



**HORIZONTAL FACILITY
FOR THE WESTERN
BALKANS AND TURKEY
2019-2022**

*FOR YOUR RIGHTS:
TOWARDS
EUROPEAN STANDARDS*

Public Service Media in transition: current challenges and ways forward

The views of the PACE

Webinar

*for the staff of the of the specialized commissions of the Parliaments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia
21 - 22 September 2020*



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1. Introduction

Media freedom, pluralism and independence are crucial components of the right to freedom of expression, which is guaranteed by art. 10 ECHR.

This right is *“one of the essential foundations of a democratic society”*.

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“Free, independent and pluralistic media based on freedom of information and expression is a core element of any functioning democracy. Freedom of the media is in fact essential for the protection of all other human rights”.

(Dunja Mijatović, Commissioner for Human Rights of the CoE)

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2. PACE (recent) work on media in general and public service media (PSM) in particular

Most recent reports

- Threats to media freedom and journalists' security in Europe (2020)
- Public service media in the context of disinformation and propaganda (2019)
- Media freedom as a condition for democratic elections (2019)
- Political influence over independent media and journalists (2017)

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New reports in preparation

- Media freedom, public trust and the people's right to know
- The role of media in times of crisis

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3. What is the role of PSM? Or why our democratic systems do need to preserve them?

“the media play an essential role in democratic society, by acting as public watchdogs, while helping to inform and empower citizens, through widening their understanding of the current political and social landscape, and fostering their conscious participation in democratic life”.

(the European parliament - Resolution of 3 May 2018 on media pluralism and media freedom in the European Union)

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PSM “should be a forum for pluralistic public debate and a means of promoting a broader democratic participation of individuals, and also a factor of social cohesion and integration of all people, groups and communities”

(PACE Resolution 2255 (2019) on Public service media in the context of disinformation and propaganda)

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PSM are called to *“deliver high-quality journalism by focusing on matters of public concern and providing the public with reliable information and a diversity of opinions. This is all the more important in the new media environment, where the dissemination of disinformation, propaganda or hate speech is growing exponentially”*

(PACE Resolution 2255 (2019) on Public service media in the context of disinformation and propaganda)

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PSM must “*ensure balanced and impartial coverage of elections and fair participation in the election process of all candidates and political parties*”

(PACE Resolution 2254 (2019) on Media freedom as a condition for democratic elections)

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4. What are the challenges that PSM are facing today and what are policy and decision makers expected to do to guarantee the conditions for these challenges to be met?

PSM (and indeed all media) *“must be free to inform the public, without being subject to any political, economic or other pressure, and with due regard for professional ethics”*

(PACE Resolution 2254 (2019) on Media freedom as a condition for democratic elections)

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Threat 1: undue influence

Are the PSM of our respective countries really independent and able to freely inform the public, without being subject to any pressure?

PACE Resolution 2255 (2019) highlights “*an emerging trend of threats to the independence of public service media*”

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“Many governments’ preference for taxpayer-generated funding has given them more budgetary influence, which can result in more State-controlled content.”

(PACE Resolution 2255 (2019) on Public service media in the context of disinformation and propaganda)

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What the PACE urges to do

Review PSM governance mechanisms, to secure
“genuine independence of PSM, including in editorial terms, while preserving the oversight role of national authorities and, in particular, parliaments”

[Resolution 2179 (2017)]

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“guarantee the editorial independence of public service media, putting an end to any attempts to influence them or transform them into governmental media”.

[Resolution 2254 (2019)]

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Threat 2 : lack of financial sustainability

All traditional media operators are facing higher commercial pressure.

PSM suffer the reduction of resources available in national budgets.

As PSM have a specific unique role – which entails specific responsibilities and constraints – they need specific financial arrangements

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PACE policy guidelines

[Resolution 2179 (2017)]

- A level of funding coherent with the agreed role and remit of PSM
- Predictable and sufficiently stable revenues
- The buoyancy of the funding schemes

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No one-fit-for-all model for a sound funding system;
but some learnings from experience:

Combine different sources (also paying attention to the
context)

Give, however, preference to licence fees (paid by all
households irrespective of the device) and/or
earmarked taxes (with stability of their level in real
terms).

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A final note

“In the First Amendment, the Founding Fathers gave the free press the protection it must have to fulfill its essential role in our democracy. The press was to serve the governed, not the governors.”

(Judge Hugo Black, writing for the 6-3 U.S. Supreme Court majority that decided in favour of press freedom in the Washington Post case.)

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