PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA UNDER PRESSURE: COMPARING GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN SPAIN AND SWEDEN 2006-2012

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Abstract

The current economic crisis is global in scope, thus affecting both countries in the North and in the South. As a consequence, national European governments are modifying their policies in order to cut down on public spending. This article compares how public service media policies are shaped in this new situation in two countries that represent very contrasting models of public service media: Spain and Sweden. The story of public service media survival in times of rapid development of media technology and liberal political hegemony is a common theme in contemporary media and communication research. This study adds to this theme, by exploring the conditions for public service media further by a more explicit focus on how newly elected governments approach public service media policies in times of economic crises. The basic aim of the study is to compare how public service media conditions may change in countries with very different public service media models.

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Introduction

The current economic crisis is global in scope, thus affecting both countries in the North and in the South. As a consequence, national European governments are modifying their economic policies in order to cut down on public spending. This article compares how public service media policies are shaped in this new situation in two countries that represent very contrasting models of public service media: Spain and Sweden.

The future of public service media in Europe remains unclear. During the last decades, competition in radio and TV markets has increased with public and private media companies in tough struggle for audiences and revenues (Iosifidis 2010, 1; Trappel et al. 2011b, 190). The highly competitive current market conditions raise new questions about public service remit, the autonomy of public media and the conditions of the co-existence of public and commercial media. In the current situation, the concept of public service is not only linked to the traditional broadcast scene, but also to the new digital and mobile platforms, such as the Internet and mobile devices (Debrett 2010, 24–25; Lowe and Steemers 2012, 15).

These developments have not occurred in a vacuum, but are the result of structural changes in media technology and media policy instead. The introduction of new technologies, such as satellite and cable TV and digital radio and TV, has been a powerful factor in explaining changing broadcast media markets (Lund et al. 2009, 30). Another influential force in this process is the implementation of more liberal media policies in many industrial countries. From a political perspective, public service media has increasingly been perceived not only as a provider of public benefit and a defender of the public interest, but also as a fundamental distortion of free market mechanisms, preventing private media from successful commercial operations (Donders 2012, 14–15). Thus, the story of public service media conditions in times of rapid development of media technology and an increasing liberal political hegemony is a common theme in contemporary media and communication research.

This article adds to this theme, by exploring the autonomy conditions for public service media by giving a more explicit focus on how newly elected governments have implemented public service media policies in times of economic crisis. The basic aim of the study is to compare how such media policy changes develop in countries with very different public service media models (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 43). The study compares public service media policy changes in the two very different public service media contexts of Spain and Sweden during the period 2006-2012 with regard to general regulatory framework, organisational and management structures, and financing models. The following section examines the concept of autonomy that is vital for this study of changing public service media conditions.

Autonomy Matters

In a democratic society the media plays an important role as a fourth state acting as "watchdog" for politicians as well as for other influential groups in society (Trappel et al. 2011a, 22). In order to fulfil this task, media require of certain autonomy to operate independently from those they are supposed to control. Therefore, – public service media constitute important "defining centers" in the infrastructure of public communication, as they can gain a higher degree of objectivity than private media. Independence from political and economic power plays a crucial role in this aspect: it serves as a principal rationale justifying a specific status of public service media and it also ensures that the influences of the State and the market, as well as their institutions (including e.g. government, parliament, commercial entities), are reduced to the minimum so that public service media are allowed to fulfill their mission with total, professional autonomy. Additionally, media regulation is determined by political, public, and economic objectives. Autonomy is an important factor in each and every one of these objectives, but its meaning differs. In the concept of public service media based on democratic theories, autonomy is understood above all as a prerequisite for independency of the State, the economy and other powers in society, such as big enterprises and interest groups.

