



International Association for Media and Communication Research
Asociación internacional de estudios en comunicación social
Association internationale des études et recherches sur l'information et la

The Lord Best, Chairmain
House of Lords Select Committee on Communications

5 October 2015

Dear Lord Best:

The [International Association for Media and Communication Research](#) - IAMCR - is the preeminent worldwide professional organisation in the field of media and communication research. Its members promote global inclusiveness and excellence within the best traditions of critical scholarship in the field.

IAMCR aims to support and develop media and communication research throughout the world. It particularly encourages the participation of emerging scholars, women and those from economically disadvantaged regions. IAMCR was founded in 1957, has members in more than 100 countries and its annual conference in July 2015 in Montreal attracted 1,300 registered participants.

On behalf of IAMCR I would like to submit the attached evidence for the consideration of the House of Lords Inquiry into aspects of the BBC Charter Renewal.

Yours sincerely

Professor Janet Wasko
President, IAMCR
5 October 2015

Evidence submitted by the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) to the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications, 05 October 2015.

Inquiry into aspects of BBC Charter Renewal: the public purposes of the BBC, who should set the licence fee and the BBC's scale and scope

The International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) is the pre-eminent worldwide professional organisation in the field of media and communication research. Its members promote global inclusiveness and excellence within the best traditions of critical scholarship in the field. IAMCR aims to support and develop media and communication research throughout the world. It particularly encourages the participation of emerging scholars, women and those from economically disadvantaged regions. IAMCR was founded in 1957, has members in more than 100 countries and its most recent annual conference in July 2015 in Montreal attracted over 1,400 participants. Further details may be found at: <http://iamcr.org/>

1. Introduction

1.1. IAMCR welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications. We hope that by drawing on the knowledge and research of scholars in many countries, including the United Kingdom, we might be able to present some evidence and observations of use to the Committee.

1.2. We include an Appendix consisting of short statements written for this submission and addressing the concept, practice and potential of public service broadcasting (PSB) in the Arab World, Belgium, Canada, Italy and Mexico. For these and many other countries a distinction is increasingly being drawn between state and public broadcasting. Where states or governments seek to control the content, especially the news, and to link funding to 'good behaviour' then public outlets may find themselves enfeebled and increasingly not trusted (Smith, 2012: 10-14; 57).

2. The public purposes of the BBC

Q1. Are public purposes the best way to judge/analyse the BBC's performance?

2.1. The BBC's public purposes appear to be an appropriate way of judging performance as long as these purposes are appropriate to the contemporary world, to universally available technologies and to the national and international context in which the broadcaster operates. The six current purposes, of interest to all countries seeking to establish or improve public broadcasting, are

- To sustain citizenship and civil society
- To promote education and learning
- To stimulate creativity and cultural excellence
- To represent the UK, its nations, regions and communities
- To bring the UK to the world and the world to the UK
- To help ...deliver to the public the benefit of emerging communications technologies [including] the switchover to digital television

2.2. In respect of the last purpose - regarding the benefits of new technologies - we are concerned that some national Governments now consider the use of private subscription services (via cable, satellite or the internet) as the long term policy solution for the delivery of television and radio programmes that are currently delivered, directly to households, over the airwaves. We caution against the loss of spectrum for use by broadcasters since such a development might contravene a missing seventh purpose: universal availability with a service free at the point of use for all within the nation state. We note the observations of young people in a small sample study included in a recent UK Parliament report that online-only availability would exclude those whose 'parents cannot afford internet or fast internet' or who live in 'areas that have a poor internet connection' (House of Commons, 2015:136). We would urge, therefore, the addition of a universal access purpose.

2.3. The British regulator Ofcom has recently investigated the strengths and weaknesses of PSB and endorsed '...the BBC's original Reithian mission: *to inform, educate and entertain*'. Ofcom also underlines the requirement that '...PSB content should be universally available to all citizens' (Ofcom 2015: 1) (1). The principle of universality remains despite the evident speed of change in the communications industries, the increasing interest in Video-On-Demand, Internet Protocol and Catch-up TV.

2.4. Some of the evidence provided by Ofcom and others identifies a series of weaknesses and threats that undermine key elements of the public service. We examine two of these here related to the purposes of stimulating 'creativity and cultural excellence' and representing the 'nations, regions and communities'.

