

## LIVE FROM MOSCOW

### THE CELEBRATION OF YURI GAGARIN AND TRANSNATIONAL TELEVISION IN EUROPE

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**Abstract:** On April 14th, 1961, television viewers across Europe watched live images of Yuri Gagarin being celebrated on the Red Square in Moscow. The broadcast was made possible by the linking of the Intervision and Eurovision television networks, which was the result of cooperation between broadcasters on both sides of the Iron Curtain. By looking into how the co-operation between the OIRT and EBU was gradually developed between 1957 and 1961 this article engages with the interplay between cultural, legal and technological aspects of broadcasting and how the transnational broadcast of Gagarin's return to Moscow was made possible. The article furthermore argues the need to understand early television in Europe as a dialectic between the national and the transnational and shows how the live transmission network binding the East and West together was the result of an interplay between structures provided by transnational organisations such as the OIRT and EBU, and initiatives by national broadcasting organisations.

**Keywords:** programme exchange, EBU, OIRT, transnational broadcasting, television history

According to one of the technicians involved, Jerzy Rutkowski, the television link between Tallinn and Helsinki was set up with only a few hours notice.<sup>1</sup> It was used in a broadcast organised through of a number of phone calls and a "chain of goodwill", showing live images of the first man in space, [Yuri Gagarin](#), as he returned to Moscow and was celebrated by his fellow countrymen.<sup>2</sup> The broadcast, on 14 April 1961, marks the inception of a live transnational television link between the Soviet Union and Western Europe. Even though at the time only temporary, the link between Tallinn and Helsinki was the first junction of the Intervision and Eurovision television networks. The networks were initiatives of Europe's two main broadcasting organisations, International Organisation for Radio and Television (OIRT), which established Intervision in 1960, and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) which established Eurovision in 1954. Television programme exchanges up to this date had been of recorded material and not live images of events happening in front of television viewers across Europe and people in Moscow at the same time.

There are no reasons to believe that Rutkowski was not telling the truth, last minute telephone calls were surely placed in order to make sure that the broadcast was possible. A similar account is given by another technician involved, Kari Ilmonen who at the time worked for YLE in Finland, explaining that "the TV transmission from Tallinn

<sup>1</sup> Jerzy Rutkowski was chief engineer of Polish television and interviewed by Ernest Eugster in Geneva, November 1976 (cited in Ernest Eugster, *Television Across National Boundaries: The EBU and OIRT Experience*, Artech House, 1983, p. 108)

<sup>2</sup> The video on YouTube shows a Soviet edited newsreel published by the BFI. However, the images shown are basically the same as the live broadcast, only with significantly better sound and pictures.

was received on the roof of the Pasila Water Tower using an ordinary TV set and the signal was fed via a microwave link to Eurovision”.<sup>3</sup> Rutkowski and Ilmonen both emphasise the material aspect of the broadcast, phone calls placed and antennas adjusted, but do not engage in the novelty of the broadcast being a transnational co-operation between broadcasting organisations on both sides of the Iron Curtain.<sup>4</sup> By referring to a “chain of goodwill” the organisation of the broadcast is portrayed as a matter of personal relations rather than the result of transnational co-operation. But the linkage of Intervision and Eurovision had been discussed extensively during a number of years and the 1961 broadcast must be seen in this longer historical context, not only as the result of an ad hoc technological solution and personal communications and relations. This is not meant as yet another argument concerning technological determinism, or a wish to downplay the importance of the work carried out by Rutkowski, Ilmonen and other technicians involved. This particular case is a good example of how technology is important for developing new means of communication, but that there are also a number of other aspects to take into consideration.<sup>5</sup> The political reality of the Cold War had long prevented a transnational television link through the Iron Curtain, but the sensational orbital flight of Gagarin seemed to have removed some of the political obstacles and made co-operation possible. By looking into how the co-operation between the OIRT and EBU was gradually developed between 1957 and 1961 this article engages with the interplay between cultural, legal and technological aspects of broadcasting and how the transnational broadcast of Gagarin’s return to Moscow was made possible.

