

Chapter 6

Public-service media in Europe: a quiet paradigm shift?

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The following discussion focuses on the question of public communicative spaces, as spaces for citizens' participation in public debate and, ultimately, public policy.

For a functioning democracy, the existence of institutions based on an architecture geared towards benefiting the public good is (or should be) paramount. The concepts of "public good" and "public interest" are inextricably connected to the pursuit of "the good life" as a political claim and goal of public policy. For Aristotle the good life or *eudaimonia* is the ability to know what the "right thing" is and the ability to do it. In his theory of the good life, developed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle speaks of the good life as the happy life, but he does not identify the good life with merely the *feeling* of being happy or amused. Rather, the good life for a person is the *active* life of functioning well in those ways that are essential and unique to humans. Hence, there remains an "active life of the element that has a rational principle" (Aristotle, 1098a). This proclamation consists of two parts that are relevant to his definition of *eudaimonia*: for one, it is the element of the "active life", and second, that of rational principle (or in other words, the *logos*) through which public life ought to be governed.

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Aristotle believed that the ability to reason was exclusive to human beings and therefore the good for humans was the maximum realisation of that function. The good life was thought by Aristotle to be the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue. As for the state, in his work *Politeia*, Aristotle asserts that political society exists not simply to provide for a communal life but “for the sake of noble actions” (Pol. III. 9.1281a3). Doing the right thing was, for Aristotle, part and parcel of being an active citizen; a person who participated in the public affairs of his/her community and helped shape the decision-making process. Democracy then is understood to be the utmost participation in public life. By extension, the state has the responsibility to act in such manner as to pursue the good life of its citizens by enabling them to participate fully in public affairs. The direct kind of democracy the Athenians enjoyed not only allowed efficient administration of the state, but financed Greek drama, invested in great public works such as the construction of the Parthenon, and made itself responsible for the welfare of its people.

Hence, the good life of citizens demands an active state, an active citizenry, public engagement and public support. Seeking the creation and sustenance of enabling environments for public debate is at the core of political action across the world, from the social movements now known as the Arab Spring of more recent times, to social movements for global justice, from Occupy to anti-austerity protests across Europe. What connects all these movements ultimately is the quest for enabling the conditions to exercise full citizenship, that is to participate fully in public life and the politics of the city. Deprivation of structural and material resources undermines citizenship and democracy because, without them, any law providing for the core values of equality, personhood and the right to free association is without foundations.

For the meaningful participation of citizens in public life, certain fundamental conditions must be fulfilled. These conditions refer to the legal, structural and economic, political, cultural and social aspects surrounding the governance of political participation and the governance of the “political society”. For a start, the legal provision for freedom of expression and its associated rights must be guaranteed for all citizens. The exercise of these rights must also be facilitated and enabled by social and state institutions. For that reason, disproportionate limitations and excessive exceptions to the exercise of these rights, state or administrative secrecy, cannot be considered in the spirit of free communication and deliberation. Moreover, structural impediments must be limited to the minimum possible degree so that the maximum possible degree of citizens’ participation can be achieved. Here, questions of education, availability and accessibility of information resources, equality and inclusion are core elements in enabling environments. Moreover, the ethical responsibility to truthfulness and protection against deception and misinformation are further prerequisites in building the right condition for public deliberation. Habermas’s (1984) “ideal speech situation”, for example, refers to these conditions as well as the freedom from fear of retribution, so that all opinions can be expressed. For Aristotle, the generation of knowledge, the path to knowledge, whether as scientific enquiry or in the political society, goes through dialectic, that is the existence of oppositional voices and the questioning of falsity in each position. For that purpose, Aristotle envisions a freedom of juxtaposition and equality among people, whether or not distinguished by their skills to apply the scientific method or not (Berti 1978). A dialectic of opinion

is to Aristotle necessary for democracy and freedom of expression in relation to this dialectic necessary, not for the right of a private individual but “as the contribution of the individual to the realisation of the common good of a political or scientific nature” (Berti 1978: 369). Hence, the historical understanding of what common good entails in relation to the citizen brings us to the fundamental principles underlying a democratic polity. Without this participation, which for Aristotle would have to be pursued also through the extinction of extreme economic inequalities, the governance of a society is characterised by tyranny.

This brief discussion on the connection between the common good, public participation and freedom of expression is useful to set the foundations for an empirically detailed discussion of the environments within which European societies today are called to defend democratic institutions and re-energise the connection between citizens and those institutions. Public debate is the cornerstone of democracy, but only if access to the public sphere is guaranteed and enabled for all citizens and with diverse voices and experiences. In particular, the claim for universal access to the public sphere in both mediated – through mass media, for example – and direct ways has several conditions embedded, one of which is freedom of expression. Furthermore, freedom of expression depends on structural and symbolic determinants. Not only are spaces for debate required to be accessible and usable, for example, affordable media for information, user-friendly technologies for participation and so on. They must also support a culture of inclusiveness and respect that allows and creates spaces for interaction among historically or otherwise marginalised groups and views.