2.5. *Creativity and cultural excellence.* Ofcom's figures indicate that levels of spending on originated output (new programmes) has been going down in the British PSB sector since 2003 and this has had adverse consequences across a range of genres. Media consultants Oliver and Ohlbaum point out that in the period of five years from the banking crisis in 2008 to 2013 spending decreased from £2.9 billion to £2.4 billion showing a 17 per cent decrease in real terms. Among the PSBs in this period spending on Drama and Soap has gone down by 31 per cent, on Sport by 33 per cent, on Arts and Classical Music by 27 per cent and on Children by 19 per cent. These figures include programme investment by all the PSBs and show a five year trend from 2008 to 2013 (Ofcom, 2009: 67; 2014: 49; Oliver and Ohlbaum, 2015: 3).

2.6. However, despite this general picture of declining investment the BBC plays a positive role according to Ofcom, showing *more than twice as much original programming as all the other PSBs combined*. Moreover the BBC provided just over half of the investment made in original content by all British PSB contributing £1.27 billion out of a total PSB figure of £2.5 billion in 2013 (2014: 37; 2015c: 3). It is perhaps this fact that explains the popularity of the BBC which, across all of its TV channels, attracted a viewing share of just over 33 per cent of the total UK audience in 2014. Taken as a whole and including all their channels, the British PSBs (BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Five) attracted 72 per cent of the audience in the same year with overall satisfaction levels apparently rising from 69 per cent in 2008 to 79 per cent in 2014 (Ofcom, 2015b:197; 2015c: 3). On an annual survey of 'would be missed if it wasn't there' BBC scored 78 per cent in 2014 compared with its nearest PSB rival, ITV on 69 per cent and with non-PSB Sky on 45 per cent; though the BBC had

slipped a little from an 82 per cent rating in 2009 (House of Commons, 2011: Ev50; NatCen, 2015: 1).

2.7. However, despite continuing positive responses from audiences, across the board production costs have been driven down in part because of intensified channel competition within and without the PSB sector, reductions in the value of the licence fee and increased competition for advertising spend. Less money has meant a move towards less originated content (especially in day time) and a move to cheaper genres. Reality TV programmes, for example, are likely to be cheaper to make than long-running documentary investigations and fewer high quality dramas have been made over the last few years. One expert commentator suggests that the pressure to obtain international co-production investment or to sell into international markets means that some drama ‘...may have to lose some of its Britishness to broaden appeal’ (Oliver and Ohlbaum, 2015:77). This is a problem facing many countries and reduces the potential for commissioning original stories and comedies that speak to the current reality of different national experiences.

2.8. It is clear that the BBC is a big player both nationally and internationally and when it sneezes others may catch a cold – this is true not only for audiences but also for producers and for the wider creative industries sector in the UK. And matters could deteriorate further along with the proposed reductions in the value of the licence fee. A Frontier Economics report of 2015 suggested that the BBC invested some £2.2 billion in the creative industries in 2013-4 (including hardware and software as well as in programme-making, music commissions etc.). This also included some £450 million invested in ‘small and micro creative businesses’ widely seen as ‘an engine of creativity and growth’ (Frontier, 2015: 3-4). The BBC was also a key risk-taker and contributor to the emergence of the Video On Demand (VOD) market through its timely and persistent investment in the new ‘catch-up’ technology of the iPlayer.

2.9. Some of the various kinds of investment indicated above are arguably now at risk following the British Government’s Licence Fee settlement with the BBC in July 2015, a week or so before the launch of its first formal public consultation on the renewal of the BBC’s Charter.

2.10. The pivotal national role played by the BBC (apart from the value of its international reputation and presence) is confirmed in a 2015 report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). They note:

...PSBs currently spend more of their revenue on original UK TV content than non-PSBs; in 2013, the PSBs accounted for 85% of total first-run UK TV content spend. In this context, the BBC accounted for around 40% of total UK first-run TV content spend in 2013, despite representing a fifth of TV industry revenues. (PwC, 2015: 11)

2.11. This suggests that the BBC punches well above its weight when it comes to the effective use of British licence fee payers’ money and that the diminution of its role will have correspondingly negative consequences for viewers and listeners.

