

BULGARIA: PROVISIONAL RULES AND DIRECTORIAL CHANGES: RESTRUCTURING OF NATIONAL TV

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Introduction

In the summer of 1990, when the first multi-party elections were to be held in Bulgaria, the newly organised Union of Democratic Forces aired on TV a video recording of the then communist Prime Minister of the country Petar Mladenov, muttering something like "call in the tanks" when facing an outraged public heckling in the country's capital. In spite of the fact that Petar Mladenov fiercely disputed the authenticity of the record, the airing of such a compromising material eventually led to his resignation. Since the very beginning of the post-communist transition, the democratic forces knew how to make use of the TV medium, and very rapidly TV came to be the focus of the power struggle. And it still remains there.

Two TV channels with shrinking broadcast hours (6,200 Hs. yearly), run by the Parliament and owned by the state, operate in the country and broadcast to around two million TV sets (Milev 1993, 65). Bulgarian viewers have also access to a Russian and a French language TV programs. A number of major foreign networks are available to those who own satellite dishes which are no longer banned. Two new private contenders appeared on the scene in 1995: New Television and 7 Days TV were granted temporary licences to broadcast. A number of TV journalists and producers who have lost their jobs during the past few years are getting involved in projects of more private TV stations which would allow them to pursue their own professional concepts.

Broadcast media are in the centre of political debate. However, near five years after democratic changes started in Bulgaria, the country still does not have legislation in the field of broadcasting. By the summer of 1994, only one piece of legislation has been passed — Regulations for Cable Distributing Systems for Radio and Television Signals in 1993 (*Balkan Media* 1994, 1, 56-57).

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Political Control over Bulgarian National Television

Meanwhile, the National TV changed leaders six times. Each one made numerous personnel changes within the “inherited clumsy vertical structure” (Georgiev 1992) and contributing to the “managerial turbulence” (Gotovska-Popova and Engelbrekt 1993, 46). Any other attempts at re-structuring were inevitably abandoned, due to the lack of a firm legislative basis. It proved impossible to launch structural changes within the volatile context of provisional rules.

Back in 1990 direct governmental control over broadcasting was replaced with indirect (parliamentary) control and Provisional Rules for the work of the broadcast media came into effect. “Political censorship was not practically abolished, but only changed institutionally” (Jordanova 1992, 22). No matter to which political force they belong, MPs are reluctant to commit to firm media legislation, since it would mean irreversible loss of the control they still exercise over the national broadcast space. While consensus on many other major issues is lacking in the Parliament, there is a quiet consensus on the matter that the best should be done to keep the national TV and other national media agencies under control. The situation came to a full absurd in July 1995, when the Prosecutor-General Ivan Tatarchev asked the Constitutional Court to review the constitutionality of the provisional statute on national radio and TV. He claimed that the current provisions violate the constitution, which provides for the independence of the media and forbids censorship. He was also quoted as saying that the commission is not empowered to take decisions on its own and that by doing so, it violates the constitution (*OMRI Daily Digest II*, 1995, No. 139). Thus, instead of taking steps to speed up the passage of a relevant piece of legislation in the Parliament, the Prosecutor General indirectly suggested that even the provisional rules have to be cancelled.

Dissatisfaction with the leadership of Bulgarian National Television (BNT) has been voiced by various circles within the political spectrum (Vulkanova 1993, 5; Abadzhiev 1993, 7). However, ever more often the critics call for firm legislation, rather than for another change of chairman. Vladimir Mikhailov, who teaches communications at the New Bulgarian University in Sofia insists that “the TV is more important than its chairman,” and that the first thing to be resolved is the issue with censorship and monopoly over the broadcast space (Mikhailov 1991, 15). M. Pesheva notes that the change of bosses does not lead to profound changes within TV (Pesheva 1993a, 7). H. Butzev criticises the parliamentary commission for its reluctance to pass the bill on the media (*Kultura*, 14 May 1993) and notes that it has become a rule that the leadership of the national media changes following any change in parliamentary balance of powers (*Kultura*, 5 March 1993). In 1993 even the President Zhelev expressed concern and urged the parliament to adopt legislation regarding the status of television; it was intolerable to keep the national television hostage to political games and ambitions (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 6 March 1993).

