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Funding of Public Service Media and Its Connection with the Operating of Such Media

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Abstract

Public service media have reached the point where they need to prove their usefulness and sometimes even justify their existence in commercial-driven markets. One of the main topics for public discourse is how they should be funded, who exactly should pay for them, and consequently, how much people should pay for them. This study offers a comparison of funding models in three different European countries, namely Finland, the Czech Republic, and Serbia and their providers of public service broadcasting—Ylesradio Oy (Finland), Czech Television (the Czech Republic) and Radio Television of Serbia (Serbia). As this paper is mainly concerned about funding, conducted research considers quantitative factors. These countries and providers are compared using several metrics, e.g., viewership, wages, or tax and GDP ratio. Research concluded that, despite they are without any doubts underfunded, public service media in the Czech Republic and Serbia do not necessarily need to increase fee but they need to raise money from the citizens more effectively.

Keywords

Public Service Media, Ylesradio Oy, Czech Television, Radio Television of Serbia, Funding, Comparison

1. Introduction

The growth of convergent and especially online media presents a challenge for all traditional media (e.g. Lin & Tsai, 2023 or Schulz, Levy, & Nielsen, 2019). While commercial entities have room to adapt flexibly to the market, the adaptability of public service media is considerably limited. First, they often need to justify their very existence. In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic provided this justification. As the Report for the House of Commons suggests, linear television led by the BBC had a crucial role in communication with certain audiences. It must also be said that BBC was not the only public service medium (PSM) in Europe that was "blossoming" under the conditions of the pandemic. Increased level of trust and viewership was reported by many other European public service media (House of Commons, 2021).

As for the challenges, the one that stands above all is probably the well-documented evolution from public service broadcasting to PSM (Donders, 2019), as broadcasting itself is currently just one of the channels on which content of the PSM can be observed. Donders also suggests that the competitive positioning of public broadcasters is unclear and, in most cases, also lacks focus. There is insufficient alignment of strategies between the different brands and departments within public broadcasting companies. This, however, can be expected since all media companies need to adapt to the rapidly changing environment and the evolving strategies of their competitors. Everyone is in the same boat. In fact, it could be argued that a clear focus will never be possible, given the highly fluid nature of the media sector (Donders, 2019).

Unlike commercial media, PSM are political institutions, which means that politicians (governments) select the management. They can also legislate changes in their financing. As Milosavljević and Poler state, the expectations that private media would sever political ties and become independent "watchdogs" of democracy proved unfounded, resulting in the capture of public service media by governments and the political instrumentalization of private news outlets by political entities. In an environment dominated by politics, market factors and the commercialization of the media, certain secondary issues persist. They can be, for the most part, summarized as minor aspects of the broader difficulties experienced by the media confronted with political intrusions and the dominance of political parties or governments (Milosavljević & Poler, 2018). We can identify increasing competition that generates pressure on policymakers and public service broadcasters all over Europe (Berg & Lund, 2012). The ties between the media and the state are even more evident in post-communist countries, which repeatedly encountered severe shortcomings in terms of media independence (Urbániková, 2023). Considering this study offers a comparison of media in Finland, the Czech Republic and Serbia, it seems to be very relevant to consider the communist history of the Czech Republic and Serbia.

This brings us to the topic of the legitimacy of PSM, which has different aspects, as the study of Sehl and Cornia suggests. Firstly, new tools and projects are developed to secure pragmatic legitimacy, i.e., to ensure that the existing audiences of PSM continue to rely on their news products in an increasingly digital and competitive media environment. This approach is also used to reach new audiences, especially younger ones, which allows PSM outlets to fulfil their mandate to guarantee universal access to a broad and differentiated audience. Audience satisfaction helps to legitimize PSM and to secure stakeholders' support. Secondly, PSM also aims at securing moral legitimacy, i.e., to show their audiences and stakeholders (including political ones) that by developing new digital products, the organization can adapt to major changes affecting the industry (Sehl &

Cornia, 2021). Concurrently, it is apparent that the pressure for PSM to keep its audience interested and engaged online, as well as gain new audiences, is increasing. This goal can be challenging to achieve, considering the abundance of audience engagement techniques with low-quality content in the market (Donauskaitė, 2022).

Despite the notion of "unequal competition" from the perspective of PSM, which offer free news to its audience and might consequently decrease the incentives for the audience to subscribe to paid commercial news (Donauskaitė, 2022), the funding of PSM still seems to be the most crucial topic. The results of empirical analyses show that funding affects the impact of PSM audience performance. PSM with higher overall revenues and budgets (per capita) achieve higher market shares and stronger relevance as an information source. PSM with higher public funding (per capita) achieve higher market shares, more substantial relevance as an information source and a higher level of trust in terms of independence from political pressure (Saurwein et al., 2019).

