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## THE DECLINE OF PUBLIC BROADCASTING IN FRANCE?

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**Abstract:** European public broadcasting has been suffering in the last few years from a decreasing budget, a reduction of quality programming and a loss of TV ratings. One may then wonder if, in France, we are not contributing in the same way to the decline of public broadcasting, especially since the audio-visual reform in 2009. The first part of my work carries out an analysis of concept definitions and public broadcasting in Europe which will lead us to then analyse the situation in France. The second part is devoted to the analysis of television in France, especially after audio-visual reform that could precipitate the decline of public service channels.

**Keywords** *Public broadcasting, France, Europe, decline, audio-visual reform*

### Introduction

In France, the concept of public service is a “noble” value because it is placed above pragmatic, political or financial considerations. Theoretically, it aims at improving a situation in the material or human sense for the benefit of the community. I chose to study how public service is applied to French television from the creation of the first stations (in the forties), until 2014. 2010 was marked by the application of an important reform of audio-visual public sector (radio and television) approved by vote in 2009. The study of the evolution of public service over a period of approximately seventy years allows us to better understand the reasons why private or public channels have changed. These reasons are often of a political and economic nature because the operation of French channels depends closely on a double political and financial supervision. It is then interesting to know what the direction and application of public service within the very precise framework of television is. What are the missions of public television channels? Its specifications necessitate society to be represented in its totality by taking into account ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. It also necessitates quality programming and detachment from TV-rating constraints to operate its programming policy.

The history of public service television in France fits into a broader framework, that of Europe’s, which has evolved (or should I say, regressed) in a similar way. The European public audio-visual sector has suffered in the last few years from a decreasing budget, a reduction of quality programming and a loss of TV ratings. One may then wonder if, in France, we are not contributing in the same way to the decline of public service channels.

The first part of my work carries out an analysis of the concept of public service because it is meaningful. The public system in France is based on values and shares collective interests, and is even

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“saturated with multiple meanings” (Chevallier, 2006, p.4). I start with a synthesis of the evolution of public broadcasting in Europe which will then lead us to analyse the situation in France. The second part of my work is devoted to the analysis of television in France, especially after the audio-visual reform that could precipitate the decline of public service channels. I analyze two points. The first point is related to the text of the reform, heavy in contradictions between the missions assigned to public television and the actual means available. The second point is related to the analysis of the programming which also went through many modifications that have altered programming policy.

The few studies conducted on public broadcasting in general (in media studies in particular) make the epistemological study more difficult. Many works deal with the link between public service and the State and the few researchers working on the subject come from an economic (Henle & Bourgeois, 2008), historical (Jeanneney, 1996) or legal (Regourd, 2008) background. Bourgeois' work presents particular interest for the comparative analysis she conducted between France and Germany. She considers both in the European context and favours the economic and social aspects related to media (1993, 1995). The work conducted by Regourd on audio-visual communication in the field of law, mainly dominated by the problems of public service television and doubly developed in the French and European area (Regourd, 2001, 2008) was also an important reference for my work.

## **A. Concept definitions**

### **1- Public service**

The definition of public service lacks clarity. Several researchers in law underline the difficulty of clearly circumscribing the term and point out that its definition is generally vague and unclear (Guglielmi, Koubi, Dumont, 2007). It is generally accepted that public service is characterized in opposition to the concept of “private” because it guarantees a principle of cohesion and unity, contrary to the private field which is more defined by the principle of diversification. The opposition between private and public is also built on the moral principle: private enterprise aims at profitability and financial profits, whereas public service takes care of the collective good (Chevallier, 2006). We prefer to quote the careful definition suggested by R. Chapus because it satisfies the totality of the considerations: “...an activity constitutes a public service when it is assured or assumed by a public person for a public interest” (Chapus, 2001, p.579). As public service aims at serving collective interests, it eliminates the risks of arbitrary decision, sovereignty and domination.