Charles Dawson (1992, 598) identifies two types of threats to the new media situation in Eastern European countries — economic (monopoly controls of printing and distribution methods, lack of management experience) and intellectual ones

("inevitable tradition of didactic rather than informational journalism, and ambiguities in the relationship between the media and the governments of which they are reporting"). These both fully apply to the case of Bulgarian television. Features of the general crisis of all East bloc media systems, described by Downing (1993, 7), such as "governing party obsession with broadcasting control, especially of TV; a very large corpus of media professionals inherited from the recent past; a media system responding with no greater success than in the West to demagogic proposals for economic advance or to the ethnic prejudices," are also easy to discover in Bulgaria. The ideal task of creating a "new kind of public service media which would be based on public funding and not controlled by the state or dominated by commercial interests, and characterised by high concerns for production and recipients" (Splichal 1993, 19) is too far from reality. Civil society in Bulgaria is an imaginary construct barely able to counteract restoration of state monopoly or a possible take-over by commercial enterprises. The concept of public service broadcasting is more than questionable in a situation when all parliamentary forces are preoccupied with the "usage" of TV. Contrary to all democratic expectations, politicians "are increasingly succumbing to the temptation to try to control state-owned radio and TV" (Gotovska-Popova and Engelbrekt 1993, 46). Television is especially important, since according to data from September 1991, 91.6 per cent of all households in Bulgaria possess at least one TV set (Bakardzhieva 1992, 479) and opinion polls rate television as the most credible news source.

The two major parliamentary forces have presented draft bills to the Parliamentary Commission on Radio and TV — the Bulgarian Socialist Party in January 1992 (Vassilev 1993, 8), and the Union of Democratic Forces in May 1993 (Papazov 1993). It was expected that the law on Radio and Television would be discussed and passed by the Parliament in September 1993, but it has not happened yet. The political situation substantially changed with the return of the socialists (communists) to power in January 1995. The discussion of media legislation was again indefinitely postponed. Restructuring is thus restricted to changing the key players. This lawlessness is supported by the Parliament (Alafandari 1994, 33). Some applicants for private TV companies are selectively licensed before the relevant bill is passed. This has already happened with a number of radio stations and local TV enterprises. As Bourne notes (1993, 7), even in countries that have legislated a measure of independence for their media, TV remains a hotly contested issue. In the Bulgarian case, claims of an arbitrary approach to licensing would be justified, and a number of lawsuits might take place.

To understand the reluctance of politicians to commit themselves to legislation, one should have a look at the configuration of political forces in Bulgaria. Since November 1989, governments have changed five times, parliamentary elections were held three times, and for President, once. The former communists (socialists) and newly emerging democrats were in equilibrium in Parliament, and the ethnic Turkish party (MRF) had the decisive say, since the balance depended upon whom they would support. This situation lasted until the socialists' take over in December 1994, when they won the majority (52%) of the seats in the Parliament.

It seems that democratisation is now on hold in Bulgaria. All political forces claimed they were for "objective" (unbiased) television. This "objectivity," however, is

often being understood in Leninist terms, as active involvement of the media in carrying out the tasks of "objective historical necessity." Politicians shared the belief that television can generate and perpetuate desired social change (Engelbrekt 1993, 24). The realisation that they do not have the backing of the majority of the population led many democrats subscribe to a quasi-totalitarian belief during the time of their rule: If the Bulgarian public is so short-sighted that it does not see the full rejection of communism as the "imperative of our times," the objective of democratisation should be imposed on it. A poll of some leading figures of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), for example, carried out in 1991 suggested that while all they were theoretically favouring independent and private TV, they would welcome it only when "the existing conditions are satisfactory" (St. Savov), and only after carefully calculating "when to relax the monopoly" (Dimitrov 1991, 15).

