



## **Best Practices and Recommendations**

### **Central Asia Media Conference: Best Practice Sharing on Public Service Broadcasting Models**

*BISHKEK 22/23 May 2014*

This document summarizes best practices and recommendations that were identified during the discussion of more than 70 experts from Estonia, Germany, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Mongolia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan gathering in Bishkek to share their experiences on various models of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB). The conference focused on various models of funding, management and ways to guarantee editorial independence, that programming fosters social cohesion and national identity and discussed experiences of six OSCE participating States that have transformed a state controlled broadcaster into public service broadcasters among them also the model of the Public Broadcasting Corporation of Kyrgyzstan (OTRK) established in 2010, as the first public service broadcaster in Central Asia.

The conference was organized in cooperation with the OSCE Centre in Bishkek, the nongovernmental media network Internews and OTRK.

#### **Session I: Funding models of Public Service Broadcasting:**

The funding mechanism is an essential element for the proper functioning of a public service broadcaster to secure political independence, maintain the quality, pluralism and universality of programming, and support accountability and build trust with the public.

The participants concluded that there is no universal solution to funding and models vary widely.

However there are principles and lessons learned from experiences with this various funding models.

#### **Best practices and recommendations**

- A general feature is **public funding from the state budget**, the size of which varies: a percentage of Gross Domestic Product, a percentage of a certain tax, , government subsidies (Mongolia) or a fixed amount decreed on yearly bases in the State Budget

Act approved by Parliament (Estonia). Whatever method, the funding should be tied to a predictable mechanism in order to ensure independence.

- A fixed method of funding is a prerequisite for sustainability and independence; a “not-less-than-last-year” funding principle should be guaranteed.
- A **mix of funding sources** can raise additional revenues where public funds are scarce and state budgets low. It also can help to become more independent in countries where political decisions over budgets are or can be used as means to secure influence.
- **Commercial advertising**, however, was found to be a double-edged sword because it could affect programming quality. It was noted that Lithuania recently transitioned to full state funding, following the example of Estonia. This decision was preceded by an extensive public debate on the impact of commercial advertising on content quality. The revenues generated through advertisement were, as a consequence replaced, by additional government subsidies.
- While it was noted that many PSB funding models currently move away from the subscription fee model and in many countries PSB is funded through a media tax or through another similar instruments the introduction of a **subscription fee** in Mongolia was mentioned as a positive example. The modest monthly fee is fixed at \$0.40 in the provinces and \$0.56 in urban areas and is charged on electricity bills. Such a fee can provide an incentive to best serve the public interest and produce audience-oriented programmes in high quality. The model, however, often lacks both the support by the authorities and the audience as the experience of Lithuania and Kyrgyzstan showed. The Director General of the Kyrgyz broadcaster calculated that a yearly fee of only \$10 per family would generate \$11.5 million.
- A subscription fee could replace advertising revenues.
- State controlled media should be fully abandoned. In Kyrgyzstan that still maintains a large number of state controlled media outlets participants noted that PSB showed much better results and called it a waste of resources to continue to fund these media additionally to the publicly owned. All public investments should be redirected into the development of public broadcaster.
- The members of the Supervisory Board should play an active role in seeking revenue.
- Transparent, predictable funding mechanisms can help to avoid political pressure.

## **Session II: Best practices in administration and management of PSB**

Lean, cost effective structures as well as internal accounting and oversight systems are important so that public money is well spent. Administration and management structures and procedures of PSBs also have an effect on the quality, editorial independence and programming a broadcaster can offer. A special element in PSBs is the supervisory board and

its influence on the management of a PSB.

Participants discussed 1) what procedures can ensure that the public has a role in what the PSB is offers, 2) how PSB models differ from state broadcasters and how can they avoid repeating their mistakes of lack of authority, editorial independence, quality and credibility of their programming; 3) how the legal framework, management and administrative structures best contribute to output, creativity, innovation and meeting the audience's needs and 4) how the entity's governance can ensure pluralism.

Participants concluded that the transition from a state broadcaster to PSB is a long-term endeavour and can take years to complete.

