

Television in Russia

Is the Concept of PSB Relevant?

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In the traditional Western discourse on commercial and public service broadcasting, little attention was given to the state TV model which was present in many countries of the 'Socialist' block, and in many Asian states as well. Strictly speaking, public service broadcasting [PSB] is not a common concept shared and implemented by different countries in a similar way, but rather a continuum that implies different modes of interaction between the society, audience, state, and social institutions. In many European countries – France, Germany, Netherlands, Finland, Spain, – PSB practices indicate varying degrees of control and interference from political forces, governments and state agencies (Weymouth and Lamizet, 1996, Euromedia Research Group, 1997).

The model of Western European PSB provides clear evidence that the state as a social agent is not an entirely antagonistic force to public service. On the contrary, "some forms of accountability to (political representatives of) the public, other than through market forces", was traditionally considered a key public service element (McQuail & Siune, 1998: 24). This has led to the acceptance of some forms of content regulation embodying positive and negative criteria which, in turn, were shaped by the need to serve the *public interest* more than commercial, political or consumerist interests of society and audience. In Western Europe, there were fierce tensions between the goals set by 'society' in relation to the public interest and demands of the audience as consumers (McQuail, 2000:157).

Dissimilar to this, post-Socialist societies experienced another tension paradigm. Under new names as public service broadcasters, former state broadcasting monopolies have been put under subordination to local political elites which, in turn, attempted "to ensure that broadcasting developed in the desired direction" (Sparks, 1998: 162). The particular case of debates about potentials of public service broadcasting and the development of TV in post-Soviet Russia has illuminated many vital issues in the PSB debates. Soviet broadcasting was, from its very inception, non-commercial. The dan-

gers of commercialisation started to be felt only in the 1990s with the massive introduction of advertising. But the concept of *public* radio and television was compromised via its connection in many minds with the continuation of state control and the subordination of the interests of the audiences to the Government. The pervasive Soviet concept of television as an instrument of power made Russian media and the public elite cynical about independent public bodies, and thus deprived them of credibility from the start of the debate.

Historically, the dual State/Communist party dominance was the key feature that distinguished the Soviet television model from the two alternative models, e.g. the US privately owned commercial model and the Western European public service model. In present Russian circumstances, the state still maintains strong relations with national TV channels, demonstrating the existence of a 'third way' model. The state TV or, more accurately the state-controlled TV, reflects specific realities of the Russian political situation in which the role played by TV is mostly assessed through its manipulative potentials in election campaigns. More generally, in Russian circumstances the definition of 'state' is often used to mask the influence of 'the government of the day' and new political and financial elites known in the Russian context as 'oligarchs'. This is evident both at national and regional/local broadcasting markets where federal and local authorities, together with corporate business, exert fierce pressures on local TV companies.

This chapter is devoted to the development of TV in post-Soviet Russia. The old system of state owned, state funded, state and party controlled broadcasting has collapsed. The 1990 Media Law opened the way for non-state and private broadcasting. We aim to analyse the process of conceptualising new approaches in Russia to broadcasting and its relationship with the state, public and private capital, new ways of funding, and new programming concepts determined by these new circumstances.

Broadcasting in Russia (1991 – 2001): Ups and downs of the PSB concept

In the last decade, the Russian TV landscape has changed fundamentally. At the time of the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, all TV channels were owned, financed and controlled by the state broadcasting monopoly – the State Committee for Broadcasting (*Gosteleradio*). It broadcast on five national TV channels, with two having almost universal geographic coverage. The First Channel was received by 99,8% of all households in the USSR and had a generalist programming scheme with a strong emphasis on news and current affair programmes. The Second channel (95% of population) transmitted documentaries, children's and cultural programmes, TV drama, and provided regional content from regional branches of the *Gosteleradio*. The Third

and the Fifth channels had a particular regional focus on Moscow and St-Petersburg, respectively. The Fourth channel broadcast educational programmes for school children on specific school topics, and for adults as well.

The Soviet radio system had an even more diversified structure, aiming at universal coverage of the entire USSR territory and offering a variety of radio programmes targeted to different social groups, ages, and audience tastes. Technically, radio was widely spread throughout the country: Gosteleradio broadcast over 14 national and many local channels, providing diverse programming for mass and segmented audiences. Although radio was strictly controlled by the Party and various state agencies, there was a certain degree of impartiality and free thinking. The popularity of humorous and music entertainment, programmes for children of different ages, and radio theatre was high compared with political radio programmes. Cultural and art radio programmes made important contributions in the promotion of Soviet 'high culture' among the population (Sherel, 2000: 72-78).