The complexity of the public debate over TV is to be properly understood if one keeps account of the content of other media. Downing (1993, 17) notes that in post-communist times functional differences are observed between television, radio, the daily press, the magazine press, advertising, public opinion research, and not least, software and telecommunications. The press is mostly party affiliated, thus newspapers represent much wider diversity of views and approaches. A number of Bulgarian newspapers maintain permanent column on TV — *Standart*, *Kultura*, *24 Hours*, *168 Hours*, etc. *168 Hours* even rates the TV journalists on a weekly basis, using categories such as professional behaviour, quick reflexes in a difficult situation, original ideas, and photography. TV's Channel 1, along with the National Radio's Horizon program, have a leading part in forming the public opinion (53 per cent) compared to the press with 36 per cent (Grozlekov and Ivanov 1994, 4). For a while, the Second Channel of BNT had also a special TV program (TV Mirror with Svetlana Bozhilova), to reflect the on-going debate over TV in the other media. In February 1994, a program called The Miracle of TV was launched, featuring interviews with TV personalities and visitors from abroad.

A situation illustrating the badly kept secret of tensions between press and TV developed in late 1993, when a TV reporter was fired for "spying" in favour of the press group 168 Hours. In January 1994, the tension reached its peak in the controversy surrounding the Melon awards for best TV journalism, awarded by the same press group. The director of TV had declared a boycott of the award ceremony, and issued an order that people from the press group should not be let into the TV building. For this, he was mocked by the press (Aslanov 1994, 24). Thus both the Melon awards and the TV Oscars in March 1994 became political events and helped journalists who were barred from TV to enjoy better reputation and wider popularity than while working there.

The dependence of radio and television on state money became especially evident during the press strike in March 1994, when journalists from the electronic media failed to actively support their colleagues (Manolova 1994, 2). Even so, TV did cut down on parliamentary and cabinet reports, suspended coverage of other state institutions, and thus demonstrated solidarity with the demands of press journalists when they protested against the introduction of an 18 per cent Value Added Tax.

The fluctuating reputation of TV is reflected in the results of public opinion polls

carried out by BBSS Gallup Intl. in an atmosphere of general mistrust in any sort of polls. Back in 1990, concerns were voiced that polling rather influences than reflects public opinion. The chairman of BNT has also made statements to the effect that he will reject the polling of TV audiences since it is an impediment of his work (Terzieva 1993b, 7).

While public opinion polling was often ignored by the TV bosses, they were exposed to another kind of direct public intervention — groups of people (usually supporters of the political force which happened to be in opposition) used to gather every day in front of the headquarters of Bulgarian TV and yell their opinion to the TV journalists passing by, who, certainly, cannot turn a deaf ear to this **vox populi** (Bakardzhieva 1992, 483).

Changes in the leadership of the Bulgarian National TV clearly indicate the direct dependence of TV on the government, despite the fact that, officially, the Parliament is in control. Since November 1989, when the democratisation process was first launched, Bulgaria has changed governments five times, and the heads of TV on six occasions (plus several periods when TV did not have officially appointed chair).¹ Changes of government did not automatically lead to changing the leadership of TV, but each new government exercised pressure on the Parliamentary Commission to make sure that the work of TV was “unbiased.” In practical terms, this meant appointing as TV chair a loyal person, who would introduce further personnel changes down the hierarchy. This is why if one speaks of re-structuring of Bulgarian TV, one is necessarily restricted to commenting upon personalities and their concepts, visions and short-lived efforts. Almost all changes come and go with the change of boss.

