

Public Service Media in Montenegro - a Leaf Aflutter in the Wind

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Introduction

The year 2002 will go down in the modern history of Montenegrin media as a time of extensive reform, which was influenced by the international community and resulted in the adoption of the media legislative framework, notably the Law on the Media, Law on the Public Service Broadcasters Radio of Montenegro and Television of Montenegro and Law on Broadcasting. The formerly state-owned media outlet RTCG was restructured in the same year into a public service media (PSM), and the first Code of Ethics of journalists was adopted. One year later, with assistance from the OSCE, the first media self-regulatory body was established.

The transformation of Radio and Television of Montenegro (RTCG) officially provided citizens with a media outlet supposed to promote their interests. In his book titled 'Strateško pozicioniranje Javnog TV servisa: Komparativna analiza iskustava BBC-ja, RTS i RTCG', Zvezdan Vukanovic illustrates the editorial policy of the RTCG at the time:

'Rather than transform into a public service broadcaster, all the way until January 2003 the TVCG would remain a state/party bimedia company run by the political parties represented in Parliament, on behalf of the Parliament, as its founder... During this period, the influence of the ruling and political structures was notable. At the same time, the Television of Montenegro was run by predominantly partisan rather than professional staff who primarily pursued the interest of the political parties and the ruling elites'.¹

¹ Zvezdan Vukanović (2006) Strateško pozicioniranje Javnog TV servisa: Komparativna analiza iskustava BBC-ja, RTS i RTCG (Strategic Management & Marketing Positioning of PSB-Public Service Broadcasting: Comparative Analysis of BBC, RTCG-Montenegrin Radio Television and RTS-Serbian Radio Television), Podgorica: Internacionalna Akademija za medijski menadžment, p. 112.

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Five years after this transformation, it became evident that the changes were purely formal and that the RTCG continued to promote the interests of the ruling structure. Since 2007, public service media have been continually exposed to open political and economic pressure. Regression of the legislative framework, abolishment of the licence fee, dismissal of three former directors general and two RTCG Council members testify to the battle between different political factions for control over the media outlet. The PSM is financially dependent on the government in power and therefore unable to fulfil its obligation to citizens. The state allocates the funds from the national budget, verifies the appointment of the Council members via Parliament, advertises on the RTCG and has also committed to funding digitalisation. Political pressures and financial dependency largely impact PSM editorial policy, resulting lower public trust in the model.

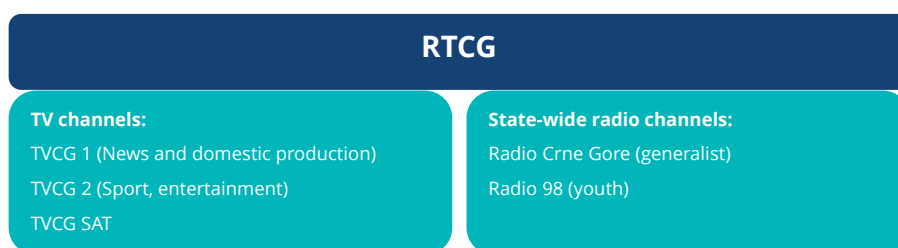
RTCG – transformation from a state media into PSM

Radio and Television of Montenegro (Radio i Televizija Crne Gore – RTCG) is the oldest electronic media in Montenegro, having launched radio broadcasting in 1949 and TV broadcasting some fifteen years later – in 1964. Radio Titograd, i.e. Radio Crne Gore as of 1990, broadcasts programme content on two channels, notably 'Radio Crne Gore' and 'R98'. The former targets the adult population while the latter seeks to capture the attention of the digital generation which has so far not been exhibiting much interest in the media.² The history of the first TV station in Montenegro can be traced back to 4 May 1964, when the first feature produced by the Montenegrin desk was aired on the news programme of TV Beograd. The citizens of Montenegro gradually received more opportunities to follow an established programme schedule, starting with the chronicle 'Kroz Crnu Goru' (Through Montenegro) and then a regular newscast from 1975 onwards.³ Nine years later, the RTCG received adequate premises for its work and in 1991 it started to operate as a single broadcasting system named Radio Television of Montenegro (RTCG). The TVCG currently broadcasts its programme on three television channels (TVCG1, TVCG2 and satellite channel TVCG Sat). Channel One broadcasts news programmes,

² According to IPSOS survey, only 19% of Montenegrin citizens aged 15-65 listen to the radio every day and 31.5% every week. Ipsos (2018) Crna Gora – Medijska Scena, [http://www.rtcg.me/sw4i/download/files/article/TV%20RTCG%20BRAND%20EQUITY%20AND%20IMAGE%20STUDY%20za%20objavljivanje%20\(1\).pdf?id=2061](http://www.rtcg.me/sw4i/download/files/article/TV%20RTCG%20BRAND%20EQUITY%20AND%20IMAGE%20STUDY%20za%20objavljivanje%20(1).pdf?id=2061) (date of access: 31 March, 2019).

³ RTCG (n.d.) Istorija, <http://www.rtcg.me/rtcg/istorija.html> (date of access: 01 April, 2019).

morning shows, documentaries, educational, children's programmes and a programme for minorities. Channel Two broadcasts entertainment, film, series, sports and youth programmes. The RTCG uses its satellite channel to broadcast programmes intended for the diaspora living overseas, promoting Montenegro as a multicultural and multireligious society.⁴ Seeking to modernise, it launched its online portal in 2013, with contents now available on the web or via a mobile app. The portal also contains an archive all of the aired content.