2.12. *Giving a voice to nations, regions and communities.*

We note with interest that British broadcasting legislation requires that designated PSBs provide services specifically for the populations in the four nations of the UK. The varied size of the national populations makes the production of services for each quite a challenge. This is because England constitutes 84 per cent of the UK population (53.9 million people), Scotland 8 per cent (5.3 million), Wales 5 per cent (3.1 million) and Northern Ireland 3 per cent (1.8million).

2.13.The PSBs have a duty to recognise the cultural and political interests of the nations in a variety of ways from the most expensive – the production of network drama, for example, reflecting the specific character and quality of place and of national culture (itself likely to be highly diverse) - to the daily provision of national news and current affairs. In addition there are some services offered in different languages for example in Welsh, in Scottish Gaelic and, in Northern Ireland, in Irish Gaelic and in Ulster Scots. Ofcom note that ‘the importance people place on their Nation or region being portrayed fairly to the rest of the UK has increased...since 2008’ with concerns about the allocation of broadcasting resources intensifying in the run up to and after the Scottish independence referendum of 2014. In addition some local BBC radio stations, a number of community radio stations and some of the recently established local television services broadcast in a much wider variety of languages.

2.14.The political violence of the so-called ‘troubles’ in Northern Ireland and the conflict between UK unionists and Irish nationalist republicans resulted in quite high levels of local news provision; while local commercial radio and BBC radio remain ‘...among the most listened to radio services in any part of the UK’ (Ofcom, 2015d: 6).

2.15.The last thirty years has also seen a growing demand for UK-wide network programme production to take place within the nations and regions and not, as was previously the case, predominantly in the capital city of London. By 2014 5.2 per cent of this production was taking place in Scotland with 3.2 per cent in Wales, 1.2 per cent in Northern Ireland and 22.5 per cent devolved to the north of England. The BBC has led the way here with a major devolution of production spend from London to Salford (Ofcom, 2015d: 8).

2.16.Despite its continuing provision and variable popularity in the nations and in up to 15 different English regions, this special strand of PSB broadcasting in the nations has suffered disproportionately compared to the already mentioned reductions in PSB spending since 2008, seeing a 31 per cent reduction between 1998 and 2014 (Ofcom, 2015e: 29).

*Q2-4.*No response

Q5. Who should decide what the public purposes are? What body, combination of bodies and/or individuals? Are there any comparisons with other organisations which would be useful to inform the debate?

2.17.We think there may be useful examples from other countries (for example Germany) where extensive work has been undertaken to try to ensure that the voices

of civil society are heard alongside those of politicians and regional and national Government.

Q6-8. No response.

Q9. *Should the BBC do anything beyond its public purposes?*

2.18. The BBC is widely respected on the world stage as an open and fair-minded broadcaster. It is also a powerful ambassador for British culture, values and exports. We are concerned – from what we understand to be Government funding decisions that preceded the 2015 consultation on the Green Paper – that the BBC’s role both in the UK and in the wider world may be cut back quite considerably. We regret this and hope that some reconsideration of the level of resources allocated might be possible. We also note, as outsiders, that the level of foreign ownership of British broadcasters and production companies appears to be rising quite considerably. We hope that the attendant pressures to develop stories and forms of entertainment that may be more easily ‘exportable’ does not diminish the distinctive British voices that we have come to expect as one of the strengths of this national broadcaster.

2.19. From our point of view the survival of a strong, risk-taking and imaginative BBC is important for audiences and policy makers in other countries as well as in the UK.

3. Who should set the level of the licence fee?

Q1. *What are the positives and negatives of the way the settlement has been reached in the past? How should the settlement be reached for 2017?*

3.1. It is our understanding that in 2010 and most recently in July 2015 the British Government imposed substantial budget reductions on the BBC. We appreciate that Governments faced with large budget deficits, largely as a consequence of the global banking crisis of 2008, are determined to tackle these deficits. However, the combined budget cuts from 2010 and 2015 appear to us to amount to nearly 40 per cent of the BBC’s budget in 2009 and therefore have the power to transform the BBC into something unrecognisable by past users. (Hunt, 2010; Osborne 2015). We consider that the licence fee-funded BBC while accountable to Parliament is a distinctive entity and should not be confused with either a government department or a local government service. We suggest that the licence fee is by no means a conventional tax and should not be seen as such by Government.

