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Title	European news vision : 1993 and beyond
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Citation	Lansipuro, Y. (1991). European news vision : 1993 and beyond. In AMIC-FES Seminar on News and the North-South Relationship : Singapore, Sep 23-24, 1991. Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research & Information Centre.
Date	1991
URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10220/2666">http://hdl.handle.net/10220/2666</a>
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**European News Vision : 1993 and Beyond**

**By**

**Yrjo Lansipuro**

## European news visions: 1993 and beyond

By Yrjo Lansipuro

Eurovision News Exchange was born in the fog of European winters in the 1950's, when some brave TV news executives came upon a revolutionary idea: why not use microwave links to convey newsfilm items between half a dozen European cities, instead of airplanes which were usually late, especially in the winter.

From this fledgling experiment, seen as recklessly expensive at the time by many, EVN grew steadily into what it is today: a mammoth operation of several daily multi-origin, multi-destination exchanges, partly by landlines, partly by satellite, with a volume of some 17,000 items a year. Its links with other news exchanges in the world have made EVN a de facto global clearinghouse of hot news, wherever it happens in the world. And wherever the next crisis strikes, there'll be an EVN coordinator and a feedpoint in no time, complete with a flyaway earth station and an Inmarsat phone, if necessary, ready to fulfill the unilateral needs of EVN members.

You might think that this edifice is so strong and stable that it can withstand even the winds and waves of change now sweeping Europe. But this is not so. Like everything else in Europe, EVN is in a state of flux. It is being hit by the biggest changes since the microwave replaced onion bags as the main vehicle of international news exchange.

The changes are political, structural, technical; everything is happening at the same time. That makes the situation even more fluid.

The collapse of communism in Europe has made redundant, among other things, the other European broadcasting union whose mission had been to demonstrate the superiority of socialism by means of radio and TV. OIRT, its television arm Intervision and its news exchange IVN are going to be merged with EBU, Eurovision and EVN respectively.

The merger of the news exchanges might not be too difficult, because they have been in constant and increasingly friendly cooperation since 1965, when they started a mutual daily exchange of selected news items. Joint meetings of the news working parties (then called news study groups) date back to September 1969. At these twice yearly occasions, mutual accusations for imbalance of the exchange gradually gave way to genuine cooperation. It is a fact, and matter of the EVN/IVN folklore, that already in 1972, in the middle of Cold War, representatives of ZDF and DDR-F sang Schubert's Ave Maria together, as a duet, outside a sauna in the Finnish woods north of Tampere, after a successful joint EVN/IVN meeting.

For years already, EVN's have been available to Intervision members in their entirety. Now, the main IVN exchange at 1415 GMT, instead of just selected items from it, will be fed into the EVN network. If necessary, EVN items will be added to it, so that this already will become an integrated IVN/EVN exchange. And in September 1993 the EVN news working party will meet the first time in its new enlarged composition. Nobody at time knows, how many independent entities formed from the heritage of the former Intervision will be there.

The integration of EVN and IVN will happen simultaneously with a complete overhaul of the structure of EVN exchanges, which would have happened anyway, with or without the collapse of IVN. The exchange at this stage should take place entirely by satellite, with one channel dedicated for the purpose 24 hrs/day. It will be possible to feed whatever is available as soon as it becomes available, without waiting for a specific time slot. At the stations, sound-activated VTR's might be used for recording in order to ease staffing problems. On the other hand, for the benefit of some organizations and also of partners in other regions, some package feeds will remain.

Yet another new development is the Euronews project, which can be seen as an European attempt at an answer to CNN. The idea is to produce in the beginning an 8-hour, finally a 24-hr news service, directly available by DBS to the end-user, as a joint European effort. The preparations are now carried on by Euronews Development which is a separate entity from EBU as such, and where not all EBU members have chosen to participate. BBC, for one, is out, because they have their own World News project. So is ITN. The Germans are in, so are the Finns. The product would be a newscast without an anchorperson, thus 100% covered by visuals, and narrated simultaneously in 5 languages. There is a fierce competition among several European cities (mainly in Germany and France) to become the home of Euronews and its 200+ staff.

Participating organizations have pledged a certain amount of money each, but it is still not clear, where the bulk of the money is going to come from. There is also the controversy about a new quasi-HDTV system which the EC wants to impose, and which is opposed by most TV organizations. In any case, the starting date has been set on 1.12.92.

Over many years, EVN nurtured bilateral relations with other exchange systems in the world on the basis of reciprocity, even though the scales were not exactly balanced. This wise policy is now bearing fruit, when the other exchanges - especially AVN - have grown up and are able to provide worthwhile news items to EVN on a daily basis. As I mentioned before, this has made EVN a de facto global clearinghouse of hot news, a role it no doubt will continue to play. However, other unions should not assume that this role can be much expanded from what it is now, and beyond whatever items EVN members themselves are interested in. Thus, in the end, there might be need for inter-regional exchange channels bypassing EVN among the exchange systems of the South.