The complexity of television and the importance of acknowledging the interplay between culture and technology, as well as politics and economy, is well established. However, to a large extent the historical relations between, for instance, culture and technology are explored in national contexts, which have motivated critique from scholars within the field of television history. Michele Hilmes, for instance, takes issue with the national perspective, arguing that “the media historians frequently adopt a national perspective blindly” and that the transnational, rather than the national, “shaped core values, aesthetics, and practises within each national tradition”.<sup>6</sup> While Hilmes’ interest lies in the transnational relations between broadcasters in the US and UK, others have focused on transnational broadcasting in (Western) Europe.<sup>7</sup> In this article, then, I argue that the broadcast of Gagarin’s return to Moscow highlights the need to understand early television in Europe as a dialectic between the national and the transnational.<sup>8</sup>

## 1 Live and Direct: Space Man Celebrations

Until 14 April 1961 the Intervision and Eurovision networks were not linked together. Intervision was born in 1960 when television organisations from four East European countries (Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Poland) were linked together, and the broadcast of Gagarin signalled the entrance of a fifth country, the Soviet Union. Eurovision was formed in 1954 and in 1961 it had members from 18 countries in Western Europe. According to Ernest Eugster one of the reasons for relaying the broadcast via Finland and Sweden and further on to the rest of Europe was that the Soviet Union at this time lacked a direct link to the Intervision network.<sup>9</sup> However, as we will see below, there are more incentives than just being able to reach the members of Intervision, not least the opportunity to join the two networks and thereby create the possibility to reach viewers in Western Europe.

<sup>3</sup> Kari Ilmonen, ‘The Basis of it All – Technology’, in Raimo Endén et al, eds, *Yleisradio 1926-1996: History of Broadcasting in Finland*, WSOY, 1996, p. 255.

<sup>4</sup> To be fair, Rutkowski’s account is presented by the words of Ernest Eugster, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Winston argues convincingly for the need to understand the relation between technology and society. Brian Winston, *Media, Technology and Society: A History: From the Telegraph to the Internet*, Routledge, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting*, Routledge, 2012, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Bignell & Andreas Fickers, eds, *A European Television History*, Blackwell, 2008; Wolfgang Degenhardt & Elisabeth Strautz, *Auf der Suche nach dem europäischen Programm: Die Eurovision 1954-1970*, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1999; Andreas Fickers & Catherine Johnson ‘Transnational Television History: A Comparative Approach’, *Media History*, 16, 1, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Other studies of the transnational history of European television are presented by Sonja de Leeuw, ‘Transnationality in Dutch (Pre)Television’, *Media History*, 16, 1, 2010, and Christian Henrich-Franke, ‘Creating Transnationality Through an International Organization? The European Broadcasting Union’s (EBU) Television Programming Activities’, *Media History*, 16, 1, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Eugster 1983, p. 108.

When it was announced that the Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin had successfully orbited the earth in 108 minutes and then returned safely to earth it was immediately recognised as part of the symbolic struggle during the Cold War. A few days prior to the orbital flight rumours spread from Moscow that the first man in space was soon due, or perhaps even already a fact. After the achievement Gagarin was celebrated, both in the Soviet Union and internationally, as a hero and as an incarnation of modernity. In the political arena Soviet communism continued to secure its position as the most fertile soil for technological advancement and fostering of a modern society, and the United States of America seemed to be hopelessly behind in the space race. This aspect of Gagarin's historical flight is often discussed in research on the space race and Cold War history.<sup>10</sup> But it was not only the space flight that accentuated the achievement of Soviet engineering and technology, the less often discussed live television broadcast was a similar symbolic victory that underlined the ambiguous position of television as both a promise and threat in the Cold War era.<sup>11</sup>

The **broadcast** showed live images of Gagarin's motorcade from the airport, as well as the celebrations in the Red Square.<sup>12</sup> Recorded images and announcements from a news studio interrupted the live feed from time to time. Initially the broadcast had some quality problems with the image breaking up and making the events on the screen difficult to discern. The sound was divided into street sounds and three layers of commentary: Russian and English in the original feed and then the commentators from the receiving country on top of that.<sup>13</sup> However, my interest in this article is not primarily concerned with the broadcast itself, but rather with how it was made possible and how the co-ordination between OIRT and EBU was realised.

In many respects the celebrations of Gagarin are similar to other early media events, such as the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 or the so-called "**Calais experiment**" in August 1950 when a live feed was transmitted from Calais to the UK.<sup>14</sup> Whereas these examples have been canonised and often discussed in literature on television history, the celebration of Gagarin is rarely mentioned. I find this somewhat peculiar and would argue that the celebrations of Gagarin and the live transmission through the Iron Curtain may be considered as just as important in television history. Just as the earlier transnational media events, the celebrations depended upon extensive collaboration and co-ordination between broadcasters, but being an event penetrating the Iron Curtain adds yet another dimension: the necessity to overcome Cold War tensions and cultural and political differences.

