

November 2019

# country report

Media Programme South East Europe



## Strong Majority in South East Europe: Public Service Media Are Important for Democracy

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**Results of KAS Media Programme's survey on significance of public service media in ten countries of South East Europe**

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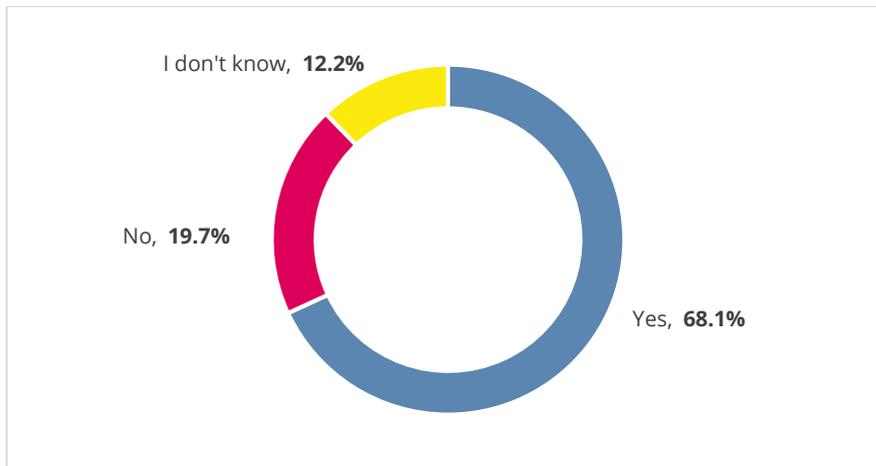
Public service media are also in South East Europe an important part of the media landscape. Their existence is enshrined in the law of all countries and their mandate is to serve the whole society by informing, educating, consulting and entertaining. They are not allowed to support unilaterally a single party, organisation or any other type of group. However, in reality the picture often differs. Public service media have repeatedly been criticised of being the mouthpiece of the government. Thus, this year on several occasions protests occurred against political interference in reporting and structures of the media. In spring public broadcasters in Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia were criticised, in the fall protests against the management of the Bulgarian National Radio followed (see country reports *"Public Service Media Under Crossfire by Protest Movements"* [March 2019] and *"Independence of the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) in danger?"* [September 2019])

The Media Programme South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) has taken a closer look at the current situation and developments of public service media in South East Europe the last couple of months. In a current representative opinion poll, over 10 000 people from all ten countries, which are covered by the Media Programme, were interviewed. How important do people find public service media for democracy? How much do they trust them? How should they be financed and what content shall be broadcast? And are PSM considered politically independent?

The survey is part of the new KAS book "A Pillar of Democracy on Shaky Ground – Public Service Media in South East Europe". The most important information on public service media in South East Europe is summarised in the book. Media experts from the respective countries write about the history, the legal framework, the financing model and organisational structures in place. For the first time, the Media Programme gives an overview on public broadcasters in the ten countries and an impetus for possible reforms of public service media in South East Europe with this project.

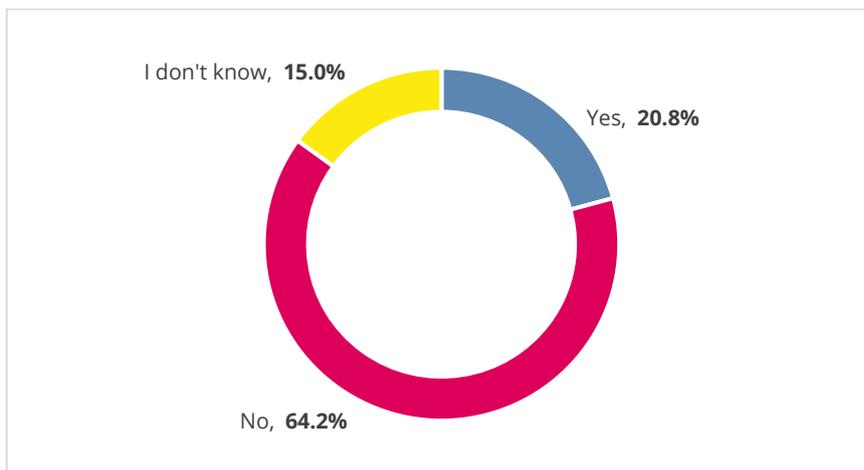
Hereinafter you'll find the summarised results for the entire region and some special findings for the individual countries.