This chapter explores the ways in which public service broadcasting faces survival challenges in Europe and what kinds of implications this has, and will have, for democracy and social cohesion in the continent. The discussion situates the current “troubles” of public service broadcasters (PSBs) within the context of the economic crisis and its impact on journalism and the free flow of information and the historical development of auditing controls for public service media, which, in general, have been disproportional to the expectations of accountability for private media organisations. PSBs, or, more precisely, public-service media (PSM) organisations, occupy historically a unique position of organisations with uninterrupted functions for nearly a century in the European continent. They stand as the only institutions tasked with comprehensive missions for universal reach in order to bring information, culture and education to the citizenry and also as the only media institutions wholly owned by the public in service of the public. The question this discussion therefore aims to lead to is “what happens in a society without PSM?” We will be discussing the particulars of a case study of the shutdown of Hellenic Radio & Television (ERT) by the Greek government on 11 June 2013 and then take a look around Europe by way of a “loose” comparison to question the degree to which ERT constituted a unique and extreme case, determined by the extraordinary financial conditions in the Greek economy, or whether the “ERT case” could be referred to as the epitome of trends in the governance of public-service media and, by extension, in the governance of free speech and public organisations in European societies.

It is necessary to investigate the current state of PSM within the context of a prolonged and unpredictably persistent financial crisis in Europe. The overall environment for free debate on democratic grounds does not offer reasons for celebration, at least

when one looks at the ways in which citizens see institutions, and it tests their trust in the role of established media institutions in public debate. Admittedly, a political malaise has begun to dominate European public life, characterised by distrust in institutions, the premeditated cultivation of polarisation among European nations towards non-European migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, combined with weak plurality of voices reporting these issues. Citizens' discontent is visible in physical and online spaces, through protests, the setting up of a multitude of media fora and other ways to communicate, often bypassing established means of communication and seeking direct connections with each other in an effort to reclaim their place in democratic politics, indeed to "restore" democratic politics.

THE MANY CRISES IN THE COMMUNICATIVE SPACES OF EUROPE

The governance of communicative environments is strategic at a time when unpopular and arguably unconstitutional public policies are being implemented over a sustained time-frame, as is most vividly the case in Greece, but also in other European countries. Changes in the media landscape are not simply consequences of the crisis, but rather strategic acts in managing public opinion, rather than managing the crisis.

On the European periphery, from the UK and Ireland to Portugal, Spain and Greece, although the economic contexts vary, the withdrawal of the state from the social safety net and welfare and the deterioration of living standards have raised waves of protest and oppositional politics. Despite repeated "packages", "bail-out programmes", "emergency measures" and so on, since 2008, poverty has risen: the average European population at risk of poverty or social exclusion increased from 23.5% in 2008 to 24.2% in 2011. In Greece, the increase was from 28.1% to 31%, and in Spain from 22.9% to 27%. Spain has 12.4 million "poor" people and Greece 3.4 million (Eurostat, 2012). The number of children living in poverty has risen dramatically in the UK reaching the highest in absolute numbers for decades (DWP 2015). In the past four years, suicide rates have increased in Greece by 45% (Branas et al. 2015). Suicide as a political act and an act of ultimate agency has reached new heights. In 2012, in response to the rise in suicides, Spain's banking association announced it would freeze evictions in cases of extreme hardship (The Guardian 2013b). According to the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (Platform of People Affected by Mortgages), there have been 400 000 evictions in Spain since the financial crisis began in 2007.

Social mobilisation through strikes and protests is a daily occurrence across Europe and is, as expected, stronger in crisis-hit countries. Co-ordinated, bottom-up pan-European actions have multiplied: school and kindergarten teachers, health workers, university staff, journalists and communication workers, as well as general workers' councils have mobilised. Demonstrating solidarity in the face of what are perceived to be unworkable crisis measures has become a permanent feature in European cities, in contrast to the discourses of segregation and polarisation among political elites. It is at this crucial intersection of an evident gap between governments and citizens across Europe where a robust public debate, supported by strong investigative

journalism and encouraging environments for finding ways out of what many see as a vicious circle, is urgently needed. Social mobilisation suggests that these spaces for debate are indeed open and vibrant and that, by definition, the media should be an integral part of it.

The evidence, however, gives cause for concern: international organisations have raised the alarm for the most important aspects of freedom of speech. Since the beginning of the crisis in 2009, Reporters Without Borders has warned about the decline of the European press in the freedom of expression index. In 2013, it recorded a polarisation in the directions taken by various countries according to the degree of freedom of the press they enjoy; some have maintained their positions, such as Finland, Germany and Austria, and some have lost ground rapidly, such as Hungary, Greece, Italy and even France. The factors contributing to these falls are a combination of incremental legal reforms and drastic changes, the politico-economic position of the media and the rise of informal forms of governance through networks of interests. The annual global surveys conducted by Freedom House have noted an all-time low in world freedom and falling standards of freedom in mature democracies. Index on Censorship has shown in detail the innumerable cases of censorship, violence and intimidation against media workers and journalists who attempt to present critical views.

