

# THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

February 17, 2022 at 10 a.m. (CET)

## Programme and contributors

### **The future of public service media: An introduction**

#### **Slavko Splichal**

In normative terms, public service media provide a service of the public, by the public, and for the public. The question of how to materialize these normative expectations in practice has always been difficult to answer, but due to complex technological, economic and political influences, they have never seemed as important and demanding as in today's Europe.

*Slavko Splichal is Professor of Communication and Public Opinion at the University of Ljubljana, member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and member of Academia Europaea. He is founder and director of the European Institute for Communication and Culture and editor of its journal Javnost-The Public. He was a member of the International Council and Deputy Secretary General of AIERI/IAMCR and Chair of ECREA Advisory Board. His most recent books include The Liquefaction of Publicness: Communication, Democracy and the Public Sphere in the Internet Age (editor, Routledge 2018) and Datafication of Public Opinion and the Public Sphere: How Extraction Replaced Expression of Opinion (Anthem Press 2022).*



### **Public service media as a citizen and democracy-oriented project: Is there a mismatch between theory, the law and practice?**

#### **Karen Donders**

Theories on public service media set out (implicitly or explicitly) from a context that is democracy. But what happens when democracy is under pressure? From the rise of populist parties over self-censorship with journalists to straightforward limitations on media freedom and the creation or survival of state broadcasting systems? Can public service media organisations play their role in terms of strengthening citizenship in the absence of robust democracies? These are a couple of questions, Karen Donders will address in her presentation, which draws from her own experience at Flemish public broadcaster VRT and her extensive research on public service media systems in the different geographical areas of Europe.

*Karen Donders is Director of Public Value, Talent and Organisation at Flemish public broadcaster VRT. She is among others responsible for public affairs, policy and legal affairs, the research department, public value areas such as education / culture / language / music / media literacy / science / ..., recruitment, staff policies, training / coaching, transformation, etc. She is also Associate Professor at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, in the Communication Sciences department. In 2021 she published the monograph Public Service Media in Europe: Theory, the Law and Practice (Routledge Law). The book won the Karol Jakobowicz Media & Democracy Award.*



### **“Optimization of remit and structure”: Process, parameter, and problems of a draft media law in Germany**

#### **Barbara Thomaß**

In Germany, the media law for public service media is currently being reformed. Under the title "Optimization of remit and structure," essential parameters for the mission and its control, as well as for the modes of financial control, are to be redefined. This contribution will provide a brief overview of how the PSM is currently regulated with a view to the legal and organizational status of PSM, its governance, the assessment and control of funding and budget and the implementation of new services. I will describe the process of drafting the new law and analyze, what are the key points and which interests and conflicts lie behind the proposals in the bill. Where applicable, references to the Slovenian draft media law will be made.

***Barbara Thomaß** Barbara Thomass is Professor em. for International Comparison of Media Systems at the Ruhr-University of Bochum, Germany. Her main fields of research are media systems in East and West, media politics, public service media, international communication, media and journalism ethics. She is the second deputy head of the administrative council of the ZDF, the national public service broadcaster in Germany. She had been lecturing and researching at the universities of Hamburg, Goettingen, Lueneburg and Bremen and at the universities in Vienna, Paris and Montréal. Prior to her academic career she had been working as a journalist.*



## **How to create public value: Independent. Accountable. Distinctive”**

### **Klaus Unterberger**

I will address some of the mayor challenges of PSM in the competitive media ecosystem. How to protect and safeguard independence in governance and program production. How to define and evaluate distinctiveness for a public funded Public Service Media. How to communicate successfully its contribution for society, for social cohesion and democracy, focusing on digital transformation and the European dimension of Media and Public communication.

*Klaus Unterberger is Head of the “Public Value Department” of ORF, focusing on its Public Service Mission and remit, in charge of substantial elements of ORF’s quality control system, relevant scientific research, internal and external communications and international cooperation. Representing its management Dr. Unterberger is member of the “Board of Ethics” of ORF. Currently he is ORF’s project manager of the EU project “Empowering Society -Technical Assistance to Public Service Media in the Western Balkans”.*



## **PSM: Challenges to the arms-length principle in online environment**

### **Hannu Nieminen**

The Finnish national broadcaster Yle is the leading media organization in Finland and it enjoys wide political support. Its public service remit is stipulated in the Act on Yle (see [en19931380.pdf](#) (finlex.fi), section 7.) Although the financing of Yle bases on taxes, its relative autonomy from the Government ('arms-length principle') is secured by setting the company under the supervision of the Parliament. The Administrative Council of Yle, which contains representatives from all parliamentary parties, nominates the Board, which consists of non-political experts and media professionals. In recent years, however, the Finnish commercial media companies have increasingly challenged Yle's successful online services. They base their complaints on EU directives and EC regulations, using them to threaten the independence and autonomy of the Yle, which is decreed in the national legislation.

