

European policy proposals to meet the challenge of public service media¹

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Abstract. The new media scenario is causing a crisis affecting the legitimacy of public service media (PSM). When several countries are considering far-reaching reforms, this paper analyses the PSM policy proposals of the political parties in Western Europe in the last elections in each country until 2021. Its methodology is based on a content analysis of the election programmes and semi-structured interviews with experts. Results confirm that PSM are present in electoral contexts, albeit with uneven attention depending on the political contexts. The main differences between countries can be seen in governance and funding, both related to the independence. Some changes can also be found in the speech of some populist parties that advocate for the most radical positions on the usefulness of PSM.

Keywords: audiovisual policies; funding; governance; independence; public service media.

[en] Propuestas políticas europeas para afrontar el reto de los medios de comunicación de servicio público

Resumen. El nuevo escenario mediático está provocando una crisis de legitimidad de los medios de comunicación de servicio público (PSM). Ahora que varios países se plantean reformas, este trabajo analiza las propuestas sobre PSM de los partidos políticos de Europa Occidental en las últimas elecciones nacionales hasta 2021. Para ello, se basa en un análisis de contenido de los programas electorales y en entrevistas semiestructuradas con expertos. Los resultados confirman que los PSM aparecen en las propuestas electorales, aunque con atención desigual según los contextos políticos. Las principales diferencias se observan en la gobernanza y la financiación, ambas relacionadas con la independencia. También se detectan cambios en el discurso de algunos partidos populistas.

Palabras clave: políticas audiovisuales; financiación; gobernanza; independencia; medios de comunicación de servicio público.

Sumario: 1. Introduction. 2. State of the PSM. 3. Methodology. 4. Results. 5. Conclusions. 6. References.

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1. Introduction

Even when updated by the authors themselves, the three models described by Hallin and Mancini (2004) are still a classic paradigm for understanding public broadcasting policies in Europe, since different conceptions of the place of the public in the media space underlie the three proposed models: liberal, democratic corporatist and polarised pluralist.

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The subject of this research emerges during election campaigns, since at legislative elections a debate on public service media (PSM) and their regulation comes to the fore and enters the political agenda. As noted by Bardoel and D'Haenens (2008: 343), the role of PSM in society serves “as a battleground for different interests and points of view”. Thus, issues such as the fee for funding these media are used as an argument to win votes (Petkovic, Panic and Hrvatin, 2016). In addition to their electioneering use, populist currents are another example of the risks that threaten the funding of these media (Campos-Freire, Rodríguez-Castro and Blasco-Blasco, 2020; Sehl, Simon and Schroeder, 2020).

States are the guarantors of a legal framework that preserves the proper functioning of PSM and prevents their instrumentalisation. However, the changing media environment, linked to technological development and new threats and opportunities, makes it necessary to update the concept of public service and review its correct development (Bonini and Pais, 2017).

This paper proposes a comparative approach to the political positions of the parties with parliamentary representation in Western European countries, reflected in their election programmes for the legislative elections in each country. This collection has been complemented by the reflections of experts in PSM.

The study of the proposals is relevant because it provides insight into the position of the political parties in each Member State. On the one hand, the proposals of major parties may be implemented and it is important to know whether they are committed to a public service scenario or, on the contrary, commercial and/or dominated by new actors such as GAFAMs (Soler-Campillo, Galán-Cubillo and Marzal-Felici, 2019). On the other hand, opposition parties have a watchdog role in parliaments and even minority parties can exert pressure.

This research responds to trends in public service policy in EU Member States through the following questions:

- P1. Do political parties pay attention to PSM in legislative elections?
- P2. Is there a current of political parties questioning the legitimacy of PSM?
- P3. Do political parties promote more policies on governance and PSM in countries where the lack of independence of PSM has traditionally been criticised?

The link between political contexts and reforms in PSM has been addressed from different perspectives. The South East European Media Observatory developed a four-year comparative study focusing on the Balkans region in Europe. This research concludes that almost all governing bodies “are commonly appointed on the basis of political affiliation” (Petkovic, Panic and Hrvatin, 2016). Some works have analysed the political positions towards public media in Spain because the different political elites see their media as their own (Guimerà Orts and Bonet, 2020). This situation has caused pervasive news manipulations over the course of years (Goyanes, Vaz-Álvarez and Demeter, 2020); the response of the Spanish and Swedish governments in a context of economic crisis (Arriaza Ibarra and Nord, 2014); the austerity policies applied in the Spanish and Portuguese radio and television stations that exit the austerity era still enduring old fragilities at a time when they must face new changes (Costa e Silva and Díaz-González, 2020); the negotiations for the 2011 management contract of the Belgian radio and television station, that promoted the social responsibility perspective, reflected in the eventual 2012–2016 management contract (Van den Bulck and Donders, 2014); a historical overview of the evolution of television in Cyprus “in accordance to the specific historical artefacts that took place and generated a series of disadvantages still reflecting upon the Cypriot private broadcasting sector (Maniou, 2017); or the evolution of communication policies in Poland, with the hypothesis that in this country that media policy paints a nuanced picture of democratic backsliding (Surowiec, Kania-Lundholm and Winiarska-Brodowska, 2020). Media policies of parties in the context of the last European elections have also been under study (Rodríguez-Castro, Campos-Freire and López-Cepeda, 2020). However, to date, none of them have highlighted the attention that the PSM captured in the national elections of a wide variety of states.