This study thus presents a comparative case study of public broadcasters from Finland (Ylesradio Oy; abbreviated Yle) as a representative of Northern Europe, the Czech Republic (Czech Television, abbreviated CT) as a representative of Central Europe and Serbia (Radio Television of Serbia, abbreviated RTS) as a representative of Southeast Europe in terms of their economic functioning. The study deals with the methods of financing these media (concession fees, state contributions, advertising, as well as other factors) and the relationship between economic aspects and the operation and competitiveness of selected televisions. It is evident from several studies (mentioned above) that there are significant differences in funding and overall stability of PSM in Western Europe and the rest of Europe. Furthermore, it also aims to evaluate the differences in funding (the size of the media budget) between Finland (Western Europe) and the remaining two countries. Consistent with other studies, this one also contributes to the under-researched area of PSM in Central and Eastern Europe, as the literature on PSMs predominantly focuses on Western Europe (Urbániková, 2023).

The research question for this study was established as follows:

What are the differences in variables connected with funding between Yle (as the Western PSM), Czech Television (as the CEE PSM) and Radio Television of Serbia (as the Balkan PSM)?

Hypotheses

1) The level of trust in PSM will be the highest in Finland, followed by the Czech Republic and Serbia.

2) The same pattern will occur in terms of their market shares. Yle in Finland will have the best market position, followed by the Czech Republic and Serbia.

2. Selection of Countries

The usual pattern of similar studies is to compare countries that are geographically or culturally as close as possible to each other (for example, the study of

Sehl, 2023). Although the point of this study is not to criticize this method, it doesn't bring breakthrough results. As a rule, the identified distinctions tend to be rather marginal in nature. Some studies, however, work with a noticeably more diversified sample (e.g., the study of Hendrickx et al., 2019). A more diverse group of samples was also selected for this case study, dealing with public broadcasters in Finland, the Czech Republic and Serbia.

The selected countries are mostly united by the fact that a dual broadcasting system is used in all of them, which means private and public broadcasters coexist in the same environment. In terms of their differences, the most obvious factor is the geographical location and geopolitical development, with Finland located in the north of Europe, the Czech Republic in its center and Serbia on the Balkan Peninsula.

The apparent diversity of these countries can also be seen in the annual ranking of the Reporters without Borders organization (RSF, n.d.), where Finland has long been among the five countries with the highest degree of media freedom in the world (in 2022, it was in fifth place, but until 2016, it regularly ranked first). In the last 20 years, the Czech Republic has experienced a relatively turbulent journey through this ranking. Until 2015, it remained among the top twenty countries for a long time. In the following years, it gradually fell to the 40th position, where it remained between 2019-2021. This decline is attributed to the oligarchizing of the Czech media. In 2022, however, it returned to 20th place. On the other hand, the media in Serbia have long been among the least free in Europe. In the past year, the country was placed in the 79th position, where it rose from 93rd place in 2021. Among European countries, only Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Ukrainian media have ranked worse.

These countries also belong to different categories in terms of their government-media relationship models. According to Hallin and Mancini's "traditional" division, Finland is included in the North/Central European democratic-corporatist model. At the same time, the other two countries do not appear in this classification, at least not in the original version of the book Comparing Media Systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). On the other hand, Jirák and Trampota, in the preface to the Czech version of this monograph, place the Czech media system at the border of all three existing models. According to them, it falls into the Mediterranean model of polarized pluralism, and from the point of view of the gender distribution of readers, it is between the liberal and the democratic-corporatist model. At the same time, the authors stated that there was no party parallelism in the Czech media (Hallin & Mancini, 2008). Since this publication was issued before the oligarchizing of the Czech media, it is necessary to accept this classification with caution. Hallin and Mancini do not deal with Serbia or the Balkans, even in the follow-up book—Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World (Hallin & Mancini, 2011). Other authors also avoid categorizing the Balkan media, including Jakubowicz et al. in Comparative Media Systems (Dobek-Ostrowska et al., 2010). The publication Central and Eastern Europe Media in Comparative Perspective by Downey and Mihelj partly deals with

Serbia (Downey & Mihelj, 2012). The authors include, for example, a comparison of the media in terms of the representation of women in journalism, from which Serbia (at the time of publishing, Serbia, and Montenegro) ranks relatively well.

3. Basic Data on the Financing of Individual Media

In the European Union, we can identify five different approaches to the payment of concession fees (CF). These approaches are further divided into two subgroups based on whether they allow media co-financing from advertising or not (see **Table 1**).

Undoubtedly, the most widespread financing model is directly from the state budget. This method is applied, for example, in all Benelux countries, the Baltics, Hungary and Spain. From July 1, 2023, Slovakia will also join these countries, as the Slovak deputies decided to abolish the existing system of concession fees at the end of 2022 (Aktuality.sk, 2022).

