

## Public Service Media in Romania: The Battle for Independence from Politics

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*Romina Surugiu, Liana Ionescu*

### Introduction

Public radio in Romania was established in 1928 and public television in 1956. During the 45 years of communist rule the regime kept both under the total control of the ruling elite. After the fall of Communism, in Eastern Europe in 1989, public radio and television had to change radically, almost overnight: first the schedule and content of productions and then technology and regulations. But above all, both public radio and television were supposed to escape from political control – an ideal that has not been fulfilled to date.

After the 1989 revolution most employees continued to work for the public broadcaster and in many cases a mentality of supporting the ruling power stayed firmly in place.<sup>1</sup> Even if staff has been renewed over the last thirty years, both journalists and managers are still afraid to openly oppose political control and therefore fail in their mission of pursuing an independent editorial policy. This will be elaborated on in further detail in this article.

On the other hand, the pressure put on public service media by political actors was and remains strong. Politicians constantly attempt to use public media services as tools of propaganda.<sup>2</sup> Political subjugation remains one of the main problems of public service broadcasting, despite important efforts to improve and modernise activities overall at both editorial and technical level.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion on the relation between public service media and politics in Romania, see Cristian Ghinea and Ioana Avădani (2011) Case study report. Does media policy promote media freedom and independence? The case of Romania, Hertie School of Governance (HERTIE), Mediadem, pp. 21-23.

<sup>2</sup> A recent media report portrayed public service media institutions as ‘state propaganda tools’ that altogether with the national news agency cost the state budget between 2017 and 2018 the impressive sum of nearly 500 million Euro; see Octavia Constantinescu (2018) Propaganda de stat ne-a costat cât 100 de km de autostradă, Newsweek România, 23-29 November, p. 13.

### History of public service media

The Romanian Public Radio was founded as the 'Romanian Radio Telephony and Broadcasting Corporation' and subsequently renamed to 'Romanian Radio Broadcasting Corporation' (*Societatea Română de Radiodifuziune, SRR*) in 1936.

In 1956, shortly after the launch of radio and television service, the two became part of the same corporation 'The Romanian Radio and Television Corporation' or *Societatea Română de Radioteleviziune, SRRTV*. However, they split again after the fall of communism when the national Parliament approved Law No 41/1994 establishing two separate institutions 'Radio Romania' (RR) and 'Romanian Television' (TVR).<sup>3</sup>

During the communist regime, the editorial policy of both institutions was subject to strong censorship, which precluded any independence, objectivity and other features of the free press. Editorial policy and programme content were strongly influenced by the ruling communist party and featured almost exclusively its activities and those of the communist party leader. At the time, there were no commercial media and no competition between media outlets.

After an experimental phase followed in the 1960s during which broadcasting was limited to several productions. In the 1970s, the Romanian television began to develop as a modern institution with diverse cultural, educational, scientific programmes and imported content (especially from the US, France, the UK and, of course, other socialist countries). The ideological imprint was ever-present but it left room for a cultural thaw that dominated both radio and television productions.<sup>4</sup> The situation with television changed dramatically at the beginning of the 1980s when its broadcasting was severely limited, acquiring a strong ideological bias:

*'By the mid-1980s, Romanian television broadcasting was reduced to two hours on weekdays and four to five hours on the weekends. The diversity of genres in the television schedule was replaced by content that was predominantly politicized. (...) On the new schedules, news was the main TV*

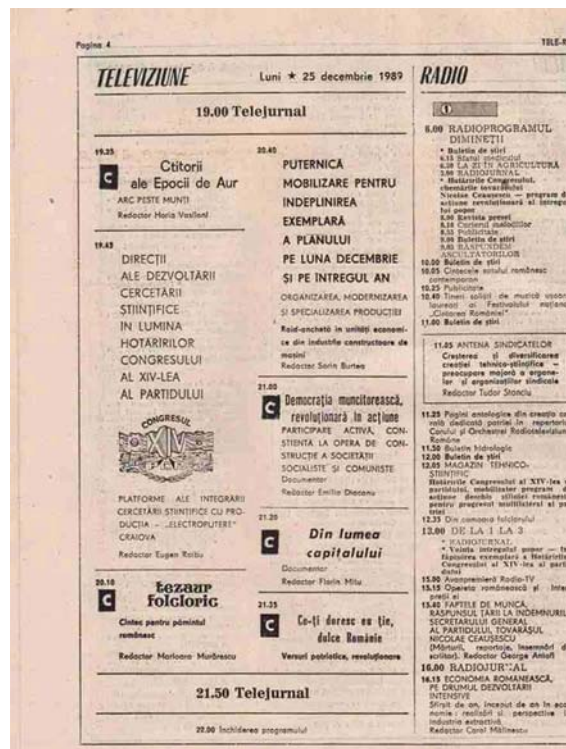
<sup>3</sup> Law on Radio Romania and Romanian Television (1994) Legea Nr. 41 din 17 iunie 1994 privind organizarea și funcționarea Societății Române de Radiodifuziune și Societății Române de Televiziune, [http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis\\_pck.htp\\_act\\_text?id=14381](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htp_act_text?id=14381).