2. Situation of the psm

Although PSM share a number of obligations and values in the EU, there are differences in three areas: relevance, funding and governance (Holtz-Bacha, 2021), into which this research is divided. Broadcasting organisations have undergone a major transformation since the mid-1990s (Rodríguez-Castro, Campos-Freire and Túnuez-López, 2021). PSB then evolved into PSM organizations (Bardoel and Lowe, 2007; Brevini, 2010), contributing to the democratic, cultural and social objectives of society, on multiple devices and through various technologies (Donders, 2019; Lowe, Van den Bulck and Donders, 2018). However, this is a process still “in progress” (Donders, 2019: 1012), as evidenced by the approval of the reform of Audiovisual Media Services Directive (2018).

There are many ways for PSM to serve the public interest in a multi-platform era (Debrett, 2009), while maintaining certain traditional values. Universality should be a core value (Fuchs, 2014; Stiglitz and Rosengard, 2016), just like civic-democratic values of the society in which they are developed, combined with the principles of fairness, equity and balanced information (Flood et al., 2011). However, it is difficult to establish

a categorisation of public service values. European Broadcasting Union did so in 2012 by establishing six core values: universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability and innovation.

Moreover, political independence is another challenge for European public broadcasters. The CoE’s first priority focuses on assuring that their “culture, policies, processes and programming reflect and ensure editorial independence and operational autonomy” (Craufurd-Smith et al., 2017: 1939). The study of independence in the public service media is a recurrent concern in academia (Schulz, 2013; Karppinen and Moe, 2016; Simunjak, 2016; Craufurd-Smith et al., 2017) because it implies freedom from political, commercial or personal interests (Green, 2016). However, and despite reforms in several countries to ensure independence in PSM, models dominated by government and political intervention often remain in place.

Finally, there is a clear link between independence and funding (Lowe and Berg, 2013; Simunjak, 2016; Schweizer and Puppis, 2017). In order for governance to be able to address and implement the values of the PSM both externally and internally, stability and independence of the funding system becomes essential. Of the four funding channels identified by Lowe and Berg (2013) –direct subsidies, advertising, subscriptions and license fees– the latter is the most widespread in Europe, contributing 59.9% to total funding in 2019. France, Germany, Italy and the UK mainly rely on licence fee revenue (European Broadcasting Union, 2020). Despite these figures, it raises some problems such as the risk of tax fraud or methods of checking the effective use of the service in households.

Nevertheless, there is some consensus in defending license fee as a system that favours accountability and is less subject to government changes and political inferences than direct subsidies (Dragomir, 2017). However, the problems it entails have led to significant changes in some countries (Campos-Freire, Rodríguez-Castro and Blasco-Blasco, 2020; Schweizer and Puppis, 2017; Ramsey and Herzog, 2018).

Advertising is another source of income, with commercial income received by the PSM in Poland, Denmark, Belgium, Ireland, Italy and Latvia. With regard to direct subsidies, a number of countries apply this system: Slovakia, Estonia, Bulgaria, Sweden, Romania, Spain, Czech Republic, Germany, France and Portugal. Below 80% of their income, Poland, Denmark, Ireland, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Italy and Latvia stand out (Blasco-Blasco, Campos-Freire and Juanatey-Boga, 2017). This form of funding brings problems of independence and is a weapon used by governments and political parties to threaten or restrict PSM organisations, as demonstrated by the 2017 Media Pluralism Monitor, which considers PSM funding to be a medium risk in the EU (Brogi et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Castro, Campos-Freire and Túnñez-López, 2021).

3. Methodology

3.1 Objectives and method

The objective of this research is to analyse the proposals on funding, public service and governance made by the main political formations in Western Europe in the legislative elections held at state level, covering a period from 2017 (France) to 2021 (Netherlands). Theoretical-observational research is proposed, based on a methodological triangulation. Firstly, the systematic review of the scientific literature has been addressed through a compilation and descriptive approach (Bickman and Rog, 1998).