The group of states where public media operation is paid for directly (in the form of concessionaire fees) currently includes only Croatia, Ireland, Germany, Poland, Austria, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic. From countries outside the European Union, we can mention Switzerland, Great Britain, or Serbia, which is important in the context of this study. Yet, the taxpayer (or the basic unit of fee collection) is defined differently in each state. While in the Czech Republic, the fee is tied to the presence of a television receiver in a household or other public facility, in Germany and Switzerland, the fee is paid by all citizens of the country, which, specifically in the case of Switzerland, enabled its substantial reduction. In Great Britain, the fee is then tied to the specific device (it also applies to tablets or smartphones) and the type of content (e.g., retrospective viewing and downloads are also charged). Ramsay and Herzog also confirm the trend of gradually abandoning the TV fee, stating that Great Britain will probably want to withdraw from this model in the foreseeable future (Ramsey & Herzog, 2018).

Table 1. Approaches to PSM funding in the EU.

Model	Advertisement	Earth
Fee paid (citizens) directly	YES	Croatia, Ireland, Germany, Poland, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovenia
	NO	Great Britain
Financed from the state budget	YES	Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia
	NO	Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Luxembourg, Spain
Paid together with utilities (electricity)	YES	Italy, Portugal, Greece
	NO	
Tax on public broadcasting	YES	France
	NO	Finland, Sweden
A hybrid approach	YES/NO	Denmark

Source: Jankovska, 2021; own processing and updates about the location of Slovakia.

The regularity of concession fee revisions is also a partial factor. As the CT annual report for 2021 states, "*a number of countries have set methods of annual or multi-year revisions of the fee. Countries that revise the fee annually in line with inflation include, for example, France (In France, the concessionaire fee was abolished in 2022 and replaced by funding from the state budget.), Denmark and Great Britain. The fee also changes every year in Poland, but here, inflation is only one of multiple factors for determining the amount to be paid. In Croatia, Ireland and Portugal, the fee is also revised annually; however, it often does not change at all. Germany, Switzerland, and Austria revise the fee every 4 to 6 years. The Czech Republic and Slovakia are among the countries where a mechanism for regular fee review is not in place*" (Annual Management Report of CT, 2021).

Other possible approaches to financing public media are then very rarely represented. In Italy, Portugal and Greece, the payment is made together with the utilities and in Finland and Sweden through the public broadcasting tax. The most unique approach can be observed in Denmark, which has seen a gradual transformation from the classic concession fee to payment through taxes.

In her comparative study focused on the willingness to pay for PSM, Sehl stated that approximately one-fifth of the population is not willing to pay for PSM at all. She also confirmed the general trend of paying for digital media content, the need for political representation to communicate with citizens, the importance of PSM and the difference between paid digital media and state media. The finding that PSM was the least expendable in Germany (compared to France and Great Britain), where citizens from these three countries pay the most for them, can be described as somewhat surprising (Sehl, 2023).

Campos-Freire, Rodríguez-Castro and Blasco-Blasco add a certain paradox to the above. At a time when PSM need to increase their income to be able to compete with commercial broadcasters and adapt to current trends, they are facing significant cuts in budgets, the overall funding crisis, and the loss of public trust caused by low political support (Campos-Freire, Rodríguez-Castro, & Blasco-Blasco, 2020). Furthermore, Lowe and Berg postulate that in most countries, public media are clearly worth running and represent good value for money. Specifically, they state: "*Although every PSM provider does not offer as much or for the same price, the example indicates that the reason these organizations are in trouble has little to do with claims of inefficiency or lack of popularity. They are mainly in trouble due to socio-political complications rooted in competition effects*" (Lowe & Berg, 2013).

Nevertheless, the decline in the income of all public sector media represents a long-term trend. According to the European Union of Broadcasters report, in 2010, PSM revenues in Europe averaged 0.2% of the GDP of individual countries. By 2021, this value had decreased to 0.16% of GDP. It has been on that level since 2019, with a slight increase in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (EBU: Funding of PSM, 2023). The same report also shows that PSM financing has long lagged inflation, adding that the gap between the two values is increasing. At the same time, it also demonstrates the relationship of direct proportionality between the financial stability of public media and their market share, i.e., a situation where well-financed PSM can afford to buy and produce higher quality programs and thus are more attractive to viewers (EBU: Funding of PSM, 2023).

4. Czech Television

Czech Television is financed from concessionaire fees paid directly. The fee has been set at €5.6 per month since 2008. Fees are the primary source of income for CT. According to CT's budget for 2023, this is 86% of all broadcaster revenues (The total revenues amount to CZK 7.39 billion. For fees, it is necessary to consider the value of the so-called Settlement of the Television Fee Fund of CZK 6.38 billion, not the simple income from fees, which was CZK 5.7 billion. As per the Budget of CT for 2023). The income from concession fees for 2023 amounted to CZK 5.7 billion. This amount has been relatively consistent over the past few years. During the period around the economic crisis of 2008-2011, it hovered around CZK 5.8 billion but subsequently fell to CZK 5.62 billion in 2015. For 2021, 2022 and 2023, it then differs by a maximum of lower tens of millions (Budget of CT for 2023).