## 2 The EBU Archive in Geneva

Even when carried out on a routine basis and within a well established framework, television production is a complex undertaking. The broadcast from the Red Square was the first of its kind and included a number of novelties - most of the people involved are unlikely to have had a clear idea of the details of the broadcast beforehand. After more than 50 years the task of trying to understand the transnational co-operation leading up to the event is truly delicate. As with any historical research the account given is the result of a particular perspective, since certain perspectives and

<sup>10</sup> James L. Kaufmann, *Selling Outer Space: Kennedy, the Media and Funding for Project Apollo, 1961-1963*, The University of Alabama Press, 1994; Asif A Siddiqi, *Challenge to Apollo: The Soviet Union and the Space Race, 1945-1974*, NASA History Section, 2000, p. 282.

<sup>11</sup> The fears and hopes of television are made clear in a statement of the Sprague Committee in the United States, which in August 1960 warned "the linkage of the Soviet television system with Eurovision will create in the future a significant problem that has not existed in the past" (cited in James Schwoch, *Global TV: New Media and the Cold War 1946-69*, University of Illinois Press, 2009, p. 116).

<sup>12</sup> The broadcast available in the EUScreen database is a recording provided by [The Swedish Media Database](#) at the National Library of Sweden. An edited version of the broadcast, as shown in the United States, is available on [YouTube](#). Furthermore, EUScreen also archives the [Swedish newscast](#) from the evening of the orbital flight, i.e. two days prior to the live broadcast from Moscow.

<sup>13</sup> At least in Sweden and the Netherlands, which are the two countries that I have managed to get hold of recordings from so far.

<sup>14</sup> The link was put into more permanent use two years later when viewers on both sides of the channel could watch the same programmes simultaneously during a week in July 1952. See further the article 'Reading Between the Lines: A Transnational History of the Franco-British "etente cordiale" in Post-war Television', by Andreas Fickers and Andy O'Dwyer in this issue. See also Andreas Fickers, 'National Barriers for an Imagined European Community: The Techno-Political Frames of Postwar Television Development in Europe', in Lennard Højbjerg & Henrik Søndergaard et al, eds, *European Film and Media Cultures*, Museum Tusulanums Press, 2006; Heinrich-Franke 2010.

certain records are prioritised over others.<sup>15</sup>

This article is based upon research carried out in the archives at the EBU headquarters in Geneva which today hold records both of the EBU and the OIRT. When OIRT ceased to exist in the early 1990s OIRT and EBU merged into one organisation.<sup>16</sup> The merging brought their archives under the same roof and the records of the OIRT are today part of the same archive as the EBU records.

The records referred to in the article present but one aspect of the transnational relations that made the broadcast possible. Even though the documents discussed are rich and provide valuable insights in how the transnational television network in Europe came into being, a wider empirical focus would paint a fuller picture of the complex broadcast events. Due to restrictions in space this article is limited to the minutes from two meetings of great importance to the emerging co-operation and co-ordination of transnational television in Europe.

The following sections present a close reading of the reports from two of the meetings leading up to the 1961 broadcast. The first is an unofficial meeting of the technical committees of OIRT and EBU in 1957 while the second took place in early 1960 and brought together not only the technical representatives but also the legal and programme committees of the two organisations. The main part of the documents used stem from the EBU, but press releases and other documents from the OIRT confirm the statements made in the reports of the EBU committees.

### 3 Synchronised Engineering: The OIRT-EBU Meeting in Helsinki 1957

The technical committees of OIRT and EBU met for the first time in early February 1957 in Helsinki in order to discuss matters of information exchange and technical co-ordination. The meeting was the result of a Finnish proposition and deliberately chosen to be informal and with a small number of representatives from both organisations. Six members of the respective technical committees were present during the meeting, and two observers attended on behalf of Finnish television.