The OSCE found in 2007 that almost half of its 56 member states imposed legal sanctions on journalists who obtain and publish classified information. This was most evident in Eastern and Central Europe, where many countries have introduced new laws on state secrets, such as the Czech Republic, Moldova, Bulgaria, Albania and Croatia. In this context, Banisar detects "a significant trend in the use of state secret laws to penalise whistle-blowers and journalists who publish information of public interest" (Banisar 2008:15). Such cases have been recorded in Denmark, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, the UK, Germany and Switzerland.

Meanwhile, in very real terms, austerity and the crisis have hit the already precarious profession of journalism hard. Closely related to the change in the communicative landscapes is the loss of jobs and the deepening of precarity for the vast majority of active journalists. Work options for journalists have been transformed dramatically over the past decade and the crisis has exacerbated this. In Spain, for example, *El País* reported in 2012 that more than 27 000 journalists were unemployed – a three-fold rise from a year earlier (El País 2012b). The Prisa Group alone dismissed 1 281 employees in 2012 (20 Minutos 2012). In Greece, long-term unemployment has become the new norm and, moreover, most available jobs are precarious, paying an average monthly salary of 400 euros and often insisting that articles are written anonymously. There are at least 2 500 unemployed journalists in Greece, according to POESY, the umbrella union of all journalists' unions in the country. This figure is inaccurate in that it includes only those journalists who are registered members of one of the unions. Registration is not straightforward if one has not completed a certain number of hours' work in the media. Given that most media industries only employ freelancers, this means that the vast majority of particularly young journalists is automatically excluded from union membership. A Catch-22 situation thus exists: it is almost impossible for freelancers to register and gain accreditation as a journalist, but without full accreditation, journalists and photojournalists are forced

THE FOURTH MODEL OF PSB GOVERNANCE? FROM THE SHUTDOWN OF ERT TO ERTOPEN

to work under uncertainty and risk their lives in volatile situations, such as when covering protests in Greece. The outcome has been, as Reporters Without Borders states, that being a journalist has become more and more unprotected in situations of social unrest and clashes with the police. Index on Censorship and Reporters Without Borders have characterised the situation in Greece as volatile: they have likened covering protests there to covering war zones, because of the violence and abuse of power by the police, who not only indiscriminately, but also strategically, target journalists and physically attack them. Amnesty International has issued a report about the Greek police, stating that it operates in a culture of impunity and violence (Amnesty International 2012).

On the matter of police impunity from prosecution for attacks on journalists, the 2014 Report On Impunity includes references to journalists whose lives are at risk. A combination of factors contributes to the detrimental state of health and safety of professional journalists, including the lack of investigation of cases of police assault and intimidation; the criminalising of journalists; and state policies of secrecy, lack of transparency and manipulation. According to Freedom House, Greece experienced the worst and largest score changes between 2009 and 2013, placing it below Bahrain, Ukraine, Egypt, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan in the category of a “partly free” country. The closure of ERT contributed to this overall detrimental effect.

Although the critical condition of the labour market for media workers is not the focal point of this discussion, it helps us understand the crucial role of public-service media in an environment of instability and precarity. PSM organisations have historically functioned as stable points of reference in this market, all the more so when market forces drive salaries to as little as EUR 200 per month for writing 28 articles a day (Milanuncios 2013). In the case of Greece, where the stakes of implementing austerity measures – as opposed to different measures that rely less on reducing salaries and privatisation – are extremely high, indirect government control of the public sector is effectively applied through intimidation, on top of the existential context within which the majority of journalists find themselves. Employment opportunities for young journalists are achieved by the systematic dismissal of older, dissident journalists like the above-mentioned cases of the public media in Greece and in Spain. Other examples are the international award-winning Greek journalist Kostas Vaxevanis, of the *Hot Doc* investigative magazine, who was arrested after publishing what has become known as the “Lagarde list” of wealthy Greeks that it was suggested the Greek government should investigate for tax evasion (Smith 2012); or Lefteris Charalampopoulos, reporter for the Greek *Unfollow Magazine*, who was threatened after reporting allegations that Aegean Oil was involved in a smuggling scandal (Zenakos 2013). Physical assaults involving an extraordinary degree of violence by the Greek police have also been well documented, especially the case of Mario Lolos, the head of the Greek Union of Photojournalists, who was left permanently disabled (Index on Censorship). Other journalists, who had clearly identified themselves to the police, were also assaulted and required treatment in hospital. And such assaults have also occurred elsewhere. In Spain, a purge of journalists who ask awkward questions has been reported by international newspapers (Murado 2012 and Baboulias 2012).