<sup>4</sup> Romina, Surugiu, Adriana Ștefănel, Mădălina Bălășescu, Alexandru Matei, Vyara Angelova, (2018) «Pôles culturels» dans les programmes de télévision, en Roumanie et Bulgarie, 1963-1983, *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, Volume XXVI, no. 100-101, 3-4/2018.

output, complemented by political and economic programs and coverage of Ceaușescu's work visits. Other genres on offer were heavily politicized to the extent that they lost their defining generic characteristics. Music programs promoted political songs dedicated to dictator Ceaușescu and his wife Elena; cultural programs talked about the political loyalties of cultural personalities; scientific programs presented the superiority of Romania's technical advancements; and children's and youth programs offered propagandistic education for youth. This political harmonizing of broadcast output made propaganda the dominant mode of address on Romanian television, promoting the party ideology and building on Ceaușescu's personality cult.<sup>5</sup>

A good example is the TV schedule for 25 December 1989 (Christmas Day) that was supposed to last three hours and contained only politicised programmes (see image attached, that was taken from the TV guide *Programul de radio și televiziune*). This TV schedule was never broadcast because on 22 December, Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship was abolished and on Christmas the politicised programmes were replaced by the news that Nicolae Ceaușescu had been executed.

In the 1980s, radio broadcasting succeeded in retaining some of its functions as educational



'Programul de radio și televiziune' for 25 December 1989<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Dana Mustață (2012) Television in the Age of (Post) Communism: The Case of Romania, Journal of Popular Film and Television, p.136, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01956051.2012.697794>.

<sup>6</sup> Arheologie Tv 6.0, Blog secundar pentru Arheologie Tv, 3 January 2016, <https://arheo6tv.wordpress.com/2016/01/03/1989-52-24-30-decembrie-1989>.

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and entertainment tool. But censorship was very strong and employees were paying a lot of attention on delivering content that respected the unwritten rules of party-political propaganda.

Immediately after the fall of Ceaușescu's dictatorship, the Romanian Television TVR added the word 'Free' (Liberă) to its logo, resulting in the abbreviation TVRL, as a first expression of the desire to discard the communist legacy. It became clear that Romanian television had to redefine itself in terms of (a) independence from political power; (b) assuming a public service role in a democratic society; (c) professional programming and broadcasting output; and (d) high-quality content.

The two public service media have functioned separately since 1994 but face the same problems regarding their independence and dangerous relations with political actors. They have also had to face stiff competition from commercial media and a wide variety of audio-visual offers.

Nevertheless, both content and technologies have improved. Television faced a harder fight for these changes to see the light of day compared to its radio sibling. 'The most urgent necessity that Romanian television faced at the time was the increase in broadcasting hours from a few hours daily to full days and from a one-channel model to a two-channel one. With this, there also came the challenge to redefine the form of broadcast output from a communist to a democratic model.'<sup>7</sup>

### Structure of the broadcasting system

The functioning of public service media in Romania is governed by Law No 41/1994. In addition, broadcasting is also regulated by Law No 504/2002<sup>8</sup> and other decisions/regulations issued by the National Audiovisual Council of Romania (CNA), which was established in 1992.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.137.

<sup>8</sup> Law on Broadcasting, Legea Nr. 504 din 11 iulie 2002 (Legea Audiovizualului), [http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis\\_pck.htp\\_act\\_text?idt=36987](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htp_act_text?idt=36987).



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Radio Romania (RR) and the Romanian Television (TVR) operate under the control of Parliament. According to the law the RR and TVR are responsible for information, education and entertainment whilst pursuing an independent editorial policy. Each year, the institutions submit an annual report on activity to Parliament.

They are led by a Director-General (PDG)<sup>9</sup>, a Board of Trustees, a Board of Directors and regional Boards of Directors. The Director-General is elected by a simple majority among the members of the Board of Trustees. The latter are nominated as follows: one member by the President of Romania, one member by the Romanian government, eight members by the political parties represented in Parliament according to the quota of MPs, two members are elected by the journalists working in the Public Radio and Public Television, and one member is designated by the parliamentary groups representing national minorities. The Board of Trustees and the Director-General are appointed for a term of 4 years. The radio and television services have the same organisational structure and operate according to similar management rules and procedures. The Board of Directors and Regional Directors are appointed by the Director-General on the basis of a competition. The Director-General and the Board of Trustees are tasked with developing the general framework of functioning of the institution: broad policies, main objectives, business and organisational strategic planning, programming strategies, while the members of the Board of Directors serve an executive function.

