

## World Trade and Culture: The East-Central European Standpoint

The title of this page implies that there is a common regional standpoint. But we do not anticipate one, instead of that we provoke thinking. Maybe there is common ground, maybe there is not. Maybe the interests of the transitional countries in east-central Europe show enough similarities to justify for a joint stand in the issue, maybe not.

The answer does not depend entirely on objective analysis. Sometimes it is a question of opinions and assumptions.

Let us illustrate this on the following. The film industries in our region are staggering. From the point of view of world trade, two opposing strategies can be described. (Of course these are abstract examples which never exist in clear form.)

**Protectionism:** Establish minimum quotas for national films in cinemas and on television. And maximum quotas for the vigorous foreign rivals. Charge special levies and import duties to the latter and use the income for making films of your own.

**Liberalism:** Seek for ways of integrating your fledgling home industry into the mainstream of the world. Attract as many filmmakers into your country as possible, both as investors and as paying users of your facilities.

In principle, the two strategies can exist in the same country side by side. In reality, the second largely excludes the first. The market leaders will not bring you their resources and know-how unless they can sell their products, too. Since you cannot divide your country into a protectionist half and a liberal half (as a control group), there is no way of objective testing as to the relative advantages of one or other approach. This is where the decision-makers' subjective assumptions come in.

There are several factors which imply that the east-central European countries are in a similar situation with regard to their cultures and the global trade:

- They have limited potentials to become world market leaders in any of the cultural industries.

- Their national economies are still

vulnerable either because of their strength (i.e. weakness) or their size (i.e. smallness).

- Their value systems are lacking  
the stability of the consolidated democracies, in other words, their public is prone to give in to foreign influences, probably to a greater extent than in Western Europe.

Do you agree with this?

The actual state of diversification of the region may imply that the diverging factors in this issue are greater, than the converging ones. If so, what makes one country occupy a different attitude than the other:

- Strength and size of the economy?
- Different conception of culture?
- Something else?

Our answers may be different by sectors. Different strategy may apply to the protection and promotion of our publishing industries from our audiovisual fields.

And what about the Internet?

This short question underlines the complexity of the issue. No wonder that neither the Council of Europe nor the European Union have arrived at a stable standpoint.

At this stage, as you see, instead of, or better to say: before presenting the case of east-central Europe, we ask for your contributions: mail to [bo@budobs.org](mailto:bo@budobs.org).

General Affairs Council of the European Union, at its meeting on 26 October 1999 gave the Commission a mandate which stipulates that "during the forthcoming WTO negotiations the Union will ensure, as in the Uruguay Round, that the Community and its Member States maintain the right to preserve and to develop their capacity to define and implement their cultural and audiovisual policies for the purpose of preserving their cultural diversity".

See also the broadcasting policy of the Union.