A historical study shows that the concept of public service presented only little importance until the end of the 19th century in France. At the beginning of the 20th century, lawyers worked to establish public law in a context propelled by a school of thought called Solidarism. Solidarism grants to the State a determining right in society and in regulation of various services in the sole purpose to ensure social peace and cohesion. It supports by principle the construction of a more equitable Republic. The end of the 1970s brought public service into question for two main reasons. The first reason is of economic order: the state monopoly in different sectors particularly coveted by industry groups (audio-visual, water, electricity) was heavily criticized. The second reason is of social order: mandates of equality and general interest failed because public facilities initially favoured the upper classes and were unequally distributed on the territory.

The objective of my work is to study public service television in France to know if the values of public service are still preserved in this mass media. Substantial literature in media Studies, history and sociology gave an account of the evolutions of European television. I used some of these works to conduct a comparative study in Europe to translate the trends and reasons which gradually established private channels in the audiovisual landscape dominated by public service.

## 2- Public service television

### a) In Europe

After the Second World War, the project to implement a European cultural endeavour grew in order to build Europe on solid consolidations. The Council of Europe, founded in 1949, was one of the first institutions working on European construction. At the end of the War, such a configuration was gradually built and the principle of public service was shaped either based on the history of the countries, or in relation to what the other countries decided in terms of their policy of programming, financing, etc.

Public broadcasting carried more and more weight over the years, but became the subject of considerable criticism. Its opponents came from various backgrounds of citizen, industrial and associative sectors. They voiced sharp criticism about its monopoly and the closely-tied link between politicians and audio-visual supervisors. Chaniac (2008) explains this situation by reasons of economic, technical and political order. Indeed, because of the cost required for the creation of new channels, the need for setting up joint funding was essential in several countries. The contribution ensured by advertising in addition to royalties improved the financial situation but demanded reconsideration of the principle of public broadcasting. This assessment was common at the European level at the end of the sixties. Gradually, the diversity of financing opened the door to liberal discourse preaching the need for a free market and the private system as protectors of pluralism and progress (Chaniac, 2008). The arrival of cable and satellite television then multiplied the choice of programs and access to many channels. Commercial television thus started becoming established. Public policy reason primarily concerned countries like France and Italy, where political and financial leaders carried considerable weight, especially on news programs. This political control delegitimized public broadcasting and became more and more disputed by many groups (associative, citizen...) through local and independent radio and television stations.

The table below synthesizes the information in listing the first private channels authorized to broadcast in the twelve European countries.

Country	YEAR	NAME OF THE CHANNEL
UNITED-KINGDOM	1954	ITV
ITALIA	1971	Telebiella
FRANCE	1984	Canal+
GERMANY	1985	SAT 1
BELGIUM	1987	RTL-TVI
DENMARK	1988	TV2
SPAIN	1989	Antenna 3
GREECE	1989	Mega-Channel
NETHERLANDS	1991	RTL
PORTUGAL	1992	SIC

**Table 1:** Year of creation of the first private channels  
(from oldest to newest)

The European audiovisual landscape adopted mainly the same configuration: the monopoly of public service was called into question on one hand, while the principle of diversity was adopted and practiced on the other hand. The seventies and eighties made it possible for private groups to put their projects into practice, mainly because of the economic crisis. Their principles were often shared with politicians, using strong

arguments about the principle of freedom of communication (Regourd, 2008). Large industry groups thus came into the audio-visual trade, with businessmen and politicians like Silvio Berlusconi in Italy and Francis Bouygues in France.

The visible changes in program schedule involved in the arrival of private channels were notably received in the same manner in Europe. The cultural programs were rescheduled later in the evening. The regional shows lost ground, the public channels awarded more place to entertainment shows and went in the direction of reality television. The establishment of broadcast programming and scheduling helped to retain viewers and to reassure the investors about substantially steady audience ratings. This plan was very effective especially because it adopted the “serialisation” principle (Chaniac, 2008), in the sense where a program could be followed in the same time slot over a relatively long period of time.

The European audiovisual landscape in large part followed the same reconfiguration, passing from the monopoly of public service to the creation of private channels, for different reasons depending on the countries. In terms of “substitution” or “complementarity” between the channels of public service and the private ones, the diversity of audio-visual financing would give rise to a new type of programming.