The funding model of the public radio and television services suffered a major blow in 2017 when the licence fee was abolished: the model practically transformed from licence fees being paid by households + advertising + a state subsidy to 100 percent subsidy from the budget of the central government + advertising. Until 2017, the budgets of the television and radio companies were based on licence fees and advertising, the subsidies from the state budget being offered only to cover broadcasting costs and support special projects/ broadcast for the Romanian diaspora. The licence fee was amongst the lowest in Europe (4 Romanian Lei (approx. 90 eurocents) per month for television and 2.5 Romanian Lei (approx. 55 eurocents) per month for radio). The licence fee was abolished for both radio and television on the grounds that they were already partly funded by the state budget and that funding in full would ensure

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<sup>9</sup> The Romanian Law uses the French denomination: *Président Directeur Général* (PDG). In this text the more common English term Director-General is used instead of President Director-General.

rigorous public control on the spending of the radio and television companies.<sup>10</sup> According to media reports the Public Radio Company received a subsidy of 383 million Romanian Lei (approx. 85 million Euro) in 2017, and 375 million Romanian Lei (approx. 83 million Euro) in 2018. The Public Television was subsidized with 950 million Romanian Lei (approx. 211 million Euro) in 2017 and 440 million Romanian Lei (approx. 97 million Euro) in 2018.<sup>11</sup>

According to the annual reports of activity the advertising revenues for the Public Radio Company stood at 6 million Romanian Lei (approx. 1.3 million Euro) in 2017<sup>12</sup> and at 6.3 million Romanian Lei (approx. 1.4 million Euro) in 2018.<sup>13</sup> According to annual report on activity the advertising revenue for the Public Television Company stood at 18 million Romanian Lei (approx. 4 million Euro) in 2017 and 32.5 million Romanian Lei (approx. 7.2 million Euro) in 2018.<sup>14</sup>

### Radio channels

Radio Romania currently broadcasts three national channels: Radio Romania News, Radio Romania Cultural and Village Antenna. There are also Radio Romania International 1 (in Romanian) and Radio Romania International 2 (broadcast in ten foreign languages). At the regional level, nine channels operate, among them Radio Bucharest and a channel exclusively dedicated to classical music – Radio Romania Music (under the slogan ‘classical music, jazz, and more’). There are also two internet channels: Radio3Net Florian Pittiș, and Radio Romania Junior (for children and youth). Radio Romania’s offer is complemented by RADOR Press Agency, Casa Radio Publishing House and some radio music bands, among them the National Radio Orchestra, the Radio Choir and the Children’s Radio Choir.<sup>15</sup> The historical radio archive is an asset of great importance for the RR as it contains recordings that genuinely showcase the history of Romania and its culture.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Octavia Constantinescu (2018) Propaganda de stat ne-a costat cât 100 de km de autostradă, Newsweek România, 23-29 November, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Radio Romania (2017) Raport anual de activitate al SRR, p.15, <http://srr.ro/files/CY1923/75/RaportAnualRadioRomania-2018.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Radio Romania (2018) Raport anual de activitate al SRR, p.28, <http://srr.ro/files/CY1923/75/RaportAnualRadioRomania-2018.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Romanian Television (2018) Raport de activitate al SRTV, p. 116, [http://media.tvrinfo.ro/media-tvr/other/201904/raport-de-activitate-al-srtv-pe-2018\\_69015700.pdf](http://media.tvrinfo.ro/media-tvr/other/201904/raport-de-activitate-al-srtv-pe-2018_69015700.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> According to Annual SRR Report 2017, Raport anual de activitate al SRR, 2017, <http://www.srr.ro/files/CY1923/68/RadioRomania-RAPORTANUAL2017.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

### Radio audience

The RR has the highest audience share in different geographical areas and in different segments of the population.

According to the Annual Report of the SRR in 2017 Radio Romania News remained the most important radio station in Romania as regards its impact on the public, with the highest market share and an audience of nearly daily 2 million listeners.

But in 2018, the audience of Radio Romania and mainly that of the principal channel Radio Romania News began to decrease. According to a survey conducted in the spring of 2018 by IMAS (Marketing & Sondaje and MERCURY RESEARCH) the national daily average audience in a sample of 1.2 million listeners for Radio Romania News was 1 768.3 corresponding to a market share of 13.8 percent, followed by Village Antenna with 817.2 listeners and 6.7 percent market share; and Radio Iași (a regional radio station) with 410.0 listeners and 2.8 percent market share.<sup>17</sup>

Focusing on the commercial segment represented by people aged 18 to 49 years, for an overall total daily reach of 3 865.2 listeners, Radio Romania News had 279.1 or a 5.0 percent market share. At the rural level, (from a sample of 4 576.6 listeners) Radio Romania News had 725.3 listeners or a 15.3 percent market share.

