

1 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEDIA IN FRANCE

- Origins of a mass press
- The advent of radio
- The media in the Second World War
- Postwar reconstruction of the media system
- The growth of television
- The liberalization of broadcasting
- Conclusion

This chapter analyses, explains and evaluates some of the key events and issues in the history of the French media from the latter part of the nineteenth century until the final years of the twentieth, with a particular focus on developments since the Liberation in 1944. It thus covers the period from the emergence of a mass newspaper press to the dawn of the digital, multimedia age. Such a historical overview is important in helping to situate elements of continuity and change in the French media over time. While history does not determine either the structures or operations of the media landscape in contemporary France, it does act as an important formative influence. Some knowledge of the history of the French media is therefore necessary to understand the ways in which they are presently organized and function. It is also essential if one is fully to appreciate the issues at stake in current policy debates on topics such as the future of the press, the status of public service broadcasting and the relationship between the media and the state. Adopting an overarching chronological framework, this chapter devotes a section to each of the following topics: origins of a mass press; the advent of radio; the media in the Second World War; the postwar reconstruction of the media system; the growth of television; and the liberalization of broadcasting.

Origins of a mass press

Newspapers have by far the longest history among the media still functioning in contemporary France. The first weekly periodical, *La Gazette*, was published in 1631, while the first national daily newspaper, *Le Journal de Paris*, appeared in 1777. As was the case right across Europe, readership of French newspapers in the eighteenth and for much

of the nineteenth centuries was restricted to elite sections of society (Sassoon, 2006: 194–9). Despite some short-lived explosions in the number of newspaper titles after the 1789 and 1848 Revolutions, it was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that the press experienced a period of unprecedented expansion during which it achieved the status of a mass medium in terms of news provision to an audience of significant size.

More particularly, in the years between the collapse of the Second Empire in 1870 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 – the so-called ‘golden age’ of the French press – newspapers underwent a massive expansion in both the number of different titles published and the size of their total readership (Martin, 2005a: 13–52). As a result, in 1914 with a total print run of over nine million copies, France occupied pole position in Europe for the circulation of daily newspapers per head of population: 244 copies for every 1,000 inhabitants, compared with only 73 in 1881 (Chupin *et al.*, 2009: 44). The opening up of newspaper sales to a mass public was underpinned on the demand side by the spread of literacy and the extension of the electoral franchise, and on the supply side by innovations in printing technology, such as the rotary press, and improvements in distribution through new means of transportation, notably the railways. Through the use of mass production techniques, the industrialization of the publication process led to a lowering in the cover price of newspapers, which in turn helped boost sales.

At the same time the period saw the emergence of leading industrialists and financiers, who were prepared to invest in the press as a business enterprise. Recognizing that progress in technology could be harnessed to create a new popular market for newspapers, they regarded the press as an economic sector ripe for commercial development and exploitation. In 1863 the sale of *Le Petit Journal* at five centimes a copy led to the introduction into the market of what were to become mass circulation newspapers, ‘specifically designed for the masses and not for those interested in politics’ (Zeldin, 1977: 526). Four newspapers – *Le Petit Journal*, *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Journal* and *Le Matin* – each had a daily print run of over one million copies prior to the outbreak of the First World War (Charon, 2005: 14).

Meanwhile, the relationship between the state and the press underwent radical change. After a long history of interference in editorial content, whereby for much of the nineteenth century the state employed a range of mechanisms to seek to ensure a compliant press, the 1881 press statute – the Law on the Liberty of the Press – began with the words ‘Printing and publishing are free’. Guaranteeing freedom of opinion and the right to publish, this reform brought a formal end to a variety of practices, including state censorship, legal restraints on content and restrictive financial measures, all of which had curtailed the functioning of a free press in the past. The new legislation was thus indicative of a major change of attitude on the part of the authorities towards the print media, with the dominant political forces in the new parliamentary regime of the Third Republic seeking to encourage the growth of a democratic political

culture in support of republican values and institutions in the struggle against conservative and reactionary forces and ideas.

Yet the 1881 statute did not put a definitive end to state interference in newspaper content. This was particularly evident at times of national crisis. During the First World War, for example, the government severely censored the press in the interest of keeping popular morale high. Moreover, from a sense of patriotic duty, much of the press for most of the time was more than happy to comply with government directives and presented to their readers a highly misleading and optimistic picture of events at the front (D'Almeida and Delporte, 2010: 17–54). There also emerged in peacetime a negative side to the newly discovered press freedom. Loosed from the shackles of state repression, the press did not always exercise social responsibility, with newspapers sometimes engaging in reporting of a scurrilous nature. This aspect of press behaviour was to become especially marked in the final years of the regime and was to contribute to the destabilization of the political system when economic crisis and political scandal rocked France in the 1930s. Nonetheless, in general the 1881 statute marked a major advance in the status of the press and in an explicit symbolic acknowledgement of its contribution to the cause of media freedom, the first line of the Socialist government's 1982 reform of broadcasting stated that 'Audiovisual communication is free' (Fillioud, 2008: 103–7).

The First World War brought the 'golden age' of the French press to an inglorious end. The factual inaccuracy and unbounded patriotic zeal of newspaper stories during the conflict led to the alienation of many readers, while adverse economic circumstances after the end of the war – including an acute shortage of labour, severe restrictions on the supply of paper, troublesome transportation problems, a marked reduction in advertising revenue and a general increase in production costs – seriously affected newspaper production and distribution. During the inter-war years there was a decline in the number of daily titles published, although print run figures for national and provincial newspapers combined had edged up from 9.5 million in 1914 to 11 million in 1939. Provincial papers in particular were becoming more important players in the newspaper market: indeed, by the start of the Second World War they had caught up with the sales of those papers produced in Paris. Yet although the total circulation of daily papers increased gradually between the wars, the per capita growth was small. Moreover, international comparison showed the extent to which the French press was falling behind in relative terms: while 261 newspapers per 1,000 inhabitants were sold in France in 1939, in Britain the corresponding figure had already reached 360.

The inter-war period saw powerful press barons coming to the fore, notably the textile magnate, Jean Prouvost, a future owner of *Le Figaro*. Magazines emerged as major media outlets during the years running up to the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1937 Prouvost established the title *Marie-Claire*, one of a range of magazines specifically aimed at women readers that emerged at this time. The following year he took over the small sports magazine *Match* and turned it into a weekly photonews

magazine, with sales of over a million by the summer of 1939. A few years after the war the magazine was relaunched with the slightly new title of *Paris Match*. As an illustrated weekly news magazine, *Paris Match* was to constitute 'one of the most glaring successes of the postwar French press' (Hewitt, 1991: 111), with nearly two million copies sold in 1957.