According to the Final Report of the meeting four points were on the agenda: 1) exchange of long-wave and medium-wave reports and lists of stations, 2) exchange of lists of VHF stations in Band I, II, and III, 3) exchange of measurements of long-wave and medium-wave ionospheric propagation, 4) exchanges of views on matters suitable for future agendas.<sup>17</sup> The discussion was thus directed towards co-ordination of information and how to avoid interference between both radio and television stations, especially concerning stations close to east-west borders. The fourth point on the agenda also spurred the issue of how to proceed with the co-operation and information exchange between the two organisations and the OIRT suggested three measures to be taken, among which one was to regularly visit each other's technical committee meetings. The delegation from EBU, however, did not agree to this proposition and referred to the Administrative Council of the EBU, which had to authorise such a plan. In a later document of EBU's technical committee it is clear that the EBU considers the proposition of future points of discussion as "not desirable", "premature" or "a matter for the Administration".<sup>18</sup>

In the following years the EBU occasionally complained that the OIRT did not respect the agreements of the Helsinki meeting, especially concerning ionospheric propagation, which was considered a reason not to expand the common

<sup>15</sup> Jason Jacobs, "The Television Archive: Past, Present, Future", in *Critical Studies in Television*, 1, 1, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> David Wood, 'OIRT-UER', *Diffusion Online* 2003/36, EBU, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Archive of the European Broadcasting Union, Geneva (hereafter EBU), 'Final Report of an Unofficial Meeting of Representatives of the O.I.R.T. and E.B.U. Technical Committees, Helsinki, February 1957', box CA PV 2 Anglais 1957/1960, 28th Jan 1957, Appendix 8 (otherwise unmarked).

<sup>18</sup> EBU, C.T./127-Com.T./16-C.A./464, 'Report of the Bureau of the Technical Committee', p. 18, appendix to EBU, O.A./1103-C.A./483, 'Sixteenth Meeting of the Administrative Council', 5th Jul 1957.

activities any further. Even though the meeting in 1957 for the most part concerned information exchange and technological issues in relation to interference and propagation it also meant an opening for future collaboration and a recognition of television as a cross-border or transnational matter. Later, the meeting is referred to as a first step and an important and successful event where representatives from the two organisations first started to share information and competence. Thus, even if the meeting formally could only be considered a partial success (since only some of the points were fulfilled to the extent agreed upon) it is accredited with importance in hindsight. One reason for this is of course the actual co-operation that was initiated, even though to a lesser extent than hoped for, but perhaps more importantly the meeting could be regarded as an ice-breaker where representatives got to share each other's viewpoints and also started to build social relations that made future co-operation run more smoothly.

#### **4 Expanded networking: The OIRT-EBU Meeting in Geneva 1960**

Three years later, in early February 1960, it was time for another meeting between the OIRT and EBU, this time in Geneva. It was a formal meeting with a more extensive agenda and delegates from respective technical, legal and programme committees participated. While the agenda of the Helsinki-meeting had a particular focus on technical issues the Geneva-meeting was instead entirely devoted to various aspects of programme exchange and possible co-operation within this field. The first two points of the five-point agenda concerned possibilities of exchange of radio and television programmes and films, as well as mutual transmission of sports events. The two following points were of a more technical character, addressing technical problems and means of measuring and controlling transnational television networks. The fifth and final point concerned legal aspects of transnational programme exchanges.<sup>19</sup> Besides widening the agenda to include programme matters and legal aspects of transnational broadcasting it also meant a greater emphasis on the content of the exchanges.

The Geneva-meeting is documented in three appendices, one from each committee, describing the proceedings during the four-day long meeting. As it seems, the discussions during the meeting only followed the initial agenda to a certain degree and the reports reflect the ongoing discussions rather than the set agenda. The reports differ significantly from each other; not only due to their shifting interest areas, but also in the ways problems are being addressed. The legal committees, for instance, refer most of the issues back to bilateral agreements rather than try to incorporate them into organisation-wide policies. The technical committees instead emphasise the role of the EBU and OIRT and possible co-operation between the two organisations, even if bilateral solutions are recommended in some cases. The programme committees often chose a middle ground, suggesting a general framework supported by the OIRT and EBU, but leaving it up to the member organisations to make bilateral agreements if necessary.

During the meeting the committees engaged in questions of programme exchanges in relation to their respective expertise. As mentioned, the legal committee referred most issues or problems back to bilateral agreements between the broadcasting organisations and their respective national legislators, directly involved in the exchanges. The meeting discussed "grand droits" and "petit droits",<sup>20</sup> as well as exchange of actualities and television films, mainly in relation to copyright issues, often noting that legislation varies between countries in the two organisations.<sup>21</sup> The report ends with the following statement: "In conclusion, it is noted that programme exchanges between member organisations of the OIRT and the EBU will be governed by the legal conditions obtaining in the countries involved".<sup>22</sup> In terms of legal issues, at least those discussed during the meeting, it is thus difficult to bypass the national

<sup>19</sup> EBU, O.A./1446-Com.T./25-Com.Pro./377-Com.J./295, 'EBU-OIRT Meeting, Geneva 3rd to 6th February 1960, Final Resolution', 6th Feb 1960.