The traditional frameworks of regulation – based on strict political considerations – are partly not applicable to the current media development. While this old framework is leaving loopholes for interpretation as long as it is not revised properly, there are more stakeholders imposing pressure on politicians to reregulate the public media framework in their respective favour (McQuail 2007, 17–18). There is a complex interplay of media actors and politicians which replaces the old, relatively static relations between public service media and politics through dynamic processes, and it is not clear whether this is a threat or an opportunity to achieve society's democratic objectives such as pluralism, participation and legitimacy. Politicians are, nevertheless, the most influential group in relation to public service media as they formally decide on the regulatory framework. However, the relationship between public service media, politics and media market is characterised by a permanent conflict of interests influencing public service media autonomy.

In this article, the basic concept of autonomy is analysed by a comparison of media policy changes in respect to public service media in the areas of regulatory framework (public service model, laws, remit) management/organisation (appointments, structure, independence) and financing models (license fee, state budget, advertising, sponsoring). Autonomy is assumed to increase when some changes in the regulatory areas include a broader definition of public service remit, fewer content restrictions or limitations, and when service contracts are not linked to electoral periods. Autonomy may also increase if the directors and board members of public service companies are appointed on professional grounds and if the state or government authority is not part of the organisation, nor appoints the governing bodies directly. Finally, a license fee system should increase the autonomy of public media more than those financing models where public media budgets come directly from the State, grants or where advertising plays a major role (Hanretty 2011, 168–169).

However, national regulatory frameworks may not explain all media changes. European Union media policy also influences member state by directives on media market competition considerations or definitions of public service remit.

EU Public Service Media Policy

The most important public service media document on the European level is the Amsterdam Treaty from 1997. It is relevant to describe it as an attempt to re-launch the idea of public service media throughout Europe, but at a time when information sources were scarce and such media basically included radio and television. The Amsterdam Treaty basically defined public service radio and television as national interests to be decided by the member states, even if the document also may be considered as support for commercial media interests of free media market conditions.

Digital media technology developments have imposed a huge challenge to the existing EU state aid and competition policy as they enable public service companies to expand on new media platforms where private media business interests are even more articulated. Public service value tests are now implemented – to varying degrees and extent – in the member states, with the purpose to test whether new public services have a public value or could be perceived as a significant market distortion.

The possible impact of EU media policy on national media markets is reasonable to be huge with regard to the regulatory framework in the single member states, as for example directives on competition laws and public service value tests have to be implemented in national media policy contexts. Less influence may be expected in the areas of organisation and management of public service companies and with regard to financing models as these are still considered as strict national issues.

Two Very Different Cases

The objective of this article is to analyse the changing autonomy conditions of public service media by comparing current changes with regard to regulatory framework, organisational and management structures and financing models in Spain and Sweden between 2006 and 2012. The comparison of these two countries is based on a most-different study design. Spain and Sweden were selected for this study as they do represent two most different cases and extremely contrasting public service media models. Referring to the terminology by media scholars Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, public service media in polarised pluralist media systems, such as Spain, are part of politics-over-media systems with limited autonomy, while countries that represent a democratic corporatist model, like Sweden, are characterised by politics-in-media systems with substantial autonomy (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 70). Thus, the study compares public service media policy changes in most different national autonomy contexts. However the design of the study does not allow for generalisations about media conditions in the whole of northern or southern Europe.

The implementation of public media policies is examined within the interpretive framework discussed above, with a special focus on possible influences from – and interactions between – those political system characteristics and media market structures that prevail in times of economic crisis. Methodologically speaking, the study is based on text analyses of secondary sources such as open access political documents on media policy in the two countries for the period 2006-2012, such as charters, public service media audits, political party platforms and parliamentary debate protocols. The most important sources for the analysis are described in the country sections. Furthermore, and besides from those political documents, press coverage of media policy issues has been analysed to some extent.

The differences between public service media in the two countries are not only based on theoretical models, but are also supported by available empirical data from the national public broadcasters on economy and market figures 2006-2009 (Table 1).

