underlying values (independence and plurality)
- Obstruction of the process of European integration and harmonization of media markets
- The internet introduced a universally available alternative distribution system, which puts the justification and need for PBS into questions
- The lessons learned after the second World War are slowly fading into oblivion

## Thank You for Your Attention!

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