Secondly, the political parties of each country with representation in the last elections at the national level until 2021 were selected and their electoral programmes were retrieved from their websites. The result is a set of 70 political programmes from 14 European countries, to which a preliminary exploratory analysis was applied in order to locate proposals that alluded to the PSM. Of the 70 documents analysed, 57 of them contained some reference to the PSM, giving rise to the corpus shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample of countries and programmes analysed where references to PSM were found

Country/year last elections	Political party
Italy (2018)	Movimento 5 Stelle
Portugal (2019)	Partido Socialdemócrata
	Bloco de Esquerda
	Pessoas-Animais-Natureza
	Coligação Democrática Unitária
	Livre
	Iniciativa Liberal

Spain (2019)	Partido Socialista Obrero Español
	Partido Popular
	Vox
	Unidas Podemos
Greece (2019)	Μέτωπο Ευρωπαϊκής Ρεαλιστικής Ανυπακοής
France (2017)	Europe Écologie Les Verts
	Parti Communiste Français
	Front National
United Kingdom (2019)	Labour Party
	Conservative and Unionist Party
	Green Party
	Liberal Democrats
Ireland (2020)	Sinn Féin
	Fianna Fáil
	Fine Gael
	People Before Profit
	Green Party
	Social Democrats
	Labour Party
Belgium (2019)	Centre Démocrate Humaniste
	Démocrate Fédéraliste Indépendant
	Groen
	Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten
	Parti Populaire
	Parti du Travail de Belgique
Netherlands (2021)	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
	Partij voor de Vrijheid
	Partij van de Arbeid
	D66
	Forum voor Democratie
	Partij voor de Dieren
	JA21
	Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij
	ChristenUnie
Austria (2019)	Österreichische Volkspartei
	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs
	NEOS
Finland (2019)	Suomen kristillisdemokraatit
	Vasemmistoliitto
	Perussuomalaiset
Germany (2017)	Alternative für Deutschland
	Die Grünen
	Die Linke
	Freie Demokratische Partei
Denmark (2019)	Alternativet
	Det Radikale Venstre
	Liberal Alliance
	Enhedslisten - de Rød-Grønne
	Socialistisk Folkeparti
Sweden (2018)	Socialdemokraterna

Source: Prepared by authors.

3.2. Analysis tools

In a third phase, a sheet was applied to each of the selected units, made up of two study categories: C1) Description of each political party and C2) Proposals they make on public service audiovisual media.

The first section (C1) collects three variables around the party of each coalition (Party's name; Ideological position; Position in the current government), while the second indicator (C2) analyses three different themes: public service, governance and funding. It also includes a field for remarks (C3) to include any relevant aspects for further analysis.

This sheet has been completed on the basis of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which allows for the identification, analysis and reporting of certain patterns (Boyatzis, 1998). This technique primarily focuses on one (semantic) level, where themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data. In other words, the analyst does not look beyond what has been said or written (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The analytical process involves description, where data has simplicity and has been organised to show patterns (Patton, 1990).

To ensure the reliability of the coding, each political programme has been analysed in parallel by the authors of this research (double-check).

3.3. Semi-structured interviews

The analysis was complemented by semi-structured interviews with seven experts in PSM. The interest of this contribution lies in challenging what experts in academia maintain with the factual propositions drawn from policy approaches. It is about obtaining explanatory and contextual knowledge (Kaiser, 2014) and constitutes a complementary method to thematic analysis.

The interviewees were Francisco Campos, University professor at Universidad Santiago and expert in public service media; Ramón Zallo, Professor of Audiovisual Communication at Universidad País Vasco and expert in structure, economics and audiovisual policies; Javier Marzal Felici, Professor of Audiovisual Communication at Universitat Jaume I, expert in audiovisual policies and political economy of communication; Karen Donders, Professor at Vrije Universiteit Brussel and researcher in European media policy, media economics and PSM; Maria Michalis, expert in European communication policy at the School of Media and Communication, University of Westminster, London; Marius Dragomir, Director of the Centre for Media, Data and Society at the University of Central Europe; and Minna Aslama Horwitz, professor and researcher at the University of Helsinki, linked to John's University in New York, specialises in media and communication studies. The interviews were conducted online between May 2020 and March 2021 and addressed issues related to the subject of the study, such as the space that PSM should occupy with the emergence of new platforms, public awareness and the funding and independence of PSM, among other issues. Through the thematic analysis of the interviews, we proceed to compare the speeches. This technique has served to carry out an intuitive classification that has nuanced and corroborated the data obtained through the content analysis carried out (Belzunegui Eraso, Brunet Icart and Pastor Gosálbez, 2012). The most representative testimonies on the current challenges have been chosen, as they provide specific knowledge on the subject and often present a neutral view (Van Audenhove and Donders, 2019).