Since its establishment the RTCG has been controlled by the government of the day and changes in the political arena have also affected the media system. Before 1993 and the adoption of the Law on Public Information that enabled media privatisation, media pluralism and foreign investments in the media market, the public used to be informed exclusively through the state-owned media outlet. The 1998 Law on Public Information partly relieved the media from political pressure. Two years later, under the auspices of the Regional Table of the Stability Pact, Montenegro adopted the Charter for Media Freedom and thus committed to a major media reform. In 2001, the Working Group tasked with drafting media legislation was set up. It consisted of representatives of the media, media associations and the government and was led by the international organisations such as IREX, OSCE and Council of Europe. Its ten-month effort resulted in the adoption of the media laws intended to regulate the work of media in Montenegro. The Law on the Public Service Broadcasters 'Radio Montenegro' and 'Television of Montenegro' stipulates the obligations of PSM with regard to programme content but also provides guarantees for their independence through financing and governance bodies.

The regression of PSM in terms of legislation and financial dependence commenced in 2008. These factors were visibly manifested in the RTCG's news

⁴ RTCG (2019) Television of Montenegro 2019 Programme-and-Production Plan, Podgorica, , pp. 6, 22., <http://www.rtcg.me/rtcg/poslovanje.html>.

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programme, which was used by the ruling structure to advertise its activities. Even though, according to some surveys trust in PSM has been on the rise, developments over recent years testify to the open struggle between political parties for control over the RTCG.

In addition to external pressures, the RTCG faces a number of in-house problems, such as redundant staff, obsolete equipment dating back to 1984, and ineffective allocation of funds due to unprofessional management. For instance, in 2003 the RTCG had a staff of 1 014 with open-ended contracts and some 200 employees hired under short-term contracts.⁵ The next year, the number of employees was approx. 1 100; in late 2005, the number stood at 906.⁶ Currently, that figure is considerably lower (721) but the wages remain the biggest cost item on the budget. According to the 2019 Financial Plan, the RTCG will spend 8.46 million Euro on wages and 5.2 million Euro on programme production.⁷ This means that wages account for 48 percent of total expenditure while programme production accounts for only 33 percent. The broadcaster has been cautioned by European and national experts concerning its 250 redundant employees and the pursuit of a policy that further compounds its financial position. However, judging by the financial plans, nothing has changed despite the alarm bells raised, although the issue has been discussed in Council meetings. The expert public is particularly concerned by the nepotistic appointments, best illustrated by the fact that the staff of RTCG includes 156 close relatives.⁸

PSM – serving the citizens or political parties?

The RTCG, as a media outlet established, financed and controlled by the public, is required to broadcast content intended for all groups in society. Article 9 of the Law on the National Public Broadcaster exhaustively stipulates the programming

⁵ Milka Tadić Mijović (2009) *Transformacija RTCG u javni servis (zakonski okvir i praksa)*, master thesis, Podgorica: Faculty of Political Science, University of Montenegro, p. 50.

⁶ Zvezdan Vukanović (2006) *Strateško pozicioniranje Javnog TV servisa: Komparativna analiza iskustava BBC-ja, RTS i RTCG (Strategic Management & Marketing Positioning of PSB-Public Service Broadcasting: Comparative Analysis of BBC, RTCG-Montenegrin Radio Television and RTS-Serbian Radio Television)*, Podgorica: Internacionalna Akademija za medijski menadžment, 2006, p. 113.

⁷ RTCG (2018) RTCG Financial Plan 2019, Podgorica, p. 8, <http://www.rtcg.me/rtcg/poslovanje.html> (date of access: 27 May, 2019).

⁸ CdM / TV Vijesti (2018) U RTCG višak 250 radnika, među zaposlenima čak 156 krvnih srodnika, CDM, 30 July, <https://www.cdm.me/drustvo/u-rtcg-visak-250-radnika-medu-zaposlenima-cak-156-najblizih-srodnika/> (date of access: 30 May, 2019).

obligations of the RTCG regarding content. The broadcaster is required to inform citizens of global and national events in line with professional and ethical standards; produce varied programmes (documentary, educational, sport, cultural, entertainment); produce programmes for the entire public (minorities, children, persons with disabilities, socially vulnerable groups); promote Montenegrin national identity, as well as the cultural and ethnic identities of minority nations; promote Montenegrin cinematography and audio-visual works etc.

The programme and production plans show that the TVCG predominantly airs news, films and series, and sports programmes.

Table 1: TVCG programme contents

	2015 ⁹	2016 ¹⁰	2017 ¹¹	2018 ¹²
Type of programme	TVCG	TVCG	TVCG	TVCG
News	50%	53%	49%	49%
Films and series	27%	21%	21%	22%
Sport	12%	16%	12%	10%
Documentaries	2%	1%	3%	3%
Science-educational	1%	1%	3%	4%
Children's	0.5%	1%	2%	7% ¹³
Programmes intended for minorities	2%	2%	2%	2%
Entertainment-commercial	3%	2%	5%	3%

⁹ RTCG (2015) Television of Montenegro 2015 Programme-and-Production Plan, Podgorica, p. 4, <http://www.rtcg.me/sw4i/download/files/article/Programme-and-Production%20plan%20za%202015%20finalx.pdf?id=429> (date of access: 27 May, 2019).

¹⁰ RTCG (2016) Television of Montenegro 2016 Programme-and-Production Plan, Podgorica, p. 6, <http://www.rtcg.me/rtcg/poslovanje.html> (date of access: 27 May, 2019).