### Television channels

The Romanian public television operates six channels: TVR 1 (with a focus on information), TVR 2 (general content channel), TVR 3 (music, arts culture, and local and regional productions), TVR International (news and programmes for the Romanian diaspora), TVR Moldova (designed to offer the Romanians living in Moldova information and programmes on Romania and EU) and TVR HD (youth, education and sport). The broadcaster has five regional studios in Cluj-Napoca (founded in 1990), Craiova (founded in 1998), Iași (founded in 1991), Timișoara (founded in 1994), and Târgu-Mureș (founded in 2008).

The Romanian television also has an impressive archive of images (360 000 hours of images according to the official website), which it has been digitalising in the last two decades.

<sup>17</sup> Marketing&Sondaje and Mercury Research (2018) Rezultatele Studiului de Audiență Radio realizat de IMAS, Spring, <http://www.audienta-radio.ro/userfiles/items/Audienta%20radio%20-%20Valul%20de%20Primavara%202018.pdf>.



### Television audience

According to a research of the state and prospects of media in Romania television as a medium has been growing in terms of audience and advertising investment since 2016. However, public television channels are not able to keep up with commercial channels. TVR1 is preferred by senior viewers, both men and women, living in small cities.<sup>18</sup>

According to data published in January 2019 on primetime audiences the TVR2 was ranked number ten (173 000 viewers), the TVR1 number 12 (160 000 viewers), and the TVR3 number 45 (14 000 viewers). The public television channels combined have a rating of approximately two percent, while the most important commercial channel (Pro TV) having a rating of ten percent.<sup>19</sup>

### Independence of broadcasting

After 1990, the year when democracy was re-established in Romania, both public radio and television were put under important editorial pressure from the entire political class. The law that governs the functioning of these institutions does not offer any tools to curtail the influence of political actors. On the contrary, by stipulating the way in which the management of public radio and television is appointed, it de facto establishes political control over the institutions.

The editorial independence of the public radio and television has been and remains questionable, regardless of the political party in power.

Support of government policy is achieved through editorial policy and is mostly visible in the news segment at both radio and television level. Many media analysts have pointed out that the influence of politics on public radio and television is ensured by the political appointment of Director-General (PDG) and the Board of Trustees (BT). The PDG is effectively selected by the ruling parties and is either a party member or someone closely affiliated with the ruling party and willing to do the government's bidding. The Board

<sup>18</sup> Media Fact Book (2018) Initiative Media, Bucharest, p. 39-40, <http://www.mediafactbook.ro/public/files/MFB2018.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Andreea Iordache (2019) PRIME-TIME FEBRUARIE. Ultima lună de iarnă, creștere pentru Pro TV. Antena 1 a pierdut locul doi pe național în favoarea Kanal D, [paginademedia.ro](https://www.paginademedia.ro), 01 March, <https://www.paginademedia.ro/2019/03/audiente-prime-time-februarie-2019>.

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of Trustees consists of 13 members who represent the political parties in Parliament. They are appointed according to a formula in which civil society is poorly represented (see 'Structure of the broadcasting system').

The top management exercises control via subordinate management levels, mostly politicised, even if not openly so. Sometimes, in order to increase pressure and control, the PDG intervenes directly through so-called managerial measures/decisions. They are in fact warnings directed at employees that increase the institution's intransigence and encourage secrecy (see section 'Current discussion' below).

If the management is political, the editorial content cannot be independent. The influence of political power is particularly noticeable in newscasts and news editing from the way segments prioritise topics that cast the government in a positive light, using arguments, sources and guests that support the government point of view.

Another lever the government uses is funding. Since 2017 funding has been provided exclusively from the state budget. Before 2017, part of the funding came from licence fees, which could have provided for more political independence and journalistic freedom.

Sometimes the political positions of public radio and television journalists identify with the government line. Journalists have learned to 'resonate' with what is required. We notice that over time journalists in public media have learned to meet the expectations of the political powers. A well-paid job, plentiful benefits, and especially job security in a state-funded organisation have diminished their impetus to protest against constraints on their editorial independence or to criticise abusive interventions. Additionally, despite visible efforts, the trade union is also failing to defend the professional interests of employees.

Like in many media organisations around the world, there are journalists who criticise the editorial control on public radio and television publicly. However, these initiatives have not succeeded in triggering real change in the day-to-day operations of public service media.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For detailed explanations, see Răzvan Martin, Alexandru Brăduț Ulmanu (2016) *De ce și cum se clatină TVR. Mărturii din interiorul televiziunii publice*, Active Watch, Bucharest.