Philip Bokov was first appointed TV chair when reform-minded communists ousted Todor Zhivkov in November 1989. Bokov proved unable to keep the TV untouched by the radicalisation of Bulgarian society, and on a number of occasions he panicked. This made the communists, then still in power, take prompt steps to replace him in March 1990 with Pavel Pissarev, an experienced administrator, who stated that he would resign if the situation became untenable. This happened few months later, in July, when striking students exercised pressure on him. During his short rule, he introduced the French language channel TV5 Europe to BNT. Pissarev was succeeded by Ognyan Saparev, who insisted that he was an “independent intellectual” (a contradiction in terms for the Bulgarian situation). Saparev was appointed in the fall of 1990, and survived as TV boss until October 1991. He was dismissed right after UDF came officially to power. After this, Saparev unsuccessfully stood for the post of vice-president, along with an independent presidential candidate. TV remained without a chair, while the Parliament debated 16 candidacies. After five months of deliberations, on 1 April 1992, the 44 years old Assen Agov, a TV anchor, was appointed. Agov was not an official member of any party, but he was well known as a UDF supporter. He was certainly much to the taste of the then UDF government and carried out the unavoidable personnel cuts under their aegis — from 3,900 to 2,200 (Davis 1993, 17). During his mandate, he launched two important structural changes: (1) the formation of production teams (a standing production staff to work on specific programs) and (2) the establishment, in November 1992, of the competing Channel 1 and Efir 2 within the BNT. This was supposed to be the first step in testing alternative approaches toward the further restructuring of television. Channel 1 was to respond to the needs of the

government, while Efir 2 was to gradually become a share holding enterprise (Gotovska and Engelbrekt 1993, 46). In an interview with Davis (1993, 18), Agov expressed his intention to invert the pyramid of control by keeping editors responsible both managerial and editorial aspects of their part of the output, to strive for financial independence, and to develop a system of public regulation and accountability under the supervision of the nine-members Parliamentary commission (whose members are three presidential appointees, three government and three parliamentary ones). Ideally, this would lead to the realisation of the desired concept of public service television.

In an interview for *Kultura* newspaper in May 1992 Agov, however, had made a comment that the TV journalism "always follows the lead of the winners" (Agov 1992, 1). This turned out to be very unfortunate for him, and caused fierce criticism by the former communists who now had proof of Agov's bias (Tomov 1992, 3). After the fall of the UDF government in October 1992, the new moderate government of Berov came to power in December 1992, Agov was considered too supportive to the UDF. He was dismissed on 24 February 1993.

Pursuing his concept of competing programs, Agov had appointed Neri Terzieva in charge of Efir 2. Neri Terzieva, an ethnic Turk, was the first woman in TV to make it to such position. She started as anchor at the TV station in Bulgaria's second-biggest city, Plovdiv. As director of Efir 2, she introduced many innovations and made the Second Channel really competitive with the first one. A Gallup poll indicated that, in 1993, 52-55 per cent of the TV audience preferred Efir 2 (Bozhilova 1993a, 2). In February 1994, the polls indicated that 31 per cent of the viewers still prefer Efir 2, versus 28 per cent for Channel 1.

Neri Terzieva worked to replace the obsolete 1968 Soviet **Kadr I** equipment of most TV studios with state-of-the-art Western technology. She had also invested substantial efforts for the transformation of Efir 2 into a shareholding enterprise, with 51 per cent state owned shares, and 25 per cent for each employees and independent shareholders. According to her, she was implementing a plan developed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Terzieva 1993a, 3). The plan was abandoned after her dismissal by the new TV boss, Hacho Boyadzhiev, shortly after he took over the BNT. There are differing opinions on their conflict. Some maintain that it was over financial interests (Terzieva 1993b, 7; Dikov 1993, 5). According to others, it was due to conceptual disagreements over competition between the two channels (Bozhilova 1993b, 3). An exemplary controversy between Terzieva and Boyadzhiev developed back in March 1993 over the *Dallas* series. Terzieva was said to have purposefully scheduled its airing on Efir 2 to coincide with the prime time news broadcast on Channel 1, thus plotting to kidnap the viewers of Channel 1 (Lozanov 1993b, 8).

