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EVALUATION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING IN BULGARIA

Democratic consolidation of the new Eastern European member states has been controversial among political scientists. This article proposes to use the media, in particular Public Service Broadcasting (PSB), as an indicator of successful consolidation. Taking the television sector in Bulgaria as a case study, the problems and flaws involved in the process of reorganizing the former state-owned channels into public service institutions will be identified. The delayed adoption of a broadcasting law reveals a lack of consensus as well as the reluctance of political elites to relinquish control over television. The state's control of funding threatens to compromise a channel's autonomy. Despite these unfavorable circumstances, the Bulgarian PSB channel manages to produce programming consonant with its public role – this, at least, is the conclusion of a content analysis conducted on Bulgarian television by the current author.

Keywords: public service, broadcast policy, Eastern Europe, Bulgaria.

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1. Introduction

The acceptance of ten Eastern European countries into the European Union in 2004 and 2007 rewarded their success at building consolidated liberal democracies (Merkel 2007). According to strict definitions of democracy, these countries established free elections, independent legislative and judicial institutions and guaranteed the irrevocability of democratic change. Nevertheless, some political scientists have questioned the level of democratic consolidation of the new EU members. Applying a multilevel model of democracy that considers also “soft” indicators (such as associations and interest organizations, participation and political culture), Wolfgang Merkel identified four groups of countries with different levels of consolidation (Merkel 2007: 422). According to him, not all of the new EU member states possess high quality democratic systems. Susan Rose-Ackerman (2007) also believes that the new members exhibit inadequate consolidation. Focusing on transparency and accountability of government decisions as well as on a civil society with active public participation, she maps areas requiring further improvement.

The theory of defective democracy, elaborated upon by Wolfgang Merkel and Hans-Juergen Puhle, offers some important indicators for assessing democratic quality, one of them being independent media as part of the regime of political rights (Merkel 2003: 49; Puhle 2005: 9). Mass media are therefore vital to democratic consolidation. By looking closely at the media, the democratic process underneath the surface of the electoral system can be described and evaluated.

Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) is especially relevant to the process of fostering a democratic political culture and broad public participation. It has the obligation to provide content of public significance that market-driven private media might neglect (Steemers 2001: 73). It is responsible to produce diverse, high-quality programming that concentrates on reporting political, economic and social issues (Raboy 1996: 18). This article argues that the degree of success that Eastern European countries had at transforming their state-controlled broadcasting into PSB is in direct correlation with their stage of democratic consolidation.

There are two ways of defining a program as PSB, either by describing its legal status and the structural conditions for its existence (Jarren

et al. 2001) or by examining the content of its programming. Independent supervisory and advisory boards, independent funding and personal policy clearly denote a true Public Service Broadcaster. Programming that corresponds to its mandate of public service is another attribute of PSB. This article therefore proceeds in a twofold manner, taking as a case study Bulgarian National Television (BNT). First, the legal framework, the potential for political interference, and the models for funding and supervision will be described. The second section reports the results of an analysis of broadcasting content conducted by the present author in the fall of 2005, wherein the programming of BNT was compared to that of its two main private competitors (bTV and Nova TV) so as to demonstrate BNT's superior public orientation over the other two channels. Finally, the overall performance of BNT in the context of the structural conditions will be evaluated.

Before we proceed, we must also consider the reason for choosing Bulgarian television for the purposes of our case study. As one of the two most recent countries to gain acceptance into the EU, Bulgaria displays more shortcomings (e.g., corruption, organized crime and weakness in the judiciary) than other new member states (Merkel 2007: 426). As a consequence, it should be expected that PSB would suffer from more problems of political nature. Furthermore, the restructuring of the Bulgarian television sector lagged behind those of many other Eastern European countries, indicating a lack of political consensus on the reforms.