Table 1: Key Data on Public Television in Spain and Sweden, 2006-2009

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2006-2009 (% diff.)
Spain:					
Audience market share (%)	38.7	37.1	37.1	36.5	-5.8
Revenues (€ mill.)	961.8	1013.8	981.8	999.7	3.9
Public cost/inhab.	26.5	24.0	28.4	31.8	20.0
Sweden:					
Audience market share (%)	38.3	34.4	34.2	32.8	-14.4
Revenues (€ mill.)	511.8	503.6	494.0	475.4	-7.2
Public cost/inhab.	75.8	73.4	63.1	66.2	-12.7

Source: European Audiovisual Observatory 2008-2010.

As the table shows, television market conditions are changing in both countries but from very diverging points of departure. While the audience market share figures for public television gradually decreases in similar ways in Spain and Sweden, economic conditions are still very different. Public television in Spain is increasingly financed from the state budget, but public money spent on it is still much lower per capita than in the case of Sweden.

Within this context, the following section investigates how governments in Spain and Sweden have implemented public service media policies in times of economic pressures and the possible implications for their autonomy conditions.

Public Service Media Policy in Spain 2006-2012

Spain's Public National Television service (TVE) is still facing, fifty-six years after its creation, the uncertainty of defining its role as the main public broadcaster, at a moment when neither the economic situation of the country nor the waning satisfaction with the controversial former socialist regulation make things any easier for the public broadcaster's future in the new media ecology. Furthermore, the announcement of a gradual withdrawal of advertising in TVE in 2009 was widely commented; partially, since it was shortly after Sarkozy in France decided to abolish advertising from France Télévisions and also because it was just before Spain proceeded to the analogue switch-off. In fact, and led by the French commercial TV channels and telecommunications operators, the Spanish industrial sector linked to the audiovisual sector and the owners of the national private television channels have complained in Brussels over the new taxes exacted on them in order to support public national television (3 percent of revenues from private television channels, 1.5 percent of revenues from Pay TV and 0.9 percent applied to telecommunications operators).

This is a very sensitive issue, especially in Spain, as there has never been, from the very beginning, any license fee in support of public media. On the other hand, the difficult economic situation that TVE is facing in 2012 and the fact that the new ruling party, the conservative PP (initials for Partido Popular) is already changing, with a conservative standpoint, the rules of the game for RTVE, complicates things even more for Spain's main public broadcaster.

There is an evident acute need of cutting down governmental expenditures on the desk of the recently elected Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. Will cuts also include TVE? So far it seems they will: its budget for 2012 was already sliced in January with 200 million euros. To worsen things more in these days there is also a lot of controversy going on about the abusive disbursements of many Spanish public regional public service media that are still operating; and there are strong possibilities that at least some of them will run a shutdown while others might be privatised, as allowed according to a Law of December 2011.

Regulatory Framework

From the very beginning, public television in Spain was far from being a public television service; that is, with public mission objectives that had inspired the rest of Western European public televisions (McKinsey and Company 1999, 3–5). In fact, public media were *public* in terms of "belonging to the State," as it was the case when referring to public education, public transport, or public hospitals (Arriaza Ibarra 2009, 268). The only existing Law for the audiovisual sector was the *Statute of Radio and Television* (January 1980) that only reinforced the power of the State as the owner of public national radio and television (Nicolás 2005, 162).

After the Statute of 1980, there were three laws directly affecting public television in Spain: The first law is dated 2006, the *Law to Reform Public Media Belonging to the State*, after the socialist proposal to completely reform the public institution. Some of the urgent measures suggested in this Law are yet to be implemented. The most important change, however, is that it transformed the public service company RTVE into a Corporation of a sole owner, the Spanish State, on 1 January 2007. This implied a lot of structural changes intended to cast off the chains that had tied it previously to the political establishment (Arriaza Ibarra 2012, 15–16).

The second Law is of 2009 and it refers to the funding sources of RTVE; basically, it copied literally the progressive suppression of advertising from the French model that President Sarkozy promoted in 2008. The last Law is the *Audiovisual Law* of 2010, and even though it did not refer to public service media in particular, it is known in Spain as the Law that promoted oligopoly and commercial television and private media in the country, as it is established nowadays.