*Hannu Nieminen is Professor emeritus of media and communications policy at the University of Helsinki and Professor (part time) at the Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas. In 2022 he is Visiting professor at London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He was Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences from 2016 to 2019 and the founding Director of HSSH (Helsinki Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities) in 2020. Nieminen has published extensively on media and democracy, communication rights, European public sphere, and media and inequality. From 2013, he serves as an Expert on Public Service Broadcasting for the Administrative Council of the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE. For more, see <https://www.helsinki.fi/fi/ihmiset/henkilohaku/hannu-nieminen-9062139>.*



## **Public service media in Sweden**

### **Jonas Ohlsson**

This presentation addresses the present position of public service media in Sweden - in relations to the political sphere, the private market, and the Swedish public. A brief overview of the regulatory and funding models for the three public service broadcasters, is followed by a presentation of the increasingly politicized debate on the performance and future role of public service media in Sweden. The presentation will also address the standing of the public service broadcasters among Swedish media audiences, especially against the backdrop of the ongoing pandemic.

**Jonas Ohlsson**, associate professor, director of Nordicom (Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research) and editor-in-chief of Nordicom Review. He holds a PhD in Media, Journalism and Communication from the University of Gothenburg. His research interests include media structure, media economics, media policy, and media consumption. Ohlsson is responsible for the annual Swedish media industry analyses published by the Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority. His monographs include *The Practice of Newspaper Ownership: Fifty Years of Control and Influence in the Swedish Local Press* (2012; dissertation), *The Nordic Media Market* (2015), and *Ad Wars: Digital Challenges for Ad-Financed News Media in the Nordic Countries* (2017; with Ulrika Facht).



## **Securing a strong BBC and its relevance to other PSBs**

### **Steven Barnett**

Scale, scope, reach and resources are vital to a thriving BBC that works for all of us. For the BBC to survive as a credible cultural force requires four essential criteria. First, it must have scale. It must be large enough to ensure that it's not reduced to a marginalised presence in people's lives, like PBS in America or ABC in Australia. Crucially, it must operate across all platforms. Second, it must have scope. It needs to invest in UK talent and content across the board. So *Casualty*, *Strictly*, *Would I Lie To You*, *Radio 1*, *Match of the Day* are as integral to the BBC's existence and its place in our lives as *Radio 3*, experimental drama, *David Attenborough* and *BBC4* documentaries. Third is reach. Universality of access is a fundamental principle that has underpinned the BBC since transmitters were built to reach a few outlying homes in the Highlands of Scotland. It is more important than ever in an age of information silos and subscription-based walled gardens that the BBC is available to every single one of us. Finally, resources. The BBC needs proper funding to continue making original, high quality content across the board. That means guaranteed revenue that keeps pace with inflation, and no repeat of the 30% cut that has been inflicted since 2010.

*Steven Barnett is Professor of Communications at Westminster School of Media and Communication and an established writer and broadcaster who has been involved in policy analysis at the highest levels, both nationally and internationally, for the last 35 years. He has*

*advised government ministers in the UK, has given evidence or served as an adviser on several parliamentary committees, has been called to give evidence to the European Parliament, and has been invited as keynote speaker at numerous national and international conferences. He specialises in media policy, regulation, the theory and practice of journalism, political communication, and press ethics, and has directed over thirty research projects on the structure, funding, regulation and business of communications in the UK and around the world.*



## **Hungarian media in the postcommunist autocracy**

### **Maria Heller**

Since the 2010 victory of Fidesz and by their 2/3 presence in the Hungarian Parliament for 12 consecutive years, the Orbán regime was able to occupy and control almost the entire Hungarian public sphere, while the loss of space for independent and opposition media and the restriction of free access to information has continued. The Media Council is unanimously composed of Fidesz delegates and the national news agency, the public service and the private television and radio channels, the printed press, a large share of the online media but even certain social media all fall under central control. Huge sums of public money are spent on so-called, (but Fidesz controlled) public media and on the Fidesz media empire, the Central European Press and Media Foundation, because Fidesz increasingly sees governance as a communication activity. While important decisions are concealed from the public, the Hungarian voter must be contented by pro-government propaganda and diatribes scapegoating migration, the opposition and the EU.

***Maria Heller**, PhD, habil. associate professor, sociologist, linguist. She teaches at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Eötvös Loránd University, where was the director of the Institute of Sociology from 2003 to 2016. Her research fields involve the theory of the public sphere, the theory of communications, media sociology, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, discursive strategies in public and non-public communications. She has published in various Hungarian and international journals and books in Hungarian, English and French. In 1999*

*she earned the distinction ‘Lecturer of the year’” elected by students. In 2006-2007 she was a guest professor at Bergen University (Norway). She is a member of various Hungarian, European and international scholarly associations and commissions. She received the Golden medal of Eötvös Loránd University in 2017 and the Great Award of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the same university in 2021.*



## **The digital transformation of PSB and implications for governance**

### **Maria Michalis**

The presentation starts by briefly explaining the notion of governance for public service broadcasting. It notes that ever since its origins in the 1920s, PBS has faced numerous challenges and adjustments. More recently, the digital transformation of the media has impacted upon PSB governance, primarily on its justification, remit and funding. The discussion draws on examples from various countries, and suggests that the governance framework is instrumentalised to undermine the PSB concept and associated values.

***Maria Michalis** is Associate Professor in Communication Policy, and Deputy Director of the Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI) at the University of Westminster, London. Her recent work focuses on the convergence between television and the Internet, and the future of public service media. She has published extensively on these issues and is regularly called to give advice as an expert. Maria has presented her research at national, European and international policy fora.*