Using this methodological combination, methodological biases and failures are avoided in order to optimise the validity and consistency of the findings thereof (Okuda, Benavides and Gómez Restrepo, 2005).

4. Results

4.1. Concept of psm

According to many experts, it is essential to redefine the concept of PSM and the role it should play in the current media scenario. Marius Dragomir (interview, 2020) believes that knowing the space of PSM with respect to the large platforms is a key issue. Karen Donders (interview, 2020) points out that "public broadcasters are more needed in this environment provided they continue to ensure the universal access to their offer, invest in service delivery to all people regardless who they are, where they come from and their ability to pay, focus on domestic and high-quality production definitely also in areas where commercial initiative is fairly absent (but not exclusively there), and they innovate services, aggregation and distribution for the common good". According Javier Marzal (interview, 2020) these public media must be able to offer quality entertainment, "but also quality, plural and diverse information that helps to strengthen the values of a fairer and more democratic society".

This concern can also be found in election programmes without there being major differences between the countries of one model or another.

Table 2. Proposals about Concept of PSM

Country	Political party	Proposal
Belgium	Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten	Information, culture, education.
	Centre Démocrate Humaniste	Promotion of independent and local artists; innovation.
	Groen	Flemish fiction, animated films and documentaries
	Démocrate Fédéraliste Indépendant	Promotion of cultural life.
Finland	Suomen kristillisdemokraatit	Transmit independent, regional and linguistically equal information and promoting national culture (production of Christian programs).
Austria	Österreichische Volkspartei	Greater variety of services and interactive media.
	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs	Freely accessible through the Internet, social networks and other emerging channels.
Netherlands	ChristenUnie	Public broadcaster programs may not disappear behind an online paywall, but it must be accessible enough.
	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie	Increase added value and focus on news and education, the Dutch and regional information.
Denmark	Denmark's Alternativet	Collaboration with private media, cultural institutions.
Italy	Movimento 5 Stelle	rethink its organisational structure in order to focus the content on the web
Spain	Unidas Podemos	excluding the outsourcing of information services
Portugal	LIVRE	provide a quality public service without direct competition with private channels
France	Europe Écologie Les Verts	Include the digital sphere.

Source: Prepared by authors.

As specific proposals, in Belgium, political parties define the public audiovisual service linked to information, culture, education (Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten); also, to the promotion of independent and local artists (Centre Démocrate Humaniste); to Flemish fiction, animated films and documentaries (Groen); or as a means of reference for the promotion of cultural life (Démocrate Fédéraliste Indépendant). According to Ramón Zallo (interview, 2020), “the increase within fiction offer generates hyper-fragmented audiences with dispersed imagination but there is still room for the great issues of information, democratic agenda and values, representation, mirror and public opinion, in addition to cultural, social and social issues, including collective myths and cultural and national identities”. Minna Aslama Horowitz (interview, 2021) aims for diverse national cultural production, archival preservation and other distinctive high quality content.

The defence of the most traditional values of public service is also present in Finland (Suomen kristillisdemokraatit; Vasemmistoliitto) and Austria (Österreichische Volkspartei; Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs). However, some parties to this model are aware of today’s media changes. Thus, in Belgium, in its broad programme on the public service, the Centre Démocrate Humaniste feels it necessary to anticipate changes, adapt and innovate in order to keep public service TV and radio attractive to citizens, while defending the obligation to maintain recommendation algorithms that invite their users to open up to new areas of interest related to their public service missions. The Dutch ChristenUnie and Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie propose the suspension of the paid streaming service NPO Start Plus, promoting greater accessibility to public channel content.

In Austria, the Österreichische Volkspartei focuses on the need to offer a greater variety of services and interactive media and the Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs points out that “in view of the massive change in user behaviour, public content for citizens must also be freely accessible through the Internet, social networks and other emerging channels”. Denmark’s Alternativet also defends the public broadcaster DR as a driving force and points out that, in the current media scenario, it would be necessary “to further engage and collaborate through private media, cultural institutions, procurement initiatives and public service media”.

In the countries belonging to the liberal model, the case of Ireland stands out, where mentions of the PSM have been found in practically all the programmes. They advocate for protecting their public service broadcasting, and not a single party questions its legitimacy in today’s media landscape, although some parties see a need to update its operation.