It is clear that the Soviet broadcasting system fulfilled several important functions traditionally associated with the PSB concept in Western Europe. The geographic universal coverage and financial accessibility of services, as well as contributions to national identity, language and culture, are perceived as characteristic features of PSB (Raboy, 1999; McQuail, 2000). These are easily identified in the practices of the dually controlled Soviet TV. The crucial difference was a propagandistic and manipulative role assigned to Soviet broadcasting by the political elite, e.g. the Communist party and *nomenklatura*. Yet even here, one finds the legitimating reasons for PSB and state TV seem rather close. As Sparks puts it, "the starting point for public service broadcasting is the need of programming, rather than the need of profitability" (Sparks, 1998: 157). But in the Soviet Union 'the programming need' of Soviet broadcasting was to act as a "means to realise the process of dissemination of ideas, theories, socially significant information and education of social sentiments, habit, motivations, intentions, etc" (Politizdat, 1984: 31). In other words, both approaches strongly focus on content and its value, albeit for different intentions.

Together with the basic functions of the Soviet media as collective propagandist, agitator and organiser, the concept of *democratic centralism* was used to safeguard the concentration of political and ideological power in the hands of the Communist Party and the submission of minorities to the majority. In this light, the idea of serving minorities, which is implied in the philosophy of PSB as one of its basic pillars, clearly opposed practices of Soviet broadcasting. On the other hand, internal cohesion of society as part of its missionary task was within the scope of Western European PSB discourse. The evidence indicates that the Soviet concept of broadcasting was within the same rational and socioeconomic continuum as the concept of PSB itself, although the Soviet case represented the extreme end of this continuum when assessing the intensity of ideological pressures and its dependency upon the *nomenklatura* (Brants, 1999: 232).

In practice, this all resulted in the high centralisation of Soviet broadcasting with programming policies that were completely subordinated to needs of the ruling political elite. As Paasilinna bluntly wrote, “there was a Party television in the Soviet Union. Everything else in television broadcasting was secondary to this purpose” (Paasilinna, 1995: 130). Although heavy ideological dependence of Soviet TV on the political strategy of the Communist Party remained self-evident, the idea of serving the society (or at least the proletariat, the dominant class of the society, headed by the Communist Party) was quite explicit in the concept of national broadcasting. Therefore in the course of Gorbachev’s ‘top-down revolution’, the *perestroika* economic course and *glasnost* media policy became a specific Soviet instrumentality to impose reformist social and economic innovations from the top of the power hierarchy on the society.

In the new historical circumstances, broadcasting was perceived as a key social institute to carry into practice the democratic intentions of the reformist Party leaders. Shortcomings of this policy became evident quickly: the lack of legal guarantees made broadcasting extremely vulnerable to political pressures, and consistency of broadcasting reforms was interrupted by numerous attempts of power elites to obtain immediate political advantages by instrumentally using TV but neglecting public interests. Recent Russian political history provides numerous cases of such attempts. But the idea of applying broadcasting as a tool or instrument to shape social values and improve social process is again very similar to Western PSB ideals.

In 1992, *Ostankino*, the reformed state owned national TV company, acted within traditions of public service television free from direct state censorship. This was symbolised and realised by the Ostankino company Director General, Yegor Yakovlev, one of the most popular journalists and the editor-in-chief, who successfully managed the *Moscow News* weekly in the new market conditions. Russian scholars pointed out that Yakovlev and his colleagues were well known due to their democratic views, professionalism and respect for the PSB concept as implemented in the BBC model.

Yakovlev was personally capable of transforming Ostankino into a truly public service company according to BBC principles (Tzvik and Kachkayeva, 1999: 276), but his independent position irritated President Yeltsin and the governing elite. He was unexpectedly dismissed and this signified the end of a short-lived period of editorial independence and efforts to apply the concept of PSB on the First national TV channel. The pressures were not only exerted by the political elite, however. The emerging commercial advertising lobby pushed for the restructuring of the Ostankino ownership to grab a substantial piece of former state property for their business interests, thus multiplying the opposition to the public service model in the Russian TV industry.

