

*Public Service Media in Europe. A comparative approach.*

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The authors propose a trip over the European Public Service Media (PSM) with the objective of updating certain noteworthy aspects and reassessing the ideas that originally accompanied them in their initial years.

They describe it as a pillar of all democratic broadcast models in the Western World and consider it has played for many years a primarily cultural and identity-building role. This integrative function is exemplified by the cases of Germany, Canada, Ireland and South Africa by means of the use of products that help bind the community together and support national identity. Holtz-Bacha highlights the surprise that nation building and confirmation of national identity cannot be found in the remit for public media in Spain, a country that she defines «with strong separatist tendencies in the Basque country as well in Catalonia».

Nevertheless, they consider this nation-building role has become insufficient at the beginning of the twenty-first century to guarantee its continuity because State aid as main funding source is causing commercial competitors accuse PSM of market distortion and unfair competition. It leads to the debate of the risks of an increased participation of the State in the media and on the contrary, the risks of private media playing a more prominent role among broadcasters.

Besides, digitalization came with new challenges for some PSM that had to face the implementations of new media services while in the analogue word there were still some tasks to be accomplished. Damian Tambini and Christian Nissen look closer at the renewed dispute over the PSM presence on the Internet or their future role in light of the metamorphosis of audiences as citizens in a society to individual consumers in a multimedia market. They both argue for a strict involvement of civil society and audiences what requires ways of radically simplifying this debate in order to open it to non-experts.

The second part shows the results of a comparative analysis of six European countries: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and Sweden from different views:

In first place, Beata Klimkiewicz and Lars Nord discuss how financing mechanism and content obligations are imposed in the six countries.

There is a first group characterized by the sustainable dominance of the licence fee, represented by Sweden and Germany (80-90 per cent). The low estimated evasion levels show public acceptance of this form of funding, thus generating greater independence of PSM from the political and economic domains.

The second group, made up of France and Italy, reflects moderately funding pluralism. With a relatively high proportion of licence fee income (66 per cent for Italy in 2012, around 70 per cent for France) and other minor, but still quite significant, sources of funding (advertising in the case of Italy, around 25 per cent in 2012 or advertising and State grants in the case of France, 12.4 per cent and 11 per cent respectively). The development in France shows that the State here may continue to play a central role in determining content regulation rules, but also

that various lobby groups representing private media competitors are successful in playing an increasing role in influencing political decisions. In Italy a commercial logic strongly affects the mission of the public broadcaster RAI, which devotes a large portion of time to news and broadcasts many talk shows and current affairs programmes dealing with politics and matters of general interest.

The third group demonstrates dependency on commercial income or State grants. This group comprised Poland and Spain where PSM were created later than in other European countries. In fact, Poland has the second most commercialized public television in Europe, behind Ireland, and PTV ignores PSM provisions under increasing commercial and political pressures. On the contrary, Spanish TVE recently followed the French example and changed the public broadcaster financial model from commercial to financing through the State budget. However, independency on market forces has been exchanged for loss of autonomy with regard to the government.

Klimkiewicz asks for financial mechanisms that would ensure more autonomous performance of PSM (especially in the third group of countries) and compares the licence fee with the price paid for a healthy and balanced diet.

In second place, Karen Arriaza analyzes the organization and management of two different PSM European institutions:

Germany, that tries to preserve the principles of democratization that accompanied public broadcasters from the very beginning even though it has to face some attempts at politicization of public service media.

On the other hand, Spain, whose national public broadcaster started out from a dictatorial regime and had to figure out ways to solve problems and adapt itself without any pre-established notions or concepts. Spain belongs to the group of European States in which public service media continued to simply mean 'belonging to the State', with little or very little actual level of plurality and objectivity.

In third place, Van den Bulck explains the evolution of accountability mechanisms from a 'self-evident' position of Europe PSM that were accountable only to government and the elites, going through the end of monopolies from the 1980 onwards, the importance in the 1990s of ideas based on New Public Management (what led to new forms of accountability) to a recent phase in which PSM is becoming subject to accountability to the market and its commercial competitors. However, being made accountable to the market and its consumers does not provide any guarantees for being made accountable to the citizenry and thus for promoting democracy.

Both Van den Bulck and Ulrike Klinger state that the future of PSM does not only depend on the norms and values, but on effectively securing and guaranteeing compliance with its normative footing.

To sum up, this is a really fruitful lecture so as to understand better the whys and wherefores of the European PSM. Not only is it interesting for specialists and journalists but it also concerns everyone aiming to achieve a high quality broadcasting system.