Organisation and Financing Models

Spain has never introduced a license fee to fund public television. This has been so firstly because it was unnecessary due to advertising, which arrived as a continuous source of income since 1957, and secondly because public financing came directly from the State (Iosifidis 2007, 56–57) that did not want to give away any portion of authority and control by letting any commercial television enter the market until January 1990 (Bustamante 2013, 133). This aroused the terrible suspicion that the political establishment would be closely related to the financing, support and continuity of public service media, as international researchers have regularly underlined (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 106–107). However, new important organisational changes also came along after the 2006 Law.

In respect to the public media debt, it was assumed by the government and will be paid by all Spanish citizens. However, there is a clear and strict prohibition for RTVE to acquire new debts in the future by putting the Spanish State as guarantor.

In respect to personnel, those employees aged 50 years and older were "invited" to retire with attractive settlement offers, whilst hundreds of young people were employed instead with the salary equivalent to one third of a former employee in the years prior to the reform.

When it came to authorities and board of governors (Executive Board), a President would head RTVE. This President would be proposed by the Parliament and approved by 2/3, and he/she would name the directors of public television (TVE) and public radio (RNE). To prevent the previous coincidence of a change of the country's government with the end of his/her mandate, the new Director of the Corporation would be appointed for a six-year period instead of four.

Notwithstanding these written rules, four years after the start of the *new* RTVE Corporation two directors have already perished: Luis Fernandez, 54, who was appointed director in January 2007 and resigned in November 2009 due to a lack of consensus regarding budget and management issues between RTVE and the government authorities, and Alberto Oliart, 83, who was appointed in 2009 after Fernández resigned and surprisingly stepped down from RTVE in July 2011 (Arriaza Ibarra 2012, 15–16). For almost a year no Director of RTVE Corporation was appointed and the Executive Board was temporarily assuming its tasks and responsibilities, in a curious rotating procedure by which each of its members assumed the "temporary direction" of TVE for a period of only thirty days. Just recently, in June 2012, this situation changed shortly after the new government of the Popular Party, led by Mariano Rajoy, took office and again decided, unexpectedly, to take control over RTVE by appointing directly the new Director of the RTVE Corporation, a measure that, in opinion of the leader of the opposition socialist party, PSOE, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, "took us 32 years back in democracy" (*El País*, 4 June 2012).

There is still an important change to be considered to carry out an accurate analysis of RTVE, this time concerning the Executive Board. In the 2006 Reform Law of Televisión Española, there were twelve members of the Board proposed by different sectors of society, including unions and workers' associations. The new government decided to leave three union members out of the Executive Board, by simply reducing it to nine members. Of these, five would be renewed in 2012 and the remaining four in 2013. The democratic way by which their designation would be distributed would be as follows: the Popular Party had the right to renew three; the Socialist Party one, and the catalanists CiU (initials for the Catalonian nationalist party *Convergencia i Unió*), the remaining one. But after the government's decision to appoint directly Leopoldo Gonzalez-Echenique as new Director of the RTVE Corporation, the socialists decided not to present any candidate to the Executive Board at all. "Let them have it all," said socialist leader Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba, referring to the conservative party's decision to control RTVE Corporation (*El País*, 3 June 2012). On the contrary, CiU decided to present its own candidate and support with their votes the governing party's decision to appoint directly the new RTVE Director. As the socialists decided not to participate the result was that the conservative and governing party got four members, out of a total of five, and the Catalans one.

The remaining four members of the Executive Board of the RTVE Corporation will be renewed in January 2013. Two of them will be elected by the Popular Party, another one by the left party IU (Izquierda Unida), and the remaining one by PSOE, replacing the prestigious professional Miguel Angel Sacaluga, the only socialist member of the Executive Board to this date. But if the socialists again decide not to participate that would probably give the governing party another member. The final result would be an Executive Board of RTVE Corporation ruled by nine members, seven belonging to the governing party, one to the minority Catalan party CiU and another one to the minority left party IU, while the main opposition party would have none. That would give conservatives an absolute majority, which paradoxically is unnecessary since the governing party has also the need for the members of the Executive Board to be elected by two thirds of the votes in Parliament, instead only a simple majority is needed.