#### **b) In France**

French television had a single channel in the forties and three in 1972. Starting in the eighties, private cable and satellite channels started appearing. From 2005 to 2010, the passage from analogue television to digital television allowed for the broadcasting of eighteen free national channels and nine paying national ones. Many studies attach immense historical value to the television in the history of media (Bachmann, 1997; Bumblebee, 1990; Brochand, Mousseau 1982). Figures show the preponderant place occupied by television within households, the ownership rates of audio-visual appliances and how often and for how long listeners tuned in (Chaniac & Jezequel, 2005). Before the war and in the early days of television, one counted approximately 300 television sets in 1939; the ownership then went from 1% in 1954 to 9.5% in 1959. In 1968, households equipped with televisions increased to 62% mainly because of significant drops in price and its importance as a leisure activity practised in families. They became more and more accessible: in 1975, 84.2% of the households had a television and in 2005, 94% of households had at least one television set. If one compares these figures with the ownership rate in 1958, then estimated at 5%, one can share the authors' analysis according to which the presence of the small screen is “massive” (Chaniac & Jezequel, 2005, p.3). This “presence” has not ceased to expand over the years. The investigation conducted by the CNC in 2008 revealed that 98.3% of French households are equipped with a television, that is to say a 1.5% increase compared to the year 2007-2008. Eco divides television history into two periods: *paléo-television* and *néo-television*. He contrasts these two periods by assigning well-defined characteristics in televisual communication: the first (paleo-television) refers more to a didactic approach which gives an account of the external world. The second (neo-television) is characterized by its auto-reflexive tendency aiming more at speaking about it and the events it creates (Eco, 1985). *Neo-television* carries a critical and pejorative meaning because it refers to television of the eighties and to its general context: the arrival of commercial and private channels and the celebrity culture of television and TV-reality programs. For Eco, the programming established by private channels decreased the quality of the contents and knowledge.

After the Second World War, the first period (*paléo-television*) refers to the programming of the fifties, mainly made up of entertainment and variety shows like “La Joie de vivre” (1952-1959), “Trente-six chandelles” (1953-1959), “Le cabaret de la télé,” etc... As the viewers also liked watching fiction, Gaullist politicians granted a more substantial budget for their production with an aim of “distracting” and “cultivating” the population. In the seventies, television was regarded as mass leisure and required adaptation to the




increasing demand expressed by viewers. As program choices remained limited, new programming was scheduled, like the literary magazine “Apostrophes” presented by Bernard Pivot on Antenne 2 (1975), “Le Petit Rapporteur” with Jacques Martin on TF1 (1975), “Thalassa” with Georges Pernoud on France 3 (1975), “Stade 2” created by Marcel Jullian (1975) or “Récré A2” with Dorothée (1978). In the eighties, French public service television suffered from the liberalization of audio-visual service with the privatisation of TF1, the arrival of Canal+ and La Cinq because they together monopolized two-thirds of TV ratings. The arrival of private channels in Europe was considered a “complement” to public channels, whereas in France it was considered as a “substitution” for public channels, as exemplified with TF1 (Regourd, 2008). Indeed, TF1, a public channel, was privatized and bought in 1987 by Bouygues, the businessman. TF1 thus drained most of the TV ratings and advertising resources, to the detriment of the public channels. Italy is one of the rare countries where the public sector managed to reach a very respectable position. RAI leaders applied a “complementary strategy” between private and public channels, which was more relevant than a “substitution strategy”.



## B. ANALYSES

### 1- The reform of public broadcasting

In France, public service channels must respect precise specifications in terms of programming, pluralism and advertising. The distribution of various programs between channels aims at complementarity in terms of content and broadcast time. The program schedule is developed according to TV ratings to reach the largest audience and time slots susceptible to reach a pre-identified public so that the majority of viewers will be satisfied watching one of the five stations.