Television in Bulgaria constitutes a clear-cut market with only three important players. According to legal definition, "national" channels should cover over 84% of the territory. Three terrestrial channels correspond to this definition and account for about 60% of the television market (January–June 2008, s. GARB 2008). These are public BNT, private bTV (owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation) and Nova TV (part of Greek Antenna Group). BNT offers one "national" and four regional channels; bTV's single channel is on the air since the fall of 2000; Nova TV started in 1994 as a regional Sofia-based channel and acquired a national terrestrial license in 2003 (Kavrakova 2005). Market entry of private television rapidly eroded the popularity of BNT's "national" channel and reduced its market share to currently 11%. Both bTV (about

32%) and Nova TV (about 16%) established themselves as the leading channels thus clearly outstripping BNT.

A fourth terrestrial program started during the fall of 2007. TV2 still broadcasts only seven hours of original programming a day and has acquired a market share of about 1.7%. Furthermore, there are nearly 200 mixed-genre and thematic television programs that are transmitted through cable or satellite. The most successful of these – Diema Family – reaches a market share of about 3 to 4%, Diema + gets 2.5% and TV 7 gets between 2 and 4%. The others have fewer than 2% share of the television market in Bulgaria (GARB 2008).

2. Conditions for the Bulgarian PSB

The restructuring process of the Eastern European media is often addressed in the literature from the point of view of a three-phased transition model (Voltmer 2000). It is customary in political transition studies to distinguish between the phases of liberalization, democratization and consolidation, implying a structural similarity between political, economic and media transformation (e.g. O'Donnell et al. 1986; Merkel 1999: 119–170; Beichel 2001: 27). Since the development of the media sector depends on the will of the political elites as well as on the market structure, these phases will be considered as an outline framework hereafter. A comparative overview of the media policies in the new EU member states reveals two insights in this regard. On the one hand, after a short period of political idealism, media policy became a contested field in which political officials struggled to preserve their influence on the media organizations (Kleinwächter 1995; Voltmer 2000: 138–139). On the other hand, especially in regard to television, privatization decisions were often political, thus neglecting economic arguments and creating, *inter alia*, advertising monopolies (Pavlik & Shields 1999).

The case of Bulgaria demonstrates some deficiencies in this process more clearly than other Eastern European countries, as developments occurred at a slower rate and were contested with more political heat. This was due in part to the important role that the communist regime attributed to broadcasting as means of enforcing party propaganda. On this view, broadcasting was placed under the close scrutiny of state

institutions. Initially, the responsibility for broadcasting rested with a permanent committee at the Ministry of Culture. Although the institutional environment subsequently changed, the party control remained (Lazarova & Milev 1997).

Regulation of state-owned broadcasting was one of the main objectives in the phase of liberalization. As early as December 1990 a provisory directive on state-owned broadcasting was issued by the Parliament, thus removing it from the control of the communist party (Tscholakov 2000: 33). This directive put newly created public service broadcasters under the supervision of a parliamentary commission, providing the Parliament with the potential to control every aspect of broadcasting, i.e., its funding, its policies, its production and the appointment of its directors (Zankova 2005: 6). In the phase of democratization the consequences of this regulation yielded.

The most extreme examples of attempts at political control stem from the first years of the post-communist period. After prolonged journalistic protests in 1993, military units were placed in the buildings of both public radio and television and several reporters lost their jobs (Milev 1994: 694). Wholesale dismissals of opposition journalists followed during the spring of 1996 (Venkov-Wolff 1996). In later years, these sorts of public confrontation between journalists and politicians ceased. Instead, conflicts mainly surrounded managerial positions. The directors of BNT were replaced, for example, almost annually; thus ten different people presided over public television from 1989 till 2001 (Tzankoff 2001: 71).

During the phase of consolidation, broadcasting structures take definitive shape, leaving the transitional state behind and revealing the circumstances under which the PSB channels are to operate (Indzhov 2005: 34–35). Since this phase usually begins with the adoption of a new broadcasting law, consolidation was delayed in Bulgaria until 1998.