It was in this climate that the decision of the Greek government to shut down ERT arbitrarily, and without parliamentary approval, was announced on 11 June 2013. The closure was effected by a Special Decree which, in theory, required validation by the Greek Parliament, but the parliament was never given the opportunity to vote on the Special Decree. With immediate effect, over 2 500 highly skilled professionals, including many journalists, joined the high numbers of the unemployed. Greek television screens turned black, in what has become known in Greece and internationally as “The Black”. The former ERT employees occupied the ERT buildings in Athens and Thessaloniki (the headquarters of ERT3, the major non-Athens based television and radio station with remit for the coverage of the rest of Greece). For several months after 11 June 2013, citizens turned the ERT buildings in Athens and Thessaloniki into a place of public debates that were broadcast by the former ERT employees. This spontaneous decision to keep on broadcasting turned into a long-term political action that would eventually bring ERT back to Greek television screens: on 11 June 2013 the newly elected Syriza government gained parliamentary approval for a new legal framework to allow ERT to reopen. At the time of writing, ERT is broadcasting a full programme, albeit temporarily, without having returned to previous levels of operations.

The decision to shut down ERT was announced by the government spokesman Simos Kedikoglou, himself a former ERT employee, citing “the chronic corruption and mismanagement” of the corporation (Kedikoglou 2013 and Euronews 2013). This was despite categorical denials made by Kedikoglou on his website on 15 and 19 May that ERT was being closed down. This website has apparently since been hacked and is now offline. “ERT is a case of an exceptional lack of transparency and incredible extravagance. This ends now,” government spokesman Simos Kedikoglou told a news conference (BBC News 2013). Nearly a month before, Kedikoglou was denying in several interviews rumours about an imminent closure of ERT:

Notably, it was Kedikoglou who, in several instances, had categorically denied that ERT was about to be shuttered, including in interviews as recently as May 15th and 19th, and on his website (which has apparently since been hacked and is now offline).

The shutdown of ERT immediately called into question various clauses in the Greek constitution, as well as the Treaty of Amsterdam, which oversees public service broadcasting in Europe (Nevradakis 2013).

These contradictory declarations echo Psychogiopoulou et al. (2011:4) that “Greek media policy has been characterised for years by an essentially non-transparent, government-centred model of policy-making”. The shutdown received widespread international condemnation from journalists’ unions, the EBU, the European Parliament and NGOs such as Reporters Without Borders. *TEXTE*, the magazine published by the public-service broadcasters of Austria, Germany and Switzerland devoted an issue to the events in Greece (Mitschka & Unterberger 2013). Within eight months of the shutdown, typing “ERT” as an Internet search term yielded over a million social media mentions.

The European Commission claimed that it was outside its jurisdiction to intervene in national affairs and demand the reinstatement of ERT (European Commission 2013). In Greece, the Council of State Court, the highest administrative court, immediately ordered the government to reinstate ERT, but this was ignored. The trade unions representing ERT staff immediately filed lawsuits, for each geographical location separately, against the government for unlawful and unconstitutional dismissal. The first court decision, issued in Heraklion, Crete, declared the dismissal of ERT employees as unconstitutional and ordered the government to reinstate them and compensate them with immediate effect. The government did nothing. Similar judgments were pronounced in the other cases across Greece. In the meantime, the government, under international pressure, was forced to set up a transitional PSB called *Dimosia Tileorasi* (DT), at a cost of over a million euros per month. DT gave way to a new PSB called NERIT, which was, like DT, under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Finance. NERIT continued until 10 June 2015, the day before ERT was reinstated. The process of recruiting staff for NERIT was plagued with problems, due to the lack of transparency in its hiring procedures. The senior management team resigned and NERIT became mired in scandals, including the infamous television “interview” of the then Prime Minister, Antonis Samaras, by two NERIT journalists, where Samaras read his answers to the questions from an auto-cue. For many observers, this incident highlighted the difference between NERIT and ERT.

Not only was ERT self-financed by charging viewers fees of approximately EUR 4 per month per household, but by 2010, it had managed to pay off its debts and generate a profit of approximately EUR 100 million. At the time of its closure, therefore, not only was it not costing the Greek government money, but it had already offered to use its funds for nationwide social assistance programmes, such as the rehabilitation of drug-addicts programme, but the government had turned down this offer. ERT had undergone several restructuring attempts recently. Beyond any particularities that differentiate ERT and RTVE (the Spanish PSB), governments, irrespective of their ideologies, have seen PSBs as their own instruments. In the two years preceding the ERT shutdown, its Director-General, Emiliós Liatsis, who was appointed by the Greek government, exercised intensive censorship of programmes and came under immense criticism for surrounding himself with overpaid secretarial staff (Reporters Without Borders 2011). During the same period, attempts were made by the government to prevent journalists on the morning television magazine show from reporting on important issues such as police violence and the impact of austerity policies. The level of political intervention in ERT led to expressions of concern from Article 19 (2012), especially the case of the removal of Marilena Katsimi and Kostas Arvanitis from the morning magazine programme for expressing their disagreement with the declarations of the Minister of Public Order in relation to an anti-fascist demonstration.