During political debates or reform projects of public service, three main themes frequently come up in the challenges of the public service television (Dagnaud, 2000): its missions, its identity and finding balance with private operators. The specifications of France Télévisions develop several missions which often come back up to affirm a strong principle of their policy selected by the group (Journal officiel de la République française, June 25th, 2009). One of the missions consists of implementing the necessary means “to create bonds while giving meaning”. Another axis insists on the willingness to offer viewers a “free choice between programs ensuring the expression of trends of a different nature”. Each channel has a particular identity which distinguishes itself from the others. The following table summarizes them:

CHANNEL	IDENTITY
	Through information, debate, drama, documentaries and entertainment, France 2 offers a varied program for a wide audience. It has a leading role in the creation of original television productions and provides national and international information.
	France 3 is the channel of proximity. In all of its programs, France 3 aims to develop an emotional and intellectual affinity accompanying the geographical proximity.
	A free channel of digital terrestrial television, France 4 is intended for the 15-34 age range. Aimed at an audience that demands a freedom of tone and thought, it

	<p>chooses eclecticism through entertainment, culture and live events.</p> <p>France 5, channel of knowledge and discovery, aims to promote access to knowledge and to arouse curiosity, discussion, emotion and sharing.</p>
	<p>France Ô aims to discover and share news from overseas.</p>

**Table 2:** Channels identity (France Televisions)

The “Commission on new public television” report, more often called the “Copé Report” in the media, was submitted to the President of the Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy, in June 2008. It developed the reasons for an audio-visual public reform in these terms: “I wished for public television to be adapted more quickly and that its programs differ more clearly from private channels. Public television must support quality and endeavour to “boost” the audiovisual landscape. The end of advertising on France Télévisions channels must make it possible for public television to take more risks in their programming, to emphasize arts and culture, and to treat the great debates of the world of today and tomorrow in a more demanding and thorough way.” (Commission on new public television, 2008: 61). If the main missions of public service television (inform, cultivate, entertain) are recalled in this report, we note that they are limited in only these terms and the main reasons justifying the reform project depend on the position of public service television within the plethora of private channels. We note the most paradoxical aspect: if the objectives for “new public television” are clearly listed on a qualitative level, they have to be achieved using less means on a quantitative and financial level. The mission is much more explicit about it and devotes very precise paragraphs dealing with plans to be adopted. The mission deals with the “new economic model of the France Télévisions group”, on the plan to remove advertising or on “substitution resources” (Commission on new public television, op.cit.: 62).

The public broadcasting reform took effect on January 5th, 2009 with the removal of advertising between 20:00 and 6:00 on all channels of France Télévisions (France 3, France 4, France 5 and France Ô). The reform modified the texts for private channels. The government measure indeed scheduled the possibility of a second commercial break per 30 minutes during fiction and film broadcasts by private channels. A decree also allowed advertising to last three minutes longer (from 6 minutes to 9 minutes) per hour on Hertzian channels, from January 1<sup>st</sup> onwards. When we compare the financing of French public television with other countries, we note France is not very privileged: “In 2007 in Great Britain, the overall income of broadcasting per capita was about 210 euros whereas it was only 134 euros in France. Being more specifically about the public broadcasting, the earnings of France Télévisions reached a maximum of 2.9 billion euros, that’s to say less than half of the earnings of the ARD in Germany (6.3 billion euros) or BBC in Great Britain (6.2 billion euros)” (Regourd, 2008, p.44). At first sight, the shortfall appears difficult to quantify and we can only give an approximate price range taking into account the elaborate calculations by the least pessimistic (members of the Copé Commission who are at the origin of the report) as well as those expressed by the most pessimistic (people in charge of the public broadcasting). To briefly summarize the calculations worked out by the various authors of this report, we note that the Copé Commission estimates shortfall for public broadcasting until 2012 at 450 million euros, by taking into account on one hand the removal of advertising between 20:00 and 6:00, and on the other hand sponsorship, overseas advertising and the advertising of general interest on Radio France. Proponents of public broadcasting estimate the financial loss at a total value of 1 million euros, taking into account the removal of advertisement incomes on one hand and on the other hand, the financing of shows to be programmed in the future. (Regourd, 2008). To offset the shortfall, the National Assembly approved the introduction of two taxes: one on internet access providers and the other on the advertising turnover of private

channels. The government measure maintains this principle: the royalties which are indexed each year on the rate of inflation starting from 2009 go on to finance the public broadcasting sector.