The advent of radio

The first radio station to broadcast regularly was Radio-Tour Eiffel, which was established in 1921 as a state service linked to the Ministry of Posts. The first private radio station to transmit officially was Radio-Paris (originally called Radiola), which had the backing of the national syndicate of radio-electric industries and began broadcasting at the end of 1922. During the inter-war period there was strong competition in Paris between different public and private stations, such as Radio-Tour Eiffel, Paris-PTT and Radio-Paris. Rivalry between stations was also fierce in the provinces. The private stations broadcast mainly entertainment programmes and were funded principally from advertising revenue. The public service stations were also funded in part from advertising until 1933 when the radio-receiving licence was introduced. The licence fee was designed to give a solid funding base to the state sector at a time when radio was just beginning to establish itself as a mass medium: by 1938 there were over four million radio sets in France, compared with just under two million at the start of 1935. Public and private stations continued to coexist up until the start of the Second World War.

French newspaper owners were particularly concerned by the uptake of the new medium, as they faced up to the challenge radio posed to the political influence and economic viability of the press. One response, prefiguring that adopted by press groups in adjusting to the legalization of private local stations in the 1980s, was to acquire their own stake in radio. In 1924, for instance, *Le Petit Parisien* was the first newspaper to establish a radio station, *Le Poste Parisien*. As competition between public and private stations intensified, news bulletins became part of the programme output of radio, raising issues of political balance and impartiality. Worried about losing readership, the press in general was opposed to coverage of politics on the radio. However, as newspaper owners were unable to prevent this development, they adapted to the new circumstances by encouraging listeners to purchase their company's newspapers so as to complement their audio news diet. Radio also began to make an impact on French political debate, with the medium first being formally used in an election campaign in 1936. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, however, French politicians were only just beginning to appreciate the potential of radio as a means of mass persuasion.

The media in the Second World War

On the eve of the Second World War, in response to the signing of the non-aggression pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the French government moved to ban the publication of the Communist press, including the daily *L'Humanité*, and as a result the party's publishing ventures were forced underground. Inevitably the defeat of 1940 entailed massive dislocating consequences for the French press, as the population came to terms with the psychological shock of the military collapse, the reality of Nazi occupation in the north and the authoritarian Vichy regime of Marshal Pétain in the south. In terms of press organization, the fall of France led to many Paris newspapers fleeing to the southern zone. Others simply stopped publishing altogether. Strict censorship was established by the Nazis and the Vichy state in their respective zones (Kedward, 1978: 187–8). After the German invasion of the southern zone in November 1942, most of the Paris dailies that had earlier moved south abandoned publishing. In the northern zone the officially sanctioned press was naturally dominated by collaborationist papers for the whole period of the German occupation.

During the war the influence of the pro-Vichy and pro-Nazi press was to some extent offset by the publication of clandestine newspapers sympathetic to the views of de Gaulle and the Resistance (Jackson, 2001: 402–26). This clandestine press was a vital means of spreading the ideals of the Resistance, mobilizing support for its activities and maintaining a sense of solidarity. The launch of a clandestine newspaper was a major gesture of defiance against the authorities and those who took this initiative of political engagement ran a considerable risk of discovery and punishment (Kedward, 1985: 52). The number of different clandestine titles was impressive, as was the political spectrum covered: Catholic, Socialist, Communist and Gaullist among others. Moreover, the longer the war continued, the more the clandestine press became well organized and highly professional in its operations. As the defeat of the Nazis came to seem the likeliest outcome of the war, the clandestine press formed a national federation at the end of 1943. In agreement with the Resistance organizations and the Provisional Government, this federation was to help shape the content of legislation on the press after the Liberation.

It was the outbreak of the Second World War that thrust radio into an incontrovertible position of political prominence. From 1940 to 1944 France was the scene of a verbal battle over the air involving radio stations articulating views sympathetic to the Nazis (Radio-Paris), Pétain (Radio-Vichy) and the Resistance (Radio-Londres) (Amaury, 1969: 409–22; Eck, 1985). Pétain frequently used radio to try to rally support for the Vichy regime, while de Gaulle broadcast over the BBC as the symbol of French resistance (Smith, 1973: 157). Although some politicians were already becoming fascinated with the power of the medium of radio, de Gaulle was virtually unique among the military in appreciating its significance. His first and most famous broadcast, the appeal of 18 June

1940 from the London studios of the BBC, was a call to his compatriots to continue the struggle against the Nazis. As the Second World War progressed, the BBC became one of the authentic voices of French resistance. The military and political conflict of the war thus found a reflection in a propaganda battle of the airwaves as each side strove to impose its views through the medium of radio.

Postwar reconstruction of the media system

It is impossible to overestimate the impact of the Second World War on the media landscape that emerged in France after the Liberation. The wartime period marked an almost wholly clean break with the prewar media system, with both press and broadcasting sectors effectively rebuilt from scratch once the conflict was over. This reconstruction was heavily influenced by the statist and anti-capitalist ideals of the National Council of the Resistance. Moreover, although values associated with the market, first in the press and much later in broadcasting, effectively challenged the initial hegemonic dominance of the postwar media settlement, nonetheless the ethos of the Liberation continued to influence both the attitudes of various media policy stakeholders and the framing of different elements of media policy throughout the second half of the twentieth century and even into the first decade of the twenty-first.

The press

In the press sector the sum of the changes introduced in the immediate postwar period amounted to nothing short of a revolution. Newspapers accused of collaboration with the Nazi occupiers were closed down and their assets redistributed to owners untainted by collaboration. As a result, of the 206 daily newspaper titles that had been published in France in 1939, only 28 were able to resume operations after the war (Guillaume, 1988: 19). At the same time, the old prewar press groups were eliminated and a new press system was reconstituted from independent companies. Small press groups, including those of Catholic and Communist sensibilities, established themselves in the new system.

Many new titles were established in both Paris and the provinces in the months following the Liberation. Party political titles were particularly in evidence in the initial postwar period (Martin, 2002: 307–27). So too were politically committed ‘opinion’ newspapers, of which the most famous example was *Combat*, in which the philosopher Albert Camus played a leading role. The quality daily *Le Monde* was also set up in 1944 to provide France with a newspaper of reference in the style of the prewar *Le Temps*. There was some shrinkage in the number of different daily newspaper titles, with the number of Paris dailies (i.e. national titles) dropping slightly from 31 in 1939 to 28 in 1946, while the total of provincial dailies remained constant at 175.