Here, it is possible to identify an obvious problem that CT is facing in connection with CF, the real value of the CF. This value gradually decreased (because of inflationary effects and the current purchasing power of the population) to a real value of CZK 56 between 2008 and 2023. In 2013, i.e., five years after the introduction of the CF of 135 CZK, the real value had already fallen to CZK 115, a whole CZK 20 less. The aggregate sum of CT's income from CF in real value was only CZK 2.37 billion, which represents only 42% of the nominal value.

In addition to the obvious cause of this problem, which is the absence of CF valorization, other partial deficiencies can also be identified. The first is that, between 2009 and 2021, the number of registered television receivers in the Czech Republic decreased by 110,000, which in terms of fees represents CZK 178 million. The second, probably more important, is the definition of the taxpayer and the subject of the fee. As stated in the CT Budget for 2023, "*the obligation to pay a television fee linked to the possession of a television set is proving to be unsatisfactory due to technological development and changes in the behavior of viewers and leads to an unequal situation, where the part of society that does not own a television set does not have to participate in financing public services in the field of television broadcasting, but at the same time has the possibility to watch the content produced by Czech Television on other devices (mobile phone, tablet, computer)*" (Budget of CT for 2023). Of course, one way to increase the volume of funds from fees is by addressing unregistered taxpayers. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of this activity is doubtful.

In the last two years, the debates about a possible increase in CF have intensified. "Sustainability of public media funding" was even part of the program statement of the current government (Vlada.cz, Program statement of the Government, 2023). Despite experts' opinions (Supova, 2022), it seemed that it would not happen soon, which was also stated by the Minister of Culture Martin Baxa at the end of 2022 (Loudová, 2022). However, the situation has changed in recent months, and according to information from the Minister of Culture, the fee should be increased soon. The amount considered is CZK 180. On the one hand, this is an increase of one-third. On the other hand, the CT Budget for 2023 states that "*if the television fee were linked to macroeconomic development* (*inflation*) *and thereby kept the same purchasing power*, *it would have risen to* 214 *CZK by* 2023" (if we were to consider the prices from 2008, when the CF amount was set).

5. Ylesradio Oy

It is necessary to divide Yle's funding into two chapters. Until the end of 2012, it was financed the same way as CT, i.e., from concessionaire fees. Since 2013, a special tax, commonly referred to as the "Yle tax", has been in place to finance the PSM (Laki Ylesradioverosta, 2012). It is also necessary to state that in Finland's case, one fee covers the complete services of Ylesradio, i.e., television, radio, and online platforms.

It is advisable to start monitoring CF in 2008, when a fee for CT of CZK 135 per was introduced. CF for Yle in 2008 was €215.45 (Yle's Year 2009, 2010). In the following years, it continuously increased by 3% - 6%. In the last year of its validity, 2012, it rose to €252.25 (Yle's Year 2011, 2012). It is evident that Yle reacted both to inflation and to a similar trend that CT faced, namely the decreasing number of concessionaires. Specifically, in the case of Finland, inflation was slightly above the European Union average in the monitored period, around 2% - 3% (Euro Area Statistics, 2023). The number of concessionaires (concessionaire units) then decreased to the lower tens of thousands per year (as a result, from 1.92 million in 2008 to 1.85 million in 2012) (Yle's Financial Statements 2008, 2012).

The appropriateness of Yle's response to the negative phenomena (inflation and the loss of concessionaires) is evidenced by the fact that the company's turnover increased from 380.5 million (figure for 2008) to 422.7 million (figure for 2012) between 2008-2012. Regarding turnover, it is necessary to add that its value has changed over the years. Yle's yearly report for 2013 states different values for individual years. At the same time, the turnover in the monitored period consisted almost exclusively of revenues from concessionaire fees. Their share of turnover between 2009-2012 (data for 2008 is not available) varied between 92.7% in 2012 and 96.1% in 2011 (Yle's Financial Statement, 2010, 2011).

The previously mentioned Yle tax, valid since 2013, represented a significant reduction in the annual public media services fee, especially for those already paying the fee. The potential drop in the overall amount of money collected was compensated by payments from all eligible taxpayers, including companies. Nevertheless, the obligation to pay the Yle tax still does not apply to all citizens of Finland who have reached the age of maturity.

In the first year of the new financing system, the tax ranged from €0 to €140 per year per taxpayer, depending on their income. The individual was to pay 0.68% of his income but not more than the stated €140. It was further established that, in addition to minors, persons whose annual income was lower than €7352 would not pay. In the case of companies, the tax obligation concerned entities whose annual income reached the threshold of €50,000. In that case, the company had to pay a tax of €140 + an additional 0.35% of its income up to a maximum tax limit of €3000 (Yle's Financial Statement, 2010, 2011). **Table 2** below monitors the development of the Yle tax over the entire period of its existence.