### Adaptation to the digital age

Digitalisation is not mentioned in Law No 41/1994 (the Act that currently regulates the organisation of public radio and television in Romania) for obvious reasons. A change in legislation is needed to adapt to current digital, social, and economic trends.

In Romania, digitalisation was delayed relative to other European countries. According to a report on digitalisation published in 2006: 'the position of many TV managers is that "things are working just fine" and that changes were being implemented at a slow pace'.<sup>21</sup> Although public service radio and television offered extensive in-house training for journalists (including training organised by the EBU), adaptation to digital technology was slow, with significant resistance to change.<sup>22</sup>

Upgrades of radio equipment began in the early 2000s. Broadcasting and production have now been digitalised. New FM transmitters, West Band, are in use.

In late 2003, Radio Romania International diversified its transmission formats, becoming part of an international network of transmitters (satellite transmission, internet via real audio and audio formats on demand, terrestrial transmission over FM and AM via radio partnership, mobile reception, and Wi-Fi).

The digitalisation process has multiple aspects: editing and production and signal broadcasting and reception. Requirements related to the former were generally met, the initial reluctance of journalists being overcome in the early 2000s. Equipment costs have been high, which has put additional financial pressure on public service media. At Radio Romania, there are radio stations that broadcast online only, such as Radio 3 Net 'Florian Pittiș'. There are also dual air-and-online as well as air-only stations, with the choice of dissemination method depending on geography, such as Radio Romania Music, a classical music channel. In addition, the programmes of the main channels are streamed live online in both audio and video formats.

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<sup>21</sup> Romina Surugiu, Raluca Radu (2009) Introducing New Technologies in Media Companies from Romania, Portugal, Spain and Cyprus. A comparative approach, p. 11, <http://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/40618>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 12.

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Front entrance of Sala Radio ©Alexandru Dolea

The process of digitalisation of archive records started in 2010 and is scheduled to be completed by 2025. According to Maria Țoghină, Director-General of the Public Radio at the time, no attempt will be made to remaster the files in the archive to improve sound quality. The audio will be preserved the way it is, the files being kept as historical documents.<sup>23</sup>

The public radio also intends to launch an internet portal at some point where it will provide all the documents obtained in return for payment. The archive of the public radio includes 4 shelf kilometres of written documents, 25 000 files, and 12 000 photos. The audio archives include a total of about 132 000 hours of recordings that would take, according to persons involved in the effort, 15 years for a single person to listen to them.

<sup>23</sup> Liviu Moldovan (2009) Digitalizarea Fonotecii de Aur, 1,5 milioane de euro până acum, money.ro, 1 November, <https://www.money.ro/digitalizarea-fonotecii-de-aur-1-5-milioane-de-euro-pana-acum>.

Media digitalisation and the independence of media institutions were among the topics addressed at the March 2019 conference on Modernizing Media Services through Innovation and Dialogue, organised with support from the European Commission and at the initiative of the European Federation of Journalists, in collaboration with FAIR-MediaSind Federation of Culture and Mass Media. A BBC representative underlined on that occasion: 'There are three levels of interest in digitising public-interest media: developing voice platforms, focusing on mobile applications, and countering fake news.'<sup>24</sup>

### Current discussion in Romania about public service media

There is much debate in the public domain regarding public radio and television, including criticism of the government's attempts to limit freedom of speech and interfere with the impartiality of journalists. At the same time, another topic of interest is the lack of transparency regarding the way public radio and television use their budgets.

Limiting access to inside information and, implicitly, restricting freedom of speech are issues that go back a long time, as noted by media analyst Brîndușa Armanca.<sup>25</sup> In February 2019, a document entitled 'Warning regarding the provision of information to Board of Trustees members' caught public attention. The document was issued by the Public Radio and signed by Georgică Severin, former MP of the ruling party and current Director-General of the SRR. The document was a warning to the employees of the Public Radio that no information, data or documents should be provided to the members of the Board of Trustees.

The document states that any request made by a member of the Board of Trustees should be submitted in writing to the Council Secretariat and would be subject to approval by the Director-General himself. Ignoring the requirement would be regarded as a disciplinary offence carrying potential legal sanctions for the employee.

<sup>24</sup> George Bănciulea (2019) Digitalizarea presei și independența instituțiilor de media, printre temele dezbătute la conferința dedicată mass-media, Agerpres News Agency, <https://www.agerpres.ro/cultura/2019/03/06/digitalizarea-presei-si-independenta-institutiilor-de-media-printre-temele-dezbătute-la-conferinta-dedicata-mass-media--269890>.

<sup>25</sup> Armanca, Brîndușa (2019) Radioul public vrea tăcere, Revista 22, Year XXX, no. 4 (1489), 19 February - 4 March.