The immediate post-Liberation period saw a sharp increase in the total print run of daily newspapers in comparison to prewar figures: over 15 million in 1946, an increase of more than four million compared with 1939. This meant that 370 newspapers were sold in 1946 for every 1,000 inhabitants, a statistic that has never been surpassed since. The explosion in circulation figures can be explained by an enormous hunger for information after the famine of the war years, the pace of institutional and political change, and the flourishing of new social and economic ideas. Most of this increase benefited the provincial press, whose print run went up from 5.5 million in 1939 to over nine million in 1946. The legacy of the Second World War helped the provincial press in its battle against the Paris papers. The wartime division of the country into an occupied and an unoccupied zone, with the capital firmly under Nazi control, increased the importance of the provincial press over its Paris counterpart (Pedley, 1993: 150). Another factor working in favour of the provincial press was that in the immediate postwar period, when rationing was still in force, local and regional newspapers were the major source of information regarding the availability of food supplies in the locality.

Organizational change in the press sector was underpinned by legislative reform. Many in the Resistance were critical of the prewar newspaper industry and wanted to vent their wrath on those owners who had controlled the press before the war. The dominance of the inter-war press by capitalist financiers was anathema to those forces that dominated French politics immediately after the Liberation. Their attention, however, was not confined to a mere settling of personal accounts, though that certainly formed part of their revanchist agenda. More importantly, proponents of reform wanted to address what they regarded as the structural weaknesses of the prewar press system that had allowed it to fall into the hands of capitalist entrepreneurs. In their eyes the market had failed both to provide real choice and to reflect the diversity of opinion in French society, while it had concentrated power and influence in the hands of a few unscrupulous proprietors. An increased role for the state was designed to counter what were regarded as the undesirable consequences of the operation of a free market in the press. Reformers therefore concentrated their attention on the organizational framework of the press and on the liberal values that had underpinned its operation since 1881. In short, rather than just the ritual scapegoating of those proprietors who had abused their freedom to publish under the Nazis and Vichy, a full scale reorganization of the press was considered essential by the parties in power after the Liberation.

This concern of the postwar government to reform the legislative framework of the press system found embodiment in the ordinance of 26 August 1944, the main provisions of which were intended to guarantee pluralism, prevent concentration of ownership and introduce transparency into the financial dealings of newspapers. The measures aimed to establish a more positive framework to protect the press from economic pressures that might limit the independence of newspapers. The reform sought to make patterns of ownership and control more visible through a

combination of initiatives that compelled newspapers to declare their economic interests and make public their financial situation. In particular, the ordinance made it illegal for the same person to be the publishing boss of more than one daily newspaper.

The 1944 ordinance was thus a very different piece of legislation from the press statute of 1881. The *laissez-faire* provisions of the nineteenth-century legislation were now perceived as an inadequate means of ensuring pluralism in ownership and diversity in content. In its emphasis on the need for new legislation to secure these objectives, the postwar government was trying to make a clean break with the liberal paradigm instituted over 60 years previously. The 1881 legislation had been introduced at a time of expansion and as a counter to the previous practice of excessive state control. In the eyes of the postwar government the inadequacies of this free market approach had been exposed during the inter-war period. Whereas in 1881 the concern of the legislators had been to promote the liberty of the press by protecting it from *political* control by the state, in 1944 the emphasis was placed on removing *economic* threats to press freedom from capitalist owners.

In 1944, therefore, state intervention was not viewed as a means of impeding editorial freedom. It was not intended to mark a return to nineteenth-century censorship and governmental interference in content. Rather it was advocated as a prerequisite for countering the ineffective functioning of the market. The state, it was argued, could help deliver a more pluralistic and responsible press. At the same time the government hoped that the result would be a press system more sympathetic to the viewpoint of the dominant centre-left parties in politics and of progressive forces in society. Thus, a mixture of altruism and self-interest lay behind the introduction of the new legislation.

Overall, the role of the state in the organization of the press was massively increased after the Liberation. The radical provisions of the 1944 ordinance, the establishment of a national press agency, Agence France-Presse, and the institution of a system of financial aid were all indicative of the state's desire to play a more proactive role in the affairs of the press than had been the case prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. So too was the creation in 1947 of a new cooperative system of distribution to replace Hachette's prewar private monopoly.

The daily newspaper market was in an apparently healthy condition in 1946. Circulation figures for daily newspapers had never been higher, while the large inter-war drop in the number of newspaper titles had been virtually halted. Yet this postwar boom was short-lived. Sales began to decline, the number of titles shrank and the ethos of the Resistance quickly evaporated. By 1952 the number of Paris and provincial newspaper titles had fallen to 14 and 117 respectively, while total print run figures dropped below the ten million mark. Meanwhile, the number of papers sold per 1,000 inhabitants had declined to 218.

As interest in news subsided and the economy stagnated, the new papers were forced gradually either out of business or into the hands

of people willing to apply new capital to their development. In 1947 a month-long printers' strike led to the loss of scores of papers, and the sudden miracle of a 'decapitalized' press was over, together with much of the spirit of the Resistance. Many of the pre-war press-owners, including Prouvost, who had been banned from owning papers at the Liberation, returned to their businesses, and France ceased to be among the major newspaper-consuming countries of the world.

(Smith, 1979: 176)

Not surprisingly, the postwar emphasis on a strong role for the state in press matters has not been without its critics. For example, in comparing what he terms 'the French model' unfavourably with the more laissez-faire regimes in Germany and Great Britain, Charon puts forward a critique of the excesses of statism. He argues that the powers taken by the French state in press matters have facilitated political control, prevented the implementation of decisions that were desirable on economic grounds and made essential rationalization in the newspaper industry more difficult than would otherwise have been the case (Charon, 1991).

It has also been argued that the ideals of the Resistance were utopian and their fulfilment soon undermined by the re-emergence of hard-nosed economic realities. According to this interpretation of events, the 'political phase' of the postwar press was very short lived. State regulation and financial aid may have tempered some of the less desirable aspects of market competition, but the parties of the Resistance were unable to impose their anti-capitalist values on the functioning of the press. Within a few years of the end of the war, many newspapers had gone out of business. The inexperience of some of the new press owners played a part in this retrenchment. Economic factors also came into play. As the price of newspapers increased, the circulation figures of some fell, while those of others went up. Advertising tended to go to those papers whose circulation was already healthy, thereby giving a further downward push to the weaker papers. Meanwhile, readers preferred to read newspapers of a general information character rather than party political papers with their ideologically partisan content (Guillauma, 1988: 21). Another reason why the objectives of the 1944 legislation were not fully realized was that several politicians themselves became press owners and had no interest in seeing its provisions tested in court amid a blaze of critical publicity. The further the experience of the Resistance receded into the background, the more economic factors and commercial concerns asserted their importance.