In 1992–1994 the Russian parliament tried to work out a law on broadcasting with a twofold aim: 1) to legitimise a dual TV system in Russia characterised by the coexistence of state and private TV companies already operating in the market, and 2) to introduce a more responsible and account-

able television model. The draft law envisaged certain public service elements: state TV companies funded by the Government were to be supervised by a nine member supervising board appointed by the two chambers of the Parliament and the President. That was proposed to safeguard Russian public broadcasting controlled by different political representatives and accountable to several competing centres of political power. The law has not been adopted. The idea of supervising councils fell on deaf ears and did not gain support from the Government or in the Russian parliament, the *Duma*. The dual – state and private – broadcasting system has instead been consolidated under the control of a new integrated financial–political elite, the oligarchs, thus resulting in the creation of a state-private TV system accountable only to media-political corporate capital (Zassoursky I., 2001: 80).

Still, the idea of PSB was supported by groups of civic activists and academics. They tried to promote the accountability of the state-funded companies to the public. But their efforts sadly failed and the way was open for various models of combining government and corporate control over broadcasting in Russia. The political legacy of Soviet state broadcasting survived in terms of the relations between government, power elites and broadcasting institutions and this is evident through the whole period of social and economic change in 1991–2001. In this case, both excessive political control and excessive commercial control signalled dangers and weaknesses in the growing new system of Russian broadcasting.

The oligarchic model of ‘public’ ORT

The First channel of the former Gosteleradio went through a long period of partial privatisation and structural reorganisation. It was separated from the formerly unified broadcasting monopoly in the early 1990s and renamed. The Ostankino company was later privatised and converted into a national share holding TV company by presidential decree on November, 30, 1994. This was the genesis of ORT, ‘*Public Russian Television*’ (Obshestvennoye Rossiskoye Televideniye). However, it did not actually anticipate any elements of public service as construed in Western Europe. There was nothing about such principles as accountability to the public or regulation of content in, for example, banning certain kinds of advertising, violence, and pornography (Siune & Hulten, 1998: 25). Instead, ‘*Public Russian Television*’ was gradually moving towards increased accountability to top politicians and powerful financial and industrial pressure groups, dependence on commercial advertising and reliance upon low taste and low quality programming.

Contrary to the recognised role of public and/or state ownership in protecting public service broadcasting from commercial pressures, the ORT corporate structure thus represented a strange symbiosis of new oligarchic capital with inflexible and technologically outdated state television property. Although in formal terms the majority of ORT shares were owned by several

state agencies (51% of all shares), the role of private banks, insurance and industrial companies (49% of shares) remained truly decisive in establishing managerial schemes appropriate to media-political capital interests. The control over top management established by Boris Berezovsky, one of the ORT private shareholders and a politician who secured his political carrier through his media companies, made him the true boss of 'public' Russian TV.

In these circumstances ORT became a mouthpiece for a select group of Yeltsin's allies to transmit their views to the nation. Berezovsky and the Kremlin administration, to which he had strong informal ties, enormously benefited from ORT institutional and managerial ambiguity. In 1996, during Yeltsin's re-election campaign, ORT acquired a reputation as 'the presidential channel' because of its apologetic support for Yeltsin. In turn, Berezovsky successfully translated the virtual capital he gained through ORT privatisation into political power to influence public opinion in Russia. With 36% of the shares under his personal control, combined with the weak state unable to manage and finance the ORT channel that was available to 98% of Russians, Berezovsky "headed the main Russian TV channel and explained to Russians what happened in the country" (Khlebnikov, 2001: 167).

The inclusion of 'public' in the defining name of the company could no longer camouflage the existence of this media-political system. It was only used to roughly mask mixed state-corporate exploitation of ORT with the dual goal of promoting the influence of the political elite by establishing tough controls over public opinion during election campaigns and garnering commercial profits through uncontrolled transmission of advertising. The channel was and still is financed mostly by advertising and remains under the total control of its executives appointed by the state.

The democratic model of RTR

At the start of the democratisation process in Russia, the democratic model was promoted by journalists of the Russian broadcasting company (RTR), created in the Russian Federation but in the frame of the Soviet media system in 1990. For its operations, RTR obtained Channel Two of the former Gosteleradio, which was separated from the Central Ostankino television company. The idea of competition, in contrast to the 'old' Soviet TV monopoly, was integrated in the concept of new Russian TV. Political confrontation between Gorbachev and Yeltsin resulted in the first real step towards destroying the monolith of state-owned TV, although the state duopoly that emerged in the early 1990s still had a very long way to go to acquire a clearly competitive structure (Vartanova, 2001: 45).