<sup>20</sup> The terms 'grands droits' and 'petit droits' refer to different kinds of music rights, where grands droits covers stage performances and petit droits cover non-stage performances.

<sup>21</sup> EBU, O.A./1446-Com.T./25-Com.Pro./377-Com.J./295, 'EBU-OIRT Meeting, Geneva 3rd to 6th February 1960, Final Resolution', 6th Feb 1960, Appendix 1, 'Report of the Group of Legal Experts'.

<sup>22</sup> EBU, O.A./1446-Com.T./25-Com.Pro./377-Com.J./295, 'EBU-OIRT Meeting, Geneva 3rd to 6th February 1960, Final Resolution', 6th Feb 1960, Appendix 1, 'Report of the Group of Legal Experts', p. 3.

legislations and create a transnational legal framework that runs parallel to those of the respective member countries.

The report from the meeting of the programme committees is divided into two main parts, one dealing with exchange of radio broadcasts, the other with television broadcasts. They are structured in similar ways, both discussing different types of programmes that could be exchanged. There are three points reported in relation to television programme exchanges: 1) direct exchanges, 2) exchanges of television recordings, and 3) exchanges of actualities. These three types of exchanges cut somewhat differently, where direct exchanges incorporate different genres such as cultural, scientific and sports events. Actualities could be regarded as one such genre that would be included by the term direct exchanges but was apparently considered a large and important enough issue to earn its own heading in the report. The main conclusion of the meeting was that the two organisations would systematically exchange lists of programmes deemed suitable for exchange between member organisations. The member organisations could then choose between the programmes on offer, and the exchange would normally go “through the intermediary of respective secretariat”, but not excluding “direct exchanges between member organisations, which inform their respective secretariat thereof.”<sup>23</sup> Here then, the OIRT and EBU are willing to take an active part in the programme exchanges, organising information exchanges and also suggesting the secretariats as central nodes in the exchanges. However, the sovereignty of individual member organisations is protected by means of keeping the possibility of bilateral agreements open at all times and in effect bypassing all efforts made by the EBU and OIRT.

The technical committees have a head start due to their ongoing collaborations since the Helsinki-meeting in 1957 and this is the area in which the organisations have most experience both regarding technical co-operation and co-ordination and negotiations of respective agendas. There are four main points of the agenda, starting with “Operational questions regarding the mutual exchange of television programmes”, followed up by a similar point regarding sound broadcasts and a follow-up discussion of the Helsinki-meeting three years earlier. The report ends with a discussion of “Additional matters for future study”.<sup>24</sup> The discussion regarding television programme exchange is by far the lengthiest and includes exchanges of maps of respective networks as well as exchanges of conducts of practice. Other issues include co-ordination of test signals and broadcasts. Just as in 1957 a great deal of the meeting was set aside to discuss the exchange and co-ordination of information but it is also evident that some important measures towards creating a permanent network for television exchange were taken, for instance regarding the ordering of and payment of circuits.

Few places in any of the three reports witness differences of opinion between the two organisations. The only visible trace of such differences appear in the report from the meeting of the technical committees where the OIRT opened the meeting by suggesting five terminal points for Intervision/Eurovision junctions. The report of EBU’s technical committee concludes on the different points that need to be negotiated by the countries involved (see figure 1).

Regarding most issues the representatives of the OIRT and EBU were able to make agreements without having to refer them back to the national broadcasters (or other national bodies), as far as it had to do with programme matters or technical issues other than the actual linking of the two networks. The permanent junctions suggested by the OIRT included five links, from Hungary and Austria in the south to East Germany and Denmark in the north. However, the suggestion presented by the OIRT was clearly too sensitive to be decided upon during the meeting and the EBU therefore referred it back to the national PTTs. It is notable that the junction eventually linking the two networks is not mentioned in the discussions. The Tallinn/Helsinki link was put into use 14 months later but then comes as a near surprise to the EBU.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> EBU, O.A./1446-Com.T./25-Com.Pro./377-Com.J./295, ‘EBU-OIRT Meeting, Geneva 3rd to 6th February 1960, Final Resolution’, 6th Feb 1960, Appendix 3, ‘Report of the Group of Programme Experts’, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> EBU, O.A./1446-Com.T./25-Com.Pro./377-Com.J./295, ‘EBU-OIRT Meeting, Geneva 3rd to 6th February 1960, Final Resolution’, 6th Feb 1960, Appendix 2, ‘Report of the Meeting of Technical Delegates’.