Yet this does not mean that the innovations of the Liberation were a total failure. Whatever its limitations in practice, the 1944 legislation did have some impact in checking a tendency towards concentration of ownership and the emergence of large press groups in the postwar period. What evolved was a market system in which the state played an important but by no means all-embracing role in aiding pluralism and diversity.

If this revolution was not as durable as its promoters in the Resistance or in exile had hoped, at least it did for a time make a *tabula rasa* of the past, put in place new titles, men and organizations and defined a different regime from that of 1881. Developments since the Liberation have profoundly transformed this new press; economic factors have favoured concentration. The constraints of commercial journalism have rendered inoperative many of the prescriptions of 1944 and 1945. The Resistance was able to give an opportunity to a very wide spectrum of newspapers and journalists: it could not guarantee to each the same success.

(Albert, 2008: 206)

Overall, the strongest legacy of the postwar reform of the press was to legitimize the role of the state as a positive enabling force in this sector of the media, a legitimacy which the state enjoys among many policy stakeholders to this day (see Chapter 4).

Broadcasting

French radio emerged from the war ripe for reorganization. Not surprisingly the medium had expanded only very gradually during the conflict, with 5.5 million sets in use by 1946. In comparison, the UK had almost twice as many radio sets as France in the same year. The main concern for French politicians, however, was not so much to encourage consumer demand for radio as to ensure that the medium would serve the objectives of the postwar state. The role played by radio during the conflict was to have a spillover effect on French broadcasting policy once peace had been restored and in particular to have a crucial impact on the postwar organization and development of the medium. Politicians emerged from the steep learning curve of the war not just conscious of radio's power, but also determined to harness that power for their own political purposes. This meant creating structures for broadcasting that would facilitate the achievement of those goals that were at the heart of the economic and political programmes of the centre-left governing coalition of Christian Democrats, Socialists and Communists.

The role played by radio during the war was, therefore, a decisive factor in the formulation of broadcasting policy by the political forces active in the Resistance, since it was decided during the wartime period that the provision of broadcasting services would be nationalized following the Liberation. With all private radio licences cancelled, the private stations that had been allowed to broadcast up until the outbreak of hostilities were compelled either to cease broadcasting altogether or to transmit from outside French territory. Installations and equipment belonging to the private radio companies were requisitioned by the state, though some staff from the prewar private stations obtained posts in the new state service. The Vichy laws on broadcasting were reinstated after temporary repeal.

The main provision of the immediate postwar legislation was the affirmation of broadcasting as a state monopoly with public service goals, placed under the responsibility of a Minister of Information. Among the parties of the governing coalition the state monopoly represented without any doubt the optimal organizational framework for broadcasting. The Liberation government thus legitimized the framework within which broadcasting in France was to develop and attain maturity: a state monopoly with a formal public service role, but in practice closely subordinated to the political interests of the government of the day (Thomas, 1976: 2–5). The propaganda role played by radio during the Second World War thus had the unfortunate consequence of linking two separate ideas – state monopoly and political control – in the minds of French politicians (Eck, 1991). Evident under the wartime Vichy regime, this fusion of state monopoly and government control was to continue during the Fourth Republic (1946–58), when representatives of various political forces – Socialists, Radicals, Christian Democrats and assorted conservatives and independents – all sought to exploit radio for their own partisan political ends.

Right up until the early 1980s the state monopoly in the provision of radio services was enshrined in all major pieces of postwar legislation on French broadcasting. In theory this meant that only state radio could transmit from within French territory. No privately owned or commercially managed competition was allowed under the provisions of the various pieces of legislation which applied to broadcasting in the period before François Mitterrand's presidential election victory in 1981. In practice, however, the situation was significantly more complicated. The monopoly status of state radio in the postwar period did not go unchallenged, with strong competition coming from the so-called 'peripheral stations' (*postes périphériques*) such as Europe 1, Radio Luxembourg and Radio-Monte-Carlo. These advertising-funded stations transmitted to French audiences from just outside the national territory and their existence was tolerated by the French state, which even had a stake in managing their operations. The 'peripheral stations' were considered by French audiences to be less stuffy and politically tainted than their state counterpart and they were to play a particularly important role in news dissemination during the 1968 'events', when state radio was heavily controlled by the Gaullist government.

The growth of television

Compared with some other industrialized countries, such as the USA and Great Britain, France was slow to enter the television era. Though French television was officially established in 1935 and regular transmissions began after the Second World War, it was not until the late 1950s that a significant mass audience began to emerge: in 1961 fewer than 20 per cent of French households had a television set, whereas over

80 per cent possessed a radio. Financial constraints within the state broadcasting services, which were still geared up primarily for radio broadcasts, meant that the transmission network and programme output of television were slow to expand and attract a large nationwide audience. In contrast, during the 1960s the take-off of the sale of television sets was impressive. The number of households owning a set steadily increased – from below two million in 1960 to just over ten million in 1969. The amount of time spent watching television by the average French adult also increased from 57 minutes per day in 1964 to 107 minutes in 1969, almost wholly because of the expanding market penetration of the medium rather than through any radical changes in individual viewing habits.

A second national channel was established in 1964, while colour television arrived in 1967. Daily programme schedules were lengthened with the result that the total supply of television programming doubled during the decade. These measures were designed not just to raise viewing figures and widen choice, but also to boost sales of domestically manufactured television sets. By the end of the 1960s television had displaced the press and radio as the principal mass medium of national and international information for the French public – a status it has maintained ever since. Television also became the primary source of domestic entertainment and the single most important disseminator of culture. It was held responsible for various social phenomena, such as the decline in cinema attendance and newspaper reading. While the specific nature of the impact of television in any particular sphere of political or cultural activity may be open to debate, there is no doubt that by the time General de Gaulle resigned from the presidential office in 1969, television had become the most pervasive mass medium in French history.

From the very beginning of its public transmissions after the Liberation, French television was organized within the framework of the state broadcasting monopoly. France was by no means unique in adopting such an organizational principle for its new television service. A state monopoly was common practice in several Western European countries in the immediate postwar period. Yet there were also specific domestic factors that Smith argues worked in favour of the application of the state monopoly model to French television.