To conclude, public service media policy in Spain has undergone significant changes in recent years. Most important changes are a tightened financial control of public television and increased dependence on public revenues instead of advertising. Both changes may be seen as reflections on the current economic crises: the first as an effort to make public service more cost efficient and the second one as a way to protect private media interests.

Public Service Media Policy in Sweden 2006-2012

Broadcast media markets in Sweden have historically been characterised by the de-facto monopoly of public service radio and public service television across the whole nation. Public service radio has operated since 1925 and public service TV since 1957. There are three public service media companies today: *Sveriges Radio* (SR) and *Sveriges Television* (SVT), as well as *Utbildningsradion* (UR). UR produces educational programs for both radio and TV. The increased competition in broadcast markets due to new technology and deregulation policies in recent decades (television 1991 and radio 1993) have affected the public service media to a considerable extent. Public service media feel strong market pressure from commercial competitors, especially in the television market.

Regulatory Framework

Public service companies adhere to the *Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression*, a part of the Swedish Constitution. Principles of the public service media licence are formulated in the *Radio and Television Act*. The Act stipulates some fundamental rules regarding the assertion of democratic values, such as the importance of avoiding bias. A Charter decided by the Swedish Parliament regulates the operations by public service companies. The Government issues the Charter after parliamentary decision. The Charter states the right for public service media to operate in a "neutral and objective ways, taking fundamental rights of freedom of expression and freedom of information into account" (Prop. 2008/09, 95).

Traditionally and in agreement between all political parties, the Charters have been issued for periods of six years in order to avoid correlation to the four-year election cycles. However, the new centre-right Government in 2006 decided to break up previous arrangements and decide about a new three-year Charter, making it possible for it to impose new conditions. The decision was heavily criticised by the opposition parties and by the public service companies as a new attempt to politicise public service media (Nord 2008, 262). When a new Government Inquiry on public service media was appointed in 2011 the issue was addressed again, and the Inquiry proposal is now a return to six year Charters in Fall 2013 (SOU 2012, 59). Thus, the temporary conflict on the length of the charter seems to be replaced by renewed consensus.

The existing legal framework also restricts influences on programming and content. Public broadcasters have built-in shields against political influence on news (Prop. 2008/09, 195). In practice, politicians also try to avoid criticism for interfering in public service programming and are generally reluctant to propose changes of public service remit that could be interpreted as measures to increase government control over it. These attitudes have not changed in recent years.

The most dramatic change with regard to regulatory framework is probably the public value test of new substantial public services that was introduced by the centre-right Government in December 2010 in order to check market impact and public service value. The Swedish version of the test could be descried as fairly "soft" as it allows test projects of new service without announcements and particularly as it is the public service companies themselves who should announce in advance new services and inform the regulator, Swedish Broadcasting Authority (SBA). Since the implementation of the public value test public broadcasters have not announced any new services to be tested. Private media companies are invited to comment on the proposals, after which the government is to decide whether to permit the new service (Nord and Grusell 2012, 61–62). Public value tests are a new element in the regulation of Swedish media that empower the state to evaluate and restrict future activities of public service media. Overall, they put commercial media in a more favourable position than before. The public value test was certainly an unusual area of media policy conflict in The Parliament and the Socialistic and Green opposition parties argued that the government was mainly acting in the interests of private media.

There is hardly a general opposition to public service media presence on new media platforms. Government Inquiry reports in 2008 and 2012 concluded that public service Internet activities were legitimate and should aim at reaching as many people as possible. Since then, political parties from left to right have not questioned public service media activities on other media platforms (Nord 2012, 57). However, following recent criticism from the European Commission regarding public service market distortion on the Internet, the government has declared that public service online services should have a clear connection to content associated with broadcast radio and television (Prop. 2008/09, 195).