3.2. Moreover, the House of Commons Select Committee for Culture, Media and Sport was itself highly critical of the way in which the 2010 licence fee settlement was reached - behind closed doors and with no public consultation:

No future licence fee negotiations must be conducted in the way of the 2010 settlement: the process must be open and transparent, licence fee payers must be consulted and Parliament should have an opportunity to debate the level of funding being set and any significant changes to funding responsibilities.

3.3. The Select Committee’s *Future of the BBC* report went on to assert that ‘... income from the licence fee ... be used only for the purpose of broadcasting or the

production of public service content on television, radio and online’ and proposes that ‘...the Government must be prepared to remedy any existing spending commitments agreed in 2010 so that those not deemed appropriate for funding through the licence fee are met by other means such as general taxation’ (House of Commons, 2015: 87; 90).

3.4. These now seem extraordinary comments in the light of the subsequent 2015 licence fee settlement which took place barely 5 months after the publication of the report cited here. This recent settlement appears to have used a similar behind-closed-doors method, without any scope for consulting the licence fee payers or Parliament. This second speedy and effectively secret negotiation required the BBC to take on a substantial welfare payment cost – licence fees for the over-75s - by no stretch of the imagination a ‘purpose of broadcasting’ and a responsibility that had been rejected by the BBC Trust as unacceptable when proposed during the 2010 licence fee talks. Moreover the Chairman of the Select Committee at the time of publication of the report went on to become the key Minister and Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, responsible for the July 2015 licence fee settlement.

3.5. The *Future of the BBC* report also expressed concern that the independence of the BBC had been compromised by the manner and substance of the 2010 negotiations. In answering Question 2 below we therefore seek to identify new mechanisms that might offer some insulation from inappropriate Government pressure and a degree of suitable independence for the broadcaster.

Q2. What alternative mechanisms exist for setting the fee, and what are their advantages and disadvantages? In each case, how might independence from government be achieved and protected? Are there any useful international comparisons?

3.6. We note some of the positive proposals in the British Government’s current consultation on the renewal of the BBC Charter and appreciate its determination to find a new model for funding the BBC appropriate to the age of the internet when listeners and viewers have access to an array of devices able to relay audio-visual material, films and television programmes, along with an array of online video-on-demand services also on offer, notably Netflix.

3.7. The Green Paper (DCMS, 2015) notes with interest the German household levy introduced in 2012, payable by all households and not linked to the possession of any one kind of receiving device. Detailed economic mapping work as well as careful constitutional checks were undertaken in Germany and similar work will be required in the UK if the decision is taken to adopt what is arguable a more radical and more realistic model of funding. The papers given at a conference in Bonn in 2010 explore some of the many aspects and challenges of this new way of doing things (Bonn Conference, 2010).

3.8. The German model also includes an independent body responsible for overseeing a three-step process: (i) preliminary identification of a possible licence fee/household levy amount, based on costings and proposals from the broadcaster; (ii) independent expert scrutiny of costs and (iii) civil society comment and evaluation of the process.

3.9. New technologies, the converged media landscape and the availability of online ‘catch-up’ services should be taken into account in considering how payments should be made. However we favour the model of universal access to a public service, free at the point of use. We would not, therefore, support either the use of encryption technology or the linking of payment to the amount consumed.

4. Is the BBC’s current scale and scope appropriate to meet the current purposes of the BBC? (Supplementary question from 18 September 2015)

4.1. Fixing the BBC’s future income (as appears to have been done in early July 2015) prior to embarking on a public consultation regarding scale and scope seems illogical since the funding base will to a large extent determine both scale and scope. The UK Government appears to have decided, at least provisionally, that the BBC should be significantly reduced in scope.

4.2. In our view scale and scope are determined by the PSB remit to inform, educate and entertain, to offer a diverse programme suitable for different tastes and interests and to offer something of value to all on the ‘something for everyone’ principle.