<sup>25</sup> Even if not discussed during the meetings the junction between Tallinn and Helsinki was probably not totally unexpected since the television towers are within near proximity of each other.

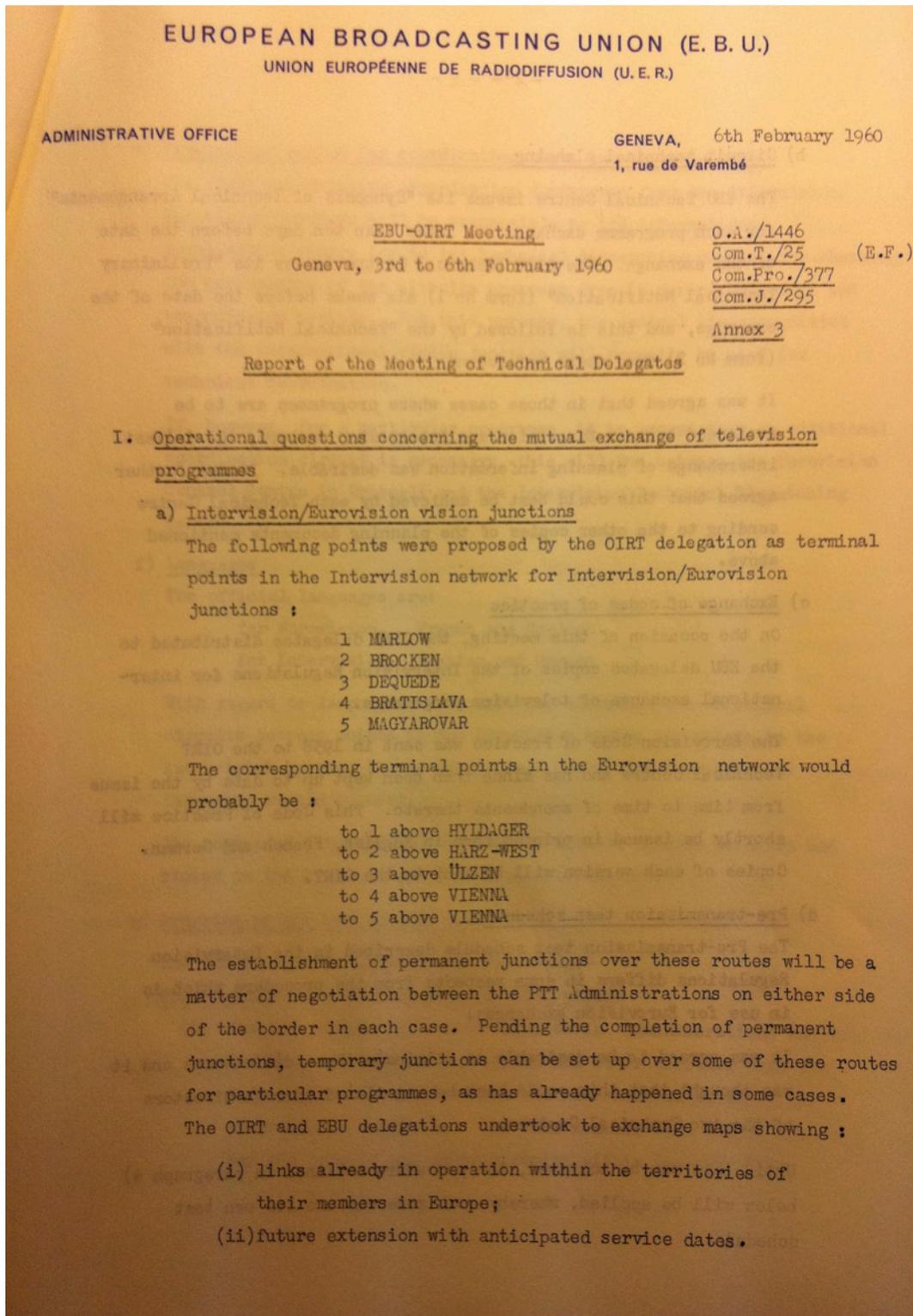


Fig. 1. Report of the Meeting of Technical Delegates, Geneva, 6 Feb 1960.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> EBU, O.A./1446-Com.T./25-Com.Pro./377-Com.J./295, 'EBU-OIRT Meeting, Geneva 3rd to 6th February 1960, Final Resolution', 6th Feb 1960, Appendix 3, 'Report of the Group of Programme Experts', p. 1.