The first law was passed in 1996, albeit declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court shortly thereafter (Dinkova 2003: 48). It was not until 1998 that the Parliament managed to pass the current Broadcasting Law, one designed in accordance with the idea of a European (read: Western European) example (Pesheva 2001: 247). Despite intense discussion on the subjects of regulation, institution building and assessment procedures for the members of the supervisory board, no clear vision

of a new broadcasting system arose (Bakardjieva 1998: 32). From the beginning, the lawmaking process resulted from the bargaining of different political interests that possessed neither definite aims nor ideal goals. Soon after adopting the law, there arose a general outcry for reform – even for a new law. NGOs and experts – e. g., from the Bulgarian Media Coalition (BMC 2003) – discussed proposals and new regulation models. The 1998 Broadcasting Law (BL) has survived to the present day, albeit with fourteen further amendments.

The creation of a supervisory body (the Council for Electronic Media, or CEM) as well as the selection of its members proved a point of controversy in the lawmaking process. Currently, the CEM has nine members – five appointed by the Parliament and four by the President of the Republic (BL: Art. 24). An early requirement for becoming a CEM member – i.e., at least five years of work experience in a broadcasting company – was quashed (Bojilova 2006). A special tool for achieving more diversity among the CEM members is the so-called “rotation clause” (Tzankoff 2001: 121). It assures the appointment of new members every two years (BL: Art.29). Some experts criticize the appointment procedure for facilitating the appointment of the governing majority’s “own people” (Tscholakov 2000: 110). The implementation of the “rotation clause” – a mechanism for compensating for party majorities – is, furthermore, flawed by delays (CEM 2006b).

The management of the public service broadcaster BNT and its funding and content obligations corresponds to the disputes of the lawmaking process. A director and an advisory board appointed by the CEM share the managerial duties for BNT. The position of the director in particular is the subject of party wrangling, so much so that nothing has changed since the early 1990s. No special interest groups or civic representatives play a role in the BNT management or in the appointment of its director.

According to the Broadcasting Law, BNT has three main financial sources at its disposal: a special fund, state subsidies and advertising/sponsoring revenues. The fund was supposed to have been composed mainly of monthly reception fees; unfortunately, a system for fee-collection never came into existence due to a lack of political desire to implement such a plan (Kavrakova 2005: 344). Therefore, BNT presently derives its funding from subsidies and, to a lesser extent, from advertising revenue. State sub-

sidies foster the possibility of state interference into television programming, though it is not unusual for small countries such as Bulgaria to fund their broadcasting sector (Votmer 2000). The main problem with using state subsidies for financing BNT lies in the way they are assigned: The Council of Ministers decides each year on a fixed amount of subsidies, estimating it by averaging the amount it costs to produce an hour of airtime (BL: Art. 70: 4). There is no independent organ appointed with the task of estimating these expenses. With the power to set the amount of subsidies, the Council of Ministers effectively decides whether BNT produces the same, a greater or a lesser amount of airtime the subsequent year and whether it will have the necessary budget for funding expensive productions. This is, in effect, a direct interference of the state into the operation of PSB. Moreover, an annual decision concerning financing does not allow for reliability in planning.

The content regulations for BNT programming are another indicator of the state's firm grip on public television in Bulgaria and of the political elites' unwillingness to loosen control. One side of the regulations corresponds to the traditional Western European idea of Public Service Broadcasting (BL: Art. 7; Art. 71): BNT should provide informational, educational and entertaining programs; its transmissions should contain diverse political, economic, cultural, scientific, educational and other relevant social information, while respecting different points of view; it should produce programs geared towards minorities in Bulgaria, even presenting them in their own language; it should support Bulgarian culture and fund Bulgarian artistic productions. Other content regulations are more problematic, e. g., the tenet that BNT is supposed to promote the official position of the state (BL: Art. 7: 8). Numerous people (e. g., the President, the Chairman of the Parliament, the Prime minister and others) have the right to obtain airtime free of charge for stating their political position. Whenever the Parliament votes for a live transmission of its session, BNT is obliged to free up airtime for this purpose (BL: Art. 52). These stipulations violate the principles of program autonomy and independence from the state.

