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**Entertainment and political debate**

On Saturday 25 June, BBC1 as well as Dutch pub caster Ned.3 aired the TV film *The girl in the café*. This BBC/HBO co- production was written for the *Africa Lives at the BBC* season. The film combines the G8 summit of world leaders with a love story between a high powered civil servant and a young woman. He invites her to join him on his trip to the G8 conference and through her writer Richard Curtis will bring emotion into the political debate. During this conference about the Millennium Developments Goals she becomes very outspoken and challenging the politicians to do more to end poverty, pointing out that for parents in Africa is just as horrible to watch their children die as it would be for us to watch out kids die. This is the second example of TV with a political message in the UK in the last 6 months. Reality series *Jamie Oliver's school dinners* (Febr.2005) created a public discussion about the standard school meals and the British Government was persuaded to put more money into healthier food for schools dinners.

An example of a TV program in the US with a political message is HBO's political real life soap *K-Street* (Sept.2003) which takes a fly on the wall look at the government. Real politicians (as Howard Dean) as well as actors participated in *K-Street*. There have always been TV programs about political crisis management (drama series and non-fiction), like American action series *24* (FOX, Nov.2001), BBC2's format *Bunker:Crisis command* (Febr.2004) and the Dutch *Crisis* (Ned.3, Febr.1997). But these programs just show the viewer the consequences of political decisions, and don't have any political implications. As *The girl in the café* writer Richard Curtis says: 'TV should use itself to change the world' (Radio Times June 2005).

**Entertainment banned at Dutch public channels**

From 2008 onwards, Dutch public channels probably have to ban entertainment from their program schedule. They are forced to focus on news, debate, opinion, culture and education. Both the English BBC and Flemish One (Eén) incorporated political engagement in their schedules. The Flemish pubcaster by taking social cohesion as starting point in their broadcast charter. And the BBC by scheduling new fiction programs in which debate and political commitment are key issues. But the Dutch are the first in European broadcast history to take debate and political opinion as starting point in the broadcast charter without allowing the pubcaster to schedule entertainment. Of course this will free up advertisement space on the Dutch market, a big benefit of course for John de Mol's new commercial channel Talpa which will start airing on 12 August 2005. But at the same time, competition between production companies will increase. Within the proposed government plans public broadcasters are transformed into production companies and are free to offer programs to commercial channels. Before long, production capacity will go up and production prices will go down: a nightmare or a new opportunity for Dutch producers?

## Celebrities get hard challenges in Germany

German celebrities are frequently participating in sports events and shows this year. The 'Celebrity challenge events' belong to the top 5 list in the genre of Celebrity Reality Shows. Teams of TV stars compete doing sports, motor races and stunts. The trend started in the USA with *Celebrity Boxing* (FOX, May 2002), the reality version of MTV's animation series *Celebrity Death Match* (May 1998). Celebrities also participated in FOX's 2002 show *Celebrity Daredevils*. This stunt show became very exciting when Dennis Rodman drove off a cliff.

German TV presenter Stefan Raab picked up on the celebrity trend and has been presenting and producing 'celebrity sports challenge events' during the past 5 years. His production company Raab TV organises so-called *TV Total Sports Events*, starting with *Promi Boxing* (Pro7) in 2001. His most recent show *Stock Car Crash Challenge* was aired on 25 June (Pro7). Celebrities competed in stock car races in the rebuild arena of the FC Schalke stadium with an audience of 60.000 people. Remarkable detail: Stefan Raab participates in all shows. He boxed against professional boxer Regina Halmich, rode a horse like a professional and drove a stock car. While Raab is trying to sell the event formats world wide, public channels ARD and ZDF are picking up the trend with the ARD airing *Star Biathlon* (Jan.2005) and ZDF transmitting *Promi Turnen* (May 2005).

'celebrity challenge events' is one of the 5 celebrity reality show trends where TV personalities participate as a contestant. The other trends are:

'celebrity performing', started when VIP's had to perform on stage, to sing or playback a song like the *Sterren Play-Back show* (RTL4, March 1994) or had to do a circus act like in ARD's *Stars in der Manege* (Dec.1999). These shows were mostly produced to bring in money for a good cause. Recently BBC followed up on this trend and started celebrity dance event *Strictly become dancing* (May 2004), in which teams of celebrities and professional dancers compete every week. In 2005 this celebrity show was aired in local versions in France and Italy.

'celebrities living together' is the second trend. Celebrities live together in a house like in C4's *Celebrity Big Brother* (March 2001), in the jungle like ITV's *I'm a celebrity get me out of here* (Aug.2002), on a farm like *Fermé Celebrité* (TF1, Apr.2004) and *La Fattoria* (Italia1, Apr.2004) or in a castle like in Pro7's *Die Burg* (The castle, Jan.2005)

'celebrity family life', started with hard-rock music family *The Osbournes* (MTV, May 2002) and was followed by sports families like Flemish VTM's *De Pfaafs* (Oct.2002). In 2004 the US followed up on this trend by showing family life of young pop star families like MTV's *Newlyweds Nick & Jessica* (June 2004), UPN's *Britney & Kevin* (May 2005) and MTV's *Meet the Barkers* (Apr.2005). On Polish channel TVN pop star Michal Wisniewski was followed in *Jestem jaki jestem* (I am what I am; March 2003) and recently Germany started reality show *Sarah & Marc in Love* (Pro7, June 28) about singers couple Sarah Connor and Marc Terenzi, who just had baby Tyler.

'celebrities take up a challenge' by taking driving lessons in BBC1's *Celebrity Driving School* (Febr.2003), by loosing weight in ITV's *Celebrity Fit Club* (Sept.2002), the American version at VH1 (Jan. 2005) and the Australian *Celebrities Overhaul* (Nine, March 2005), or celebrities fall in love in ITV1's *Celebrity Love Island* (June 2005).

## New Dutch TV channel Talpa tries to knock down competition

Over the last months, every week another Dutch TV presenter decided to move to John de Mol's new channel Talpa. It seems John de Mol tries to assure the launch of his new channel by persuading stars from all evening timeslots at rival channels to come work for him. On Monday 27 June he presented his plans to the press and from August 12 Talpa will be on air, daily from 6 p.m.. The majority of the stars were bought from RTL-Group. From RTL4 he scooped up a popular show news format at access prime time and a late night talk show. Three presenters of show news magazine *RTL-Boulevard* and all three presenters of late night talk show *Barend & Van Dorp* moved to Talpa.. An upcoming sports presenter of RTL5 *Voetbal Insite* (Soccer Inside) moved to the new channel. And De Mol drastically changed prime time programming on public channels Ned.2 and Ned.3. From Ned.2 he bought lottery shows *1 tegen 100* (One against 100) and *Miljoenenjacht* (Deal or no Deal). From Ned.2 he took most popular prime time talk show *TV Show*. From Ned.3 he bought the whole team except for one comedian of popular satirical show *Kopspijkers*. Almost directly Ned.2 took its chance and signed a deal with presenter/producer Reinout Oerlemans (Eyeworks) who will present a new talk show that replaces *TV Show*. Other channels are busy finding replacements for the popular presenters who left. TV channel Talpa will have a varied programme package for the whole family ranging from lottery shows, sports, satire, reality shows, to show news and talk shows.