Finally, in countries following the Polarised Pluralist Model there is a certain concern among political parties to differentiate public service from private channels. As an example of this trend in Mediterranean

states, in Italy, the currently ruling party, the Movimento 5 Stelle, offered a broad political programme on the concept of public broadcasting in the country. The party proposed to rethink its organisational structure in order to focus the content on the web and pointed out that it has four basic functions: 1) Increasing media accessibility; 2) Focusing on local productions and cultural heritage; 3) Enhancing the country’s critical sense through information; 4) Guaranteeing control and supervision by public authorities. Unidas Podemos, in Spain, advocated excluding the outsourcing of information services and LIVRE, in Portugal, defended the maintenance of RTP to provide a quality public service without direct competition with private channels. In France, the party Europe Écologie Les Verts proposes a broader and more up-to-date concept of public audiovisual service that includes the digital sphere.

4.2. Governance and independence

The independence of PSM has been an issue widely studied by the academy. Francisco Campos (interview, 2020) links independence to eight areas: political, governmental, economic, trade union, social, religious, hearings and various lobbies. In María Michalis’ opinion (interview, 2020), independence has always been tested, throughout the years; it is not a new phenomenon. Having an established regulatory framework, and again independent, can help shield the PSB against political intrusions. Also, starting from a strong position, an established PSB with good levels of public acceptance and support can more easily fight back”.

In this vein, Karen Donders (interview, 2020) argues that, on one hand, “it is definitely possible to install legal safeguards to protect the editorial and also operational independence of public broadcasters”. This can be done through “media-specific regulation or even constitutionally”. On the other hand, the expert points out that “you can also look at this from a practice angle” through “professionalism and well-trained journalists (...) a strong management and a de-politicised Board of Directors”. Finally, “there should moreover also be a political culture that accepts that political meddling with public broadcasters is not a right when you get into government”. Javier Marzal (interview, 2020) argues that “it is not possible to absolutely guarantee this desired independence; but it is possible to create bodies and institutions, both internal and external to public communication platforms, to ensure the greatest possible independence”.

Table 3. Proposals about governance and independence

Country	Political party	Proposal
Germany	Alternative für Deutschland	The social representatives in the control bodies must be determined by the citizens.
	Die Grünen	Credible and independent public service broadcasting system.
	Die Linke	The broadcasting councils must be democratized.
Austria	JETZT – Liste Pilz	Real independence of the ORF through foundation funds and end of party dictates in the control body.
	NEOS	Changing management boards.
	Österreichische Volkspartei	KommAustria organised as an independent regulatory body.
Belgium	Centre Démocrate Humaniste	Change the composition of RTBF’s Board of Directors. Strengthen the missions of the Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel.
Denmark	Alternativet	Changes on board of DR.
	Det Radikale Venstre	Strengthen DR’s independence and secure support for independent media.
Sweden	Socialdemokraterna	Defend and develop the free and independent role of the Swedish public service media.
Netherlands	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie	More transparency BUSCAR
	Forum voor Democratie	the appointment of an independent Ombudsman and Supervisory Board.
	Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij	More transparency.
Italy	Movimento 5 Stelle	A public tendering process to elect the members of the Board of Directors

Spain	Partido Popular	Promote corporate governance guided by principles of professionalism, merit and capacity.
	Unidas Podemos	Consolidation of the renewal process via public tender.
Portugal	Bloco de Esquerda	Revision of the RTP’s management model.
France	Écologie Les Verts	A Board of Directors with a greater presence of social and professional members.
	Parti Communiste Français	Creation of a National Media Council.

Source: Prepared by authors.

Political parties belonging to the countries of the Democratic Corporate Model also consider a link between governance and independence to PSM. This trend can be found in Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, Die Grünen, Die Linke), Austria (JETZT – Liste Pilz, NEOS, Österreichische Volkspartei), Belgium (Centre Démocrate Humaniste, Groen), Denmark (Alternativet, Det Radikale Venstre) and Sweden (Socialdemokraterna).

Governance is also related to accountability. In the Netherlands, Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie and Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij promises more transparency with regard to programme costs or anchors’ salaries. In terms of management bodies, there are policies aimed at changing management boards by Austria’s NEOS, committed in 2018 to removing political interference from supervisory boards and other internal governance bodies, although it is a minority party. On the other hand, the Österreichische Volkspartei, today’s party in government, proposed in 2019 that KommAustria should be organised as an independent regulatory body, free from instructions, taking into account the convergence between media, telecommunications and information services. In Belgium, the Centre Démocrate Humaniste proposes in 2019 to change the composition of RTBF’s Board of Directors so that it is composed of an equal number of political representatives and representatives of cultural associations. They also propose to strengthen the missions of the Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel (CSA), in particular with regard to Internet content. In Denmark, the Alternativet party specifies - *inter alia* - the need for the board of DR to be appointed by an independent committee and to be composed of representatives with media expertise and a representative of the Danish community. The Dutch party Forum voor Democratie proposes the appointment of an independent Ombudsman and Supervisory Board.