The change in financing between 2012 and 2013 also brought a drastic increase in the company's turnover. This increased from €422.7 million in 2012 to €465.9 million in 2013. However, as Yle's financial review for 2013 notes, the increase was, in truth, insubstantial (the report states only 6.2%, which would correspond to the amount of €449 million). There was also an adjustment to the method of calculating the turnover, in which additional income (from the sale of broadcast rights to various programs and services) was also included (Yle's Financial Statement 2013, 2014). In the first six years under the new financing method, Yle's turnover remained relatively consistent. Interestingly, it experienced stagnation in the order of millions of euros between 2014 and 2015. Since 2019, it has been growing regularly at a rate of approximately 2% per year. For the year 2022, it then reached €511.6 million (Yle reports from years 2013-2022).

6. Radio and Television of Serbia

In order to describe the conditions under which Radio and Television of Serbia (RTS) operates, it is first necessary to mention the fundamental specificity of the Serbian media market and its significant connection with the political sphere, as well as the resulting practical division into "pro-government" and "opposition" media. As a result of this situation, the country fell to 91st place in the press freedom ranking in the last year. Simultaneously, the European Commission (The country has been a candidate for joining the European Union since 2012) has been urging Serbia to resolve this situation for a long time (Nova.rs, 2023a).

The public institution RTS was established in its current (public) form in 2006 as part of the transformation of the former state media. From this time until 2013, RTS was primarily financed through a so-called "subscription", which in 2012-2013 amounted to €4.3 per month (€51.6 per year). However, it became problematic that, due to the pre-election campaign of the Serbian Progressive Party (led by its chairman and the current Serbian president, Aleksandar Vučić), which partially based its election campaign on the promise of abolishing the fee, many citizens stopped paying this fee. RTS thus got into considerable financial problems (Gajić, 2020).

Table 2. Overview of Yle tax in 2013-2023.

Year	Lower fee limit	Upper fee limit	Income share	Calculation from the share	Lower income limit	Upper income limit
2013	50	140	0.68%	0.68%	7353	20,588
2014	51	143	0.68%	0.68%	7500	21,029
2015	51	143	0.68%	0.68%	7500	21,029
2016	70	143	0.68%	0.68%	10,294	21,029
2017	70	143	0.68%	0.68%	10,294	21,029
2018	0	163	2.5%	>14,000 = 2.5%	14,000	20,520
2019-2023	0	163	2.5%	>14,000 = 2.5%	14,000	20,520

Source: Yle's internal document entitled "Yle's financing model and principles" was sent on request by the company's financial director. Note: Financial data are given in €.

In 2014 and 2015, RTS was financed from the state budget. In August 2014, a key amendment to the law was passed, establishing a system of financing public media through a concession fee. Residents of Serbia started paying the fee in January 2016 (RTS Business Report for 2020, 2021). The tax and its payment were tied to the consumption of electricity. The fee for the first three years amounted to €1.3 per month (€15.6 per year). From 2019, it increased to €1.9 per month (€22.8 per year) (RTS, 2018). Another increase occurred the following year, to €2.2 per month (€26.4 per year) (RTS, 2020a). From January 2021, it then increased to the current €2.5 per month (€30.6 per year) (Act to amend the temporary law adjusting method of collection of fees for public media service, 2020). The fee thus increased to almost double within three years.

In connection with the collection of the concession fee in Serbia, it is necessary to mention a local specificity, which is the existence of the autonomous region of Vojvodina in the north of the country. In this territory, the primary provider of public media services is Radio and Television of Vojvodina (RTV), although local citizens also have full access to RTS services. The amount of the concessionaire fee is the same for residents of Vojvodina. The difference occurs in the further division of this fee. 70% of it goes to the operation of RTV, while the remaining 30% goes to the RTS account (RTS Business Report for 2021).

RTS has had a relatively turbulent period in terms of funding. After the so-called Great Recession (years 2007 and 2008), it struggled with negative economic results, resulting in hundreds of employees being dismissed. In 2014, both Serbia and RTS underwent fundamental changes. The current president, Aleksandar Vučić, became the country's prime minister. Since then, according to some reports by, among others, the European Commission (see below), a "toxic" media environment has prevailed in the country (RSF, 2023). RTS, in this "transitional period", i.e., in 2014 and 2015, based on Vučić's pre-election promise, stopped collecting any fees from residents (Dedeić, 2019). At that time, there were also changes in the management positions of RTS, including the highest ones. In May 2015, Dragan Bujošević became the director and occupies this position to this day.

In 2014, legislative reforms were also introduced. These reforms established a clear and transparent way of collecting the concession fee (from 2016). The impact of these measures was reflected in the company's slowly growing budget. It reached €77.5 million in 2015 and grew to €115.8 million in 2021. In terms of financing, there has also been a gradual shift away from state-budget financing. In 2016, for example, it contributed 29% to the funding of RTS. In 2020, it was only 12%, and a year later, RTS did not receive any funds from the state. However, concession fees do not contribute as significantly to the budget as they do with CT and Yle. In 2021, when CF's share of the budget reached a historical maximum, its value was 75%. It can be considered as a specificity of RTS that marketing and advertising activities constitute at least one-fifth of its annual budget (RTS Business Reports for 2015-2021).