With respect to broadcast policy, regulation and law, a number of deviations from the idea of PSB can be perceived (three in particular): (1) in the law and policy-making processes which are marked by an aspiration of the political elites to maintain their influence over the broadcasting;

(2) in the appointment of the members of the supervisory council and advisory board where party politics gets involved; and (3) in the funding and content regulations that hamper the independent development of the BNT as an institution of the public sphere. Under these conditions it seems highly improbable that the PSB channel is capable of fulfilling its public service obligations.

3. The Programming of the BNT

In order to answer the question of whether the BNT is producing programs that respect the principles of PSB, the programming itself should be considered. The “national” channel of BNT was analyzed for content and compared to the programs of its two most important private competitors. The objective behind the research strategy was to discover whether BNT was sufficiently distinct from the private channels to account for its special position as a PSB operator.

3.1. Methodology

For the purposes of this study, the design of time series content analysis of German television programs conducted by the team of Hans-Jürgen Weiss at the Free University of Berlin since 1998 was adopted (Weiss & Trebbe 2000; Weiss 1998). In this design, television programming is recorded for one week twice a year and then analyzed with a two-phased codebook. One of the main objectives of the original study was to develop a coding procedure that distinguishes informative programs from those designed as pure entertainment. Thus television programs are divided first into different elements such as advertising/sponsoring messages, news, other informational broadcasts, non-fictional and fictional entertainment etc. Then, all broadcasts designed “informational” (including news) are closely scrutinized so that each discrete segment can be assigned to a certain thematic category. In this manner, the political, economic and social elements can be separated from the more entertaining human-interest elements. Moreover, the “infotainment” cluster that exists somewhere in-between can be described and compared over the spectrum of different programs.

The codebook of this study was adapted to the Bulgarian television reality and used for analyzing the content of a week of BNT, bTV and Nova TV programming. One important difference in procedure consisted in abandoning video recording in favor of announced programming transcripts. A reduction of time and effort expended was achieved by focusing the analysis merely on the evening news segments, thus neglecting all other “informational” programs. This content analysis was conducted in the fall of 2005 by the current author. With respect to the aim of this article – i.e., to use PSB programming as an indirect indicator for democratic consolidation in Bulgaria – a comparison over a longer period of time would be certainly more appropriate. Since no time series data exist that allow a secondary analysis, the 2005 data was used for an efficient, if not an exhaustive, measurement for PSB performance.

3.2. Results

First, some of the main results of the overall analysis of the three programs will be discussed. The data provide a basic classification of the different programs during the sample week, allowing them to be grouped according to genre, function (e.g. information, education, entertainment) and theme (for informational programs only). Table 1 conveys the impression of three distinct programming strategies. All three channels offer about the same quantity of news – about 8%.¹ The public BNT offers more informational programs (47% including news), with fewer fictional and non-fictional programs and a relatively large amount of music programming (8%). The broadcaster bTV concentrates on different entertainment programs (fictional, non-fictional and children’s programming). It still offers a respectable amount of informative shows (35%). In contrast to the previous two, Nova TV fills more than 55% of its airtime with fictional programs, filling out the rest of its schedule with some informational and non-fictional programming (about 20% and 16% respectively), 3% for sport and 4% for programs aimed at children.

¹ Repetitions of news programs during the night are included in this sum. When filtered, the quantity of original news programs is much higher in the program of BNT in comparison to bTV and Nova TV.