Similar to the attempts of Yegor Yakovlev to renovate ORT in 1992, RTR's drive for democratic values have been associated with Oleg Poptsov who was the head of the state broadcasting company run by All-Russian State Television and Radio Company [VGTRK] in 1991–1996. McNair described

Poptsov's activity as a personal attempt to preserve the public (as opposed to commercial) sector as the only strategy for introducing BBC-style PSB into the practices of Russian TV:

[RTR] regularly received only 30 percent or so of its agreed annual state subsidy, and became dependent on advertising and sponsorship. In the face of this slow starvation (and *de facto* privatization) RTR, and its head Oleg Poptsov in particular, ran a principle campaign to retain public sector status, on the grounds that Russia needed at least one publicly owned TV channel, free of advertising if possible, and dedicated to the pursuit of the public service goals in programming (McNair, 2000: 89).

Poptsov's approach to state TV in the service of Russian society was based on his professional experience as a democratically-minded journalist with a strong belief that pluralism in news coverage, professionalism in bridging the gap between political rhetoric and reality, and criticism of government policies, might guarantee the state TV partial fulfilment of public service obligations. Until the Presidential elections in 1996 he managed to maintain a fairly high degree of autonomy in defining RTR programming policy, thus reflecting his respect for PSB values and journalistic norms in a democratic society. So this was an attempt to create a democratic model for the new state television premised on the principles of serving the public first and foremost.

It is however remarkable that even within the current mixed TV landscape the state remains the key player in the Russian TV market. In fact, the TV industry is the only segment of the Russian media where the state maintains the controlling position. Fully 50% of programming is provided by state-controlled TV channels. They also receive 70% of all TV advertising. This strange symbiosis of state ownership and commercial models of financing in the TV sector might be explained by its under-financing, but this is also crucial for the competition between state and private channels, especially in regions.

In terms of national coverage, RTR is the second biggest channel with a generalist programming scheme. However, it is clear that nowadays news and current affair programmes at RTR are used by the state to provide Russians with information that is favourable to the government and the President. Again the television started to be used for the propaganda and public relations of the state. At the same time, it has become fairly open to commercial interests since the bulk of its revenues came from advertising.

The state controlled model of NTV

Vladimir Gusinskiy, the owner of the Most-bank, went into to the media business. In 1994 he consolidated his property into the Most Media corpora-

tion which started a broadcasting company, NTV. The company positioned itself as an independent broadcasting outlet and rapidly gained recognition with the public. Its independence dramatically accentuated the servile position of state controlled TV channels in mid-1990s. But then NTV used its popularity in co-operation with its competitor, Berezovsky dominated ORT, to push Yeltsin to victory in his campaign for reelection in 1996. As a kick back NTV got the license for broadcasting, previously used by the Russian educational channel. Most Media also paid for the launch (by a USA provider) of a broadcasting satellite which allowed Gusinsky to start a satellite TV company, NTV+.

However Gusinsky differed with President Yeltsin's policies on the war in Chechnya, and this independent stand taken by NTV irritated the President's administration. Gusinsky's company could not pay for its numerous media projects and had to seek loans. These came from the state monopoly, *Gazprom*. At the peak of the conflict Gusinsky was accused of mishandling the *Gazprom* loan and for a time was even put into the Butyrki prison.

Gazprom Media [GM] went to the courts to recover the loan from Most Media. The legal decision authorised GM to become a major shareholder in NTV. The ensuing battle for the control of the popular channel led to public protests, but anyway ended in the *Gazprom Media* take-over. The most militant group of journalists, headed by the editor in chief Yevgenie Kiselev, left the channel and went to TV-6, owned by Berezovsky who accommodated their continued broadcasting activities. This led to drastic changes on the TV-6 channel that started a new concept of broadcasting based on the principles of NTV. For several months in 2001-2002 TV-6 and the *Gazprom*-owned NTV were simultaneously on the air competing for the audience.

Under *Gazprom Media* control, NTV changed its previous independent position and in practice became state controlled through the mother-company – the state monopoly *Gazprom*. As a result, four out of five national Russian TV channels were state-controlled. The new NTV-*Gazprom* company became a new model for tying television to the state and government. The change in NTV editorial policies was evident, although it retained most of its previous programmes for which it had the copyright. Moreover, in competition with successful TV-6 it was reduced to a clone trying to win back its former audience – the audience lost due to popular dissatisfaction with the *Gazprom* take-over of NTV. Thus the privately owned NTV, which came close to the PBS model in its independent programming policies, was taken back to the Government-corporate controlled model (very close to that of the ORT) and, in reality, quite the opposite of the PSB model.