## 1. Are public service media important for democracy in your country?



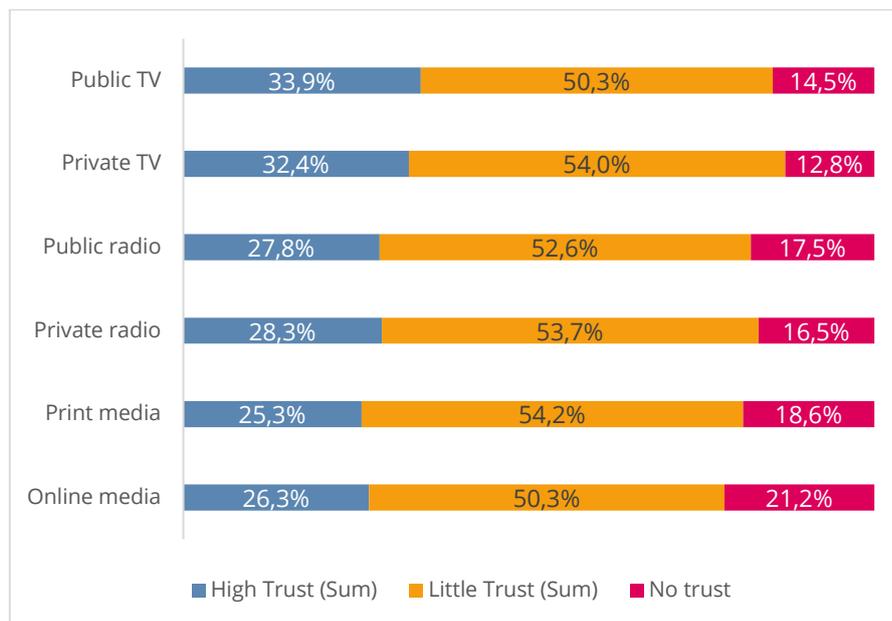
More than two-thirds of respondents in South East Europe consider public service media important for democracy. This underlines the importance of public broadcasters in the whole media system of a democratic society. This number is even higher in the surveyed EU Member States: Bulgaria (81 percent), Croatia and Romania (both 78 percent). Due to EU membership these three EU countries might have developed a stronger sense for democracy. People in North Macedonia and Montenegro (both 57 percent) as well as Kosovo (54 percent) are the least considering PSM important for democracy.

## 2. In your opinion, are public service media free from political influence in your country?



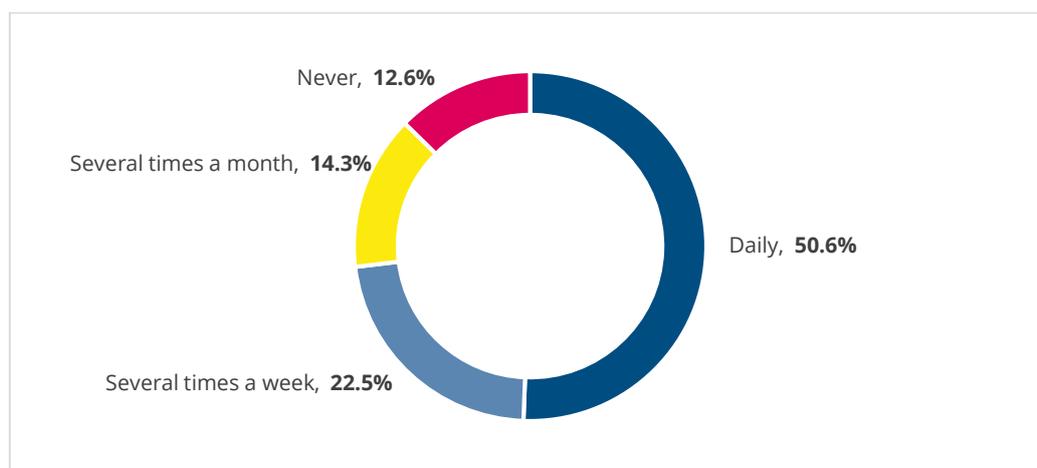
Although the democratic importance of PSM is very high in most countries, almost two-thirds of respondents see them under political influence. This confirms the criticism visible at this year's protests. In country comparison this percentage is higher in Bosnia and Herzegovina (88 percent), Croatia (83 percent) and Montenegro (71 percent), and the lowest in Albania (46 percent) and Kosovo (50 percent).

### 3. How much trust do you have in following media?



Citizens in the region do not have a high level of trust in any media channel. The range of the average rates for trust in each media channel shows that citizens do not point out any specific media channel that would be more trustworthy than others. Print and online media are the least trusted media sources while TV enjoys the highest trust without any difference between public or private providers. This also applies for the radio which is less trusted than TV. High-trust values for public service media compared to commercial media are higher in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova and Serbia. In contrast, private broadcasters are trusted more in the other countries. The highest trust in public service media can be recorded in Kosovo. Here 56 percent of people have high trust in public TV and 33 percent in public radio.