This concern is exacerbated in countries belonging to the Polarised Pluralist Model, in line with the lack of independence of PSM in these states. In Italy, Movimento 5 Stelle presented in 2017 a broad policy agenda on the governance of public audiovisual media. This party proposes a model based on a public tendering process to elect the members of the Board of Directors.

The deadlock in the election of the Board of Directors, following the legal provision for a public competition, also took place in Spain for three years until the main political forces reached an agreement in 2021. In this context, in the 2019 elections, the implementation of the public tender system to end the management of the Provisional Sole Administrator was included in the programmes of Partido Popular and Unidas Podemos. Ramón Zallo (interview, 2020) points out that in this country “public media have been politicised spaces of political confrontation that have greatly deteriorated their function, legitimacy, identity, economy and prestige (...) Only with a prolonged exemplary practice can citizens be convinced of the value of public services”.

In Portugal, only socialist Bloco de Esquerda proposed a revision of the RTP’s management model in its election programme. According to this party, it would be important to eliminate the Independent General Council, a supervisory body, and to ensure greater transparency and accountability in the election of management and administrative bodies. However, it does not propose any concrete measures.

In France⁵, two political parties raised the need for changes in the governance of PSM for the 2017 elections, although they are minority parties, namely, Europe Écologie Les Verts y Parti Communiste Français. The former proposed a Board of Directors with a greater presence of social and professional members, but without rejecting political candidates; the latter promoted the creation of a National Media Council with the participation of elected representatives, professionals and users. In this regard, the bill presented in December 2019 by the Macron administration provides for the creation of the single-person parent company, France Médias, and also proposes changes in the governance of the audiovisual sector with the merger between the Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel and the High Authority for the Dissemination of Works and the Protection of Rights on the Internet.

4.3. Funding model

Legitimacy of PSM in Europe has been questioned by some political parties, although a minority of them have taken radical measures in their electoral proposals, such as the privatisation of corporations or the suppression

⁵ France has characteristics typical of both the Mediterranean and Northern European model.

of government support, on the grounds that they are instruments at the service of the government in power, or that it should be the citizen who chooses whether or not to receive (and finance) the public service.

Table 4. Proposals about funding model

Country	Political party	Proposal
Germany	Alternative für Deutschland	Abolish transmission fees. Free choice to subscribe to the service.
	Die Linke	Fee-exempt groups. Phase out advertising.
	Die Grünen	Phase out advertising.
Denmark	Denmark’s Liberal Alliance	Elimination of financial support for PSM.
	Enhedslisten - de Rød-Grønne	Direct fee proportional to income.
	Alternativet	Direct fee proportional to income.
Finland	Perussuomalaiset	Reduce “over-funding”.
Sweden	Socialdemokraterna	General tax on public services.
France	Europe Ecologie les Verts	Phase out advertising revise the TV ownership fee.
Belgium	Centre Démocrate Humaniste	Ban the monetisation of content.
	Démocrate Fédéraliste Indépendant	Abolish advertising.
Netherlands	Partij van de Arbeid	Streaming fee for companies.
Ireland	People Before Profit	Tax on digital media companies.
	Fianna Fail	Implement a new household broadcast charge.
	Fine Gael	Combating evasion and improving the rate of payments.
	Labour Party	Replace the TV licence with a public service broadcasting charge (PSBC) and intensify efforts to combat evasion.
United Kingdom	UK Liberal Democrats	creation of a licence fee commission
Italy	Movimento 5 Stelle	maintaining the public contribution
Spain	Vox	elimination of the regional broadcasting corporations
Portugal	Iniciativa Liberal	full privatization and open licences for transmission

Source: Prepared by authors.

In the democratic corporatist model, the conservative Alternative für Deutschland, which defends the free choice to subscribe to the service, promoted encrypting contents in such a way that only voluntary payers have access to it. In this model, the only similar proposal is that of Denmark’s Liberal Alliance, which proposes the elimination of financial support for PSM, although a deadline of 10 years was set to that end. The Danish party calls for the abolition of the compulsory licence and the funding of the DR through a subscription system, as well as the privatisation of TV2, the Danish state-owned commercial and public service broadcaster.