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Brîndușa Armanca notes that ‘what appears to be a simple administrative regulation is in fact a measure typical of public media, very good at creating secrecy and lack of institutional transparency through managerial directives. In effect, the leadership of the public radio constrains the relationship of the Board of Trustees with the employees in order to control the flow of information, to suppress complaints, and to prevent awkward leaks.’<sup>26</sup>

What kind of information is envisaged? Contracts, management policy and decisions, financial statements involving the institution’s numerous directors, etc., i.e. material that should be available to the public according to the Law on Access to Public Information. The core issue is financial data about ‘fees’, bonuses, contracts, etc. In theory, this data should be managed transparently by the SRR. In reality, the information is being withheld, as we have seen, even from the members of the Board of Trustees, particularly to opposition representatives on the Board whose representatives are either ignored when decisions are made or subjected to constant harassment.

At the TVR, the situation is hardly any better. In 2018, journalists complained that the PDG was materially interfering with editorial policy, especially in the news department.<sup>27</sup>

At a conference organised by the European Commission and the European Federation of Journalists in March 2019, the ongoing conflict at the TVR was explained as a consequence of the lack of real social dialogue and transparency as regards public money spending. Joining the conference, the Employee Representative in the Board of Trustees of TVR, journalist Monica Ghiurco, stated: ‘Extraordinary things have been accomplished in Romanian Television thanks to professional (journalists). They do their jobs admirably, often sacrificing personal resources to get respectable results. (...) If today we are talking about suspicions of abuse of office and managerial overreach that a parliamentary committee will investigate, this is a clear signal that no one is willing to accept the state of affairs any longer.’<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Andrei Tudor Dumitru (2018) Dragoș Pătraru: Doina Gradea se implica de acasă, suna, dădea SMS-uri, romanialibera.ro, 15.May, <https://romanialibera.ro/politica/dragos-patraru-doina-gradea-se-implica-de-acasa-suna-dadea-sms-uri-728566>.

<sup>28</sup> George Bănciulea (2019) Digitalizarea presei și independența instituțiilor de media, printre temele dezbătute la conferința dedicată mass-media, Agerpres News Agency, <https://www.agerpres.ro/cultura/2019/03/06/digitalizarea-presei-si-independenta-institutiilor-de-media-printre-temele-dezbatute-la-conferinta-dedicata-mass-media--269890>.

At the same conference, the President of the MediaSind Romanian Journalists' Union, Cristi Godinac, stressed that the main challenge facing the two public broadcasters is the elimination of the licence fee in 2017, which has effectively transformed the public service broadcasters into state-owned institutions that are strictly dependent on the Ministry of Finance. The PDG, it was pointed out, is unable to cope with the situation and is ruling through dictatorial decrees.<sup>29</sup>

### Conclusions

This report focuses on public radio and television in Romania, aiming to outline a clear picture of the present state of both institutions. Many voices from different areas (researchers, journalists, media analysts and politicians) have provided evidence of constant political interference in public radio and television in Romania that impairs the editorial independence of these institutions and their credibility in the eyes of the audience. We argue that the political influence may have also affected the economic situation of public radio and television, although this aspect has not been explored in the report.

Legislative action is required to limit political interference in the operations and organisation of public radio and television in Romania. The present Law No 41/1994 is obsolete because as it does not take into account digitalisation and creates the conditions that make political meddling in the public service media possible. There have been several reform initiatives but none has succeeded so far.

In order to limit political influence, a new formula for the nomination of senior managers of the public radio and television is needed. The present process (with eleven members nominated by political parties or institutions and two members elected by radio and television employees) results in constant political pressure on both institutions and serves to institutionalise the political influence on public service media in Romania. The Board of Trustees should reflect the diversity of Romanian society, not the diversity of Romanian political parties, in the sense that it should give a voice and vote to non-governmental organisations, universities, and journalists' professional associations. We argue that the Board of Trustees should be composed of 13 members selected solely from non-governmental organisations, universities and research institutions

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

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and journalist groups. No political party should nominate members to leadership positions in public radio and television.

Also, in order to limit the influence of the political power on these two public institutions, the law should clearly state that Parliament is not entitled to dismiss the Board of Trustees in its entirety and to install an interim administration sitting for more than six months. Romanian public service media have been run by nominal caretaker boards from 2012 until today. Administration on an interim basis means that managerial policy changes every time the government does, creates confusion, and exacerbates political pressure on public radio and television in Romania.