Qs 1-3. No response

5. Conclusion

5.1. In many parts of the world where violence has been a daily reality the BBC through its World Service and other outlets has served as a beacon of rationality, providing largely accurate and reliable information. The BBC has been a widely trusted institution and has served internationally as a persuasive ambassador for the United Kingdom; it is a ‘brand’ of considerable value on the world stage. It would be a terrible irony if this voice of reason were to be silenced or severely diminished not as a consequence of physical violence, but as a result of political responses to the fiscal chaos and austerity that have followed in the wake of the western banking crisis of 2008.

Note

(1) The UK’s public service broadcasters, as defined by the 2003 Communications Act, are the BBC, Channel 4, ITV1, Channel 5 and the Welsh Fourth Channel.

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Appendix (Statements on Public Service Broadcasting from five countries: Lebanon and the Arab World, Belgium, Canada, Italy and Mexico).

1. Public service broadcasting in the Arab World

Dima Dabbous, Assistant Professor, Lebanese American University

The impetus to reform the broadcasting sector, especially the ailing state-run broadcasting, was one of the major outcomes of the Arab Spring uprisings. This was particularly the case in

countries that witnessed regime change (such as Tunisia and Egypt), but also in neighboring countries where governments sought to deflate the mounting dissatisfaction among their citizens who were pushing for serious democratic reform, and more human rights and media freedoms (e.g. Morocco and Algeria). In response to demands for greater freedom of expression and the lifting of state control over the media sector, active steps were taken to enshrine greater media freedoms in the constitutions of several Arab countries (Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt), and to introduce laws and regulatory frameworks to democratize the media in general, and to make state broadcasting more independent and responsive to the public's needs. Such reforms were often based on external support and advice from international organizations that are specialized in the promotion of media freedoms and the plurality of expression (UNESCO, ARTICLE 19, Reporters Without Borders, etc.).

Up until the start of the uprisings in Tunisia in December 2010, publicly-owned television and radio stations in the Arab world were still suffering from the same “ailment”: they were exclusively mouthpieces for the government, were not independent in their administration and sources of funding, and were not accountable to the general public (in its diversity) or serving its interest. Indeed, the development of national media in the Arab world, which is relatively recent, went hand in hand with the rise of nationalist, anti-colonial movements and Arab media became closely associated with the mission of nation-building undertaken by authoritarian Arab governments. More importantly, the concept of “public service” broadcasting (as a matter of public policy in general, but also as it applies to national media in particular) was never part of public or official discourse and did not evolve organically as it did in Western Europe in the early 20th century.

In one recent comparative study of public service broadcasting in eight Arab countries, qualitative interviews with activists and members of civil society revealed the extent to which many respondents (most of whom are professionals and human rights activists) were not at all familiar with the basic components of “public service broadcasting” (PSB). This lack of knowledge was at times alarming, particularly definitions put forth by some interviewees, which turned the concept of PSB completely on its head. According to some, the mission of PSB is to “convey the regime’s point of view”, its position to “the people” and “the world” and “to reinforce understanding between the people and those in power”. Interestingly, none of the 111 respondents surveyed in the study mentioned the various universal values ascribed to public service broadcasting and enshrined in the various international declarations and

conventions which relate to media and freedom of expression. Rather than see the role of public TV as one meant to serve exclusively the public, in its diversity, and as a forum for expressing critical opinions (including criticism of government actions and policies), public TV was seen by some Arab respondents as a “normalizing”, “homogenizing” tool which would bring together the people and their rulers. In the case of Syria, which is atypically extreme, respondents believed that the role of Syrian TV was to be a tool for “public relations” whereby the Syrian State could promote a positive image of itself through its publicly-owned broadcaster. Obviously, none of these “roles” falls within a public service remit as universally accepted. Indeed, this is what state-owned media do in authoritarian countries: serve as a propaganda tool for people in power.