Hacho Boyadzhiev is known as producer and director of TV variety shows, popular music and entertainment programs. He was appointed two weeks after Agov's dismissal in March 1993. In April, he promptly fired Neri Terzieva. This initiated an avalanche of resignations and dismissals. During Agov's times, the TV had already undergone substantial personnel cuts, but Boyadzhiev was subjected to more fierce criticism for his personnel policy. Almost everybody who joined TV or was promoted during Agov's rule was gone within a few months (Bozhilova 1993b, 3; Paskov 1993,

6). Boyadzhiev declared a vague intention to stand for “national” television (Boyadzhiev 1993, 9). He promised to provide more opportunities for Bulgarian authors, and to resist the invasion of American programs, by promoting original Bulgarian ones, and to ban violence on TV. Since the socialists came back to power in December 1994, there has been much interference in Boyadzhiev’s work, the two major “promoters” of this interference being two former TV journalists, closely affiliated with the ruling party — Clara Marinova and Lyubomir Kolarov.

A major change introduced by Boyadzhiev was the cancellation of the TV teams established during his predecessor’s rule. He replaced the teams with a producers’ bureau, which was supposed centrally to supply with programs both channels. Boyadzhiev opposed the concept of competing channels, and strove to make the news on both programs uniform. In an interview, he stated his intention to schedule the TV news on Channel 1 and 2 at the same time, so that, as he put it, “the viewers could compare and choose.” This tendency to make the news more uniform reflects a general state of mind among the Bulgarian audience which is less and less interested in political struggles. It is very doubtful, however, if he could have succeeded in this endeavour, since his attempt directly affected a large number of journalists who enjoyed significant public attention, and for whom it was a moral imperative to be as highly opinionated as possible.

In June 1995, in a dash to take over the major news media, the government of the Bulgarian Socialist Party changed at one stroke the directors of the Bulgarian National Radio, of the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency, and of the Bulgarian Television. No specific reasons were given for the changes, and, in spite numerous requests by parliamentarians, the newly appointed Chairs did not have to appear in the Parliament to present their views on the future of the media they were taking charge of. The new Chair of BNT is Ivan Granitski, a literary critic in his 40s, and well known for his commitment to the socialist party. Immediately preceding his appointment for a TV Chair, he was Director of the Socialist Party’s Publishing House “Hristo Botev.” As with all of his predecessors, his first acts on the job were to cancel several entertainment shows, and to fire a bunch of top executives (*OMRI Daily Digest II*, 1995, Nos 143 and 146). At the start of his rule, Granitski promised to ban programs “propagating violence, homosexuality, prostitution, gambling, and drug addiction” and to lead a “struggle for higher professional and artistic levels of programs and against those [who] oppose national interests” (*OMRI Daily Digest II*, 1995, No. 143).

A major concern for the TV leadership is operating the enterprise within a difficult financial situation. The lack of laws makes it impossible to regulate expenditure and investment in the media. The fact that relay facilities are owned by the Committee of Post and Telecommunications makes it an imperative that regulation of broadcasting should be carried out in financial terms. BNT tried to secure partial self-financing through selling advertising time, but the search for sponsors still remains a major concern. The yearly budget for TV voted by the Parliament envisages a projected deficit of at least 10 per cent — for 1993 it was 468 million leva, with projected deficit of 53 million (Gotovska-Popova and Engelbrekt 1993, 47).