During the two years from the shutdown to the reinstatement of ERT, the PSB continued broadcasting based on a self-governance model, initially from its studios in Athens and then from ERT3's studios in Thessaloniki. These broadcasts included round-the-clock radio news programmes from 16 of its 19 regional radio stations. Its television broadcasts were moved from Athens to Thessaloniki in November 2013, following a raid by the riot police on its Athens studios. Despite the disabling of its digital service, ERT used “guerilla tactics” to keep its analogue transmitters working, meaning that between

50% and 70% of Greek households outside Athens were able to receive its radio and television broadcasts during those two years. Moreover, ERT kept broadcasting online through ERTOpen (still, at the moment of writing, live at www.ERTOpen.com, with the full online service resuming on 29 June 2015 at www.ert.gr).

Although it is not the aim of this chapter to describe in detail how ERT developed a self-governance system, it is important to refer to some core elements of this experience. In the first weeks after the shutdown, former employees – now strangely similar to “pirate” broadcasters – followed a self-discipline model of continuing to operate in their positions (technicians, journalists and so on), although there was a realisation that the old hierarchies were no longer valid. Over the next 24 months, many left ERT for various reasons, including a sizeable minority who applied for positions with DT and then NERIT. Those who decided to stay decided to reorganise the governance model of ERT by adding a workers' council, trade unions and general and regional assemblies, which made decisions on the programme of broadcasts and the financing of those continuing to produce this programme, from purchasing consumables (tapes, hardware and so on) to paying for teams to travel from Athens to Thessaloniki to provide support for the daily news programmes. Funding came from the staff themselves, donations from ex-colleagues and later from contributions from all over the world, including citizens' solidarity groups, and fundraising events.

Radio and television programming decisions were made on a weekly basis, centred on a daily news bulletin. Staff, including editors, rotated jobs. Everyone involved in keeping ERT on air had to learn – and teach – new skills to support the production of the news programme. As new programmes were added, this activity was extended to social groups and wider society members, who, with the support of professionals, created new programmes run almost entirely by non-professionals. As the months turned into years, these skills were further developed among young people, such as recent graduates or volunteer journalists for community media, as well as others with an interest and the ability to run a project, such as the production of a programme on a regular basis. Immediately, the openness of ERTOpen, and, in particular, of ERT3, attracted social movements and civil society groups, who donated information and resources. It is not an exaggeration to state that ERT3 became the core point of reference for a variety of social actors and groups, especially those involved in providing some form of public service, such as teachers, healthcare workers, public-sector cleaners and even environmental activists such as the Anti-Gold movement and the Save the Water European Citizens, Initiative.

The outcome of these new connections with the wider society has been a direct way of communication that ensured the input of resources for the sustenance of the organisation. The model of self-governance developed over those two years is perhaps unique in the history of European media, but certainly not unknown, if we consider South American community media initiatives or other self-managed, worker-led enterprises across the world. Indeed, such examples demonstrate that professionalism and quality assurance on the one hand, and fulfilment of the PSB remit on the other hand, are functions that can be fully served through democratic models of governance that do not depend on permanent, hierarchical structures. The “living experiment” at ERT proves in a practical way that a pragmatic approach to ensuring the full acceptance of PSBs by, and their legitimacy in, society runs

through to the core of the organisation of its daily business. To dismiss such models as utopian or unrealistic, especially when dealing with a fully fledged organisation with thousands of employees, misses the point. Not only can such a governance model make a meaningful contribution in terms of a philosophical approach to the present and future of PMB, it can also provide solutions for the problems encountered by large organisations. It remains to be seen if, and to what extent, the recent re-establishment of ERT can withstand the pressures to return to the perceived normality of its previous incarnation.

The reopening of ERT attracted as much interest in Greece and internationally as its shutdown. Looking back, what were the reasons for, and the impact of, its closure? The government's reasoning was to clean up the organisation and create a "Greek BBC". The claims about financial mismanagement and extraordinarily overpaid employees proved misleading. ERT's news programmes had managed to remain investigative and interrogatory about the developments in the country, in particular on the impact of the crisis on social groups, despite government attempts to exert more control over them. At the conference of his New Democracy Party in 2013, then Prime Minister Antonis Samaras stated in his leader's speech that each government had made its own appointments to ERT, but that all the people ERT had hired itself were "communists", making it clear to many observers that the motives behind the closure of ERT by Samaras' government were party political. However, another motive may well have been the sale of the rights to run digital broadcasting in Greece. The call for tenders for this project was issued by the government only a few days after the shutdown of ERT, and with ERT out of the running, the contract was easily won by DIGEA, a joint-venture by the five largest private media companies in Greece.

THE STATE OF EUROPEAN PUBLIC-SERVICE MEDIA: A PATTERN OF DISMANTLING?

The forced closure of the Greek PSB may appear at first to be an extreme case or merely a "storm in a teacup". Yet, a closer look elsewhere in Europe shows that partial closures of, and the placing of restrictions on, European PSBs are rapidly becoming the new norm. Soon after the forced closure of ERT in Greece, the Spanish government moved to close down the Valencian PSB, and the Israeli government proceeded to shut down its own PSB. While these shutdowns may also be claimed to be extreme cases, it is important to survey developments in the structural resources of PSBs across Europe.