Despite some noted improvements (mostly on paper) in the broadcasting sector due to the Arab Spring, recent mappings of the sector have shown that there is little evidence of real impact in practice. Using a variety of excuses related to security, governments in reality have been loath to relinquish control over state broadcasting. Existing private media, where they are allowed to operate, tend to have strong sectarian or factional backing and to serve very narrow political and economic interests, contributing to widening the schisms in many Arab countries (e.g. Lebanon and Libya). Most important of all, the notion of “public” and “public interest” continues to be an anomaly in Arab countries, since there is little understanding of what the public wants from its national media. Still, wherever some form of audience research was conducted, results have shown the predilection of Arab audiences for private national or regional television, and an aversion towards state-controlled broadcasting. The need for national coverage that reflects local interests and is more inclusive and representative of the diverse groups in society was also voiced.

Finally, it is worth noting that, according to some Arab activists interviewed (including media personnel), in the absence of a successful model for public broadcasting in the Arab world, the BBC was the quintessential example that was brought up to prove how things should be if a model of successful broadcasting that works in the public interest is to be introduced in a given country. It would be ironic to see such an example of best practice being dismantled at the very moment when its existence is crucial for introducing much needed reform of national public media in many Arab countries. 27 September, 2015.

2. Public service broadcasting in Belgium

Daniël Biltereyst, Professor in Film and Media Studies, Ghent University

In the late 1920s, the Belgian government decided to get rid of the various private radio initiatives, which existed in the small kingdom, and established a state monopoly on all broadcasting activities. Although the creation of a public service broadcasting system (PSB), which started in 1930, served clear political-economic and ideological interests, it is interesting to notice how the BBC model played, right from the beginning, an important role in legitimizing this monopoly, first on radio and then in 1953 on television. Even up till today, defenders of the public service broadcasting system often refer to the BBC as an idealistic, quasi-nostalgic model in terms of social responsibility, impartiality, and of a cultural-educational ethos. One major difference, however, throughout the history of the Belgian PSB system was that the broadcaster's independence in terms of information was at times heavily tested, mainly in terms of attempts from the government and political parties to influence particular news items. The politicizing of the broadcaster was most strongly felt in the recruitment of staff members, mainly among journalists and managers. Political influence was felt in both parts of Belgium where separate PSB institutions continue to operate.

Although in the French-speaking southern part, Wallonia, the monopoly of the RTBF (Radio-Télévision belge de la Communauté française) was already broken by foreign channels quite early on, it was only in 1989 that a commercial television channel (Vlaamse Televisie Maatschappij) challenged the Flemish PSB broadcaster BRT (Belgische Radio- and Televisieomroep, subsequently re-named VRT/Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie). Ever since, both PSB institutions have been part of an intense struggle for audiences and legitimacy. After ever more competitors in the market and a series of internal reorganizations, new commercial strategies and management practices from the private sector were brought into the PSB system, ultimately leading to a sustained and substantial market share. For example the five radio channels of the Flemish VRT have a joint market share of 61.2 per cent, while their three TV counterparts have a share of 40 per cent. Both in Wallonia and Flanders, the public service broadcasters have mixed sources of finance, consisting of public money and a number of other private revenue sources (sponsorship, advertising, merchandising etc.).

In Belgium as in many other European countries, the PSB model continues to be a contested political issue, as much in terms of its public service remit and obligations, as in respect of its

financing. In the French-speaking part (where social-democrats continue to have a stable power base) the old PSB model continues to be defended, but the situation tends to be quite different in the Flemish part of the country. The 2014 elections that brought forward a strong majority for nationalists and liberal-conservatives have had quite dramatic implications for the Flemish public service organization VRT. Ever since the election the new government - clearly supporting free enterprise and encouraging entrepreneurship – has developed a policy which tries to reduce the PSB's position in the market. In addition to severe cuts in public funding and a reduction in the number of staff members, the new Minister of Media decided to impose a downsizing of the third TV channel (mainly aimed at young children). This included the closure of several online activities, including the VRT's cultural information site *Cobra*, and an end to the financing of programs representing different religious and philosophical currents in society. The government claims that it wants to preserve a smaller and more flexible PSB with a clearer focus on news, information and culture, but it uses the current economic and budgetary crisis to implement a policy that strongly endangers the traditional PSB's mission. September 28, 2015.