7. Making Sense of the Numbers

To summarize the financial data above, it is true that the residents of Finland pay by far the highest annual amount for public media in the long term. Although the value of the Yle tax ranges between 0 and 163 € per year, as already mentioned above, the reality is that most Finnish citizens pay the maximum tax. This has been happening since 2018. The fee collected by Czech Television and Czech Radio together has long been approximately €91.2 (the amount in Czech crowns has not changed since 2008, but it would be different in euros through the years, depending on the exchange rate), i.e., at 56% of the Yle tax. In Serbia, RTS then collects approximately €30.6 per year, i.e., less than 20% of the Yle tax and approximately one-third of the concession fee paid to Czech Television.

Nevertheless, the given data are not completely indicative. The diametrical difference in collecting funds from companies also affects them significantly. Here, while Finnish companies pay up to €3000 annually under the Yle tax, in the Czech Republic, companies pay for each receiver (which puts most companies at the level of households with a real decline in devices across the entire company). A similar situation occurs in Serbia, where companies pay a concessionaire fee as part of their electricity bill, similarly to the rest of the population and in a similar amount.

Therefore, the total budget of the given media, or the sum of its disposable income, can be considered a more indicative value. The budget data are shown in Figure 1 below. From it, we find that the budget of CT + CRo was approximately three-quarters of that of Yla, for example, for the year 2022. Yle received €511.6 million, while CT and CRo had €395.2 million at their disposal. The difference in the number of inhabitants accounts for the smaller gap between the overall budgets of the PSM compared to the monthly fees they collect per concessionaire. The population of the Czech Republic is almost double that of Finland (the Czech Republic had approximately 10.5 million inhabitants in 2022,

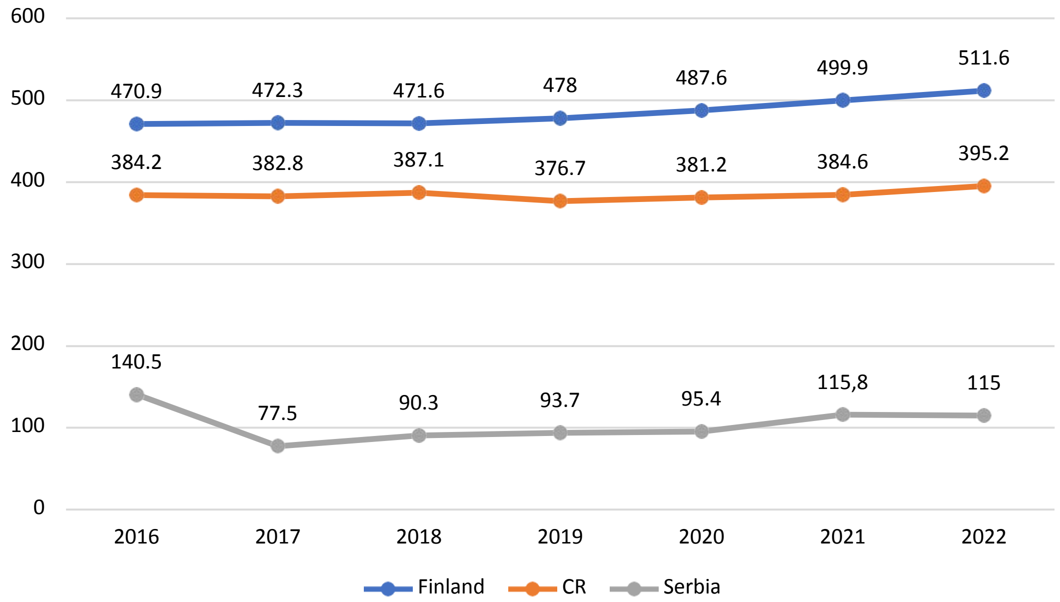

Figure 1. Comparison of the budgets of individual media in 2016-2022. Source: Created by the author of this study. Note: The given data represent the value in millions of euros according to the euro's exchange rate for the given currency on 06/30/2023. With a more accurate conversion, they would be slightly lower in both cases, as both currencies have tended to strengthen against the euro in recent years. As for the Czech Republic, it is calculated with the income of CRo and CT together. Regarding Yle, the figure represents turnover, not income.

while Finland had approximately 5.5 million as per World Population Review, 2023). The RTS budget is approximately one-fifth of that of Yle (in 2022, it was €115 million). According to the discussion that took place in Serbia in 2014 and 2015 in connection with RTS financing, the current budget is close to the then-requested value of €120 million (RTV, 2015). However, the financing of RTV remains problematic, as it receives only 70% of the fees collected from the citizens of the autonomous region of Vojvodina. Its representatives, therefore, demand that it continues to be financed from the state budget (Danas, 2022).