The TVS private model of quasi-public television

The success of TV-6 disturbed its state-controlled opponents and they used legal pretexts based on unclear aspects in the transfer of the former NTV

team (headed by Kiselev) to oust them from the TV-6 channel. They succeeded in getting an injunction against TV-6 and, by a court decision, their program was switched off the air in the middle of the night program. Kiselev's team had to find a new sponsor. After long negotiations a new company, 'Socium', was formed. It included most oligarchs who agreed to let Kiselev act free from their direct pressure to create a kind of public broadcasting service sponsored by the money of the very rich. Embattled by attempts to serve the public in privately owned TV, Kiselev argued for an option to develop PSB type channel under the auspices of a consortium of wealthy people and prominent politicians. For this purpose he developed a new structure of funding, management and programming in the new replacement service, TVS, which was *carefully* arranged with checks and balances to exclude pressure from financial, commercial, governmental and political parties in order to promote objective journalism on the pattern of public service broadcasting.

The private share holding company of Socium, *Shestoi kanal*, is owned by a group of so-called 'natural resources oligarchs' controlling major oil, electric energy, aluminium and other industrial and financial companies, which comprise the basis of the Russian economy. The Directors of the Company include major figures in Russian business – A. Chubais, R. Abramovich, O. Deripaska, the Chairman of the Russian Chamber of Commerce, Y. Primakov (the former Prime Minister of Russia), and the President of the Society of Industrialists, A. Volskiy. The broadcasting license for TVS (Channel 6) belongs to a non-commercial partnership, "Media-socium" which is to serve as an intermediary between the owners and the journalists. The later is headed and directed by the editor in chief, Kiselev, whose rights and obligations are set in a special treaty between the journalists and the Media-socium, which thus serves as a link between the journalists and the owners of the channel.

Kiselev had to rename his broadcasting company, changing the name from TV6 to TVS. It resumed broadcasting under the new abbreviation. It was indeed an attempt to create quasi-public television funded by big business corporations which united to create an independent (or at least free from state agencies' pressures) national TV channel in the face of almost unchallenged state domination in the national television market.

The nine-member Board of Guardians was established to promote editorial independence from any pressure on the part of the state, management and other interested parties, and thus to counter any attempts to establish direct or indirect censorship or submit broadcasting to the interests of political or financial groups. This move stresses the public service profile of the channel. The Board is comprised of prominent Russian public figures and experts in broadcasting with respect for high ethical standards. The Board is comprised of three candidates from the non-profit partnership Media-socium, three candidates from the shareholders of the share holding company "The Sixth Channel", and three candidates representing the public. The Board of

Guardians is an important mechanism for transparency of the channel, and also an important link with the public.

The substitution of the public interest by the state interest promotes etatism in the media sphere (Zassoursky, 2001: 188) and TVS seems to be challenging the etatisation onslaught on the Russian television market. The non-profit partnership Media-socium is financially independent of the State and the Government, the funding comes from private sources of the corporations which voluntarily accepted the obligation to respect the independent character of the content of the broadcasting, the independence of editorial policies. In this case, the Board of Guardians is to safeguard the public interest against the pressures of both the state and the corporations. This concept of broadcasting is different from the traditional West European PSB vision via basing its public character on an alternative consensus of journalists, capital and the public – although the State retains its regulating function through the legal system.

In traditional PSB the state transfers its rights to public control via various forms of independent watchdog councils. In the non-profit partnership, Media-socium, the corporate forces behind it try to transfer their rights to the journalists through the Council of Guardians. Only future practices will prove the sustainability of this concept of serving the public that has already confronted certain difficulties from the advertising monopolists. And there other substantial differences compared with traditional PSB – Media-socium is best in its news service, but not strong at all in programming for children and for education. It also relies for revenue on advertising and entertainment and is targeted to the emerging Russian middle class.

