

Introduction

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[p.2] *Western European Perspectives on the Development of Public Relations: Other Voices* is the fifth volume in this series of six books on national histories of public relations (PR). The 13 nations that comprise the ten chapters range from Finland and Scandinavia in the north to Greece, Italy, France and Spain on the Mediterranean rim. In two chapters – Netherlands and Belgium (Chapter 7), and Scandinavia (Sweden, Norway and Denmark; Chapter 8) – regional groupings were created for linguistic and historical reasons.

In the western half of Europe, defined by either Cold War borders or a westward-looking national aspect, with numerous languages, past histories of empire and national formation and religious and philosophical diversity, there are multiple histories of public relations. In the case of linguistically-divided Belgium, there are two parallel histories from French and Dutch linguistic aspects.

As several chapters reveal, there was a strong post-war influence on the formation of agency PR from the United States, which started during the Marshall Plan era of the late 1940s and expanded later by the agency groups, primarily Burson-Marsteller and Hill & Knowlton. However, the history of PR in Germany shows strong corporate and governmental influences from the early 19th century onwards. In the Netherlands, its philosophical *voorlichting* approach to diffusion of information arises earlier from the Enlightenment.

In Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, Italy and Spain, PR was primarily a post-World War II development. For Belgium and France, like the UK, the impetus often came from wartime communicators. In Greece, ravaged by Nazi occupation, PR arose from opportunities that became evident in advertising agencies which were servicing US and UK clients. In Italy, there were pre-war examples of PR practices but the influence post-war of the United States Information Service (USIS) aided its formation as a defined sector. Italy and Greece were zones of conflict between strong Communist parties and trade unions with government, churches and business. PR was seen, at these times, as part of a democratic bulwark against Communism. Spain, nominally neutral during World War II, had delayed development of a PR sector because of exclusion of post-war aid and was further held back by Francoism until the mid-1970s. Because of these negative factors, it is the only nation where a single individual, Joaquin Maestre, can be said to have created foundations of a national PR sector and brought it into contact with international influences.

[p.3] In Finland, the beginnings of PR as an identified practice are linked to wartime propaganda in its conflict with Russia, while the Scandinavian nations also had mainly post-war development from government and private sector. The UK, which tracks PR to the early 20th century, developed a governmental culture of communication before World War II. Unlike other nations, its desire to form a professional PR culture came from governmental communicators and was fostered by a trade union.

Although the US model of PR agency practice can be detected now in most countries, it is notable that some sought to resist it. France from the 1950s to 1980s countered what was seen as propagandist practices with an ethical and social approach which could also be found in other countries (Belgium, The Netherlands, Greece and Scandinavia). The UK had a typically pragmatic approach while German PR was strong, as it had been from the late 19th century in corporate communications.

Periodization has been applied in several chapters as a route to identify themes and influences with periods ranging from three in Austria, focused on post-war PR, to seven in Germany where the analysis goes back to pre-history or proto-PR influences. Overall, Western European PR has developed from a multitude of influences to create distinctive national models. Apart from imported patterns of agency operations, those national forms and structures have not been reduced to a common form of 'Euro-PR'