8. Methodology

The case study approach was adopted for this paper. Case studies are both descriptive and interpretative (Vennesson, 2008), not only explaining the strategies but also clarifying the reasons for certain findings and highlighting differences between the studied cases (Donders, 2019). A case study is a research strategy based on the in-depth empirical investigation of one, or a small number, of phenomena to explore the configuration of each case and to explain the features of a larger class of (similar) phenomena by developing and evaluating theoretical explanations (Ragin, 2000). We can also think of a case study as an attempt to understand and interpret a spatially and temporally bounded set of events. With the shift of political science toward a more theoretical orientation in the last three decades, qualitative methodologists began to think of a case as an instance of something else—a theoretically defined class of events (Levy, 2008).

There are several characteristics of case studies, e.g. the ideal number of cases, the nature and richness of the data collected, the ways in which the data can and should be collected, the logic of generalization, the role of inductive and deductive approaches, the importance of time span and historical depth, the access to actors and their perceptions, the units of analysis, the connection with fieldwork, and participant observation (Vennesson, 2008). We can also identify more types of case study evidence (Gerring, 2004).

Data collection took place exclusively in the form of desk research, during which data of a similar nature about all three public broadcasters (i.e., Yle, CT and RTS) was collected and subsequently compared. Given that the presented article evaluates the importance of individual media financing, all the data used are quantitative.

The author considers the definition of suitable variables subjected to comparison to be key for this work. In this respect, variables that are commonly used in similar types of research were chosen, e.g., the relationship between the budget and viewership of individual media or the share of funds spent on employees. Additionally, fewer common variables were proposed. These include the share of the fee for the given media (in any form) and GDP per capita (GDP per capita). Like many other authors, Sehl uses the ratio of PSM income to GDP (PSM/GDP) as an indicator (Sehl, 2023). However, the author of this study does not consider this factor to be fully indicative, as the number of inhabitants and, consequently, the number of payers of the concessionaire fee or other forms of payment differ in the selected countries. For this reason, we propose to consider the relationship between GDPs per capita and the amount of the fee that an individual must pay.

When processing financial indicators for the given media, it was necessary to overcome several barriers. The first, which can be described as natural, stems from the different conditions under which the selected media work, the currencies in the given countries, etc. If we consider each country, the following applies:

- Finland is the only country surveyed where the system is not financed through the "classic" CF but through a direct tax. Moreover, it is not only paid for by residents but also by society. In this case, comparability is indicative. However, given the fact that the fee is set to the current value of 0 - 163€, when the lower limit of income for the payment of any fee is €14,000 per year, and the upper limit is €20,520 per year, it is likely that the majority of Finnish residents pay the fee in the maximum possible amount, i.e. €163, as the median average wage, for example, in 2021 reached a value of €3314 per month, i.e. €39,768 per year (Yle, 2022).
- The Czech Republic is the only country on the list where public television and broadcasting do not operate as a single unit but form two autonomous companies. First, it was necessary to add up the fee for its broadcast with the fee for the completely autonomous Czech Radio (CRo). Subsequently, a currency conversion to euros is necessary, as the official currency of the Czech Republic is

still the Czech Crown. The exchange rate was 23.8 CZK/1 € on the date indicated below in the notes (Google Finance, 2023). The fee for radio is €1.9 (Act on Radio and Television Fees and Amendment of Certain Acts, 2005), so €7.6 per month is paid for both media. The total annual fee for CT and CRo thus amounts to €91.2 (Monthly fee CZK 180 × 12 months = CZK 2160/23.8 [rate] = €90.7.).

• In the case of RTS, converting Serbian Dinars (RSD) to Euros is necessary. If we consider the current exchange rate of RSD to EUR, which is approximately 117.4 RSD/1 € (Google Finance, 2023), the annual fee comes to around 30.6 € (Monthly fee RSD 299 × 12 months = RSD 3588/117.4 [exchange rate] = €30.6.). Here, too, similarly to the case of Yle, it applies that for the stated amount, the citizens of Serbia receive both television and radio service.

The subsequent barrier could be described as administrative. Research has shown that the only medium that has kept data in the same or similar form for a long time is Czech Television. Yle has changed the format of its annual reports and financial reports several times over the years, which means that the indicators used in previous years are not necessarily used again in later reports.

Although RTS presents relatively constant, stable, and consistent indicators in its reports, these reports are available only from 2014. Hence, the period from 2016, when "classic" concession fees came into force, was chosen for comparison. Before 2016, the financing demonstrated a relatively low degree of transparency. According to the information provided on the RTS website, reports were created before 2016 but are not publicly available.

There is also a difference in the availability of statistical data across countries. In the Czech Republic, socio-economic data are often included directly in the annual reports of Czech Television. They are also available on the website of the Czech Statistical Office. Serbia also has a good availability of structured data consistent over time. In Finland, such data are often missing. For example, data on average gross wages are available on the website of Tilastokeskus (the central Finnish statistical office) only for some years. In other years, it is the median, i.e., a slightly different figure. The comparison of salaries in journalism is then complicated by its classification, divergent from other fields across the given countries (Tilastokeskus, n.d).