Mixed TV system: The future of Russian PSB in a commercial TV landscape

By 2000, the number of state-owned and state-controlled TV companies remained the same but there appeared a multitude of commercial privately owned television stations which now outnumber the state owned TV companies more than ten times. According to the Russian Ministry of Press and Broadcasting, the authorities have issued 1,276 broadcast licenses in 2002 for TV broadcasting and 1,002 for radio broadcasting (Proekt doklada, 2002). The core of the Russian TV market is comprised of 9 channels available to more than 50 per cent of the population. They are:

- Three all-national federal channels though of different ownership: *ORT* with a mixed structure of state and private shareholders, the state *RTR*, and the private *NTV* owned by the state-controlled natural resources company Gazprom,

- Four federal TV networks: *TVS*, *Ren-TV*, *CTC*, *TNT*,
- Two regional channels with national distribution: state-owned and financed *Kultura* (Culture) and the Moscow municipal *TVC* (TV Centre).

The federal government maintains strong relations with the majority of nationally distributed state (formally) and private (informally) TV channels. This has put state-controlled TV in a very competitive and market-driven environment and the profit-making motivations are becoming essential for the bulk of TV companies regardless their ownership status. Expansion of the new commercial TV logic gradually erodes the basis for the still embryonic PSB in Russia, and its potentials.

Thus, future prospects for public service broadcasting in Russia remain rather vague. Increasing competition in the media field provides Russians with increased media choice and alternatives. A vigorous newspaper market offers new quality dailies in the sector of business press or weeklies. Quality entertainment is supplied by commercial TV channels and the video market, and by format radio stations. Educational and political analysis content is available through the *RUNET*, the Russian language sector of the Internet which invented a number of on-line newspapers and news portals truly competitive with offline media. So, consequently, one must ask if there is currently space for PSB in Russia?

Financial schemes

The reason the widely debated and publicly supported concept of PSB has failed to be implemented in Russian circumstances is mainly economic, since even the state-owned RTR and state-controlled ORT do not get sufficient state funding. They must heavily depend on advertising as a result of the lack of political will on the part of the government to support broadcasting as a public service institution.

The lack of financial resources is a fundamental obstacle preventing the development of the Russian media. The introduction of a license fee as a source of funding for public service broadcasting seems really unworkable in Russian circumstances for several reasons. The low living standards of the bulk of the population make it impossible even to put this idea to public debate. In addition, in the planned Soviet economy the state fully financed the broadcasting sector, thus establishing the tradition of 'free' access to TV and radio. These economic conditions are clearly a big part of the problem. One of the main causes of the problematic situation is a lack of positive regulation favouring the interests of developing civil society in Russia. As a result we see a political and industrial failure to support even the concept of PSB. On the contrary, the post-Soviet Russian combination of politics and industry, i.e. the state and commerce, has contributed to the oligarchy with egoistic commercial interests and a deplorable neglect of the public interest.

On the other hand, it is evident that the dependence on advertising leaves broadcasting open and particularly vulnerable to commercial interests because, generally speaking, advertising is considered to be a very risky source of financing for PSB (Curran & Seaton, 1997: 113-115). From this point of view, the economy of Russian broadcasting is extremely complicated, reminding one of 'the vicious circle'. Poor, undeveloped or ineffectively managed advertising markets do not produce enough profits to sustain broadcasting development, thus forcing private channels to seek financial support and extra benefits from state authorities. In turn, looking for additional sources, under-financed state channels progressively introduce more advertising, thereby increasing commercial pressures from the corporate forces. In terms of the programming outcome, this ambiguity creates a new form of openness described by the second author as 'permissiveness' with little regard for humanistic values or requirements of morality, and simultaneously creates a barrier to public access to knowledge about what is going on in society (Zassoursky Y., 2000: 25).

The contradictions and complexity of the Russian media situation are revealed in the advertising industry, as well. The commercial advertising sector remains extremely sensitive to even minor changes in the still unstable Russian economy. In contrast, the Russian market in political advertising has been demonstrating a constant growth and a relatively good financial performance. As a result, Russian broadcasting, to a greater degree than many other media industries, remains connected to the market of political advertising (Raskin, 2001). This trend becomes especially evident before and during election campaigns, signalling a serious deviation from media economics in market democracies.

Consequently it can be concluded that in recent years the only profitable and reliable source of revenue for the Russian media has been political advertising. In pursuit of economic profit Russian media are selling audience access to politicians and political elites instead of commodity and consumer service advertisers. Seeking revenue within markets in depression, media become increasingly dependent on politics and, as a result, reflective media diversity substantially decreases (Vartanova, 2000: 114).

Kultura: A single alternative?