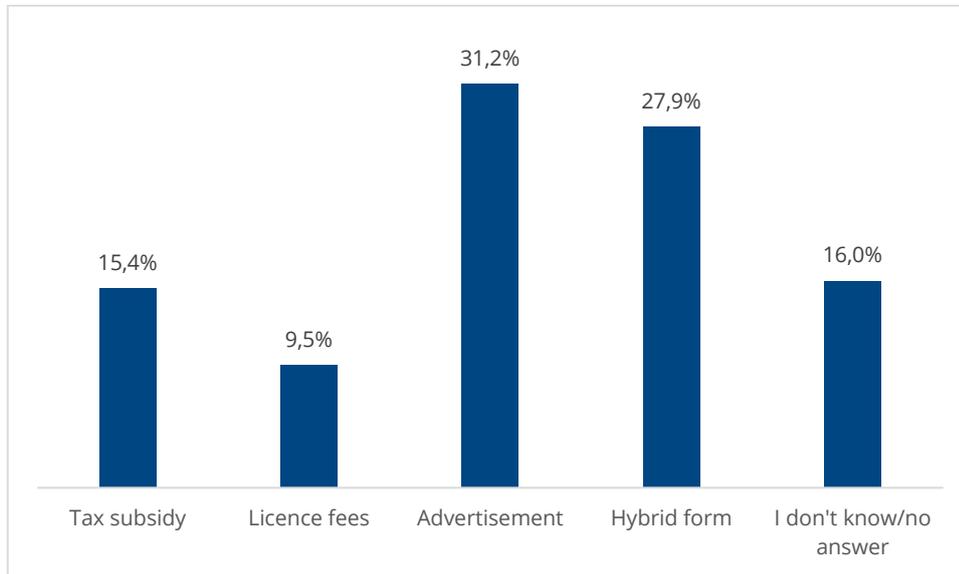
### 4. How often do you use the services of public service media?



On average, every second citizen in South East Europe uses daily the services of PSM. Adding the 23 percent watching and listening several times a week, almost three-fourths of the population use public service media frequently. This regular high usage shall be incentive for guaranteeing the independence and integrity of broadcasters as well as secure and sufficient funding. The percentage for daily use is higher in Bulgaria (71 percent), Croatia (69 percent) and Serbia (64 percent). While in North Macedonia (49 percent) and Albania (47

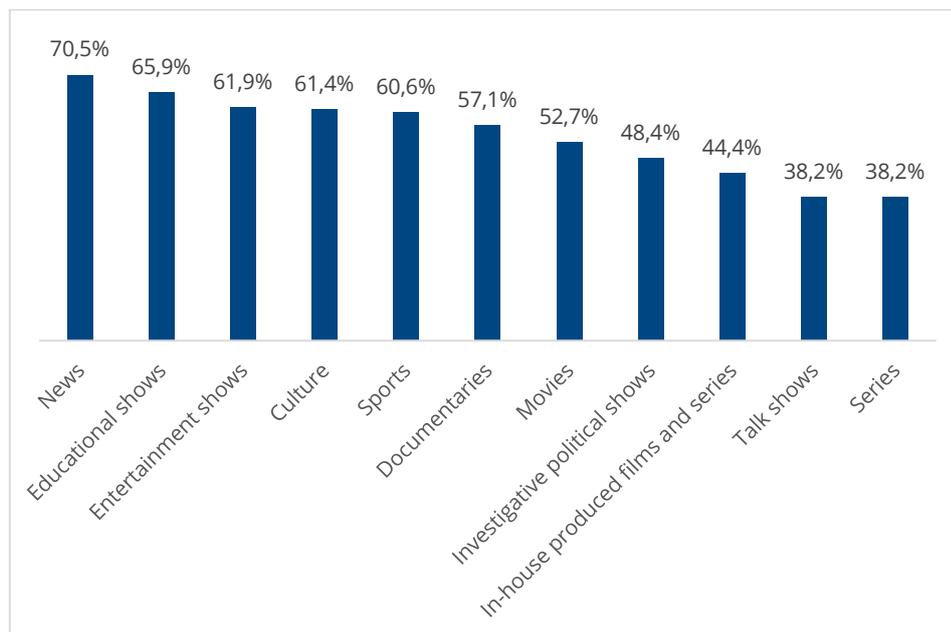
percent) PSM are rarely used (several times a month or never). This is especially astonishing for Albania where PSM enjoy higher trust (43 percent) and the opinion that PSM are politically dependent is lower with 46 percent, in comparison to the other countries.

### 5. What type of funding do you prefer for public service media?



The majority of respondents rejects any form of state funding and wishes that public service media are funded through advertisements like commercial broadcasters. Almost every third prefers this form of funding. High approval ratings for funding through tax subsidies exist though in Romania (25 percent); in Moldova it is even the preferred form of funding (45 percent). However, tax subsidies also cause higher dependence on the state and gives possibilities to influence the broadcasters. It can be thus assumed that the advocates for the tax subsidy accept this fact, in order not be asked to pay up. The second most given answer was hybrid form – a mix between licence fees and tax subsidies as well as advertisements. This type of funding is already common in all countries.

## 6. What kind of content should public service media present?



The respondents understand the public service media – according to its mandate – as a source of information, education, culture and entertainment, since these are on average the most asked contents. Especially in Moldova, Bulgaria, Croatia and Kosovo news are the most demanded content. Educational shows are in the first places in Romania, Moldova, Serbia and Albania. In Croatia however there is a high demand for documentaries. Talk shows and series play a minor role.

### General information on opinion poll

The institute “Ipsos” conducted the opinion poll in the ten countries of South East Europe. Overall 10 383 persons over 18 were interviewed in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania and Serbia during May to July 2019.

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