¹¹ RTCG (2017) Television of Montenegro 2017 Programme-and-Production Plan, Podgorica, p. 3, <http://www.rtcg.me/rtcg/poslovanje.html> (date of access: 27 May, 2019).

¹² RTCG (2018) Television of Montenegro 2018 Programme-and-Production Plan, Podgorica, p. 4, <http://www.rtcg.me/rtcg/poslovanje.html> (date of access: 27 May, 2019).

¹³ Programme devoted to children, culture and music.

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As the table above shows, the change of management and the adoption of a new legislative framework has led to a change in RTCG programming and production plan. Although the news, films and series, and sport programmes continued to dominate the TVCG schedule, there was a notable increase in the share of science and educational programmes from 1 to 3 percent i.e. a total of 4 percent, and of documentary programme content from 2 to 3 percent. These changes resulted from the amendments to the Law on the National Public Broadcaster adopted in 2016. Until recently PSM, judging by the programme-and-production plan, competed with commercial broadcasters by airing popular contents such as the Turkish series 'The Magnificent Century'¹⁴ and buying the broadcasting rights for prestigious sports events. To prevent such situations, in line with the new Article 9a of the Law, the RTCG is required to draw up a programme and production plan and hold public consultations over 45 days to ensure that the public has sufficient time to respond. In 2017, such consultations took place in the municipalities of Podgorica, Herceg Novi and Bijelo Polje, in order to present the PSM programme schedule to citizens¹⁵ who were given the opportunity to comment, ask for clarifications and make suggestions concerning the programme. Upon completion of this process, a three-year agreement was signed between the Government of Montenegro and the RTCG. It determines the amount of funding available for programme contents.¹⁶ This article of the Law influenced RTCG programming in that it now has a greater focus on minorities, children and persons with disabilities.

Difficult relations to politics

Political pressures are compounded by the economic dependence of the RTCG. The international community has provided for the public broadcasters' independence through a number of documents and recommendations. The first document, which attempted to regulate the financing of public service media, was the Amsterdam Protocol adopted in 1997. The Protocol stipulates the four principles of public media financing – stability, independence,

¹⁴ Popular Turkish TV series aired on *TVCG Channel One* in 2014.

¹⁵ Vukoman Kljajević (2017) *Javna rasprava o programu RTCG, RTCG*, 1 November, <http://www.rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/183041/javna-rasprava-o-programu-rtcg.html> (date of access: 30 May 2019).

¹⁶ Law on the National Public Broadcaster of Radio and Television of Montenegro, Official Gazette of Montenegro 079/08 of 23 Dec, 2008, 045/12 of 17 Aug, 2012, 043/16 of 20 July, 2016, 054/16 of 15 Aug, 2016.

proportionality and transparency.¹⁷ According to the Council of Europe Recommendation 1878(2009), public service media should have diverse sources of funding, including 'fees for licensing permits, taxation, state subsidies, licence fees, advertising and sponsoring revenues, specialised pay-per-view or on-demand services, the sale of related products such as books, videos or films, and the exploitation of their audio-visual archives.'¹⁸ According to the Law on Public Broadcasting Services Radio of Montenegro and Television of Montenegro adopted in 2002 the RTCG was to receive funding from licence fees, a share of the fee on car radios, production and airing of advertisements, audio-visual works, sponsorship of programme content, organisation of concerts and other events, the national budget and other sources envisaged in the Law.¹⁹ The PSM enjoyed the highest level of financial independence between 2004 and 2007, when the 3.5 Euro licence fee was included in telephone bills, i.e. charged through the Telekom Company. The problem arose after the privatisation of the Telekom company as an appropriate method for licence fee collection could not be identified.

The subsequent law adopted in 2008 cancelled both licence fees and charges, with Article 16 envisaging an annual budget allocation of 1.2 percent of the total budget for the RTCG. Though cautioned by the experts that, given the economic crisis, it would be better to finance the PSM relative to GDP in order to secure stable funding, only eight years later it was decided to allocate a share of only 0.3 percent of GDP to PSM financing.²⁰ Owing to these amendments to the legislative framework PSM have had a stable revenue stream during the last two years. For instance, in 2016 the RTCG received 11.2 million Euro from the budget and in the next year the figure increased by 300 000 Euro, i.e. to 11.5 million Euro, and then to 12.5 million Euro in 2018.

The RTCG's financial dependence on the State is also clearly visible in the advertising arena. The small market includes four daily papers, two weeklies, 30 monthly journals, 53 radio stations, 19 TV stations, one news agency and

¹⁷ Milka Tadić Mijović (2009) *Transformacija RTCG u javni servis (zakonski okvir i praksa)*, master thesis, Podgorica: Faculty of Political Science, University of Montenegro, p. 49.

¹⁸ Council of Europe (2015) *Zbornik odabranih pravnih instrumenata Savjeta Evrope u vezi sa medijima 2017-2014*, Belgrade, p.81.

¹⁹ Law on the Public Service Broadcasting Radio of Montenegro and Television of Montenegro, Official Gazette of RMNE 51/02, str. 3

²⁰ Law on the National Public Broadcaster of Radio and Television of Montenegro, Official Gazette of Montenegro 079/08 of 23 Dec, 2008, 045/12 of 17 Aug, 2012, 043/16 of 20 July, 2016, 054/16 of 15 Aug, 2016, p.6.