3. Public service broadcasting in Canada

Gaëtan Tremblay, Emeritus Professor, Université du Québec à Montréal

The media system of a society has an important role to play in the pursuit of the common good and it is thus from this starting point that I will discuss the contribution of public service media to Quebecois society and to Canadian society. From various definitions of public service we can extract the following synthesis: an activity judged to be in the public interest by society and recognized as such by the State. Such an activity cannot be left to private interests and abandoned solely to the laws of the market. The State assumes, directly or indirectly, the responsibility and the control, subjecting it to special law if necessary.

In the UK, the British Broadcasting Company, founded by Marconi and managed by John Reith, broadcast its first program in 1922. Converted into a public corporation with a Royal charter in 1927, financed by a Post Office license fee and presided over by John Reith, its objective was to inform, educate and entertain with total independence from political power and commercial pressure. Reith defined the BBC's role as “to bring the best of everything to the greatest number of homes”.

Current Canadian broadcasting policy is defined and regulated by the 1991 Broadcasting Act. Here it is specified that “the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, as the national public broadcaster, should provide radio and television services incorporating a wide range of programming that informs, enlightens and entertains”. The CBC, also called the Société Radio-Canada (SRC), broadcasts in English and French and in a number of aboriginal languages. The Corporation is generally characterized as playing an important role, for example, in the change in consciousness that led to the Quiet Revolution in French-speaking Quebec and the development of a more secular and more egalitarian society.

Public service media have a primary role to play in the access and appropriation of knowledge and the sharing of knowledge by all the individuals and groups that constitute a society. In the age of digital networks, and the enormous potential they embody in terms of supporting social inclusion (as well as in challenging its opposite, social exclusion) - public service media must more than ever fulfill their mission of informing citizens, contributing to their lifelong learning, stimulating their creativity and helping them share their creative worlds with their fellow citizens.

In terms of information, history has demonstrated the immense contribution that public service media - independent from political power – can make to democratic life. The BBC is one obvious example both in the British context and globally. The history of SRC/CBC, while more modest in scale, is no less remarkable. One notable illustration is how revelations made on the SRC program *Enquête* led to the Charbonneau Commission and the current fight against corruption in Quebec.

In Canada, and even more so in Quebec, the concentration of media ownership has reached frightening proportions. In this context, one should not underestimate the contribution of SRC/CBC to the pluralism of information and opinion, both indispensable to the vitality of democracy. Further, the resources it dedicates to local and regional news – unfortunately constantly threatened with repeated budgetary cuts – are critical for understanding local issues. SRC journalists constitute more than half the journalists in all of Quebec. They are well-trained, well paid, and adhere to high standards of quality. Their contribution to democratic life in Quebec is beyond estimation.

The interactive nature of digital networks opens up new dimensions in popular education. Public service media, through their mandates, are obliged to explore these dimensions, to stimulate innovation so they may benefit disadvantaged populations. It is up to public service media to assume a leadership role in popular education innovation. SRC today offers over 3000 programs and educational resources on the website.

The new challenges of the digital age make public service media all the more pertinent. We must give it the means to innovate, to renew itself in order to better assume its socio-cultural mission rather than let it slowly suffocate by constantly choking off its financial resources. This task cannot be adequately accomplished without proper public education and the participation of the public. Decision-makers must implement participatory mechanisms to recreate their mandates, reaffirm their relevance, make their offerings known – through digital media as through conventional – and open themselves up to the creative contributions of their publics. To fulfill this mission, the public service must be able to count on dynamic human resources and public funding that meets its needs. 25 September, 2015.

4. Public service broadcasting in Italy.

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The subject of public service broadcasting is of topical importance in Italy for two main reasons: on the one hand, the government recently announced its intention to reform it, and on the other, the franchise for public broadcasting granted to the RAI by the state will expire in 2016. The public debate generated by these two events has often given rise to reference to the BBC as a model to aspire to, as its qualities are recognised unanimously by professionals in the field, experts and politicians alike. Although most of those who contribute to the debate do not know in detail the governance, organization and activities of the BBC, and not least, the problems the corporation is facing at the moment, there are certain aspects which play a role in the BBC being seen as an “idol” in Italy. Of those often cited, we can outline the five main aspects. The first is its funding and governing model, which ensures, much better than in Italy, the independence of public broadcasting from political and economic forces. The second is the ability of the BBC to represent the identity of the UK and be a recognisable national symbol worldwide. The third factor concerns the credibility, balance and independence of information transmitted by the BBC on an international level and the production quality and cultural standard of its programs. The fourth factor is the ability to

apply the spirit of public service to the web, creating a website which has proved very popular. The fifth factor is how the corporation has been able to reduce running costs considerably over recent years and make the corporation more efficient. It is above all for these reasons that public debate on the matter in Italy continues to regard the BBC as the archetypal public service broadcasting model that Italy should seek to emulate