Obviously, recent years have not seen any substantial changes in regulatory frameworks of public service media in Sweden. The new government has been careful in challenging the existing political consensus and the mutual desire to de-politicise the issue of public service media. The attempt to change the structure of the Charter failed and political views of public service media are generally positive and stressing the importance of independence and a strong position in the market. The implementation of public value test could be interpreted as a step to an increased market-orientation of media policy and is probably the most important change taking place and the only area where the government's media decisions have been influenced by private media considerations.

Organisation and Financing Models

The three public broadcasters in Sweden are organised as limited liability companies, and are all owned by a public foundation, *Förvaltningsstiftelsen*. The main objective of this foundation is to maintain and safeguard the integrity and to foster the independence of the three companies. The foundation generally reflects diverse interest groups in society, and should be perceived as a "wall" between the government and the public service companies in order to keep an arm's length distance between the two actors. Managing directors are appointed by the government but the process has been less politicised in recent years. Previously, there was a gentlemen's agreement that the biggest political party should appoint the director of television and the second biggest the director of the radio company. Now all political parties have acknowledged the advantages with professional directors with media skills, regardless of political party affiliations. Consequently all the managers of SR, SVT and UR now have extensive professional background as journalists or publishers.

The procedures for appointing chairmen of the company boards have been controversial as former ministers of government often were recruited to these positions. Criticism was based on the fact that it was hard for public service media to claim to be independent and "free" when former politicians with strong connections to a political party led its activities. There has sometimes also been a debate about the current organisational structure with three independent companies (Nord and Grusell 2012, 89–90). Most other countries have only single company with different divisions, and the main argument for a merger is the potential for increased efficiency and reduced cost. This debate has been a bit more intense in the digital era, as the three companies today appear on the Internet on different web sites. However, a complete merger of the three companies has not been on the political agenda, even if co-operation is encouraged in non-editorial areas.

Financially, all three public service broadcasters are financed by license fees. The current license fee system is based on the possession of a TV-set. The annual license fee was SEK 2,076 (approx. 200 Euro) in 2012. In contrast to most other PSB systems in Europe, advertisements have never been allowed in Sweden's public television. The issue has been raised occasionally in the Swedish parliament, but all proposals aimed at commercialising public service in this way have been rejected by a majority of the Parliament, and have been described as threats to the independency of PSB's. Furthermore, financing through the state budget has always been rejected by a huge majority of the political parties, fearing such a model would jeopardise the autonomy of public broadcasters (SOU 2008, 64; SOU 2012, 59).

Still, there is today a growing political consensus about finding other models of financing public service media. One reason is that the current model allows 12 percent of the households to be free riders; another argument is based on the fact that the possession of a TV set is not the only way to consume public service media any more. As the perceived advantages of license fees compared to advertising and state budget grants still are important for decision-makers, a possible new system will probably be based on a revision of the current system. The latest public service media Government Inquiry has proposed a new model based on a payment linked to the yearly individual tax declaration (SOU 2012, 59). The proposal seems to be controversial as the Government response was to investigate the matter further, and no change in financing will appear before 2015.

Consequently, there are only minor changes implemented with regard to organisation, management and financing of public service media. Despite the obvious potential in increasing economic efficiency by implementing a new organisational structure, no political actor has suggested such changes. Regarding financing models, there is no political support for a state budget-financing model, even if this could increase government control over costs and future developments of public service media. Thus, the political willingness to interfere with basic public service media structures continues to be limited in Sweden.

Conclusion: Crisis, Cuts – and Contrasts

The analysis of public service media policy in Spain and Sweden during the the years 2006-2012 confirms that there are considerable differences between the two countries with regard to the developments of regulatory framework, organisation and management structures and financing models. The table below summarises the findings in the comparison (Table 2).

