

Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

EU Broadcasting Conference: *Between Culture and Commerce*, September 20th 2005;
1400hrs

Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen, good afternoon, and James, thank you.

Ladies and Gentlemen I know that you will be extremely skilfully navigated through the next three days by James as your Chairman.

Now I arrived in Liverpool only 10 minutes ago and I have to tell you that it was not nearly as memorable as the last time I arrived in Liverpool, which was the day on which I had announced that Liverpool was to be the Capital of Culture in the year 2008. On that day when I stepped off the train at Lime Street Station the platform was lined with smiling children waving flags, there was a brass band, there were police mounted on horses and everybody seemed to be smiling. Those of you who are seasoned politicians will know that you will only have one day like that in your political life, and that was my day.

As I was making my way through the adoring throng this little girl stepped out and she had been duly primed to do with the most enormous bunch of flowers that was bigger than she was and as she wrestled to hand it over to me she looked up and said 'Big Lady, who are you?' . So every time I come to Liverpool I feel that I have to explain that I am Tessa Jowell and I'm Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport.

And it is my great pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the Council of Ministers and the European Commission, to this very important European Audiovisual Conference.

When the Television Without Frontiers Directive first came into being, at the end of the Eighties, I think it's fair to say that it referred to a world far-removed from the one we all live in today.

Back in the 80s, if you can cast your minds back, the UK had only had four analogue TV channels, VHS was winning the consumer battle against its Beta-Max rival, no one had heard of DVD and satellite TV was going to be brought in by the BSB squarial, if any of you here can remember that.

But by the start of the 90s, a technological revolution was underway and almost nobody throughout the EU would be untouched by that.

Talking about a revolution

In 1985, barely 13% of the UK population owned a computer. Today, 13 million families in the UK are connected to the internet, and more than half of them have broadband.

Fast forwarding a few years, to 1997 and around 23% of people in the UK owned a mobile telephone. Just eight short years later, there are 61 million mobiles actively being used in the UK and UK companies such as Vodafone and O₂ dominate the global market.

So, we are talking about a revolution in the way that we communicate, that we inform and that we entertain.

Digital switchover

Just last week, at the Royal Television Society Conference in Cambridge, I set out our vision for a Digital Britain, by switching over fully to digital TV by 2012.

So there have never been more channels, more services or more choice for consumers. And as a result, there has never been a more complex set of issues facing both broadcasting and telecoms regulators across the EU.

The Television Without Frontiers Directive was revised in 1997 and it's done a good job of maintaining minimum standards for broadcast content, and applying those standards to multi-national TV broadcasters.

But the job of all of us gathered here today is to ensure that Television Without Frontiers doesn't turn into Broadcasting Without Boundaries, or Commerce without Culture.

Purpose of the conference

It's not an easy task, which is why we have brought together today more than 400 delegates from across Europe, many of whom are experts in Europe's broadcasting and audiovisual industries.

The main goal of this conference is to try and find the right way of regulating sensibly the broadcasting and audiovisual industries, without stifling tomorrow's innovations or hampering the economic growth of Europe's most creative industries.

Part of our job will be to come up with proposals that reflect the real world, that acknowledge that already, people can get TV and radio through broadband; can book a doctor's appointment or order a pizza through their TV. They can place a bet, email a friend or receive a TV broadcast, just by turning on their mobile phone.

In a sense, that's the easy part, as we pretty well know what we are dealing with. The larger challenge will be to try to imagine what other technological advances are still in the pipeline.

The panel of senior industry people will I hope help us try to figure that one out later this afternoon.

The Commission's papers

And of course, we aren't starting completely from scratch. On July 11th, the European Commission produced a set of six papers, which suggested replacing Television Without Frontiers with an 'Audio-Visual Content Services' Directive.

I'm not going to go into details about the content of those papers now. Most of you are acquainted with them, and will be able to share your opinions on how they can be turned into workable legislation at the conference working groups tomorrow.

And your opinions and advice are absolutely invaluable. This conference is a learning experience in every possible sense of the word.

We need the help of all the experts in this room to develop proposals that will maintain the importance of public service broadcasting, preserve viewers' access to high quality entertainment and sport, and will encourage innovation and competition right across Europe's media industries. And which will allow commercial and public service broadcasters to flourish together.

Rules of thumb

So as we discuss our options, we need to keep asking ourselves four basic questions. What are we trying to achieve with this regulation? How will this regulation achieve our objectives? What will this regulation cost? And what benefits will it bring in its wake?

And incidentally, when I talk about costs and benefits, I don't just mean financial. Broadcasting also has immense cultural and social significance that can't be quantified in Euros.

The Commission has recognised this, and the UK applauds them for their determination to provide a full, thorough and wide-ranging assessment of how any new legislation might impact on every single affected sector.

Conclusion

So in conclusion I must express my gratitude for the help that the European Commission have given us in arranging this event. My officials in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport have been able to work very closely with their colleagues and counterparts in the Directorate for the Information Society and the Media in setting it up. Both to my and the Commission's officials I extend my and I hope also your warmest thanks.

As the Prime Minister has said, delivering the EU's agenda is the main challenge – and the measure of success – for the UK Presidency. This Conference I hope will be seen as a major part of the UK's contribution.

So we have a packed schedule ahead of us at what I'm sure will be an incredibly significant European Audiovisual Conference.

The success of this event will depend on all of you feeling that there has been a full and frank exchange of views, so I'd like to encourage everyone here to participate as fully as they can in the working groups.

Whatever side of the podium you find yourself over the next two or three days, it is in everyone's interests to develop a new Directive that will play to Europe's enormous broadcasting strengths, but will also address our potential weaknesses.

And when as we do, in successive Presidencies, seek to bridge the gap between the deliberations of Governments in the name of the people they represent - and particularly, the deliberations between Governments and the Commission, where that dialogue can be seen to be remote from the people we represent - we have here an opportunity in debating broadcasting and the audiovisual industries to close the gap. That's because the issues that you will face are issues of such significance that there is no household across Europe that will be unaffected by our conclusions in due course.

So that is an enormous challenge, it is an enormous responsibility. But it's also a vivid illustration of the importance of getting this right.

So without further ado, I'd like to hand you over to Mike Storey, the leader of the Council of the Capital of Culture 2008, to officially welcome you to your host city for today's conference.