## **2- The contradictions of the law**

The content analysis of the report reveals an inadequacy between the nature of the document and its contents. It reveals highly debatable recommendations expressed by Commission members.

The inadequacy between the nature of the document and its contents comes from the definition which generally characterizes an explanatory statement. S. Regourd outlined it in a critical examination during a workshop on public broadcasting in 2008; the reasons explain why a law is established. However, the examination of the text concerning public broadcasting reform is more connected with specifications because it directly treats basic problems, and this, "in a normative logic which is more constraining than the law itself" (Regourd, 2008). The first page of the explanatory statement gives very precise information about the contents of the programs (cultural programs must be broadcasted every day in all programs), the time slot (the first show of the evening begins at 20:35 to allow for a second part of evening at 22:15 and a third part of the evening around 23:20) and the "values" to broadcast on all France Télévisions channels. These belong to the labour field ("shows devoted to professional and economic life" to allow for "better knowledge of the labour market and the life of enterprises"); they belong to the European dimension ("public television must play a crucial role in the blooming of the European identity. The European dimension will consequently be integrated into the program schedule"). Other information affirm once again the distortion of the genre credited in a text called "Examination of the Reasons" because it specifies that "France-Télévisions must be the top investor in French audio-visual creation". This recommendation indicates a kind of obligation, unexpected in such a document because it should not contain such interventionist principles normally coming from industrial actors and "private producers" (Regourd, 2008).

Thanks to the historical channels of France Televisions (France 2, France 3, France 4, and France 5), it is possible to evaluate the recommendations of the Commission members. The table below lists the creation dates of the channels, their missions and the new missions recommended by the Copé Report in 2008.

	<b>FRANCE 2</b>	<b>FRANCE 3</b>	<b>FRANCE 5</b>	<b>FRANCE 4</b>
<b>OBJECTIVES IN THE CREATION OF THE CHANNEL</b>	<p>The only exclusively general-programming channel in public service</p> <p>Diversified programming, intended to reach a large audience</p> <p>Principal fields: national and international news, creation, entertainment.</p>	<p>General-programming channel with national and regional vocation</p> <p>Cultural and educational programs</p> <p>Importance of decentralized information and regional events</p>	<p>Family programs</p> <p>Access to knowledge, training and employment</p> <p>Programming centred on education and knowledge</p>	<p>Spectacles, sports, fiction, cinema and series</p>
<b>OBJECTIVES PRESCRIBED IN THE COPE REPORT</b>	Federative Role	Reinforced regional offering	Channel of knowledge	Channel of innovation, new generations and new writings

**Table 3:** Objectives assigned to France Télévisions channels in the Copé Report – A comparative table



### a) Identity of the channels

The Copé Report specifies that public service channels must reinforce their identities and offers particular recommendations for each one of them.

According to the report, France 2 thus has to remain a popular large channel, for which removing advertising represents an opportunity: no longer depending on advertising makes it possible to schedule the broadcast of cultural programs earlier in the first part of evening or even in the second part, but at a more decent hour than it used to be. The report particularly specifies that France 2 can integrate into its program schedule shows that were tested on other channels in order to contribute to their popularization and to give them a second life. The channel is also regarded as having priority to broadcast cultural events in real time. This recommendation restates once again the obligations already registered in the specifications of France Télévisions. It does not call into question the specificity of the channel (already considered general-programming) with a sufficiently diversified program to reach a large audience.