Firstly, there was the tradition of government control of the telegraph initiated in the middle of the nineteenth century because of fear of its use by enemies of the regime.

Secondly, there was no real debate within France over who was to control broadcasting ... State control was a convenience rather than the result of a firm policy.

Thirdly, the newspapers seeing that radio elsewhere, and later of course television, was potentially a usurper of advertising revenue became staunch supporters of a system by which the state would guarantee the financial viability of a French system of broadcasting.

Fourthly, broadcasting was seen as a primary instrument of the traditional French policy of cultural diffusion. In private hands, as in the United States, broadcasting automatically became an instrument of low culture; the French ... saw that centralised control of broadcasting was the only guarantee that the instrument would be employed to ensure that high culture would prevail.

Finally, there had been throughout the century an anxiety in many sections of French society that their state lacked coherence and a centre of gravity; there were fears constantly that French society might crack up altogether and the knowledge that broadcasting was centralised and in public hands made society as a whole that much more secure.

(Smith, 1973: 158–9)

Of these five explanatory factors, two are uncontroversial: the opposition of the press to commercial television and the prime role of the state in cultural diffusion. As it had done in the case of radio in the 1920s, the newspaper industry was deeply concerned about the potential threat from television as a competitor for advertising revenue. In these circumstances, a state-owned television service funded from licence revenue was the least worst result for the French press. That this service should aim not to pander to the lowest common denominator of taste but instead to act as a vehicle for the best of French culture was an important part of the public service ethos, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. In part this cultural emphasis was due to the approach taken by key individuals involved in broadcasting management, such as Jean d'Arcy; in part to government policy that emphasized the role of the state in cultural provision, notably evident under President de Gaulle's Minister of Culture, André Malraux, in the 1960s; and in part to the influential role of various leading television directors, many of whom had sympathies for the French Communist Party, who were opposed to the Americanization of French television content.

Conversely, the tradition of government control of the telegraph, though an important historical antecedent, had not prevented the flourishing of private radio stations in the inter-war period. Moreover, Smith's arguments that the broadcasting monopoly came about because 'state control was a convenience rather than the result of a firm policy' and that 'the state lacked coherence and a centre of gravity' are less convincing. The monopoly may well have been a convenient policy response, but it was also a deliberate policy output that could mobilize a wide cross-section of political and social groups in its support. There was a large degree of consensus among the political elites in the immediate postwar period in favour of the monopoly solution to the organization of broadcasting. In the postwar climate of antipathy to capitalist forces and enthusiasm for collectivist solutions to problems of economic management in the form of public ownership of key utilities, it was not difficult to defend the state's appropriation of the main means of mass communication. Adherence to the principle of the state monopoly found favour

among Gaullists, Christian Democrats, Socialists, Communists and trade union confederations among others. The incorporation of television into the enlarged sector of state activities testified more to the growing power of the state after the Liberation than to its incoherence and rootlessness. In any event, the Liberation government established a state monopoly that was defended by politicians of different political persuasions for virtually the next 40 years, during which time no private commercial competition was allowed to enter the market for the supply of television programming to viewers.

Until 1975 this state monopoly was organized in a single, public corporation – its last institutional embodiment being the Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (ORTF), established by the Gaullist government in 1964. The ORTF was a large organization of over 16,000 staff with a stake in all aspects of broadcasting – production, programming and transmission – in both radio and television sectors. Commercial advertising was introduced as an additional means of funding to the licence fee in 1968, while a third channel with a regional vocation was established in 1973. By the early 1970s the ORTF was one of the European broadcasting giants, embodying a specific French variant of public service values and ranking alongside other public service broadcasting organizations such as the BBC in Britain, the RAI in Italy and the ARD in West Germany in terms of organizational size and range of broadcast output.

In the eyes of its critics, however, the ORTF had grown to dysfunctional proportions, become difficult to manage and was prone to service disruptions by powerful trade unions. Politically it was a strong symbol of Gaullist control of the state. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that reform of the broadcasting sector was a priority for the first non-Gaullist President of the Fifth Republic, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. The 1974 Giscardian reform dismantled the ORTF and created separate organizational entities that included three public television companies – TF1, Antenne 2 and FR3 (Bachmann, 1997). This reform encouraged a significant degree of competition between the three channels for audiences and advertising revenue, but maintained the legal status of the monopoly for public broadcasting and eschewed any private intervention in the market. Vedel describes the organization of French television prior to the Giscardian reform as one of 'state television', while he calls the period between 1974 and the Socialist reform of 1982 'commercialized state television'. Following the 1974 reform the essential features of the Giscardian 'commercialized state' model compared to its Gaullist predecessor were: greater organizational fragmentation; a larger role for commercial advertising as a funding mechanism; more competition between television channels for viewers and advertisers; and more attention given to audience ratings (Vedel, 2009: 261–3).

By the end of Giscard d'Estaing's presidency in 1981, French television was characterized by the following key features: limited supply consisting of a maximum of three channels with restricted daytime schedules; highly regulated output with all three channels subject to French-style public

service obligations; terrestrial distribution, which meant that the overwhelming majority of the French audience was restricted to the output of the three state channels; and no minority, niche or thematic channels, with the result that programme schedules were for the most part designed for mass audience consumption. French television was thus an overwhelmingly national medium, protected by a combination of technologically imposed limitations and public policy decisions. The strong national television culture (Steemers, 2004: 1–19) evident in the French case, especially during the period of ‘state television’, is hardly surprising since in the medium’s formative years television was consciously and explicitly used by politicians and state officials, most notably President de Gaulle, as a cultural, educational and informational tool to help construct a popular national consensus around the new political institutions of the Fifth Republic (Chalaby, 2002).

The liberalization of broadcasting

On 10 May 1981, François Mitterrand became the first President of the Fifth Republic to be elected from the ranks of the Socialist-Communist left. His government’s 1982 reform of broadcasting heralded two important innovations in public policy: the abolition of the state monopoly and the establishment of a new regulatory authority for the broadcasting sector. In the wake of this reform French radio and television underwent an uneven process of economic and political liberalization over the next few years.

The monopoly was abandoned for a variety of reasons. One was the realization among policy-makers that the technological straitjacket in which radio and television transmissions had been constrained for so long was now outmoded. Advances in new communication technologies, such as the frequency modulation (FM) waveband for radio and cable and satellite for television distribution, opened up the way for a more diverse broadcasting system and called into question the technical rationale for monopoly in a field that was no longer a scarce public resource. There were also powerful economic arguments in favour of an expansion of the broadcasting system and the entry of new non-state actors as financial contributors and programme providers. Domestic manufacturers of hardware, advertisers and programme production companies all hoped to gain from the expansion in television provision. Politically, President Mitterrand and the Socialist government hoped to benefit from the electoral popularity that was expected to result from the expansion of broadcast supply.