*Table 1: Overview of the Program Structure
(Program structure analysis, in percent¹)*

Program category	BNT	bTV	Nova TV
	168:00 ²	168:00	168:00
News	7.6	7.7	7.7
Other informational programs	39.7	27.5	12.0
Fictional entertainment	30.9	34.5	55.4
Non-fictional entertainment	3.5	18.9	15.5
Music	7.8	1.7	–
Sport programs	1.1	0.6	3.3
Religious programs	–	–	0.6
Programs for children	5.4	9.1	3.9
Educational programs	0.6	–	–
Teleshopping	3.4	–	1.6
Total	100	100	100

¹ Related to the total airtime of the sampling week.

² Hours:Minutes.

*Table 2: Program Structure During Prime Time
(Program structure analysis, in percent¹)*

Program category	BNT	bTV	Nova TV
	35:00 ²	35:00	35:00
News	23.6	20.0	14.0
Other informational programs	20.0	12.1	2.9
Fictional entertainment	43.8	41.9	36.5
Non-fictional entertainment	7.6	26.0	46.6
Sport programs	3.3	–	–
Programs for children	1.7	–	–
Total	100	100	100

¹ Related to the prime time (18 to 23 h) of all days and all analysed channels of the sampling week.

² Hours:Minutes.

The structure of the prime time programs – defined as shows broadcast between 19:00 and 23:00 – further emphasizes the difference between public and private channels (Table 2). While all channels offer a substantial amount of fictional entertainment (ranging from 37 to 44 percent of airtime), BNT concentrates on informative programming whereas the private channels concentrate on non-fiction. The superiority of the BNT in the area of news programming is cemented (24%), especially in contrast to Nova TV (14%).

Informational programming encompasses a broad range of television shows: political and economic “hard” news; various social, scientific and popular knowledge programs; entertainment-oriented news about sensational topics like celebrities, crime and catastrophes; and the genre of how-to programs with specific practical tips and advice. These different thematic areas do not have the same public relevance. While “hard” news is essential to a democratic citizenry, different documentaries have a more educational bent. Human-interest stories are entertaining, while practical how-to information is mostly relevant only on the individual level (Weiss 1998).

Table 3 demonstrates the thematic focus of informational programs. (News programs are excluded here, partly because they are usually coded as “mixed,” and partly because a more precise look at their content will follow in the second part of the results section.) Since BNT has a greater number of informational programs, those programs are also more diverse and cover all possible thematic areas. BNT produces, for example, 12% politically and/or socially controversial programs, 5% economic and financial programs (including legal), 17% cultural and historic programs, while “ecology/nature” and “foreign countries/cultures” take up 7% each. A great part of bTV’s and Nova’s informational programs are “mixed” – about 49–50% each. The percentage of political and social broadcasting in Nova TV’s program (about 20%²) is of particular interest here, as it outstrips BNT’s percentage. All the channels tend to produce informational programs such as talk shows, news magazines and documentaries dealing with human-interest stories (21, 25 and 15 percent).

² The extensive amount of political information in Nova TV’s program is overrated. When repetitions of daily programs during the night are considered, the total amount of Nova’s political magazines and talks shrinks to 12%.

*Table 3: Themes of the Other Informational Programs (without News)
(Program structure analysis, in percent¹)*

Theme focus	BNT	bTV	Nova TV
	66:40 ²	46:15	20:13
Mixed/universal	22.5	48.6	49.5
Politics/society (controversial)	11.5	7.0	19.8
Economy/social problems/ financing /law	4.5	1.1	–
Culture/history	17.0	–	4.9
Sciences/technology	1.7	–	7.4
Ecology/nature	7.4	2.2	–
Foreign countries/cultures	7.3	4.3	–
Human-interest stories	21.4	24.9	14.7
Private themes/consultation	6.7	11.9	3.7
Total	100	100	100

¹ Related to the airtime of all informational programs (without news).

² Hours : Minutes.

PSB has special obligations in regard to certain program categories. According to its integration function (Raboy 1996), it has to address all members of the public, including ethnic or religious minorities, challenged persons and other marginalized groups. Moreover, the Broadcasting Law requires BNT to produce minority programs. The analysis of the program structure reveals that BNT fulfills this obligation with 0.8% of its programming; 0.5% of it consists of the daily afternoon news in Turkish and 0.3% of it corresponds to a biweekly news magazine for the hearing impaired. The private channels offer no programming in this category.