Another conservative party, Finland’s Perussuomalaiset, advocates cuts, reducing what it sees as “over-funding”. The proposed reduction would be charged against the universal tax affecting citizens and businesses. Expert Minna Aslama Horowitz (interview, 2021) reflects on these campaigns: “While PSM at least in Europe have always faced claims of their bias today’s situation seems eerily similar in mature and emerging PSM contexts. In mature countries the anti-PSM populist sentiments serve national commercial competitors that may wish to challenge PSM as online competitors, especially regarding news”.

Another trend in public policies proposals is the transformation of the contribution system. Indeed, for Minna Aslama Horowitz, “tax-based funding makes PSM vulnerable. But the time of the license fee is just about over”. The change proposed by Sweden’s Socialdemokraterna party is in line with the foregoing: when it took power, it approved in 2018 a shift from a TV licence to a general tax on public services based on personal income, a system that came into effect in 2019.

In this sense, several parties are proposing progressive taxes based on income or an increase in exemptions for groups with fewer resources. The programmes of Denmark’s Enhedslisten - de Rød-Grønne and Alternativet included a direct fee proportional to income. On the other hand, Germany’s Die Linke is considering certain

fee-exempt groups, such as people with different abilities and non-profit organisations. In short, the more progressive and left-wing promote a more equitable distribution of burdens by defending public funding.

Among the parties that somehow refer to PSM funding, the majority trend is towards phasing out advertising, a measure supported in Germany by Die Grünen and the left-wing formation Die Linke and France's Europe Écologie les Verts. In Belgium, the Centre Démocrate Humaniste advocates for banning the monetisation of content whose production has been supported by public funding, and the Démocrate Fédéraliste Indépendant party believes that advertising should be abolished in the long term, on the grounds that it undermines independence and affects programming proposals, which may be designed to attract audiences and advertisers, to the detriment of public service. In this case, according to their programme, the loss of revenue would be offset by the allocation of part of the revenue raised through the 'GAFA tax' (levied on large technology companies), supported by training. In their opinion, this measure favours the preservation of the audiovisual ecosystem by diverting these financial resources to privately-owned media. In the Netherlands, the social democratic party Partij van de Arbeid proposes a streaming fee for companies such as Youtube and Netflix, so that they contribute to maintaining "a fair and diverse media offer".

In the liberal model, Ireland's People Before Profit also refers to the use of a tax on digital media companies, such as Facebook, to fund public broadcasting. The Labour Party suggests an alternative to the current TV licence system but without defining the model; and one of the parties in the ruling coalition, Fianna Fail, wants to implement a new household broadcast charge, which would include exemptions for low and fixed-income homes, to replace the TV license and support public broadcasting.

Other parties advocate revenue reforms aimed at combating evasion and improving the rate of payments (proposals from Ireland's Fine Gael and Labour Party) or updating the concept of contribution to today's multi-platform television consumption. This is the case in France, where Europe Écologie les Verts considers it necessary to revise the TV ownership fee - a method it considers obsolete - towards a multi-screen, household-based one, which, according to the party, would result in more taxpayers paying less tax. On another front, the UK Liberal Democrats included in their programme the protection of BBC funding and the creation of a licence fee commission. For Maria Michalis (interview, 2020) the important thing is "like funding that is sufficient for the public remit, is secure, isn't negotiated on a yearly basis, is transparent and ideally links to the audiences the PSM serve (either directly through a licence fee or indirectly through taxation which is becoming increasingly popular)".

Within the Polarised Pluralist Model, Italy's Movimento 5 Stelle is the only party that refers to the funding model, as it advocates for maintaining the public contribution and, in addition, a single channel with advertising. The Spanish party Vox supports the elimination of the regional broadcasting corporations. Another party that advocates full privatisation is Portuguese Iniciativa Liberal, claiming it would save the public purse 300 million euros. The party also argues that there should be open licences for transmission and DTT for anyone, up to the technical limits of the spectrum.

These measures do not coincide with the opinion of all experts. Marius Dragomir (interview, 2020) points out that today "it doesn't make sense to impose too many restrictions on advertising on public media", although he thinks that "it is important for public service media to have a model of funding that is based as much as possible on public contributions to create that close link between the public and their media". Karen Donders (interview, 2020) points out that she is "a fierce proponent of a household fee", but that "some commercial funding is a good idea to ensure contact between public broadcasters and the real media world. But I am not so much in favour too high dependence on commercial means".

5. Conclusions

The results shows that PSM are a concern in the political sphere of Western European countries and during election campaigns its functions or functioning are discussed through proposals embodied in electoral programmes. Mentions were found in all 14 countries analysed, albeit with uneven attention. In some political contexts localised measures are rare (Greece, France), but in others, such as the Netherlands, Ireland, Belgium and Denmark, the PSM model is taken up by several political parties.