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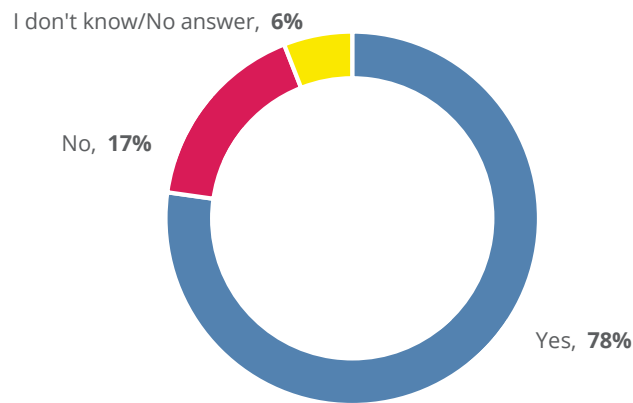
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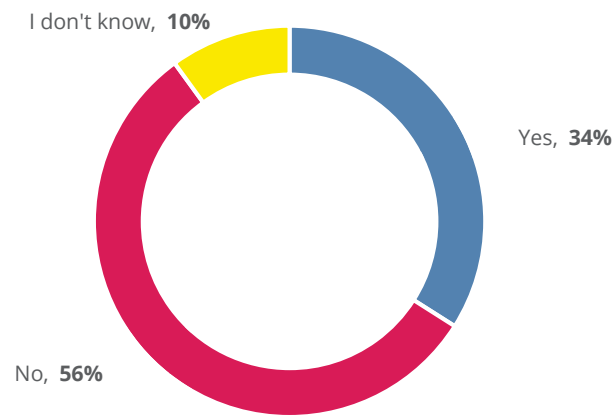
## Opinion Poll Romania

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



In keeping with other EU countries, the majority of Romanian respondents believe that PSM play an important role for democracy in their country, namely 78 percent of them share this opinion. This perceived importance is higher than in the non-EU countries of the total sample.

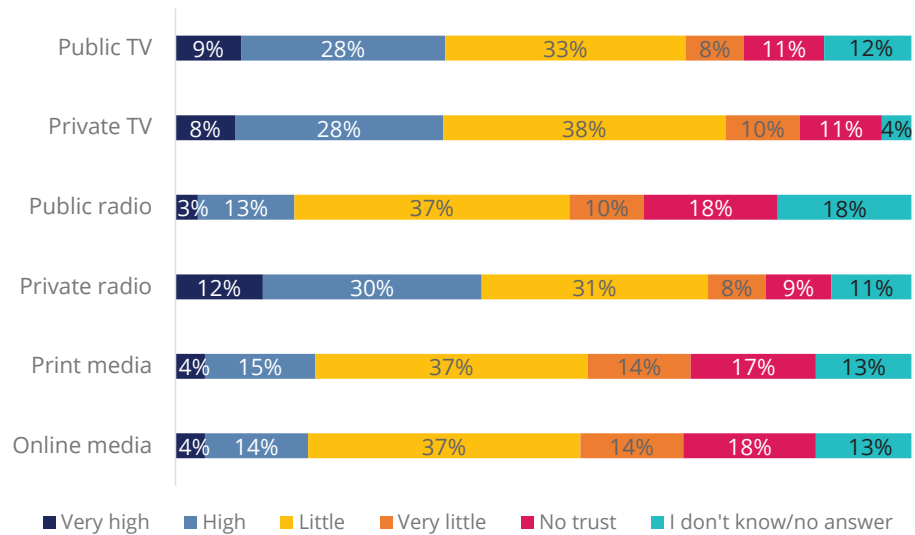
**Chart 2: In your opinion, are PSM free from political influence in your country? (Base: Total Romanian sample, in percent)**



Romanians have the most positive attitude towards their public broadcasters as compared to the overall target sample. One-third of Romanian citizens believe that PSM are free from political influence (see Chart 2). With this result, Romanians have the second most positive attitude towards PSM as a country, after the citizens of Albania. There are significant differences among Romanians with respect to their educational background: only 16 percent of respondents with university degrees believe that PSM are free from political influence in comparison to 49 percent of respondents with primary education that who share this opinion.

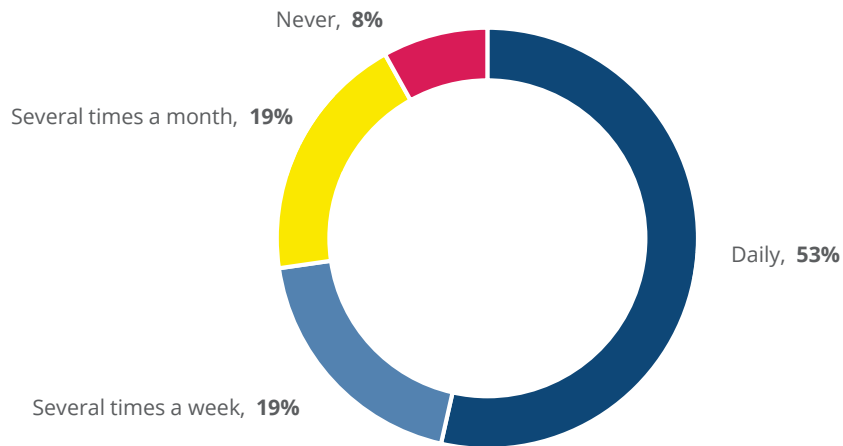
## A Pillar of Democracy on Shaky Ground