For France 3, the emphasis is mainly on the reorganization of the channel and reduction within administrative areas. This reduction aims, at least according the report, to reinforce the proximity grid thanks to the regional information offices intended to be expanded in the long run, and to be based on the structures present in the field for better relaying local life in all fields (culture, current and various events). However, France 3 was already regarded (since its creation in 1972) as a general-programming channel with national but particularly regional vocation to favour decentralized news and regional events. Its missions are thus not questioned. The difference refers to the reduction of the administrative regions (from thirteen to seven) and to operation cost-cutting. For France 4, the reinforcement of its identity places emphasis on innovation, the new generation of public and new writing. The Copé Report registers France 4 more as a “program laboratory” (Commission on new public television, op.cit.: 25) to test innovative programs and to be the channel where new talents will be expressed. Compared to the other channels of public service, France 4 is the only one which shows the most difference between the missions assigned at its creation in 1996 and the recommendations contained in the Copé Report of 2008. Indeed, the channel distinguished itself at the beginning within the France Televisions channels because of its programming that was more directed towards large spectacle, sports programmes, fiction or cinema. Passing from the status of channel featuring large spectacles to one of innovation, new generations and new writings, marked an important step between its origin and the reconfiguration of its identity in 2008.

Few differences are to be noted for France 5. It is simply recommended to maintain its current identity by noticeably reinforcing the fiction and cinema programs. Its statute of channel of knowledge is simply reaffirmed.

### b) The public

The Copé Report highlights another point: the expectations expressed by the viewers of France Télévisions channels. It specifies that the audience must become an “ambition” and not a “obsession” (Commission on new public television, 2008: 25), and recommends audience measurements which are not primarily based on quantitative references but more on one quantitative assessment of the programming. In order to evaluate the satisfaction of the viewers and to better take into account the satisfaction of TV ratings in its diversity, new measurements must integrate other criteria than those already used. The report is very precise: public broadcasting service must contribute to a better enrichment in terms of culture and information for viewers. The new audience measurements suggested by the Members of the Commission are collected thus in five types of indicators which one finds in the following table:

NEW MEASURES	OBJECTIVES
Measure of the rate of satisfaction of programs	Qualimat
Measure of the impact of programs	What does one retain from a program? What is its influence?
Measures on all media devices and on the duration of the audience scheduled from its derivatives	Number of individuals having watched a program and/or its derivatives on at least one of the media devices suggested by France Télévisions, and over the duration of its operation
Measure of public service utilization rates	Percentage of individuals having used at least once a service offered by France Télévisions over a given period
Measure of the cost/performance ratio of programs	Take into account the specificity of each genre

**Table 4:** TV ratings - ambition and new measures

*Source : Commission pour la nouvelle télévision publique, 2008*

Another contradiction is revealed: all of these measurements concern quantitative analysis, while at the same time the report advises dispensing “measures on all media devices and on the length of the audience of a program and of its derivatives,” “measures on the utilization rate of public service,” “measures on cost/performance ratio of the programs” taking into account the specificity of each genre. These three criteria do not make it possible to measure the rate of viewers' satisfaction even less so the interest they could show using only the argument of the quality of the program broadcast. With regard to the first two criteria, the proposal proves to be interesting and entails a study on its reception. Two difficulties are however raised: the first comes from the absence of information and precise details on Qualimat, thus making more in-depth analysis difficult; the latter falls under the study of reception applied by the measure of the impact of programs (what was most interesting in the program and what influence can it have on the viewers?).

### C. DISCUSSION

Public service has considerably evolved since its introduction thanks to several factors: reforms of the audiovisual service, its missions (“inform, educate, entertain”), competition with private channels and the weight of TV ratings on its programming. 1981 was the year of the liberalisation law on public broadcasting (deregulation and marketing of radio-television service) and 2009 was the reform of public broadcasting. The removal of commercial advertising on public service channels might seem favourable to better identification and better quality of public channels, likely reinforcing the specific legitimacy of public service. The realization is however

contrary to the expected effects: to-date, the financial situation of France-Télévisions is alarming and the big private operators are recovering the financial manna lost by public service. The changes were so significant in audio-visual policy that the specificity of public service must be questioned. We thus wonder if its missions and its principles always concern the principles of public service. France Télévisions have gone through significant upheavals since 2009. Several emblematic public service shows have indeed disappeared, like *Taratata*, *Les Mots de minuit* or *C'est pas sorcier*.