The public broadcasting service in Italy has always been run by RAI, a state company whose board of directors is chiefly appointed by parliament. RAI has historically played a social and cultural role of great importance. On the one hand, it has been able to strengthen collective identity and social cohesion, presenting a shared idea of what Italy is. On the other hand, it has provided extensive access to culture and information in a country where people do not read newspapers very much and books even less, in a country where the availability of cultural events is lacking outside the big cities and is especially lacking in the South. The most significant cultural achievement has been to promote the widespread use of the Italian language and enrich the vocabulary of everyday life of a nation that, until the 1950s and 1960s, mainly spoke a collection of regional dialects. To this day, the functions that RAI performs represent one of the greatest achievements of public television in Italy and continue to be of topical interest, even if its limits and are increasingly more evident nowadays. Today, public service broadcasting in Italy has to face up to several significant challenges regarding, in order of importance: its relationship with political power; its relationship with income from advertising; its relationship with audience fragmentation; its relationship with the Web. The most serious criticism levelled at RAI by public opinion is its lack of independence from political power, and especially from the government. Every political party is present within RAI on a proportional basis reflecting its electoral popularity and on whether the party is in government or opposition. This has a negative effect, not only on the content of programmes and news, but also on the appointment of managers, as they are selected on the basis of their political affiliation rather than their professionalism. The second criticism regards the fact that advertising income contributes inordinately to the funding of RAI and heavily influences the programs broadcast, rendering the corporation increasingly similar to the main commercial television networks. Progressive audience fragmentation, due to the proliferation of digital channels and increase of choice offered by the Web, are contributing to the continual decline in numbers of viewers attracted by state TV channels and is reducing the legitimacy and identity of the public broadcasting service. Another pressing challenge for RAI is the development of its web services, which can no longer be considered fringe

activities, but rather require significant economic and professional investment that RAI has till now been unable to provide. 23 September 2015.

5. Public service broadcasting in Mexico

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The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was one of the models used to design the Mexican Public Broadcasting Service. In fact, the passing of the Mexican Public Service Broadcasting Law (Sistema Público de Radiodifusión del Estado Mexicano) in 2014 was strongly inspired by the long-term achievements of the BBC during its 94 years of history, particularly its contributions to British culture and democracy, and the positive role it played in establishing standards of universality, impartiality, independence and integrity in its programme-making, and in its cultural diversity.

Mexico, as an emerging democracy and a multicultural nation, faces many issues in its efforts to improve its democratic and cultural practices. Mexican civil society long ago identified the important role of a public broadcasting system in the development of democracy and culture and for decades advocated for a national public broadcasting system, based on the BBC standards, that would be a voice for citizen empowerment and a window for cultural citizenship.

The Mexican Public Broadcasting Service is starting to build the key social, political and cultural role that was historically played by the BBC as a central engine of a national communication system. It is important to note that Mexico's broadcasting system has historically been predominantly private with ownership concentrated a tiny handful of companies -with two companies controlling 90 per cent of the television stations, 97 per cent of audiences and 98 per cent of advertisers. A public broadcasting system with a significant presence is imperative if Mexico is to balance the logic of private ownership with a public service mandate.

However, this new Mexican PBS has important challenges, which can be summarized as follows: (a) to achieve practical independence of government; (b) to achieve universal

coverage; (c) to produce quality content that reflects the political pluralism and cultural diversity of the nation and (d) to guarantee, from public funds, the permanent and substantial resources that will be required to fulfil its mandate.

In practical terms, the first challenge is to actually establish the new public broadcasting service and start producing programming that provides plural and diverse information on the main issues facing the nation; the second is to guarantee universal access: at the moment, only in 16 of Mexico's 32 states do people have access to the PSB signal.

24 September, 2015. /end