Greece and Spain are not the only two countries on the periphery of Europe that have had to face economic difficulties. Both countries were run by dictatorships in their recent history and freedom of expression occupies a particular space in popular memory and culture. Historically, ERT in Greece and RTVE in Spain were state-owned corporations. During the dictatorships, both national PSBs were used as propaganda weapons: for example, the Greek PSB television channel ERT2 began in the 1960s as YENED, operated and controlled by the Greek army. Spanish PSB television came into existence under the Franco dictatorship, on the recommendation of liberal ministers interested in the economic development of the country. It was not until the 1990s

that the Spanish PSB developed technologically and began to seek international audiences. Over the past decade, the deficit of the Spanish PSB has led to several changes in its organisation: in June 2006, the RTVE Public Body and its companies TVE S.A. (National Television) and RNE S.A. (National Radio) were merged to form RTVE. The new corporation then cut its workforce by 4 855 employees to become the smallest PSB in Europe. The austerity measures adopted in Spain as a result of the economic crisis also provided an excuse for the conservative government to put pressure on RTVE to dismiss experienced, critical journalists and interviewers who ask politicians "real" (i.e. awkward) questions (Murado 2012). The RTVE management replaced these journalists and interviewers with members of the ruling conservative Popular Party (Burgin 2012).

The closure of sections and services of RTVE was effected by privatisation, fewer in-house productions and by laying off staff. The government began a new discourse to legitimise its changes to the management of RTVE, claiming it would enable the organisation to make "faster and more efficient" decisions and to cut its spending further (BOE 2012:30986). The changes, although not of the severity of Greece, led Spain to be added to the list of European countries that have reduced the reach and function of their PSM on multiple levels. The Popular Party's most significant change to the governance of RTVE was to give the government the right to appoint the RTVE's Director-General without having to gain the approval of Parliament. The Royal Decree 15/2012 (BOE 2012:30985), which enacted this change, was approved by the Parliament in which the Popular Party had an overall majority. The Popular Party justified this change by saying that the previous process was "visibly ineffectual because it does not allow the renewal of the board of directors with the necessary agility to avoid paralysis of the normal functioning of the Corporation" (BOE 2012:30986). The change was accompanied by the following government statement: "In relation to the public sector, of which the RTVE Corporation is part, the Government has assumed a commitment to achieve maximal austerity and efficiency and is currently immersed in a process of rationalisation" (BOE 2012: 30985). In the same way, the preamble of the Royal Decree clearly states that the objectives of the governance change are to make budget cuts and to equip RTVE with a management team that will implement such changes.

The same Royal Decree empowered the government to shut down PSM television stations in the autonomous regions by privatising their services (Congreso Diputados 2012). The press referred to this new policy as an austerity measure to "flexibilise" the regional PSM model. If the autonomous regions decide to keep their PSM services, they can directly or indirectly manage them, on condition that the PSM providers make budgetary cuts (ABC 2012). This means, effectively, that regional PSM are open to privatisation (El País 2012a). The impact of such a move would probably also mean a centralised and unvaried content distributed to the regions. In August 2012, some of the regional services began closing down, too: the first was "7 Region de Murcia" after six years of public service, to reduce costs. In Catalunya, the employees of the Catalan PSB Corporation, opposed privatisation and job cuts. The Catalan Regional Parliament was forced to set up a commission to manage the changes (Parlament de Catalunya 2013: 324). The workers' representatives pointed out that the lower-ranked employees of the PSB, whose salaries are publicly visible, were facing a 35% reduction in their pay,

whereas their highest salaried colleagues, whose salaries were confidential, were not facing a pay cut (Parlament de Catalunya 2013: 324). The trade unions denounced the government's budget cuts as part of an overall strategy to dismantle the Catalan PSB. For its part, the Catalan Regional Government stated that the changes to the Catalan PSB were merely to simplify its structure and to move from doing everything in-house to outsourcing more work (Parlament de Catalunya 2013: 5).

The economic crisis offers a discursive and normative framework within which governments present measures to cut public assets and services – of which PSM are the first in line for cuts. The government of the Netherlands, a coalition between the conservative-liberal VVD Party and the PvdA (Labour) Party, provoked a huge reaction when it announced its decision to cut the budget of the Netherlands Public Broadcasting Organisation (NPO) by EUR 100 million in 2016, following a cut of EUR 200 million in 2011 and reducing the NPO's overall income by a third. The consequence of this budget cut was a reduction of the NPO's broadcast channels from 22 to 8 (European Broadcasting Union (EBU) 2013a). The Dutch government claims that these measures will make the NPO "simpler and more efficient" (Government-NL 2013). The NPO has stated that it clearly cannot function under these conditions and, in a highly unusual move, called on members of the public to demonstrate and protest against these cuts (RNW 2010).

PSM are not simply broadcasting units or television channels. The budgets of their public choir and orchestras were also halved. In addition, the NPO's "World Service" (Public Radio Netherlands Worldwide) became an entity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with a budget reduced by 70%. The EBU estimates that these cuts will severely weaken the NPO, which is currently the "most trusted broadcaster" and holds the largest audience share in the country. It should be noted that the plans to reduce the reach and breadth of work produced by the NPO was already part of a 2003 strategic policy plan which was abandoned after the change of government.