Table 2: Public Service Media Policy Changes, 2006-2012

	Spain	Sweden
Regulatory framework	State ownership imposed (2007) Change of funding sources (2009) Regional broadcasters allowed to be privatised (2011)	Public value test for new services implemented (2010) More strict regulation on sponsoring (2009)
Organisation/ management	Government appointment of director (2012) Politicisation of executive board (2012)	Professionalised procedure for board appointments (2009) Foundation without government participation (2009)
Financing	Budget cuts (2012)	Review of license fee model (2012)
Autonomy implications	Decreased in all areas, due to stronger government intervention and control	Decreased with regard to regulation and market considerations, but increased in relation to state influence

In the case of Spain, the audiovisual scenario right now is still pending on the final decision to be taken in Strasbourg related to how Spanish public television should be financed according to a polemic audiovisual regulation, at a time when the severe economic crisis that Spain is enduring will also to be addressed by both national and regional public television channels. In this respect, the new political government of the Popular Party has repeatedly expressed its intention of switching back to TVE´s previous model, with advertising as any other commercial television channel. However, this would mean that the powerful audiovisual groups with a dominant position in Spain, the Italian Mediaset and the Spanish Grupo Planeta, would lose a considerable part of the revenues they have earned in the last months thanks to the advertising that has been redirected to their channels. Politically speaking, this would imply a high price for the political leader Mariano Rajoy, who is now under strict popular scrutiny due to the severe economic situation that Spain is facing. Under these circumstances, a campaign of unpopularity spread out by the leading audience television channels is the last thing that the new President needs.

This inevitably leads us to the conclusion that Spain has already started a process that will affect its national and regional public television channels. The challenge for the new government is now to find a solution that balances the suppression of costs that exceed the limits of the reasonable along with an optimised continuity of a public service. The reason is simple: this measure, adequately managed, enhances and promotes pluralism and quality contents.

In the case of Sweden, the current changes in public service media conditions are minor in comparison. The basic policy idea seems to be to maintain the existing structures and arrangements, but to improve them in details and carefully adapt them to new media market developments if necessary. Appointment procedures of directors and board members are slightly professionalised, the old license fee system may be replaced by another model, and the public value tests implemented leave the initiative of the approval process in the hands of public broadcasters. The appreciation of public service media autonomy seems to be high even in times of economic crisis and demands for decreased public spending.

As in many other countries, left-wing parties in Sweden have generally had a more positive approach to a "broad" public service media, acknowledging its societal importance as such, while centre- and right-wing parties have approached public service media more "narrowly," focusing on their function as market adjustments with a main purpose to provide content not provided by other media. However, these diverging political perspectives on public service media should not be exaggerated as they have so far more focused on principles than on practices. There is no real opposition to the idea of independent and strong public service media regulated as it is today. Furthermore, a general view is that no single party or party coalition likes to seek conflicts in the media policy area. Media policy has never been an election campaign issue in Sweden. On the contrary, most fundamental decisions on media policy, such as the implementation of press subsidy system and new broadcast media structures, have been taken in a corporative way, more or less behind closed doors. This may hold true also for media policy in the future.

EU public service media policy has influenced developments in both countries but not to a very large extent. In Sweden, the influence is mainly noted by the introduction of a "soft" version of the public value test that has so far not resulted in any cases. In Spain, the change of funding sources for public television and its consequences has been on the EU agenda after complaints from the private media sector. This comparison confirms that EU media policy continues to be most important when free market principles are challenged and when lines between public and private media are blurred. Still, domestic media policy arrangements seem to be decisive for the development of public service media.

To conclude, the political pressure on public service media in the two countries has increased and demands for more professional and efficient management are similar in both Spain and Sweden. Still, the contrasts are more obvious than the similarities: the changes are affecting policy arrangements in Spain to a large extent and there is still large uncertainty about future developments in such basic areas as financing and organisational structures, while only minor revisions are noted in Sweden. This is not surprising, as Sweden has so far not been as deeply affected by the economic crisis, as has Spain. However, the differences in political culture and history with regard to existing public service media models in the two countries seem to have importance in explaining the character of the proposed changes and the political willingness of governments to use the current crisis for implementing new policies.

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