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43 web portals. The annual marketing volume is only 9.5 to 10 million Euro.²¹ From this amount, the annual income from advertising of the RTCG hardly ever exceeds 1 million EUR. Thus, RTCG revenue from marketing was 1.2 million Euro in 2016,²² decreasing to 862 028 Euro in the following year.

Another form of putting pressure on PSM is via the Broadcasting Council (hereinafter Council). Under Article 20 of the Law on the National Public Broadcaster²³ the governing bodies of PSM are the Council and the Director-General. The Council is required to adopt the Statute and Rules of Procedure, appoint the Council Chair and Deputy Chair, adopt financial plans and reports, programme documents, general regulation on internal organisation and job classification, appoint the Committee for programme content in the languages of minority nations and the Committee handling the petitions and complaints submitted by listeners and viewers. This body appoints and dismisses the Director-General while the managers of the radio and television are appointed by the Director-General. Eligible candidates for the position are Montenegrin citizens with a university degree and at least five years of work experience.

A comparison between the laws adopted in 2002 and 2008 suggests that the RTCG enjoyed greater independence under the previous legislative framework. The 2002 Law envisaged three governing bodies – the Council, Director-General and the Managing Board, which was eliminated by the amendments enacted in 2008. The current Council is composed of 9 members – in 2002 it had 11 members. Experts with university degrees in journalism, law, economics, sociology, marketing or engineering are eligible for the Council. The term of office of Council members is five years. Members may serve for two consecutive terms. Article 28 of the Law on the National Service Broadcaster of Radio and Television of Montenegro adopted in 2016 stipulates that each of the following institutions nominates one Council member:

²¹ Ana Nenezić, Duško Vuković (2017) *Jednake šanse za sve medije u Crnoj Gori*, Podgorica: Civic Education Centre, p. 7, <http://media.cgo-cce.org/2017/06/Jednake-sanse-za-sve-medije.pdf> (date of access: 22 May 2019).

²² RTCG (2017) *Financial Report for the period 1 Jan to 31 Dec 2016*, Podgorica: RTCG, p. 7, <http://www.rtcg.me/rtcg/poslovanje.html> (date of access: 27 May.2019).

²³ Law on the National Public Broadcaster of Radio and Television of Montenegro, Official Gazette of Montenegro 079/08 of 23 Dec, 2008, 045/12 of 17 Aug, 2012, 043/16 of 20 July, 2016, 054/16 of 15 Aug, 2016, p.6.

- › universities in Montenegro;
- › Montenegrin Academy of Arts and Science and Matica Crnogorska (Montenegrin Heritage Association);
- › national cultural institutions and non-governmental organisations in the area;
- › Chamber of Commerce and Employers' Federation;
- › non-governmental organisations working in the field of the media;
- › Trade Union;
- › Montenegrin Olympic and Paralympic Committee.²⁴

NGOs involved in human rights, consumer rights, rights of persons with disabilities, right to education and social welfare may nominate two Council members.

According to the 2002 legislative framework the Media Institute and the professional associations of journalists were also entitled to nominate a Council member. However, they lost this right with the amendments adopted in 2008. Article 26 of the Law disqualifies MPs and local councillors, persons appointed by the Parliament, the President of the Republic, Government, RTCG journalists, political party officials, the owners or members of the governing bodies of companies involved in production of radio and television programmes, persons convicted with a criminal record and their spouses from becoming Council members by reason of conflict of interest.²⁵

The procedure for appointing Council members is launched with a public call inviting the eligible entities to nominate candidates. The notice is published in the Official Gazette of Montenegro, on the website of the Parliament and in at least one print media. Nominations must be submitted within 45 days from the date of publication of the notice. Article 37 requires the working body to publish the proposed Council composition fifteen days prior to the public call. It must then decide on the proposed list within 60 days from the date of submission of the brief to Parliament. If the proposed list is incomplete, the procedure is launched again.²⁶ In accordance with Article 42 of the Law on the National Public Broadcaster the Parliament is entitled to dismiss a Council member

²⁴ Law on the National Public Broadcaster Radio and Television of Montenegro, Official Gazette of Montenegro 079/08 of 23 Dec 2008, 045/12 of 17 Aug 2012, 043/16 of 20 July 2016, 054/16 of 15 Aug 2016, pp. 8, 9.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 8.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 10.

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and appoint another in their place, if the appointee has provided untruthful information of relevance to the appointment, fails to attend Council meetings for a period longer than six months, is found to be in a conflict of interest or is unable to serve on the Council due to illness. The dismissal procedure may be launched by either the Council or the working body. The Parliament adopts a decision following the completion of the procedure and granting a hearing to the Council member concerned. In line with Article 47 the Parliament may also dismiss the RTCG governing body, the Council, if it fails to meet for more than six months or publish the financial report for the previous year or the audit report on the public broadcaster's website.

A review of the legislative frameworks enacted in 2002, 2008 and 2016 warrants the conclusion that the government has used new mechanisms to establish control over PSM. According to Article 27 of the Law on the National Public Broadcaster, Council members are appointed and dismissed by Parliament. In 2002, the Parliament addressed exclusively the appointment of Council members. In addition, according to the law enacted in 2002, Council members could not be dismissed during their tenure, except by reason of illness, failure to attend Council meetings for more than six months, conflict of interest and presentation of untruthful personal data in the appointment procedure.