In the meantime, there have been two attempts to close down Radio e Televisao de Portugal (RTP) in the past decade. The discussion started when the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs announced the possible privatisation of RTP (Pfanner 2012); and it came to an end when RTP and the Portuguese government signed a new contract in early 2014. RTP remains one of the most underfunded PSBs in Europe: in 2013 its annual budget was cut by EUR 30 million (EBU 2013c). During the negotiations of the new contract, the entire RTP board resigned in protest and the EBU wrote a letter to Prime Minister Passos Coelho, stating:

To entrust management of a valuable national asset to commercial interests – a step unprecedented anywhere in the world – would put at risk the reputation earned by RTP since 1974 ... Commercial and public interests would be mixed and pluralism endangered. Citizens could lose a trusted reference point forever (Pfanner, 2012).

The discussion about how to meet the budgetary goals included privatising or closing RTP2; "restructuring the portfolio of activities and services offered by the company and in addition reducing the number of staff"; or selling a concession to run RTP1 to a private company, funded by the current licence fee. Some of Coelho's political opponents have pointed to the attempted privatisation of RTP as a means of curtailing media criticism of the Passos Coelho Government (Pfanner, 2012).

In the North of Europe, the First Baltic Channel (PBK) was ordered to suspend broadcasts of its Russian-produced programmes (about 70% of its output) for three months. PBK is one of the most fined television channels in Europe, and a cause of concern internationally. The OSCE's Freedom of the Press Secretariat stated that this undermines media pluralism and that "such an excessive measure must be restricted to instances of intentional and dangerous incitement to violence only" (OSCE 2013).

Also in 2013, the EBU's Director-General Ingrid Deltenre criticised the Romanian government for excessive political interference in its PSBs: "Whereas Romanian radio is a strong member of the EBU, the same could be true of TV Romania if only its Chief Executives were given time for the reforms to take effect." Noting that only one of the Chief Executives of TV Romania was allowed to serve his full term, she continued: "The Parliament has frequently used the two broadcasters' annual reports as excuses to dismiss their chief executives – often for apparently political reasons" (EBU 2013b).

One of the most problematic cases in Europe is Hungary, which was categorised as an "unfree media system" in 2011 due to its new media laws (Brouillette 2012). At the time, the EBU appealed to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to ensure media pluralism (EBU 2011). The EBU asked him "to be responsive to (EBU) concerns about threats to freedom, independence and pluralism of the media in Hungary posed by the new law". The Press and Media Act (2010 Act 104 on the Freedom of the Press and the Fundamental Rules on Media Content) and the Media Law (2010 Act 185 on Media Services and Mass Media) were adopted six months after Orbán came to office. The Article 19 pressure group produced a report expressing concern about the loss of independence of the Hungarian PSB and its contribution to the deterioration of the media situation in Hungary (Article 19 2011a, 2011b).

Meanwhile, the Polish PSB Telewizja Polska (TVP) transferred 411 of its employees to Leasing Team, a private outsourcing company, in 2014. Among the 411 employees transferred were 116 editors and almost 270 journalists. This reorganisation was decided by TVP's management board on 15 April 2014, to improve the company's poor financial situation (TVP receives only 15% of its income from public funding). The Chairman of TVP, Juliusz Braun, reported a loss of over PLN 220 million (EUR 53 million) in 2012, which was reduced to PLN 20 million (EUR 4.8 million) in 2013. In 2014, for the first time in many years, TVP made a profit of PLN 6 million (EUR 1.45 million). According to Braun, TVP had made total cost savings of PLN 300 million (EUR 72 million). Back in 2011, the number of TVP employees was reduced from over 4 000 to 2 838, again through a "leasing manoeuvre". As in most cases, the reasons behind such decisions were unclear and based on questionable assessment procedures. The remaining TVP staff saw their roles and positions change from specialised editors, reporters and section leaders to general "co-ordinators". Their job descriptions were also changed to a vague task of "producing and broadcasting news", without further specification. Several of the TVP staff trade unions and several former employees have launched lawsuits against TVP and the leasing company, alleging that the transfer of employees to the leasing company was illegal, because they had not consented to it. When TVP offered its journalists the option of becoming freelance contractors, only a few accepted: the majority refused (Pytlakowski 2015).

More recently, the EBU issued a warning about the critical, "near-collapse" condition of HRT, the PSB (television and radio) for Bosnia-Herzegovina. HRT is made

up of Radio-Televizija Federacije BiH (RTFBiH), covering the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Radio-Televizija Republike Srpske (RTRS), covering Republika Srpska (EBU 2015). The reasons given are chronic severe underfunding and political interference by the Bosnia-Herzegovinan government. The OSCE and EU representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina have voiced similar concerns. On closer examination, it is clear that HRT has not been properly funded for years, receiving neither adequate funds from a licence fee, nor benefiting from a proposed new financing plan, as this has never been adopted. This is a disaster, given the significance of a properly functioning PSB to connect and facilitate dialogue among the different ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in view of the wide public support for reforms of the country's PSB system (UNDP 2004).