In the radio sector the abolition of the monopoly was quickly felt. The pirate stations (*radios libres*) that had started broadcasting in the late 1970s and been repressed by the Giscardian government were now free to transmit their programmes, although the state retained the power to grant licences and organize the allocation of frequencies. The radio sector

became more competitive after 1982 as many new stations competed for audiences and funding. While the original intention of the Socialist government had been to promote small-scale community stations financed from donations and public subsidies, in practice it was not long before advertising-funded national private networks such as NRJ came to dominate. Advertising for private local radio was authorized in 1984. Since Radio France had been long accustomed to competition with the commercial networks of the 'peripheral stations', the culture shock of the new broadcasting landscape was much less strong for public radio than was to be the case for public television.

Change was slower to come in television. It was not until late 1984 that Europe's first terrestrial pay-TV channel, Canal+, began transmissions. Initially received with considerable public scepticism, Canal+ quickly became a major force for innovation within French television and by the 1990s was a key media player at both the national and supranational levels. At the start of 1986 two free-to-air commercial television networks (La Cinq and TV6) were established, financed from advertising revenue. For those French viewers who had not subscribed to Canal+, these two channels marked the end of the total domination of television supply by public sector monopoly providers. Finally, niche channels were also made available via cable and satellite systems, although audience take-up of these alternative means of programme distribution was comparatively low by the standards of some other Western European countries. Thus, while the 1974 Giscardian reform had confined itself to institutionalizing competition within the framework of the state monopoly, the 1982 Socialist statute introduced competition between public and private providers. Moreover, whereas in the past the television system had grown very slowly, with one channel being added every ten years or so, the Socialists effectively doubled the number of channels in less than five years. It is important to note that this expansion in television supply was closely managed by state officials from the top down. This state-controlled economic liberalization in France contrasted sharply with the so-called 'savage deregulation' of the television system in Greece, Portugal and Italy at the same time (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 124–7).

The second major plank of the 1982 reform was the creation of a new regulatory agency – the High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (*la Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle*) – to act as a buffer between the government and broadcasting, especially public radio and television. The avowed intention of the Socialist government was that this would help cut the umbilical cord that had tied broadcasting to the state during the Gaullist and Giscardian eras (Bourdon, 1999; Bédei, 2008). The decision to set up the High Authority represented an attempt by the Socialists to address what was widely perceived as a defect of the postwar statist model: excessive governmental interference in key broadcasting appointments and in news content. The stated objective was that while the government would continue to determine the regulatory framework for broadcasting, it would not intervene in day-to-day management.

In particular, the new authority took over from the government responsibility for appointing the chief executives of the public radio and television companies. This change in the method of appointment was a crucial symbolic break with the former practice of government patronage. The chairperson of the new body, Michèle Cotta, was an experienced journalist whose professional reputation had been enhanced by her role as one of the two interviewers in the Giscard d'Estaing-Mitterrand television debate during the 1981 presidential election campaign. Her political sympathies were left-of-centre, but she was not seen as politically tainted.

Between 1982 and 1986 the High Authority managed with some success to establish itself as an independent agency in the broadcasting system (Chauvau, 1997). However, it is also the case that with one exception the political executive always succeeded in ensuring that nobody was appointed to a top position in public broadcasting without the approval of the President. In practice, it proved very difficult for the Socialists to make a clean break with the tradition of political interference in broadcasting. Yet ultimately the main drawback of the High Authority was not so much that it was politically manipulated, but rather that many of the most important developments in French broadcasting fell outside its jurisdiction. For example, the High Authority was not even consulted before the decision was taken in 1985 to set up two new commercial television channels (Cotta, 1986: 238). The result was that the High Authority was never a major player in the key policy decisions that determined the configuration of the television system in the mid-1980s. Its abolition by the incoming right-wing government in 1986 was more a symbolic measure of partisan revenge than an acknowledgement of the High Authority's power and influence.

The creation of the High Authority represented an important, if limited, step in the direction of the political liberalization of broadcasting. Of course, such a structural innovation could not change habits overnight. Long-established elite attitudes and patterns of behaviour remained, as traditional concerns regarding access, patronage and control of content continued to be raised. While the establishment of a regulatory authority represented an important symbolic break with previous practices of direct political control, it took some time for the notion of an independent regulatory authority to be accepted across the political class. Appointments to key posts in broadcasting were still scrutinized by politicians and commentators for their political significance, while television's political output remained a contested arena, closely monitored by politicians of all parties for indications of bias. In short, the 1982 reform did not remove broadcasting from the realm of political controversy.

In 1986 the parties of the mainstream right won a majority at the parliamentary elections, thus introducing the first period of executive cohabitation (1986–8) whereby the President and Prime Minister came from opposing party coalitions. One of the early reforms of the new conservative government under Jacques Chirac's premiership was yet another reorganization of broadcasting. While the economic liberalization of television by the Socialists was welcomed, the Gaullist-Giscardian

government wanted to extend this through the privatization of the main free-to-air public channel, TF1 (Frèches, 1989: 155–88). The privatization of TF1 was the centrepiece of the 1986 statute – the jewel in the crown of the mainstream right’s audiovisual reform package. In addition, the new government replaced the High Authority with a new regulatory body, the National Committee for Communication and Freedoms (*Commission Nationale de la Communication et des Libertés* – CNCL), and reallocated the franchises for the commercial channels La Cinq and TV6 (now renamed M6). In carrying out these reform measures, the government ensured that persons and interests sympathetic to the political right dominated both the new regulatory body and the management of the commercial television companies.

In 1988, Mitterrand won a second seven-year presidential term and after new parliamentary elections a centre-left government was elected. Condemned by Mitterrand for its political partisanship, the CNCL was replaced in 1989 by yet another regulatory authority, the Higher Audiovisual Council (*Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel* – CSA) (Franceschini, 1995). During Mitterrand’s second term, public television provision grew with the creation of the Franco-German cultural channel, Arte, and the educational channel, La Cinquième, both of which came to public prominence when they jointly took over the terrestrial transmission network vacated by the bankrupt La Cinq in 1992. Despite this expansion of the public sector, however, the main beneficiary of the new competitive environment in television was undoubtedly TF1, which after privatization was able to pursue the mass audience, especially in prime time, subject to fewer regulatory constraints than previously.

