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KAREN DONDERS (2021). PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA IN EUROPE. LAW, THEORY AND PRACTICE. LONDON AND NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, TAYLOR & FRANCIS GROUP, 313 PP., ISBN: 978-1-138-477705.

The discussion on the Public Service Media (PSM) is conducted by many actors and on many levels, most often academic and political (Głowacki & Jaskiernia, 2017). Karen Donders knowledge, as an academic analyst and media expert, combines both of these perspectives, making it possible to understand the landscape of PSM in contemporary Europe, with all its richness of diversity, but also as a whole that can be subject to general evaluation, using uniform criteria and research apparatus. Consequently, the reader receives a broad, comparative analysis of theories and a few case studies, which written with the passion of a researcher and the pragmatic eye of an expert is interesting not only to academics, but also policy makers and professionals.

Just a review of the table of contents makes it possible to assess the outstanding research project that Donders established and conducted. It includes a broad theoretical study, which assumes the analysis of PSM in many approaches: systemic, market-technological and institutional. Particularly striking is the close structural connection of PSM with democracy and citizenship, treating them as a “central” point for the construction and evaluation of the democratic nature of the political and social system. The case studies were not chosen by chance. Ireland, the United Kingdom, Flanders and the Netherlands were used to show PSM strategies in a multi-platform media environment. Poland, the only Central and Eastern European country, was chosen as a study of subordinations of PSM as political booty. The legal part considers PSM not only as a fragment of the market, but also as a field to be exploited by ideologically driven forces that do not hesitate to instrumentalize them. Modern policies towards PSM, in an increasingly cross-border, convergent and networked environment, require a modern model of governance, based on a more multistakeholder approach.

The book shows the challenges all media market players in Europe have to face after relinquishing their state monopolies and transforming into a dual broadcasting system, whereby Public Service Broadcasting is treated as a “distortion” of the system (Klimkiewicz, 2014, p. 74). The PSM monopoly came to an end in Europe during the 1970s and 1980s, which gave rise to economic, legal and ideological problems. The existence of Public Service Broadcasters (PSB), today’s PSM, requires legitimacy for their maintenance by taxpayers, acceptance of their mission

by the public, and the arrangement of relations with market competition. The main feature distinguishing PSM from PSB is the “public service driven agenda” in a digital “world of clickbait”. The treatment of PSM as a “democratic project”, was raised by Donders as one of the key issues in the search for a new formula in the conditions of technological, legal and social convergence. The Amsterdam Protocol adopted as part of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, indicates the same arguments. In the protocol, PSB “is directly related to the democratic, social and cultural needs of each society” (The Amsterdam Protocol, 1997). For Donders, the argument is that the qualities of PSB/PSM should give them an advantage over the market - putting the fulfilment of democratic values at the center by “providing all citizens equal access to a wide range of high-quality entertainment information and education”. Audience-oriented PSM also signify a deeper inclusion of audiences, their emancipation, and thus, as Donders’ concept can be recognized—their democratization. The convergent environment creates many opportunities to fulfil these demands by offering services across media devices and technologies.

The construct of the new PSM for democracy, their place in the democratic order as outlets fulfilling the role of a common platform for debate and serving democracy, implies a priority approach to goals like pluralism, diversity, social cohesion, quality. The service to the “good of society” puts the “interest of citizens at the heart of what public broadcasters do”. Inherent in this construct are the values, on which PSM is built. Donders refers here not only to the achievements of exemplary broadcasters such as the BBC, but connects the legitimacy of PSM to the traditions of representative democracy and the credo of the French Revolution or the Enlightenment’s tradition. The question “what the values *liberté*, *fraternité*, and *égalité* stand for” is an ever-present dilemma in the debate between liberals and socialists, also in the context of defining the role of the media.

Public Service Media as a societal project assumes the main objective to contribute to the wellness being and democracy. The concept of citizenship is at the center of Donders’ intriguing reflections on the three main areas of cultural, political and civic citizenship. Donders sees the role of the contribution of PSB to cultural communication as multidimensional, ranging from “nation building” to “offering services that guide people from *culture* to *Culture*”. The role of PSB’s contribution to political citizenship throughout Europe is more difficult to delineate, as it is linked to the enormous diversity of Central Eastern European countries and Western European countries. The component of civic citizenship, referring to civic rights, duties and virtues, requires a multi-faceted analysis of the intersection of interests of different social groups and the role of the state. Achieving goals set by the above values, according to Donders, requires conditions, one of the most important of which is an adequate relationship with the state, which

can seriously undermine or even completely erode the contribution of PSBs to the public interest. Government control, party interest and politization come with a decline in trust.

Empirical evidence for the above hypothesis can be found abundantly in Europe. Donders illustrates it with the example of Poland after 2015, when the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - PiS) party, after winning the elections, completely subordinated PSM, especially television, to the logic of party propaganda. The public model changed to “sovereign” (Jaskiernia & Pokorna-Ignatowicz, 2017), which in this case means the instrumentalization of PSM, the transformation into “an active agent within a system” and a tool of “political engineering”. This means the collapse of the fragile system of checks and balances, in which the PSM remains “independent enough to criticize government, not to be a servant of government”. It thus ceases to fulfill the role of an active agent of society as a whole, a *watchdog* in the public service. The case of Poland is not isolated, as can be seen by reviewing successive Media Pluralism Monitor reports between 2014 and 2021 (Media Pluralism Monitor, 2022).

Karen Donders’ book is a successful result of a wide-ranging research project in the area of ongoing controversy in Europe. It can be taken more broadly - as a study not only of PSM landscape, confronting theoretical perspectives with practice. It is a compelling, lively, and important study because of its relation to the dilemmas of public service and the role of media in democracy in the era of tectonic shift in media sectors: digitalization and commodification, polarization and erosion of political, social, cultural and civic citizenship. In the PSM model that Karen Donders proposes, the obligations of the media to empower citizens are exposed as fundamental features that distinguish and legitimize their existence. Issues of the stronger presence of digital technology, algorithms or data are not brought to the forefront. Values and goals were recognized as the resolving aspects in conceptual discussions on PSM. As Donders writes, her approach may be considered to be “too old-fashioned”, but to contest such an approach would be to reject the idea of Public Service Media in general.

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