

are used and at what rates. But it is a cardinal principle of Western democracies that government must not control the content of what is transmitted.

This is a hallowed distinction — between carriage and content — but I know from experience that there is often a fine line between action a government must take, for example to place the Canadian information sector in a position of economic viability, and action a government must not take, for example to prevent the access of its citizens to a great variety of information from abroad. It is this distinction which the Canadian delegates were defending last autumn at the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) General Conference in Belgrade.

In an information era, where about half of the Canadian work force is now engaged in information-related occupations, it is an onerous responsibility to implement policies which respect this appropriate role for government, but are successful in ensuring that there are communications facilities in place, and information flowing through them, tailored to Canadian requirements and priorities. The problem is compounded by the homogenization of information, due to advances in informatics and digitization, which makes it increasingly difficult to know what type of information is flowing within and across borders. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that, over the next 20 years or so, economic growth will be increasingly bound up with the development of information and information-related activities. Countries which wish to share in that growth will have to give priority to the financing, development and trade of selected products.

When we as a government take action, we usually declare that we are doing so to protect Canadian sovereignty. But this suggests that some country or group of countries is attempting, by design, to undermine Canadian sovereignty. This is rarely the case in the communications field. If the government, however, does not take positive action to stimulate the Canadian communications and information sector, other countries will fill the vacuum. The economic, political, and cultural viability of our country will be gradually eroded. Nothing distinctively Canadian will remain.

**Actions should
be explained**

We owe it to the informed Canadian and international public to lift the veil of sovereignty and explain our actions and the specific Canadian interests which are being protected. Why is it, for example, that Canadians take a strong "free flow of information" line on East-West information questions, but a much more nuanced position on Canada-U.S. questions? It is, in my view, because fundamental human rights are usually not at issue in the Canada-U.S. context. For example, when the government amended the Canadian Income Tax Act so that Canadian advertising on U.S. stations, intended primarily for a Canadian audience, would not be permitted as tax deductions, we did so to channel advertising funds into the Canadian media, and the measure has been effective. We did not prohibit Canadian advertising in the U.S. — Canadian advertising directed at a U.S. audience is still tax deductible — but merely removed some of the financial incentive for broadcasting such advertising back into Canada. One has to strain credulity to claim that we have infringed any principle of the "free flow of information", unless there is some principle on the "free flow of commercials" across borders.