TF1 was able to take advantage of its nationwide transmission network, its programming know-how and its sheer experience in the business to establish itself as the market leader. Conversely, the public service channels were thrown on to the defensive, competing against TF1 not just for audiences but also for advertising revenue in a new broadcasting environment that tended to favour the commercial sector and a market ethos dominated by audience ratings. A revealing insight into the thinking of programme schedulers working for private channels was later provided by the chairman of TF1, Patrick Le Lay, when he stated: ‘There are many ways to talk about television, but from a business perspective, let’s be realistic: basically, the job of TF1 is to help Coca Cola, for example, to sell its product’ (*‘Il y a beaucoup de façons de parler de la télévision, mais dans une perspective business, soyons réaliste: à la base, le métier de TF1, c’est d’aider Coca-Cola, par exemple, à vendre son produit’*) (Le Lay, 2004). Yet it is also the case during this period that ‘while commercial concerns became increasingly dominant, the French broadcasting system did not turn into a full marketplace and remained highly regulated’ (Vedel, 2009: 262).

Conclusion

Five main conclusions can be drawn from this brief overview of the historical development of the French media from the latter part of the nineteenth century up to the final years of the twentieth. First, the period saw the successive emergence of different media sectors as means of mass information, communication and entertainment: beginning with newspapers, followed by radio and finally television. This was an era of truly mass media, with usage not confined to a highly restricted audience of social elites as had previously been the case with newspapers. Instead, the intended target of much media content (with the notable exception of magazines) was a largely undifferentiated mass audience that covered all classes and sections of society.

Second, the successive arrival and popularization of print, audio and visual media did not result in the disappearance of pre-existing media sectors. Newspapers adjusted to the establishment of radio in the 1920s, while both radio and the press adapted to the advent and routinization of television from the 1950s onwards. The content and formats of the already established media were undoubtedly altered in response to competition from new sources of supply and changes in patterns of audience usage. Television viewing, for instance, had a huge impact on radio listening habits. Yet in no case did a new medium simply replace an existing one. Instead audiences regarded the press, radio and television as largely complementary in terms of their functions and usage.

Third, the increased supply of media outlets and channels created new audience demands and modes of behaviour. Media consumption became a large part of everyday social life. By the latter part of the twentieth century French citizens spent a significant amount of time per day interacting with media: reading a newspaper and/or magazine, listening to the radio and watching television. Official government statistics (Ministry of Culture, 2009) revealed that in 1997 over 70 per cent of the population aged 15 and above read a daily newspaper, with about half of these reading a paper practically every day; over 80 per cent regularly read a magazine; 90 per cent watched television, with over 75 per cent doing so every day; and over 85 per cent listened to the radio, with nearly 70 per cent doing so every day. The average amount of time spent watching television in 1997 was 21 hours per week, while the corresponding figure for radio listening was 15 hours. As the time available for leisure expanded, so the media implanted themselves as an integral part of social activity. Well before the end of the twentieth century, France had become a highly mediated society.

Fourth, there were some signs towards the end of this period that the era of mass media had peaked. Some media aimed at a mass audience either had been in slow decline for many years (e.g. sales of daily newspapers) or had witnessed audience dispersal as a result of increased competition (for instance, the established generalist networks after the growth in radio supply from the 1980s onwards). While many examples

of mass media audience usage were still evident, especially in television where generalist channels still dominated, a clear parallel trend toward niche outlets (e.g. magazines and specialist radio stations) had also emerged. This should not be equated with a return to an elite-oriented media system; rather it constituted a segmentation on the supply side as a range of media providers targeted different audience groups. The result was the beginning of a shift, more marked in some media sectors than others, towards the fragmentation of the mass audience by the end of the twentieth century.

Finally, the nature of the linkages between the state and the media altered dramatically over the period. In the press sector the 1881 reform seemed to put an end to repressive practices of state censorship. Such censorship was to reappear during the two World Wars and, more controversially, during the bloody Algerian conflict of the late 1950s and early 60s (see Chapter 5). Nonetheless, during the twentieth century the press enjoyed greater editorial freedom in its relationship with the state than had been the case during most of the nineteenth century.

In the broadcasting sector the state enjoyed a (near) monopoly in the provision of radio and television services for almost four decades after the Liberation. The abolition of the monopoly in 1982, followed by the privatization of TF1 and other media companies later in the decade, shifted the balance of ownership from public to private in the space of a few years. Economic liberalization of broadcasting was a marked feature of the French media landscape in the final couple of decades of the twentieth century. Political liberalization of broadcasting after years of governmental interference that reached its height during the de Gaulle presidency of the 1960s was harder to achieve. The creation of successive regulatory authorities revealed an apparent willingness on the part of the political executive to establish a buffer between the government and the broadcasting companies. Yet broadcasting remained an area in which the state remained strongly implicated. Some of this political involvement, for instance in the appointment to key posts in public radio and television, showed how difficult it was for French politicians of both left and right to put aside long-established practices of partisan interference.

In short, it is clearly not possible to talk about a simple all-encompassing retreat of the state in its interrelationship with the media over the time period covered in this chapter. In terms of ownership, there was a huge expansion of state involvement in broadcasting at the end of the Second World War. In contrast, by the 1990s, ownership of newspapers and a large slice of the radio and television market was firmly in the hands of private sector actors, while commercial companies had also taken a major stake in cable and satellite broadcasting. Yet the state was still more directly involved in media ownership in 1995 than it had been a hundred years earlier. Moreover, it was still very much involved in controlling entry into the broadcasting market. In terms of financial patronage, the state also played an important role both directly and indirectly in supporting the media: subsidies to newspapers, licence fee funding for public radio and television, and government advertising across

all media. Finally, the state's policy-making and regulatory role remained substantial at the end of the twentieth century, as public policy sought among other things to protect national ownership of media companies and domestic production of media content (see Chapter 4).