The Parliament should play a purely formal role and may be involved in this process in line with the Council of Europe recommendations. 'It is legitimate for the state to be involved in appointment of top supervisory and decision-making bodies of public service media'.²⁷ This does not refer to the appointment of the executive or editorial management. However, appointments must not be used to exert political influence. This recommendation was infringed upon in 2007, when Parliament declined to verify the appointment of five Council members and blocked the work of the Council from December 2007 to April 2008.²⁸ The recommendation was infringed again in 2017, when two of the Council members – Nikola Vukčević and Goran Đurović – were dismissed due to conflict of interest. The court found that both dismissals were unlawful. Three former directors general were dismissed by the Council: Branko Vojičić (2011), Rade Vojvodić (2016) and

²⁷ Council of Europe (2015) Zbornik odabranih pravnih instrumenata Savjeta Evrope u vezi sa medijima 2017-2014, Belgrade, p. 125.

²⁸ Milka Tadić Mijović (2009) *Transformacija RTCG u javni servis (zakonski okvir i praksa)*, master thesis, Podgorica: Faculty of Political Science, University of Montenegro, p. 39.

Andrijana Kadija (2018). This situation reveals the full extent of the methods used to exert political pressure on public service media.

RTCG in the digital era

In Montenegro, analogue signal broadcasting was discontinued on 17 June 2015.²⁹ This was an important year for the RTCG also because the Ministry of Finance committed to allocating funds through the annual budget laws to fully cover the cost of digitalisation.³⁰ The upgrade of PSM is under way, albeit at a slow pace due to the problems in the tendering process. The cost of RTCG digitalisation currently stands at 15.7 million Euro. The government supported PSM by committing to foot the entire bill. The digitalisation was implemented in several stages. Radio Crne Gore was the first to go fully digital. The digital sound and audio processing studio and field equipment was digitalised. The former three directors general often highlighted the problem of obsolete equipment. Rade Vojvodić referred to the RTCG as a black hole in terms of technical equipment; in December 2017, at the start of the digitalisation process, Andrijana Kadija described the development as a historic step forward as, until then, the RTCG 'had been running in the media race against other media outlets barefoot'.³¹

In December 2017, an agreement was signed with the Austrian company BFE, launching digitalisation for which the public broadcaster had been preparing for five years. Two earlier tenders had fallen through, delaying the process. During the digitalisation studio equipment was modernised, small and large outside broadcasting vehicles were purchased, as until then the RTCG had used equipment dating back to 1984.³² Following the purchase of the new equipment, in 2018 cameramen, technical staff, engineers and system maintenance staff were trained. PSM digitalisation will be finalised by the

²⁹ Svetlana Slavujević (2015) *Ugašen analogni signal*, RTCG, 17 June, <http://www.rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/94872/ugasen-analogni-signal.html> (date of access: 8 April, 2019).

³⁰ RTCG (2015) RTCG 2015 Financial Report, Podgorica, p. 2, [http://www.rtcg.me/sw4i/download/files/article/Finansijski%20izvjestaj%20RTCG%20za%202015%20\(1\).pdf?id=689](http://www.rtcg.me/sw4i/download/files/article/Finansijski%20izvjestaj%20RTCG%20za%202015%20(1).pdf?id=689) (date of access: 27 May, 2019).

³¹ Aleksandra Sjekloća (2017) *Potpisan ugovor, počinje proces digitalizacije*, RTCG, 14 December, <http://www.rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/187621/potpisan-ugovor-pocinje-proces-digitalizacije.html> (date of access: 05 April 2019).

³² rtcg.me (2018) *Stigla velika reportažna kola*, RTCG, 21 December, <http://www.rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/225087/stigla-velika-reportazna-kola-rtcg.html> (date of access: 06 April 2019).

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beginning of 2020. It will bring numerous benefits to the audience and the media organisation itself. Better image, better content and more professional journalists are just some of the advantages of digitalisation. It facilitates the production of quality content and provides new opportunities for creating cultural and educational content, enhancing social cohesion and promoting the political participation of citizens.

Naturally, the modernisation of the RTCG in the last six years has taken place in a situation of financial distress and the management is aware that without flexibility and adjustment to new technology they will not be able to capture or keep the attention of audiences. Thus, the web portal of the public broadcaster RTCG was launched in 2013. Audio streaming was launched for R98, together with a new app for Android. The app for iOS was launched in 2015, aiming to improve the portal visitor statistics. According to the Financial Report for 2015, the portal had received 40 000 hits per day and the current reported figure is 50 000 hits.³³ However, even with the steps taken in this area, the RTCG portal is not very popular among Montenegrins. The E3Consulting survey in 2018 showed that only 21 percent of the respondents visited it regularly. Similarly, the RTCG portal³⁴ is ranked 32nd in Montenegro in terms of number of hits and according to the company Alexa it is in the 38th place.³⁵ The portal enables live following of the RTCG programme. Information is also available via social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. The Facebook account has 35 487 followers and its Twitter account has 72 158.

The future of Montenegrin PSM

PSM have been the topic of constant debate in society on the account of political pressure reflected in the dismissals of its directors general, Council members and financing. On the one hand, the government claims that it supports PSM, having committed to financing digitalisation. On the other hand, opposition parties and the NGO sector warn that PSM are serving the political parties.

Political parties are fighting for control over the RTCG. Between 2012 and 2016 government bodies had free reign at the public broadcaster. The opposition parties also joined the fight for the RTCG by blocking the adoption of the

³³ RTCG (n.d.) Istorija, <http://www.rtcg.me/rtcg/istorija.html> (date of access: 30 May, 2019).