Even suffering financial difficulties, BNT still occupies a monopolistic position within the Bulgarian-language national broadcast space and “private TV remains a

dream" (Milev 1995, 192). Around 30 independent radio stations were licensed (six broadcast in Sofia). When bids were solicited to operate cable TV throughout the country, the response resulted in 160 applicants (Kapudaliev 1994, 3). Several companies competed with bids for operating cable TV in Sofia. This put the Committee of Post and Telecommunications in a difficult situation to choose one only, and to be blamed again in promoting monopoly. In early 1994, a number of claims were made against the Commission on Frequencies by enterprises which were refused licences. More than 20 companies in this field have taken steps to unite to protect their interests. According to Kapudaliev, an official in charge of these issues, the difficulties in allowing private TV enterprises to start operation are mostly due to the lack of a media law. Around 30 local TV stations were granted permission to operate in August 1994, while the rules for obtaining licences for national TV broadcasting were tightened (Bakardzhieva 1995, 76). Apparently, the intention of the government was to encourage local broadcasting, not major competitors to the National Television. The print media regularly report on major competitors for licenses in the field of private broadcasting, such as Seven Days Company, Globo TV, and more recently on companies such as Tempo and Premiera TV (partially owned by Italian Nicola Grauso, who attained prominence with his media ventures in Poland). National licensing is postponed again and again, while small local companies are being granted permissions to start broadcasting in provincial towns. Everything depends on the pressure exercised on the Parliament finally to pass legislation on TV broadcasting even if this would happen to only resolve the matter with legalisation of private TV enterprises.

Minority Language Broadcasting

"The route from Bulgaria to Europe passes through the Bosphorus" — this was the 1990 declaration of Ahmed Dogan, the leader of Bulgarian Turks. One of the most delicate issues in Bulgarian politics in general, and TV in particular, is TV broadcasts for minorities, particularly ethnic Turks. The fact that the first private TV to be licensed on 23 September 1993 by the authorities was the Kurdzhali based Rhodopi, was a major breakthrough. At first it was supposed only to broadcast in Bulgarian, but later programs in Turkish were to be transmitted. The station quickly gained audience of 110,000, and intends to expand its operation (*168 Hours*, 24 January 1994).

Demands for minority language broadcasting were not voiced publicly, but were on the agenda for political action of the MRF, so the licensing of Rhodopi was a timely move to respond to the difficult ethnic situation in the region. Back in May 1993, there were reports that powerful stationary and mobile transmitters operate unlicensed in a number of regions, all of them with compact Turkish population, broadcasting on the frequency of the National Television, in violation of the Communications Act (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 11 May 1993). It was a clear sign of protest by the Turkish speaking population over the delay of provisions for broadcasting for the ethnic minorities. As Jordanova (1992, 22) notes, the new draft legislation was supposed to allow "regional channels for areas with a substantial Turkish speaking population." A mayor of a Turkish community in Southern Bulgaria was quoted as saying that people in that area "need their mother tongue," and the town council decided to allocate funds for the installation of relay facilities to broadcast Turkish

television programs. The relay facilities are municipal property, so funds for re-transmission were raised on a voluntary basis. Despite the government intended to interfere, it proved unable to do so effectively. The Prime Minister described as violations of the law the unsanctioned import of relay facilities and "the interference with the signals of the national electronic media." He urged the Bulgarian parliament to consider a telecommunications bill making provisions for punishing similar offences as soon as possible. A minor fine was introduced and is currently imposed for illegal re-broadcasting, which is still taking place in many Turkish populated areas. The BNT has been considering introducing some Turkish language programs, but none have been aired yet. In such a context, the licence granted to the Rhodopi television is a step forward in the policy of accommodating the minority media demands of the ethnic Turks by letting them having their local broadcasting and paying for it themselves through privately run enterprises.

Bulgarian journalists are generally silent on the situation of minority media. Now and then one can see scattered reports on the matter written in a specific "newspeak," for example: "Municipal Authorities in Kurdzhali Will Request Permission of the National Assembly to Start Re-transmitting Four Satellite Programs" (*Democratsia*, 13 August 1993). To the Bulgarian audience it reads — the intention of the city authorities in Kurdzhali (area populated predominantly with ethnic Turks) is to take steps to secure Turkish satellite programs. This way, National Television will not be requested to start Turkish language broadcasts and everybody will be happy. The government fears unrest from nationalist minded Bulgarians if special broadcasts start for the Turks, so that this settlement seems to be working for now.