Key dates in the history of the French media

- 1631 Publication of the first weekly periodical *La Gazette*
- 1777 Publication of the first national daily newspaper *Le Journal de Paris*
- 1837 Legislation establishes a state monopoly in telegraph communication
- 1866 *Le Figaro* becomes a daily newspaper
- 1881 Major legislative reform of the press: 'Printing and publishing are free'
- 1904 Launch of *L'Humanité*, which becomes the Communist Party daily newspaper after the split between the Socialist and Communist Parties in 1920
- 1918 Adoption of a code of ethics by the newly formed Syndicat des journalistes
- 1920 Creation of the French version of the magazine *Vogue*
- 1921 First radio station to broadcast, Radio-Tour Eiffel
- 1927 The Socialist Party newspaper *Le Populaire* becomes a daily paper
- 1933 Introduction of the licence fee as a means of financing public radio
- 1933 Launch of the Luxembourg radio company, the future RTL
- 1935 First experimental television broadcasts
- 1935 Statutory recognition of the profession of journalist
- 1938 A year after its launch, *Marie-Claire* becomes the top-selling weekly magazine
- 1939 Ban on Communist press introduced prior to the outbreak of the Second World War
- 1940 Establishment by the Vichy regime of the first Ministry of Information
- 1941–3 Creation of Radio-Paris and then Télévision-Paris by the occupying German authorities
- 1944 Ordinance on the press
- 1944+ Wholesale restructuring of the press system
- 1944 Establishment of the national daily newspaper *Le Monde*
- 1944 First copy of the regional newspaper *Ouest-France*
- 1944 Establishment of the Agence France-Presse news agency
- 1945 State monopoly in broadcasting established
- 1946 First copy of the sports daily *L'Équipe*
- 1949 Establishment of the Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF) as the state broadcasting organization
- 1949 The radio licence fee is extended to cover television sets ➔

- 1949 First television news programme
- 1949 Launch of the photo news magazine *Paris Match*
- 1953 Launch of the news magazine *L'Express*
- 1955 Creation of peripheral radio station Europe 1
- 1964 Introduction of second state television channel
- 1964 Establishment of the Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (ORTF) as the state broadcasting corporation
- 1964 *L'Express*, originally established in 1953, becomes the first French weekly news magazine
- 1967 Introduction of colour television
- 1968 Introduction of commercial advertising on state television
- 1968 Major strike of staff at the ORTF in protest against Gaullist control of broadcasting
- 1969 Creation of competition between the newsrooms of the first and second channels of the ORTF and abolition of the Ministry of Information as part of the New Society project of Prime Minister Jacques Chaban-Delmas
- 1970 President Georges Pompidou talks of ORTF journalists as being the voice of France
- 1972 Broadcasting statute limits advertising revenue to 25 per cent of the total revenue of the ORTF
- 1973 Introduction of third state television channel to serve the needs of the regions
- 1973 Establishment of the daily newspaper *Libération*
- 1974 First presidential television debate, between Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and François Mitterrand
- 1974 Break-up of the ORTF into separate public radio and television companies
- 1977 First broadcast of the pirate radio station Radio Verte
- 1978 Legislation by the Giscardian presidency to strengthen the state monopoly in the face of the challenge from pirate radio stations
- 1979 Launch of the first local radio stations of Radio France
- 1981 Legalization of private local radio by President Mitterrand's Socialist government
- 1981 Creation of NRJ radio station
- 1982 Abolition of the state monopoly in broadcasting
- 1982 Establishment of the first independent regulatory authority for broadcasting, the High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (*Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle*)
- 1982 The state-managed cable plan is approved by the Socialist government with the aim of installing cable television and communication networks across France
- 1984 Creation of the terrestrial pay-TV channel Canal+
- 1984 Introduction of advertising on private local radio
- 1984 Establishment of the international francophone television channel TV5



- 1984 Creation of a public fund to support non-advertising funded local private radio stations
- 1986 First broadcasts of free-to-air commercial television channels five (La Cinq) and six (TV6, later renamed M6)
- 1986 Communications statute privatizes the public television channel TF1
- 1986 Establishment of a new regulatory authority for broadcasting, the National Committee for Communication and Freedoms (*Commission Nationale de la Communication et des Libertés*)
- 1986 Launch of Skyrock radio network
- 1986 Launch of Paris Première, the first cable thematic channel
- 1987 The franchise for La Cinq is awarded to the French press mogul Robert Hersant and the Italian media magnate Silvio Berlusconi
- 1987 The franchise for the privatized TF1 is awarded to the Bouygues company
- 1987 Creation of France Info radio station
- 1989 Establishment of a new regulatory authority for broadcasting, the Higher Audiovisual Council (*Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel*)
- 1989 Establishment of a single top management for the two public television channels, Antenne 2 and FR3
- 1989 Adoption of the Television Without Frontiers directive
- 1991 Loi Évin bans television sponsorship and advertising for alcohol and tobacco
- 1992 Financial collapse of the commercial television channel La Cinq
- 1992 Launch of the Franco-German public service cultural channel ARTE
- 1992 Launch of the satellite distribution system CanalSatellite
- 1993 France obtains recognition of the idea of a 'cultural exception' for broadcasting and audiovisual services at the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) talks
- 1994 Liberalization of rules on ownership share of a television channel by single individual or company
- 1994 Launch of the rolling news channel LCI
- 1994 *Paris Match* publishes photos of Mitterrand's daughter, Mazarine Pingeot
- 1995 First broadcast of new public television channel, La Cinquième, renamed France 5 in 2002
- 1996 Launch of the digital satellite service Télévision par satellite (TPS)
- 1997 Launch of the news magazine *Marianne*
- 1999 Legislation creates the parliamentary channels, La Chaîne parlementaire de l'Assemblée nationale and Public Sénat
- 2000 Vivendi group buys Universal Studios to create the global multimedia conglomerate Vivendi Universal



- 2000 France Télévisions is established as a holding company consisting of three channels: France 2, France 3 and La Cinquième
- 2000 Legislation reduces the amount of advertising on public television
- 2001 Reality programme *Loft Story*, a French version of *Big Brother*, shown on M6
- 2002 Launch of free newspapers *Métro* and *20minutes*
- 2004 Law on electronic communications: radio and television services on the internet to comply with similar obligations governing those on cable and satellite
- 2005 Launch of digital terrestrial television
- 2006 Launch of the international news channel France 24
- 2007 Creation of independent news website Rue 89
- 2007 Merger between CanalSatellite and TPS to create a single digital satellite television distributor, CanalSat
- 2008 President Sarkozy announces the withdrawal of commercial advertising from public television
- 2009 Major reform of public television, including the creation of a single public television company and the direct appointment of its chief executive by the President
- 2009 Publication of the findings of the official forum on the state of the French press (*Les états généraux de la presse écrite*)
- 2009 Introduction of the Hadopi law (*Haute Autorité pour la diffusion des œuvres et la protection des droits sur Internet*), designed to prevent peer-to-peer internet file sharing and to protect intellectual property rights on the web