

## A Profile of Public Broadcasting in Germany

### ABSTRACT

This report presents an analysis of the theory and reality of public broadcasting in Germany. The arguments in favour of public broadcasting in Germany may be characterized as taking two basic directions: one opposes commercial broadcasting, while the other attaches positive significance to public broadcasting. The former regards commercial broadcasting as an economic activity that pursues a maximum of profits through market competition, and opposes it on the grounds that commercial broadcasting has an intrinsic character that is bound to weaken the social “integrating function” required of the broadcasting media.

Those speaking positively for public broadcasting base their arguments on an organization’s internal pluralism. It works this way: by incorporating a miniature pluralistic society in the internal supervisory boards of public broadcasting corporations “various major social forces” can be represented integrally through the organizations themselves. This supervisory formula is evaluated positively as an appropriate role for public broadcasting to display its “integrating function” in pluralistic society.

Of interest to us is the fact that public broadcasting is being defended from various angles and on an interdisciplinary basis. This question has been mainly studied from a legal point of view. Today it is analyzed from the standpoint of economics or mass communications research, or studied in comparison with public broadcasting systems in other countries. Through these means, attempts are being made to prove the positive significance of an organization’s internal, pluralistic principles.

The arguments in favor of public broadcasting in Germany are certainly understandable. The public service system, but no individual corporation, was to be the cornerstone of German broadcasting. Its duty is “the provision of basic services” (Grundversorgung). We must not, however, forget to add some explanation along with the context of the actual circumstances in which German public broadcasting is operating.

**Key Words:** public broadcasting system, integrating function, provision of basic services (Grundversorgung)