To educate is one of the fundamental purposes of PSB according to the Reithian formula “to inform, to educate and to entertain” (Collins 2003). Educational programs are not easily identified. Following a narrow definition of education, there are the rather out-of-fashion language self-study courses and other training programs. By taking a more broad definition of education, there are also other programs that can – indirectly and unintentionally – fulfill this function (Volpers & Weiss 1992: 10–11). Results concerning educational programs are reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Educational Programs (Program structure analysis, in percent¹)

Program category	BNT 168:00 ²	bTV 168:00	Nova TV 168:00
Formal educational programs	0.6	–	–
Courses, Training programs	0.6	–	–
Informal educational programs	22.3	7.3	4.3
Socially relevant knowledge transfer	13.1	2.2	3.0
Politics/Society (controversial)	4.6	1.9	2.4
Economics/Social problems/ Financing/Law	1.8	0.3	–
Culture/History	6.7	–	0.6
General knowledge transfer	6.5	1.8	0.9
Sciences/technology	0.7	–	0.9
Ecology/nature	2.9	0.6	–
Foreign countries/cultures	2.9	1.2	–
Individually relevant knowledge	2.7	3.3	0.4
Private themes/consultation	2.7	3.3	0.4
Residual programs	77.1	92.7	95.7
Total	100	100	100

¹ Related to the total airtime.

² Hours : Minutes.

From this standpoint, there are formal and informal varieties of education. The first type is almost non-existent in Bulgarian television except for a Spanish self-study course on BNT (0.6%). The informal variety encompasses the type of programming that was discussed as “informational” in the former section, viz., talk shows, magazines, documentaries and reporting. It is a matter of definition which part of it is educational. Table 4 suggests three groups of informative programs that could also be considered educational. BNT provides distinctly more programs in the first two groups – the socially relevant and general themes – while bTV stands out only in the segment of individually relevant consulting programs (over 3%). In general, informal educational programming plays a

Table 5: Cultural Programs (Program structure analysis, in percent¹)

Program category	BNT	bTV	Nova TV
	168:00 ²	168:00	168:00
Other informational programs	6.7	-	0.6
Theme focus: Culture/history	6.7	-	0.6
Music programs	5.5	1.1	-
Music magazines	3.6	1.1	-
Music concerts	1.9	-	-
Residual programs	87.8	98.9	99.4
Total	100	100	100

¹ Related to the total airtime.

² Hours : Minutes.

marginal role in bTV's broadcast schedule (a total of 7%), and even less of a role in that of Nova TV (about 4%).

Cultural programs are another part of BNT's public mandate. Definitions of culture are often diffuse; from high art to everyday interactions, the term "culture" encompasses a multitude of different phenomena (Wiesener 1990: 157–159). This makes it hard to distinguish the elements of a television program that could fulfill the ambiguous obligation, imposed upon BNT by the Broadcasting Law. One core field consists of culture programs, such as documentaries on theatre, dance, art, music and concerts (Volpers & Weiss 1992: 23). More peripheral but still considered "culture" in some definitions are fictional features – cinema and possibly also television series come to mind. Programs belonging to the first are listed in Table 5; thus cultural programming of a fictional nature is neglected. The main reason for this omission is that the research strategy does not provide for a qualitative measurement of the "fictionality" of productions, so that it is not possible to distinguish a soap opera from a drama depicting social problems in presenting the overall percentage of airtime allotted for each. From the point of view of the "core" culture programming, BNT stands out with about 7% of documentaries and other informational programs dedicated to cultural themes. Music programs play an important role only in BNT's schedule with approximately 6%.