Funding is the issue on which there is most disagreement between policy approaches. The importance of this indicator in political programs could be due to the changes that our convergence culture is transforming developments in media funding (Freeman, 2017). The possibility of redefining the fee or establishing tax exemptions is raised by some progressive and left-wing parties in Germany (Die Linke), in Denmark (Alternativet and Enhedslisten - de Rød-Grønne) and in France (Ecologie les verts). There is also a tendency in the proposals to gradually reduce advertising as a source of income. This is the approach in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. Other parties are clearly committed to maintaining public service funding and even - according to several experts - propose para-fiscal taxes on advertising in media and audiovisual platforms and telecommunications or digital taxes. The contribution of large distribution platforms is referred to in the election manifesto of DéFi (Belgium), which supports the PSM receiving part of the income from the GAFA

tax; Ireland's People Before Profit; and the Dutch Partij van de Arbeid proposes a streaming tax for companies such as Youtube and Netflix.

However, more radical proposals can be found advocating for the abolition of financial support for the PSM. These include Portugal's Iniciativa Liberal and Belgium's nationalist conservative Vlaams Belang, both of which advocate for privatisation. In Spain, the far-right Vox party is proposing the shutdown of all regional public broadcasters. Denmark's Liberal Alliance suggests abolishing the compulsory licence in 10 years and funding public broadcasting by subscription, as does the conservative and Eurosceptic German party Alternative für Deutschland; in Finland, Perussuomalaiset, also conservative, advocates for cutting the budget for public broadcasting by reducing the citizens' contribution. In the Netherlands three far-right parties have referred in 2021 to the public broadcaster Nederlandse Publieke Omroep: The Forum voor Democratie and JA21 questions its independence, while the Partij voor de Vrijheid calls for the complete suppression of public broadcasting, as it considers its multiculturalism to be a departure from the country's traditional identity values. These ideas cannot be seen as a minority current. Although they are not governing parties, in some cases they have emerged as the third political force in their parliaments, which gives relevance to their speech. Sehl, Simon and Schroeder's predictions come true (2020: 15), "these attacks can be expected to continue, unless right-wing populist parties become the sole majority party (at which time they would become responsible for PSM, and would either seek to weaken or abolish PSM, or perhaps use PSM to their own advantage), or they will fade away".

As for the three dimensions addressed, many electoral texts refer to the definition of public service, although, in most cases, from a traditional perspective and linked to values such as quality, diversity or representativeness. Only a few parties specifically refer to the challenges posed by the current convergent scenario and formulate the need to adapt to changes in consumption and take into consideration internet distribution or social networks. Proposals are found in some parties of the Democratic Corporatist model (Austria and Belgium). In the view of the experts, there is enough room for European PSM, but with a differentiating nuance, which means that they must remain as entities that stimulate local identity and culture and favour a boost to innovation and reference productions. This aspect was already referred to by Bardoel and d'Haenens (2008: 343): "Traditionally, the political function of PSB in relation to democracy, pluralism and public debate was emphasized, but more recently socio-cultural goals, such as serving social integration and cohesion, cultural bonding and bridging, have become more prominent". However, it cannot be ignored that PSM "are immersed in a convergent ecosystem that must face the demands of an increasingly globalized structure" (Rodríguez Gómez and Rosique Cedillo, 2022).

Finally, independence and governance are the least frequently mentioned aspects despite PSM independence is now among Europe's most pressing issues (Llorens, 2019). Differences are found between the models of Hallin and Mancini (2004) and more developed policy proposals are located in the polarised pluralist model, although its effectiveness is doubted, due to the failures of public tendering procedures for the management of public service media in Italy and Spain. "State intervention in the media systems of Southern European democracies has been characterised by a logic of clientelism and instrumentalisation of public service media, as concluded, among other authors, by Hallin and Mancini (2004)" (Fernández Viso and Fernández Alonso, 2019).

In Italy, Movimento 5 Stelle made a proposal in 2018 to reform RAI's governance bodies. Two years later, the government has submitted to Parliament a bill to amend the Consolidated Text of the Act on Audiovisual and Radio Services, whose main novelty is the creation of the RAI Foundation, managed by a Board of Directors of eleven members, chosen from among people with a proven professional career and recognised independence, and whose mandate would last six years. The aim is to overcome the usual political games in the distribution of broadcasting control. In Spain, despite the approval of a public competition for the election of RTVE's Chairperson and Board of Directors, the process has finally materialised in an agreement between the main political forces.

6. References

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