³⁴ <https://www.similarweb.com/website/rtcg.me#overview> (date of access: 30 May, 2019).

³⁵ Alexa (n.d.) Competitive Analysis, <https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/rtcg.me?ver=classic> (date of access: 30 May, 2019).

amendments to the Law on the Public Broadcaster between October 2014 and July 2016. In 2016, the opposition parties' condition for signing the Agreement on Fair and Free Elections was the resignation of the TVCG manager Radojka Rutović.³⁶ Once this demand was fulfilled, the opposition took over PSM. Following the dismissal of two Council members, the government regained control. The opposition parties, which organised protests with the slogan 'Odupri se (Resist)', have constantly criticised the RTCG over its editorial policy. One of the organisers, Omer Šarkić, referred to the RTCG as a 'party-propaganda service' and called on the Council and the Director- General to resign.³⁷ The surveys conducted by the Civic Education Centre between 2013 and 2015, which included daily and weekly current affairs talk shows aired on the RTCG, i.e. a sample of 596 shows with 1 392 guests, showed that the public broadcaster gave more airtime to the ruling party and representatives of government institutions. In four current affairs talk shows, representatives of the Democratic Party of Socialists appeared 47 times, while those of the Socialist People's Party appeared 38 times, those of the Democratic Front appeared 31 times, and so on.³⁸

The NGO sector often criticises the editorial policy of the RTCG. In December 2017, the NGOs Civic Education Centre, Centre for Monitoring and Research, Institute Alternative, Network for Affirmation of the NGO Sector, Centre for Investigative Reporting, Centre for Development of NGOs organised an event titled 'An independent PSM and that's it'.

During the first half of 2019, amendments to the legislative framework have spurred a heated debate about PSM. The NGO Media Centre has criticised the Public Broadcaster Bill, which envisages that the relevant Committee of Parliament will select Council members on the basis of interviews and an opinion issued by the Agency for Electronic Media.³⁹ On the other hand, the Ministry of Culture claims that all amendments are proposed in line with the

³⁶ Dan.co.me (2016) Potpisivanje Sporazuma tek poslije Radojkine ostavke, 29 March, <https://www.dan.co.me/?nivo=3&rubrika=Vijest%20dana&clanak=539548&datum=2016-03-29> (date of access: 2 April, 2019).

³⁷ Mondo.me (2019) Završen protest: Želimo nezavisni javni servis, *Mondo*, 23 February, <http://mondo.me/a729691/Info/Drustvo/Protest-u-Podgorici-Odupri-se-97-000.html> (date of access: 3 April, 2019).

³⁸ Svetlana Pešić (2016) CGO: Jačati dalju otvorenost RTCG, RTCG, 19 July, <http://www.rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/135581/cgo-jacati-dalju-otvorenost-tvcg.html> (date of access: 10 July, 2019).

³⁹ RTCG (2019) Ministarstvo kulture pogoršava rješenja u oblasti medija, RTCG, 3 March, <http://www.rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/232646/ministarstvo-kulture-pogorsava-rjesenja-u-oblasti-medija.html> (date of access: 4 April, 2019).

A Pillar of Democracy on Shaky Ground

CoE recommendations and Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The independent experts Eva Solomon and Tanja Kerševan-Smokvina take the view that the new amendments to the Law 'would result in severe deterioration of independence of the national public broadcaster' while the current law is in line with European recommendations.⁴⁰ This means that the legislative framework will bring progress to PSM in some segments, such as restoration of the Managing Board as a governing body. However, the method of selection of Council members remains problematic. It is clear that without independent Council members it is impossible to talk of independent public service media.

Conclusion

The review of the overall situation of the RTCG shows that significant progress has been achieved with regard to programme content, financing and digitalisation, i.e. overall modernisation.

PSM enjoy a privileged position in the Montenegrin market as the government has demonstrated goodwill and willingness to help it survive on the market by amending the legislative framework, aiming to identify a working solution for RTCG financing and agreeing to cover the cost of digitalisation. At the same time, it is evident that the economic dependence of the RTCG on the State has an impact on its editorial policy. It is therefore necessary to implement the following changes in order to lower dependence on political actors:

1. Amend Article 27 of the Law on the National Public Broadcaster, which stipulates that Council members are appointed and dismissed by Parliament. The pressures exerted in the period 2007-2017 showed that the body abused its mandate in order to exert pressure. The responsibility should be transferred to the Agency for Electronic Media. At the same time, the independence of this body should be enhanced. According to the Law on the Electronic Media, the Agency has two governing bodies – the Council, composed of five members from the ranks of renowned experts, and the Director. However, according to Article 18 of the aforementioned Law, the members of the Agency Council are appointed and dismissed by

⁴⁰ Analitika (2018) Nacrt Zakona o javnom servisu treba odbaciti, 24 November, <https://portalanalitika.me/clanak/318790/nacrt-zakona-o-javnom-servisu-treba-odbaciti> (date of access: 5 April, 2019).

Parliament, which is not an example of good practice in the countries with low level of media freedom.

2. Address the high remuneration paid to the members of the RTCG Council, which exceeds the average net wage in Montenegro multiple times.⁴¹ Membership of the Council should carry a symbolic fee or should be a *pro bono* position. The RTCG would thus save at least 50 000 Euro a year, improving recruitment at the same time. If this duty is performed *pro bono*, it would motivate only responsible citizens to represent the public and they would be motivated by the public interest rather than the remuneration received.