Table 6: Programs for Children (Program structure analysis, in percent¹)

Program category	BNT	bTV	Nova TV
	9:05 ²	15:20	6:30
Information	7.3	–	–
Infotainment	22.0	–	7.7
Fictional entertainment	25.7	16.3	–
Non-fictional entertainment	5.5	48.9	–
Animations	39.5	34.8	92.3
Total	100	100	100

¹ Related to the airtime of all programs for children.

² Hours : Minutes.

Children's programming is an important segment of the television market, earning a share of the advertising revenue. Since this type of programming can also be offered by privately owned channels, what is the responsibility of PSB? Juvenile programs belong to different genres and can also be grouped into the categories of information and entertainment. A brief glance at Table 6 shows that the programs for children provided by the public BNT are much more diverse than those broadcast by the private channels. Moreover, BNT offers a substantial amount of information (7%) and infotainment (22%) programming, while bTV airs only entertaining broadcasts with a stress on non-fictional programming (49%) and Nova TV offers almost exclusively animation (92%), investing little in children's programs of their own production.

The second part of the results' report deals with the content of the evening news of the three channels. Table 7 offers an overview of the topics of the news items by channel. The consensus of the news makers from the three channels is remarkable: All of them reserve the lion's share of their news programs – between 62 and 76 percent - for issues pertaining to political, economical and social controversy. Two observations stand out: (1) Nova TV's news cover more issues about prominent persons, curious occurrences, crimes and catastrophes than the other two channels (33% versus 17% and 14% respectively); and (2) BNT has

Table 7: Thematic Structure of the News Programs (Content analysis of the news programs, in percent¹)

Topic	BNT	bTV	Nova TV
	3:17 ²	1:50	2:40
Political and socially relevant news	71.9	76.0	61.7
Politics/administration	51.2	41.7	43.3
Economy	3.8	7.4	3.0
Society (controversial)	16.9	26.9	15.4
Socially relevant news (non-controversial)	11.4	10.2	5.4
Other news	16.7	13.8	32.9
Human and nature/traveling	–	–	0.5
Distraction	3.8	2.7	9.2
Crime/catastrophes	11.0	5.9	19.5
Practical subjects/consumers	0.7	0.5	1.4
Physical and psychological subjects	–	1.9	0.9
Service	0.2	2.8	–
Sport	1.0	–	1.4
Total	100	100	100

¹ Related to the airtime of all informative news without trailers/promotion clips.

² Hours: Minutes.

more political news than the other two channels (51% versus 42% and 43 % respectively).

The party affiliation of politicians in the news was measured as an indicator of political independence. It was assumed that more government politicians would appear or be mentioned through citations and video images in BNT's news than in the other two news programs. It was also assumed that the private channels would not demonstrate such a bias.

Table 8 proves that this thesis was wrong: BNT is in the middle between bTV and Nova TV in respect of the party affiliation of the politicians in the news. In fact, bTV covered more news in the sampling week connected with government figures than the other two channels (75% versus 69% and 59% respectively). Nova TV stands out by reporting much

Table 8: Party Affiliation of the Bulgarian Politicians in the News Programs (Content analysis of the news programs, in percent¹)

Party affiliation	BNT <i>n</i> =98	bTV <i>n</i> =57	Nova TV <i>n</i> =70
Government parties	69.4	75.4	58.6
Koalizija za Bălgaria	46.9	43.9	37.1
NDSV	18.4	22.7	18.6
DPS	4.1	8.8	2.9
Opposition parties	30.6	24.6	41.4
BNS	8.2	12.3	14.3
ODS	19.4	10.5	15.7
DSB	1.0	1.8	1.4
Ataka	1.0	–	8.6
Other parties ²	1.0	–	1.4
Total	100	100	100

¹ Related to the number of all Bulgarian politicians.

² Parties not represented in the Parliament.

more on opposition parties in general and on the nationalist “Ataka” in particular – 41% and 9% respectively. The other news programs did not share the attention that Nova TV paid to the members of “Ataka”: BNT’s news reported very little and bTV did not report on them at all.