One should note, however, that diplomatic activity between Ankara and Sofia is on the increase. Turkey has offered all Balkan countries membership in its new Black Sea Economic Community (Glenny 1992, 183). The Turkish daily *Zaman* is being distributed for free in Bulgaria (*Mideast Mirror*, 1 March 1993). Radio Sofia broadcast in Turkish 2-3 hours daily. Along with numerous other target audiences, the recently launched Turksat 1A will reach also the Turkish population in the Balkans (Erdem, 1994).

As to other issues involving ethnic minorities and broadcasting, such as Macedonians and Serbs, there is no reliable data on the reception of TV broadcasts from Serbia and Macedonia. Still, in the South-western part of the country, a large number of TV sets are tuned to Belgrade and Skopje. Bulgarian and Western media report on requests made by Bulgarians in former Yugoslavia to increase the capacity of relay facilities to give them access to Bulgarian TV (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 4 December 1993).

External Television Broadcasting and Programming

Numerous foreign networks are present in the national wave band space of Bulgaria: Russian TV, TV5 Europe, RTL, SAT 1, MTV, EuroSport, DSF, Sky One, Super Channel, PRO 7, SWF 3, NBC, VOX, ARD, CNN, ZDF. Foreign government radio programs such as BBC and VOA have unrestricted access to commercial Bulgarian radio frequencies and RFE maintains offices and broadcasts from Sofia. Of all these

foreign programs, however, only the Russian one and TV5 can actually be watched by the majority of the population in the bigger cities, the other ones are available only to viewers with satellite dishes access.

Russian TV broadcast to Bulgaria was first introduced in 1986. Transmitting Soviet programs for Bulgaria was first negotiated before “glasnost,” but it only became effective under Gorbachev. Soon after launching the actual broadcasts, the Bulgarian authorities regretted this move of devotion to the Soviets, since their program proved very instrumental to ruin the communist regime. While the Bulgarian TV was still conforming to the traditional reporting of flourishing socialism, the “perestroika euphoria” of Soviet TV was taking the shape of reports of a harsh and troubled reality. This approach certainly appealed the Bulgarian audiences far better than the “positive thinking” attitude of their domestic TV. After 1989, the changes in Bulgaria gained momentum compared to the Soviet Union, and Bulgarians gradually gave up their devotion to Soviet television. In 1991, a cancellation of broadcasting from Russia was considered, but it never happened, and, in spite diminishing viewer interest, in January 1994 an agreement was signed between Russian Ostankino and BNT envisaging exchange of programs and joint productions (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 18 February 1994).

TV5 Europe was introduced by Pavel Pissarev, TV chair in 1990. This was one of many efforts to promote possible closer involvement of Bulgaria with the Francophone community — an important feature of Bulgaria’s foreign policy. (Since the Mauritius summit in October 1993, the “countries sharing the French language” extended eastwards and Bulgaria along with Romania became a fully fledged member of the Francophone group.) TV 5 Europe is an international endeavour, from which Bulgaria receives programs designed mostly for the former French colonies around the Mediterranean.

Foreign investors have to comply with volatile local regulations which makes them refrain from serious undertakings. This is recognised by politicians involved with regulating broadcasting (Kapudaliev 1994, 3). Still, in spite of the “tricky challenges of language, local sensitiveness and political interference” (Lynn 1994), some foreign enterprises maintain an interest in involvement with Bulgarian TV. Greek Antenna TV, for example, is interested in the advertising market of Bulgarian TV, which they consider a gateway to the Balkans (Clark and Pappas 1993, 35). Berlusconi’s Fininvest already has active involvement with Bulgarian TV enterprises and is sponsoring numerous projects (Grassi 1994).