Since its transformation PSM have not been able to cope with political pressures, which prevent them from fulfilling their obligation of informing the public in line with professional and ethical standards. The RTCG was and remains a tool in the hands of political parties, with the government in power and the opposition battling over it. In such circumstances, the PSM fall victim and are compelled, like a leaf aflutter in the wind, to lean towards one of the sides in the never-ending political games. Those who suffer the most damage, however, are citizens as they finance PSM that prone to serving political rather public interest.

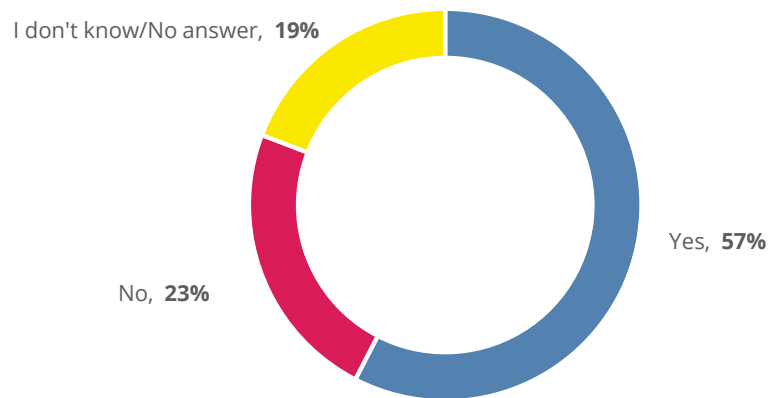


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⁴¹ According to Monstat, the average net monthly wage in Montenegro is EUR 513. Source: <https://www.monstat.org/userfiles/file/zarade/2019/saopstenje%20zarade.pdf>.

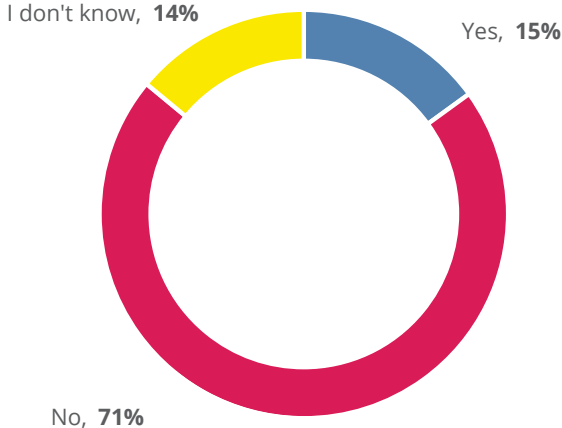
Opinion Poll Montenegro

Chart 1: Are Public Service Media (PSM) important for democracy in your country? (Base: Total Montenegrin sample, in percent)



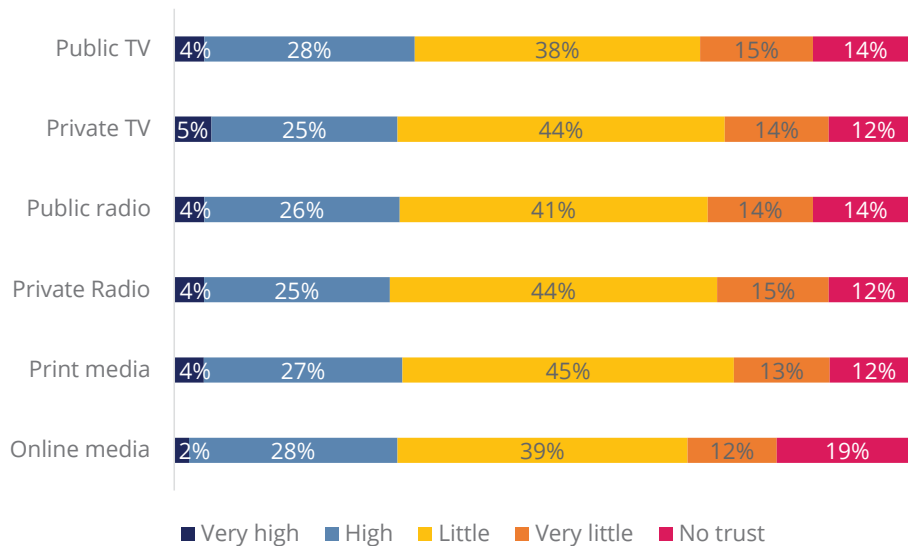
The importance of PSM for democracy in Montenegro is recognised by 57 percent of citizens who place Montenegro on the list of countries where PSM is undervalued with regard to democratic processes. With regard to this question, citizens of Montenegro did not present any differences based on demographic profile.

Chart 2: In your opinion, are PSM free from political influence in your country? (Base: Total Montenegrin sample, in percent)



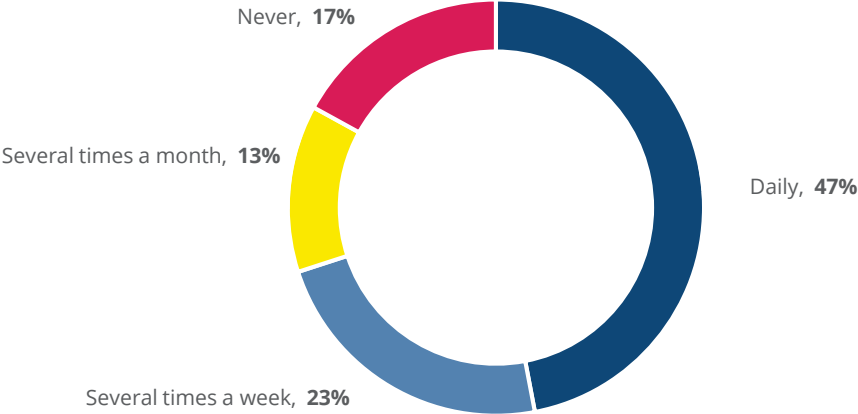
This is also reflected in the question whether PSM are free from political influence. Here again, the results show no significant differences among different demographic profiles. Overall, this question was predominantly answered negatively, as 7 out of 10 Montenegrin citizens think that PSM are politically influenced.