This rather brief survey of PSBs and PBM around Europe has sketched a pattern of change and challenges for the institutions, exacerbated by the pressures from politicians trying to cope with the effects of the economic crisis. Not only have PSM, as public communicative spaces for information and education, been under continuous pressure to define and re-define their missions and remits, as institutions, they have suffered from pressure from the market and governments, as well as from a crisis in their public image, and thus their legitimacy among their viewers and listeners. For example, in their study of the impact of policy debates on the BBC, Lunt et al. (2012) argue that the questions about the role of PSBs in society, as raised by OFCOM, weakened the position of the BBC, rather than supporting its further development and its mission. In particular, OFCOM raised the question of whether a fully commercialised media environment would (or should) be the preferred media landscape of the future, thus undermining the BBC's image and *raison d'être*.

The ways in which the governance of PSBs has changed in recent years, more intensively and without much public debate, are concentrated in three core strategies:

- i. Previously autonomous or otherwise decentralised PSBs (radio and television stations) see their administrative capacities reduced and decision-making processes transferred to a central administration.
- ii. This *recentralising* process reinforces the view that regions and localities are peripheral to a central core, both culturally and politically.
- iii. This, in turn, makes PSBs more vulnerable to political control: direct interference from a political centre is still one of the two most significant impediments to the functioning of a healthy organisation. The second is financial starvation, by withdrawing sources of funding of PSM, either by changing the rules of licence fees, by limiting advertising revenues or by reducing subsidies.

CONCLUSION

The impact of these changes is multi-level and long-term. The destruction of PSM represents a waste of historical public investment and strikes a serious blow to the intellectual capital of these organisations. It also means uncertainty for the future protection of cultural heritage, activities and identity. It is certain that the impact of these changes will be to render PSM secondary to public debate and culture, possibly marginalising them to the point where they are unable to ever recover and offer a

real alternative to private media. The ramifications of this in terms of the future of Europe and its regions are simply too serious to outline here.

In the private sector, staff reductions and pay cuts take place, irrespective of any pressing financial need. A collateral effect of such changes is the progressive marginalisation – and criminalisation – of dissent. This can be demonstrated by the use of journalists as scapegoats, both in Spain or Greece. Agnes Callamard of pressure group Article 19 put it in these words:

These dismissals send out a dangerous message to other journalists, who might now be cautious about criticising the government for fear that they will face reprisals themselves. The suspension of the (Greek) presenters could give way to self-censorship by other journalists (Article 19, 2012).

The change in the governance of PSBs is based on exceptional economic and political conditions, as has been the abrupt move towards a “corporate business model” for ERT and the “need to bring a new, clean, public broadcaster”. The implementation of legal reforms to accompany such changes has required that national parliaments are kept outside the policy-making process, to minimise debate and questions. Press scrutiny and involvement are also minimised. Furthermore, the emergence of new institutions to “normalise” change has been observed in the cases of ERT and RTVE, as was the setting up of committees or new organisations to replace others or to steer change.

Despite these pressures, the role of PSM continued to be to contribute to and to facilitate enabling communicative environments and spaces for genuine public debate in more ways than one. PSM invest resources in journalism and factual programmes and tackle areas and topics that are too expensive for private media, or for which private media do not have the expertise. PSM promote cultural diversity in programming and can take risks. PSM invest in the education and training of media and arts professionals, who feature strongly in the whole media landscape of Europe. Finally, society has invested in PSM historically, to develop intellectual capital that pushes the quality standards of the rest of the media higher to the benefit of the citizenry.

Normative, discursive and institutional changes go hand-in-hand with the transformation of public spaces that PSM represent. The discursive constructions about the “ills” of PSM are embedded in dominant discourses about the economic and political crises that are based on “dilemmas”, “urgency” and “necessity”. They remind us strongly of the first wave of deregulation in Europe in the early 1980s, where the arguments for the dismantling of the welfare state and the privatisation of public assets were that public organisations are too slow to innovate, too large, too bureaucratic, too restricting to customers’ choices. Now, against the background of the economic crisis, public assets are said to be too expensive, too slow to innovate, not transparent enough or unnecessary. Again, the discourse of “efficiency” and economic “urgency” for technocratic solutions for “modernisation” is directed to citizens deprived of independent and rigorous journalism. The (mediated) spaces of open debate and critique are shrinking rapidly. This second paradigm assault on European PSM serves two functions: not only does it leave digital and other spaces available to be used by private interests in the broadcasting “wars”; it also exercises an effective censorship of critical free speech. The disconnect of citizens

from established institutions, including mainstream media (Sarikakis et al. 2013), is caused by the sense of secrecy, non-responsiveness, and failed promises by politicians and other representatives, including journalists (Reporters Without Borders 2011). Public discontent and disquiet do not show signs of subsiding, yet the need to maintain control over the public sphere is so pressing that states and their elites have responded with violence.

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