As far as TV programs are concerned, an active Americanisation can be observed. Both American and “home-made” TV-shows adopting American style are broadcast. The most popular show lately was Nevada which follows the pattern of shows such as Jeopardy and Price Is Right. It rapidly attracted an enormous audience and gained a permanent slot on Saturday night prime time. The declared policy to encourage Bulgarian-produced programs to counteract the Americanisation of the BNT often takes the shape of creating Bulgarian programs with an American style. Endeavours such as shooting co-produced features about drug trafficking or red mercury smuggling are typical examples of post-communist approaches in program supply. Still, mini-series such as Petko Voyvoda or the movie The Goat’s Horn, featuring

important episodes of Bulgarian history, were broadcast on TV and attracted considerable viewer attention. **Gori, Gori Oganche**, a mini-series about the human rights abuses of the Pomak population of the Rhodopi mountains, which was aired in February 1995, became a source of a noisy controversy in the media, mostly because it touched on the delicate issues of ethnic tensions.

Viewers' interest in newscasts is diminishing. While in 1990 and 1991 almost all parliamentary discussions were broadcast on TV and Radio, in 1994 TV only covers basic debates. Critics noted that some of the permanent newscast shows now have a "drifting" schedule and air irregularly (Petrova 1994, 46). Still, the weekly review *Panorama* is among the most popular programs. The TV program that created a number of controversies and, at the same time, was widely acclaimed was the independent student show *Cuckoo*. It rated among the most popular TV shows since it was considered to present a really independent and critical point of view. Critics called it "a resort for the private opinion" (Lozanov 1993a, 2) and "the only free territory in TV" (Grozlekov and Ivanov 1994, 4). Many other shows covering cultural and social issues have appeared, faced competition, but were eventually cancelled.

The leadership of BNT is planning to create their own advertising agency in an attempt to prevent competing advertising companies taking over (Aslanov 1994, 24). The press reported numerous incidents involving corruption within TV departments deciding on commercials. It was also reported that members of the Parliamentary Commission on Broadcasting have become members of managing boards of advertising enterprises (*168 Hours*, 14 February 1994). According to the Program Director of Channel 1, BNT is to be considered rather an independent commercial station than a public service one, since a great part of the income comes from advertising. Promotional sale of advertising time for 1994 on 55 per cent discount, brought US \$ 400,000 (*Balkan Media*, 1994, 1: 23). Since commercials are a major source of income, regulating advertising proves problematic. In November 1993, for example, a decree was passed to ban cigarette commercials from radio, TV, city transports and street billboards, but it is still not efficiently enforced (*The Reuter European Business Report*, 14 July 1993).

To conclude: the "re-structuring" of Bulgarian TV within the limits of changing the leadership has become so routine that one can barely expect to see any legislative steps taken. A number of strong applicants are pressing the release of state monopoly over this major national medium to private television. Politicians, however, still believe that this media stronghold can be kept as a means to influence public opinion. It seems that the current socialist government will be reluctant to release the monopoly over the national broadcast space. For a while, public service broadcasting will have to remain only a desirable ideal of critics.

Note:

1. Changes of Prime Ministers of the Bulgarian Government and Directors of National Television BNT, 1989-1995:

Prime Minister

Andrey Lukanov

Communist

Nov. 1989 - July 1990

Dimitar Popov

no party affiliation

July 1990 - Oct. 1991

Philip Dimitrov

UDF

Oct. 1991 - Oct. 1992

Lyuben Berov

no party affiliation

December 1992 - October 1994

Jan Videnov

BSP

December 1994 -

Director of BNT

Philip Bokov

Communist, Nov. 1989 - March 1990

Pavel Pissarev

Communist, March 1990 - July 1990

Ognyan Saparev

moderate UDF

Sept. 1990 - Oct.

Assen Agov

UDF supporter

April 1, 1992 - Feb. 24, 1993

Hacho Boyadzhiev

no party affiliation

March 11, 1993 - July, 1995

Ivan Granitski,

BSP

June 1995 -

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