*Taratata* was a musical television program centred on rock music. It was created in 1993 by Nagui, a very popular French host who won awards several times for this show, in the “best musical program” category or as “best host”. The objective of the show aimed at bringing attention to French or foreign rock artists (Red Hot Chili Peppers, Tryo, Tété, Lady Senile, The Sugarhill Gang, Raul Midón, Scorpions, etc) who came on the show to play live sets.

*Les Mots de minuit* was a cultural television program on France 2, produced and presented since September 1999 by Philippe Lefait, a former journalist. Its goal was to present different aspects of culture, generally bringing people together from very different artistic horizons. This show, presented by Philippe Lefait for 13 years, was constitutive of the channel’s identity. In 2013, the public learned that the emission *Les Mots de minuit* would be taken off the air. Philippe Vilamitjana, programs director of the channel, explained that the budgetary constraints forced them to make choices in the programming. *C'est pas sorcier* was a television magazine about popular scientific information, approximately 26 minutes long. It received the "Sept d'Or" for the best educational show in 1999 and had been rewarded several times with the youth prize at the International Scientific Film Festival of Palaiseau, and the Roberval Prize for books and communication in technology. The show was scheduled from 1993 to 2014 on France 3. The hosts, “Fred” and “Sabine” (or Fred by himself) worked in the field, interviewed specialists and asked questions that “Jamy” answered, inside his truck-laboratory arranged for scientific experiments. In 2013, “Fred” and “Sabine” were laid off for economic reasons and the show was quickly stopped.

I took three examples of the cancellation of shows constitutive of the identity of public service television in France since the audio-visual reform in 2009. I could quote other examples, in particular with the radio where journalists who hosted very particular shows were laid off, or programs which aimed at a smaller public were removed (jazz, for example). The program managers (on radio or on television) often asserted that budgetary reduction forced them to make choices in the programming and to remove shows. This argument caused much dissatisfaction to the employees of France Télévisions and to the viewers. Strikes broke out in France Télévisions and petitions circulated among the viewers who defended the idea of public service (in particular by royalties they pay each year) and who wanted to see a difference between private and public channels. Philippe Lefait, the presenter of *Les Mots de minuit* questioned the argument of the direction of France Televisions. He explained that indeed the cost of the show (64 000 euros per number for an average of 150,000 viewers), was expensive according to a “logic of figures, expensive [...] [but] on the other hand, if one stops at a logic of public service, that does not cost a lot”, knowing that the cultural shows accounted for only 5% of the programming.

The tendency to remove public broadcasting shows was largely surpassed in other countries, in particular in Greece with the total removal of public broadcasting. Indeed, a little more than one year ago, the media largely dealt with the removal of public broadcasting by the neoliberal government. In June 2013, the Greek government decided to close all audio-visual public broadcasting. A legislative act gave it the possibility of closing a public enterprise by ministerial decision and transferring all of its assets to the Ministry of Economy.

## CONCLUSION

The study of public broadcasting raises three types of challenges: communication challenges (transmission of information via media television), identity challenges (representation of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity imposed in the specifications), institutional challenges (the role of public broadcasting).

Our study highlighted that French public service television experienced many changes because of the various laws which punctuated its evolution and the missions which were assigned to it, like “answering the needs and aspirations of the French population”, respecting the concept of “pluralism” and the citizens' participation. The constraint of TV ratings weighs heavy however and it was especially in the 1980s that the situation became more complicated with reality-show programming and in the 2000s with the reality TV programs. Cable and satellite, with their multiple channels and better quality of images, also changed the situation in terms of competition. The history of television also grew rich with the introduction of digital terrestrial television. As we also saw, political authorities strongly influenced the evolution/regression of public television. The audio-visual reform in 2009 claimed to release France Télévisions from audience obligations by removing advertising after 20:00. However, nothing changed. The audience still remains an obsession.

At the European level, the results of my work raise two questions: is the identity of public broadcasting more of a political order than an economic one? Does the cancellation of the three shows (*Taratata*, *Les Mots de minuit* and *C'est pas sorcier*) foreshadow the disappearance of cultural programs on television?

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