Chart 3: How much trust do you have in following media? (Base: Total Montenegrin sample, in percent)



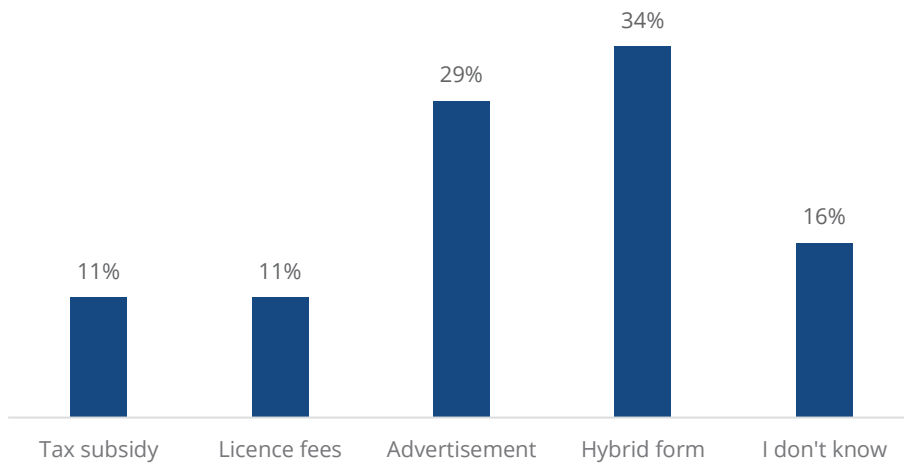
Similar results can be seen in the levels of trust. Montenegrins appear very sceptic about their media. There are only minor differences in the trust levels enjoyed by the different media channels. Among mentioned media channels, citizens have the greatest trust in public TV and print media (see Chart 3). Differences of opinion among Montenegrins were noted in terms of age and level of education. Furthermore, men seem more critical than women in Montenegro.

Chart 4: How often do you use the services of Public Service Media (PSM)?
(Base: Total Montenegrin sample, in percent)



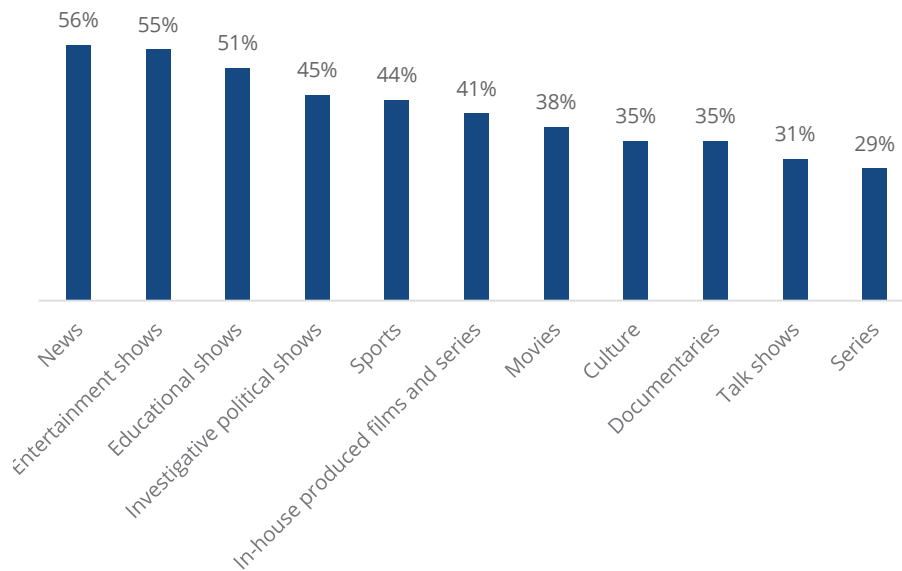
In keeping with the rest of the region, PSM is used mostly by senior citizens: 68 percent of respondents aged older than 64 years use PSM daily as compared to 38 percent of citizens aged 18-29 years who use PSM only several times per month or never. Overall, 7 out of 10 Montenegrins use PSM daily or several times a week (see Chart 4 - added sum).

Chart 5: What type of funding do you prefer for PSM? (Base: Total Montenegrin sample, in percent)



Again in keeping with the rest of the region, the citizens of Montenegro, without statistically significant differences between them, believe that the best PSM funding model is a hybrid system (34 percent) and advertising (29 percent). There is no difference in preference in terms of the main methods of funding PSM – tax subsidies and licence fees are both only preferred by 11 percent of respondents.

Chart 6: What kind of content should PSM present? (Base: Total Montenegrin sample, in percent, multiple answers possible)



The content-related preferences of Montenegrin citizens follow a well-established pattern in the region: men (62 percent) would watch sport programmes more than women (28 percent), 80 percent of respondents aged over 64 years would watch news (compared to 56 percent on average), while citizens with primary or lower education prefer watching movies on PSM (52 percent compared to 38 percent of the total Montenegrin sample).