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



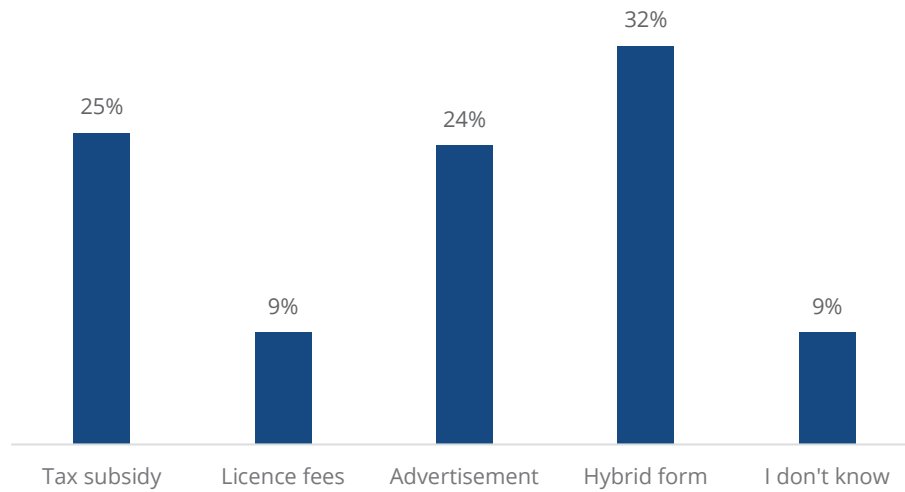
For Romanian citizens, there are no real differences in the level of trusts in public and private TV. However, the share of respondents who have a high level of trust in public radio is the smallest. Generally, Romanians have a higher level of trust in media as compared to respondents in other countries from the region (see Chart 3). Significant differences were noted on the basis of the age of respondents: citizens aged 18-29 years trust media less than average (in first line, media like TV, both private and public, and radio, private and public), while citizens aged 50-64 years trust media the most as compared to other age groups in the population.

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



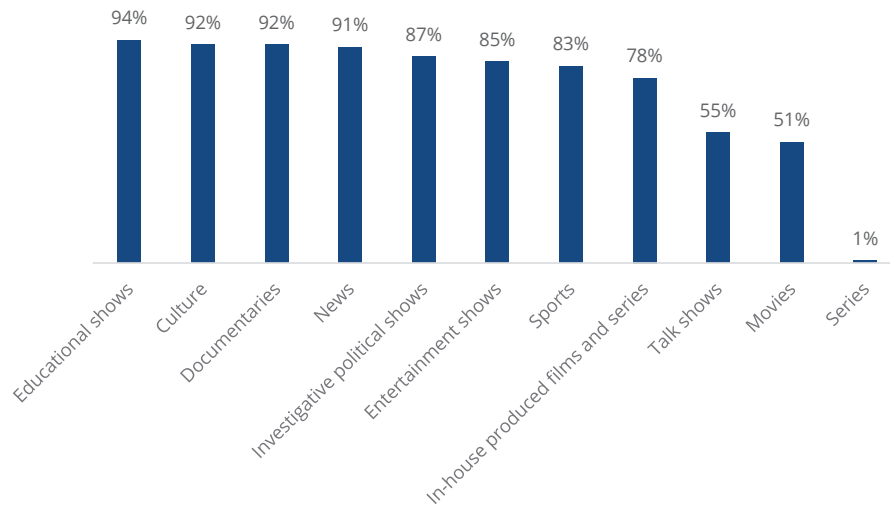
Defeating expectations, when compared to other EU Member States like Croatia and Bulgaria, Romanians use PSM less frequently: 53 percent of respondents use PSM daily (compared to 69 percent in Croatia, and 71 percent in Bulgaria). Of course, this percentage is significantly higher among senior age groups: 65 percent of 50-64 age group use PSM daily as do 72 percent of respondents aged over 64 years.

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



Unlike respondents in all other countries, Romanian citizens have one of the highest preference rates for a tax subsidy; only Moldova has a higher response rate in favour of this model. This shows that the recent abolishment of licence fees in Romania and the introduction of funding by tax subsidy is seen as a positive development by a quarter of citizens. Still a hybrid form of financing is preferred by most respondents, with one-third of all interviewees stating their preference for this model.

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



As regards preferred PSM content, Romanians have highest expectations (see Chart 6), together with neighbouring Moldova. Interestingly, the gender-based difference with regard to sport programmes is not confirmed by the Romanian sample. Although it is not a statistically significant difference, a higher percentage of women would like to see more sport programmes (90 percent as compared to 77 percent of men).