But the picture of Russian broadcasting would be incomplete without consideration of the positive experience of state owned TV. Indeed, at least one such television channel has come quite close to the concept of public service in its practical activities. This is the *Kultura* (Culture) TV channel. As in RTR, it is operated by VGTRK, which plays a crucial role in producing and broadcasting cultural programs. *Kultura* has no political news or current affair programmes, but its depoliticised nature is one of its compelling advantages.

In terms of funding, Kultura is completely dependent on direct state funding which it gets through VGTRK. On the other hand, the channel obviously benefits from being free from commercial pressures. Established in 1997, Kultura was well accepted by Russians as a source of high culture, quality feature films and children programmes. Despite the limited share of viewers (not more than 5% of the national audience), the channel provides Russians with the shared space to promote national culture and new post-Soviet identity, and to preserve worthy traditions of the Russian and Soviet audiovisual cultures. In some respects, then, Kultura perfectly fits into the framework of PSB general shifts from political to cultural motives, putting new emphasis on aims of preserving national culture and identity (Bardoel, Brants & Plug, 2000: 96).

A new and unique combination of Russian quality culture programming and a European approach to TV news was created in March 2002, when Kultura began to broadcast Euronews programmes in the morning hours. The co-operation has been based on the VGTRK partial ownership of *Euronews* shares and its new strategy of integration into the European PSB landscape. By opening up new perspectives to TV diversity, Kultura shows a unique form of state financed television with modern interpretations of PSB obligations.

Conclusions: Developing civil society in Russia

Ten years of transition to a market economy and democracy have not produced truly independent public television in Russia. This poses a number of questions about the ways of creating a television model accountable to the public rather than to new political or financial elites. In 1993, President Yeltsin issued a decree "On the guarantees of the information stability and requirements of broadcasting" in which he proclaimed the need to create "a competitive system of state, public and private broadcasting" and introduced "the minimal standard of requirements of broadcasting". But the notion of public interest, so crucial to the concept of public service was ignored in this document and consequently in the activity of Russian broadcasting companies. As a result, the discussion on public service broadcasting has been recently resurrected by some sections of the television community that are dissatisfied with the instrumental and subservient use of television by certain state and private institutions and interests.

This has reflected growing tensions between the audience and the national TV channels. State-controlled channels are openly criticised for increasing etatism, while commercial TV is repeatedly accused of using the concept of 'the public' to mask their actual private aims. Even when some private television companies at national (NTV, TVS) and local levels try to become more public interest oriented, their attempts meet enormous economic and political difficulties. Actually, Russian TV channels move towards

programming schemes based on entertainment at the expense of news, current affairs and educational programs. Openness to political and commercial interests does not automatically lead to an increase in national educational and cultural programming. So far, politicisation and entertainisation have become the major trends in the development of Russian TV, and both stand far from the concept of public service broadcasting.

PSB, non-existent and unknown in the Soviet Union, has not attracted much attention within the Russian public for several reasons, but foremost because of the lack of two basic conditions for it. These are political will and public need. The lack of a balanced and diverse political system, and consequently a recognised need for the 'democratic public forum' indispensable in civil society, has postponed public debates on the relevance of PSB for years. The neglect of PSB by the major 'player' in the TV sector – the Russian media-political elite – actually withdrew the concepts of TV responsibility and accountability from Russian public discourse. In these circumstances it took almost a decade for Russian society to realise that national TV should be more than simply a tool or instrument in the hands of politicians or oligarchs striving for political dominance.

Growing awareness about the role of broadcasting in cultural and public life has definite roots in the Soviet concept of state television that, in addition to political goals, put a clear emphasis on culture, education and enlightenment. The specifically Soviet practice of 'insular TV' described the medium as a form of contemporary art that had particular aesthetic and cultural values. The existence of the 4th national channel that broadcast only educational programs for schoolchildren and instructive programs for adults remained an exceptional practice even for public service broadcasting. Therefore, the old Soviet TV had fulfilled at least some public service obligations (maintaining cultural identity, quality documentaries, educational programs) which were lost in early post-Soviet years. This tradition was maintained in present circumstances in a very limited scope via activities of the Kultura channel.

Balanced between understanding PSB relevance and opposition to the idea of publicly financed television, Russians are left to decide what type of TV they need. The political will of the State – the Government, the Duma, the local authorities – is required to create at least the legal framework for developing independent public service television accountable to the citizens of Russia. *Thus, public service broadcasting is both a part of and a condition for developing civil society in Russia.*

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