Two more indicators will be discussed, both of which consider the geographical focus of the news programs and the attention they pay to topics dealing with matters relating to the European Union. Since Bulgaria’s membership was anticipated at the time of the analysis, the inclusion of European and EU themes could be viewed as a special undertaking for news programs. Table 9 shows that BNT addressed more news concerning Europe and the EU in general (25% versus 17% and 14%) and to EU members in particular (15% versus 12% and 9%) than did the private channels.

The same is reflected in Table 10. Almost one third of all BNT news take place in the EU compared to 26% and 16% of the news of the private channels. Nevertheless, both tables reveal that the predominant

Table 9: Reference to Europe in the News Items (Content analysis of the news programs, in percent¹)

Reference to Europe	BNT	bTV	Nova TV
	<i>n=150</i>	<i>n=78</i>	<i>n=115</i>
Reference to the continent or the EU	25.4	16.7	13.9
Reference to an EU member country	15.3	11.5	8.7
Reference to an European country	3.3	5.1	4.3
No reference to Europe	56.0	66.7	73.0
Total	100	100	100

¹ Related to the number of all informative newsitems without trailers/promotion clips.

Table 10: Places of Occurrence in News Items (Content analysis of the news programs, multiple response table¹)

Place of occurrence	BNT	bTV	Nova TV
	<i>n=150</i>	<i>n=78</i>	<i>n=115</i>
Bulgaria	87.3	93.6	84.3
Balkans	9.3	5.1	7.0
European Union (with new members)	31.3	25.6	15.7
East Europe (incl. Romania)	4.0	1.3	1.7
USA	4.0	1.3	5.2
North America	–	–	0.9
Asia	4.0	3.8	4.3
Africa	2.0	1.3	0.9
Latin America	0.7	–	0.9
Others	1.3	1.3	1.7

¹ The sum of the column percentages exceeds 100 since up to four places of occurrence were coded per news item.

focus of all news programs was toward Bulgarian issues (87%, 94% and 84% respectively) and that the majority of all news items had no reference to Europe at all.

A comprehensive overview of the empirical results proves that the public BNT has an explicitly different profile than the private channels: it has a larger amount of informational programs that are also more diverse; it is the only channel to have special programming for ethnic minorities and disabled persons and the only to provide formal educational programs; it offers more informal education and cultural programming, as well as a more diverse selection of children's programs; at the same time, its news is more politically oriented and refers more often to Europe and the EU. Surprisingly, no indications were found of direct political influence via a more advantageous presentation of government officials. The contrary was expected, given the problematic legal and organizational context of BNT. Nevertheless, this study remains only a snapshot of a certain political moment and does not allow for generalizations.

4. Conclusion

The restructuring of television from a state-owned to a public service broadcaster was regarded in this article as an indicator of the democratic consolidation of the Eastern European country of Bulgaria. First, deficiencies of the broadcast policy and regulation were described, wherein the Bulgarian legislature was slow to provide a definite framework, with laws being debated, declared unconstitutional and amended a dozen times over the years. From a formal standpoint, the Broadcasting Law provides the possibility of institutionalizing PSB with an independent supervisor, whose management and classical public service mandate for BNT lie beyond the auspices of the executive. From a practical standpoint, there are sufficient opportunities for influencing said broadcasting – be it through the personal policy regarding the members of the advisory council or the management of BNT, be it through the funding of the BNT composed primarily of state subsidies, or be it through juridical allotment of mandatory airtime for state institutions. In this context, it is surprising that BNT is able to offer programming that corresponds to the idea of a PSB – at least in comparison with the private channels. It is a matter of

debate whether less than one percent of “minority programming” suffices for a public broadcaster. It is also unclear whether the political balance of the news in the sample of October 2005 will be found in other samples. On the basis of the structured quantitative data presented here, the main obligations of BNT are fulfilled. Its content supports the impression of a broadcaster hampered by financial shortcomings but still possessing a staff with a clear understanding of their public role.

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