### **Best Practices and recommendations**

- The reform and transformation process from a state broadcaster to a PSB must be steered out by law and should be accompanied by a structural reform that raises the effectiveness of management; new rules and regulations may be needed; It might be needed to reduce the number of staff;
- An Advisory Board needs to be dedicated to the PSB and should not assume other roles, such as regulating also commercial broadcasting (e.g. Latvia), because the mission and issues are different. The Advisory Board's responsibility is similar to the board of directors in a company, which is establishing general operating procedures and the mission of the entity, while management should concern itself with the daily operation of the entity.
- The stability of management is the key to success of reforms. Rotation provisions for Advisory Board members should keep the institutional memory intact.
- An Advisory Board member involved in politics or nominated by a political party should remain independent and professional while serving on the board.
- An important function of the Advisory Board is to serve as a buffer between its director and the political elites' influence.
- Transparency is imperative for public oversight; all documents, decisions and recommendations should be available online, especially those referring to the Advisory Board.
- Government and party nominated representatives in a PSB Advisory Board should not have a predominant role and be balanced by a significant share of civil society representatives.
- The tasks for the PSB could be formulated through a "public remit" on content (obshchestvennyi zakaz) in cooperation with a public council representing the whole spectrum of society.

- Internet platforms should be used to provide access to all PSB components and products.
- Training journalists is worthy of investment in order to improve quality of programming which, in turn, can legitimize and secure public support for (more) funding.
- Public opinion research should be regularly conducted. Simple viewer ratings should not be the only criteria; they should go hand in hand with indicators measuring public trust.
- The role of civil society and international organizations in monitoring compliance of the government to transform the state broadcaster into the public broadcaster is very important in order to minimize political interference with programming.

### **Session III: Content and Programming issues: Editorial independence – programme requirements and public input/audience interaction**

PSBs can boost programme quality and ethical standards if they strengthen the bonds with their audiences and the credibility they have as an independent, pluralistic, objective and trustworthy sources of information.

It is the task of a PSB to serve need for entertainment, education, art and culture of its audience. In newly independent countries, PSBs can play an important role in the nation-building process and the development of national identity, not by propagating state ideologies but with reports and discussions on national events, developments and politics that have meaning and affect the lives of viewers. Since a PSB is created, controlled and funded for the public it also needs to closely interact with its audience.

The participants discussed how public input and audience interaction can be ensured through feedback channels; how the basic needs of the population can be identified and filled; what role New Media plays for PSB; what are the essential differences in programme production and policy decisions among public, state and commercial broadcasters.

### **Best Practices and recommendations**

- Achieving the trust of the audience should be a priority and is the most challenging task for a PSB that was a state broadcaster. There must be a clear and unambiguous policy showing that decisions are taken for the good of the society and in the public interest.
- There is a need for constant monitoring of PSBs' activities to meet expectations and raise credibility.

- The role of civil society in monitoring content analysis can contribute to the popularity and effectiveness of the public broadcaster.
- In Mongolia the PSB provides several methods for audience participation, including feedback channels such as a public relations department, a complaints committee , surveys and meetings with the audience throughout the country.
- The Internet and Social Media should be used to get feedback.
- A PSB should have distribute its programmes through all possible means of communication and networks (satellite, Internet, cable and terrestrial) to ensure competitiveness in the market.
- A PSB should give high importance to self-produced content as well as to the diversity of programme targeted to various interest groups;
- An ombudsman, as in Kyrgyzstan, can be a key feedback channel and can maintain close ties with the broadcaster's audience. An ombudsman analyses messages and complaints received from the public (through various channels) and delivers them to the management. The ombudsman also explains to the public the working procedures of the broadcaster, including programme production. This helps increase credibility.
- In order to effectively address the needs and complaints of the audience, the broadcaster should enhance internal communication of its personnel; staff members should know how to properly communicate with the public;
- A public broadcaster should not be only oriented toward viewer ratings, but primarily should pay attention to the needs of society;
- Regular meetings with the experts to get their feedback and recommendations are a good way to enhance the broadcaster's activities.
- Public broadcasting plays an important role in sparsely populated areas that are often not served by commercial broadcasts.
- Programmes in multi-ethnic and multi-language countries should be produced in several languages and PBSs should have a multi-ethnic employment policy; in order to integrate and resolve ethnic tensions.
- The needs of minorities should be addressed and priority should be given to PSB channels serving minority interests (over foreign needs), to create an alternative to biased information from foreign or local media. Regional channels might address this if funding is tight.
- National identity is a fundamental part of a national, countrywide public broadcaster.