Document Com.T.(L) 86 - E  
Page 13.

#### 5.8 Cue-dots

Dr. Castelli reported that Working Party M had briefly considered the question of cue-dots, that is to say, visible signals added to a television picture to convey information or instructions to points further downstream on the vision chain. It had decided that the question might be considered as operational and therefore invited Working Party L to take any necessary further action, if standardisation on the international plane seemed desirable.

Working Party L considered that cue-dots might well have useful applications for signalling from the origin the start and the finish of international television relays, especially when Services join late or leave early, or as switching cues from the C.I.C.T. The Director of the Technical Centre was asked to make a new appreciation of the national practice of the different Services and, if possible, to submit the results to the next meeting of the Executive Group.

#### 5.9 E.B.U./O.I.R.T. exchanges

Mr. Arni said that the Working Party might like to know of the situation concerning an East/West link between Estonia and Finland, which would be an alternative to the links already considered. A radio-link, reversible at five-minutes' notice, was being installed between Tallinn and Helsinki, with an intermediate relay station in Finland. It is expected that it will be taken into service during May, 1961, and it could be extended to Sweden outside Yleisradio programme hours. A two-way vision circuit is already in operation linking Moscow and Leningrad and the radio-link chain between Leningrad and Tallinn is expected to be taken into regular use in a few weeks' time. It is reasonable to suppose that this route could be made available occasionally as part of an international vision junction linking Moscow and the Eurovision network.

Mr. Mathews said that he had recently visited Moscow and had obtained substantially the same information as had just been given by Mr. Arni. His company intended to arrange a unilateral transmission from Moscow to London during May, 1961.

#### 5.10 Olympic Games, Rome 1960

The Chairman drew attention to document Com.T.(L) 82, which, as well as giving a picture of the reliability of the Olympic Games transmissions from Italy, could also be interpreted as an indication of whether reserve circuits are economically justifiable. He congratulated everyone concerned on the high degree of reliability attained.

Fig. 2. Report on the Tenth Meeting of Working Party L, Paris, 4 Feb 1961.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> EBU, Com.T.(L) 86, Technical Working Party L (International Television Relays), 'Report on the Tenth Meeting of Working Party L, held in Paris on 31st January, 1st and 2nd February 1961', 4 Feb 1961, p. 13.

The discussion regarding the junctions is a good example of the tension between the national and the transnational. The link is first mentioned in a report of Working Party L of the technical committee of the EBU, which was released on 4 February 1961 (see figure 2). The matter was brought up during the meeting by Mr. Arni, a delegate from YLE in Finland, who said that “the working party might like to know of the situation concerning an East/West link between Estonia and Finland”.<sup>28</sup> Arni explained that the link would be taken into service in May 1961 and that it is reversible with five minutes notice, and that it could be “extended to Sweden outside Yleisradio programme hours” and “occasionally as an international vision junction linking Moscow and the Eurovision network”. Mr. Mathews from Independent Television Companies’ Association (ITCA) in the UK confirmed Arni’s information and added that his company planned a unilateral transmission from London to Moscow in May 1961.<sup>29</sup>

So, even though the possibility of linking broadcast networks on both sides of the Iron Curtain had been on the agenda since 1957 the final realisation of such a network was created with little direct involvement of the OIRT and EBU. One way of understanding this would be to accept Rutkowski’s testimony regarding the link as the result of an ad-hoc co-operation of technicians in the national contexts of broadcasting. However, as evident from the minutes of the meetings of the OIRT and EBU in both 1957 and 1960 there were efforts made during these years to find common ground in respect of both legal, technical and programme matters. In some instances advances were made, for instance regarding technical information exchange and less politically charged programme exchanges. In other instances the co-operation soon came to a grinding halt, such as the proposed junctions by the OIRT, which was clearly too sensitive to be accepted by the EBU. Even though the transnational co-operation was only partly realised I would argue that the meetings paved the way for the actualisation of the networks that were eventually established in April 1961. The negotiations and discussions during the meetings can be said to have created a protocol,<sup>30</sup> i.e. a common understanding of how television could be part of a future transnational network. Here it is not only a matter of technical problem solving, getting the signal through, dealing with live conversion, etc., but also about finding common understandings and expectations on television as a transnational medium. Furthermore, it is likely that the meetings played an important role in creating social relations between representatives of the two organisations, relations without which the “chain of goodwill” Rutkowski referred to probably would not exist.

## 5 The Gagarin Lessons

What do we learn by studying the broadcast of Gagarin’s return to Moscow? One of the vantage points of this article was the observation that television history and theory have often neglected transnational co-operation and co-ordination and that the national perspectives have been all too dominant within the field. The meetings between the OIRT and the EBU in 1957 and 1960 demonstrate the tension and ambivalence between the national and transnational that was built into the entire process of making live cross-border broadcasting possible. As we have seen, the two organisations were quite willing to develop some transnational relations and a common understanding regarding the future development of European television, while other areas remained off limits.

So, then, how can the tensions and ambivalences regarding the national and transnational best be described and understood? The ambition to create a transnational broadcast network joining the Intervision of Eastern Europe and the Eurovision of Western Europe was the overarching objective of both meetings and was shared by both organisations. However, there are a number of obstacles that present themselves when the three committees of the organisations work through their agendas during the meetings. Some issues were more likely to be solved within a common framework than others. The actual exchange of broadcasts demanded a common practice and

<sup>28</sup> EBU, Com.T.(L) 86, Technical Working Party L (International Television Relays), ‘Report on the Tenth Meeting of Working Party L, held in Paris on 31st January, 1st and 2nd February 1961’, 4 Feb 1961, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> In the end the broadcast was organised by the BBC rather than the ITCA. Arnold’s comment can thus be understood in the light of the competition between public service and commercial broadcasters in the United Kingdom.

<sup>30</sup> Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture*, MIT Press, 2006.

understanding since they, in a more direct way, incorporated a need to overcome cultural and political differences.

Also, the process of transnationalisation clearly moves at different paces depending on which area is concerned. In order to organise a transnational broadcast a number of different actors need to be involved. I have demonstrated how advances in technical co-operation were achieved faster, for instance, than agreements over legal matters. In other words, some areas are more likely to be dealt with through transnational co-operation than others, where legal issues more often than not had to be referred back to national organisations. The third group of experts dealt with programme matters and this is perhaps the area in which the ambivalence shows most clearly. A recurring formulation in the minutes from the programme committees states that the matters could be solved by the larger broadcast organisations, but that they may as well be left to the national broadcasters and bilateral agreements. Here, then, it is obvious that the programme committee was cautious not to risk the sovereignty of their member organisations.

Overall the meetings in 1957 and 1960 were characterised by an effort to find ways to co-operate. I would argue that the collaboration between the OIRT and EBU provided a general structure of understanding and endorsed the creation of an infrastructure linking the Eastern and Western television networks. Programme exchanges between the organisations and their members were considered an important development of the European television landscape and were discussed extensively from technical, legal and cultural viewpoints. The live transmission network binding the East and West together, as well as the actual programme exchanges, can thus be seen as an outcome of the structures provided by the OIRT and EBU. But at the same time the live broadcasts, such as Gagarin's return to Moscow, were to a large extent the result of bi-lateral agreements and co-operation. However, in order to get a better grasp of how the programme exchanges across the Iron Curtain were produced more research is needed, including not only the multi-national perspectives of the EBU and OIRT but also perspectives and viewpoints of the broadcasting organisations involved, textual analysis of the broadcasts themselves and secondary media, etc.

Beside widening and deepening the empirical foundations, such a study would benefit from taking into account some of the theoretical implications of the broadcast of Gagarin's return. Already the realisation of such a broadcast forces us to reconsider our understanding of television. For instance, it is clear that television not only has national histories but also transnational histories.<sup>31</sup> As noted in the opening paragraphs, the celebration of Gagarin marks the inception of a television network stretching all over Europe and shows that we have to understand television as a transnational medium already in the early 1960s, if not earlier. But the case of Gagarin and the broadcast of his celebrations add yet another dimension: the transnational is not confined to the broadcasting systems of Western Europe and the United States, but also have to include co-operation between broadcasters on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In short, we need to do away with ideas of television in Eastern and Western Europe as separate and distinct spheres.

This article has provided but a short glimpse of the broadcast events taking place in April 1961. Its limited scope leaves a long range of questions unanswered and it is my hope that the story presented here can serve as one of many possible vantage points for further studies of the history of transnational television.

<sup>31</sup> This call for studying transnational television is shared by many: cf. Bignell & Fickers 2008, Fickers & Johnson 2010, Hilmes 2012.

## Biography

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