9. Value for Money

The EBU uses the relationship between the viewership of individual public service media and the amount of media income per inhabitant (revenue per capita) as an indicator. At the same time, the regularly conducted investigations clearly show an apparent connection between these two elements. Specifically, the trend among EBU member states is that the higher the per capita income of a medium, the better the market position of that medium, and vice versa (EBU: Funding PSM, 2022). However, it is necessary to say that viewership is not the only factor determining success of PSM (unlike in case of commercial media). PSM need viewership in terms of "stay relevant" for the majority of population but their primary concern should be providing the public service itself as it is stated above.

The development of viewership of individual media, as shown in graph no. 10 below, shows Published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford with support from Yle.an obvious correlation with the financial resources invested in these media, thus confirming the findings of the EBU. Yle, which has the most saturated budget, clearly has the best market position and is the most-watched broadcaster in Finland without competition. In the Czech Republic, Czech Television has been at the top of viewership for a long time (it was in other than first place in the ranking in the monitored period only in 2017), albeit with a significantly lower lead than Yle in Finland. Serbian RTS and its first channel, RTS 1, are also number one among broadcasters. Furthermore, it is evident that, despite the stabilization of the budget in the last three years and the increase of the concessionaire fee to €2.5 per month, its viewership and lead over commercial broadcasters are decreasing. Regarding Serbia, it is necessary to mention the local specificity, which is the considerably diversified television market. The "other" category in the viewership reports, which are part of the RTS business reports, accounts for more than 40% of viewership (see, e.g., reports for 2020 and 2021) (see **Figure 2**).

The study's authors attempted to use trust in PSM as one of the variables, as media are social institutions assessed and evaluated based on trust. The media environment has a high level of rivalry and competition; the use of media is voluntary and can easily be replaced by other information sources. Therefore, trust in media can constitute the basis for media existence since trust is associated

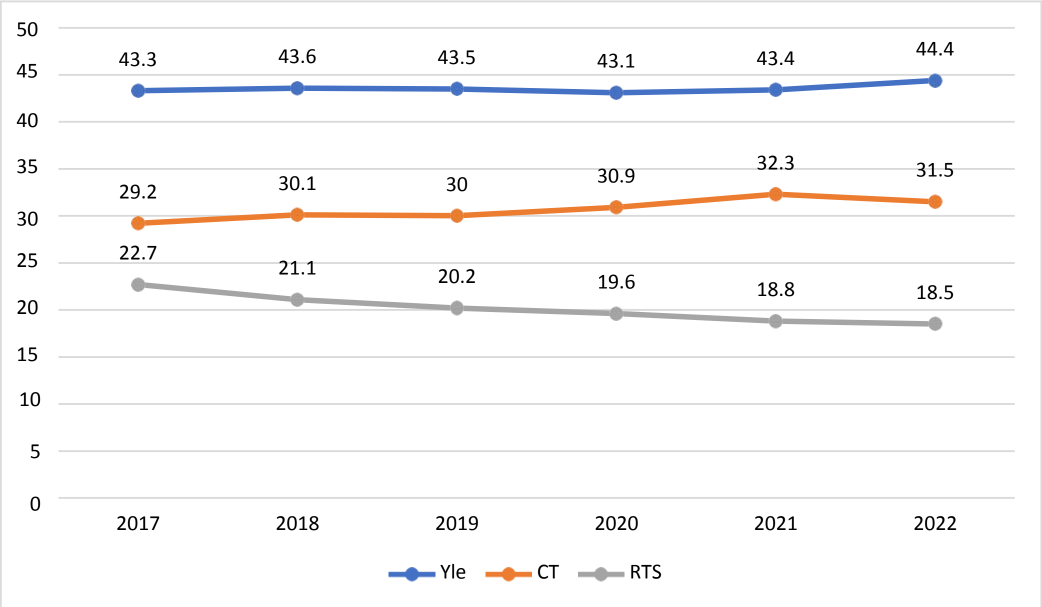

Figure 2. Viewership (share) of individual media in 2017-2022. Source: websites mediaguru.cz, finnpanel.fi and rts.rs (Finnpanel, n.d.). Note: In the case of Yle, the figure shows the population age group 4+. When it comes to CT, it is the group 15+. The age limit for RTS is unknown or has not been set.

with democracy-related concepts such as freedom of expression, independence, and pluralism (Jõesaar, Rožukalne, & Jastramskis, 2022). It is worrying that mainstream news media are increasingly becoming the target of politically motivated attacks from political actors and the so-called alt-right media, particularly as these political actors and media have become more influential over the last decade (Strömbäck, 2021).

Surveys dealing with the credibility of individual media are also relatively common today. However, as it transpired during the research, these investigations are not present to the same degree in various countries. E.g., in Serbia, they are not carried out on a regular basis. The data from the Czech Republic and Finland are available and published in CT's and Yle's annual reports. It follows from these that trust in PSM in the Czech Republic and in Finland has been at a very similar level for a long time and was even higher in the Czech Republic by lower percentage units (see Graph 11). From the only documented survey from Serbia, it is evident that trust in RTS, on the other hand, is extremely low and reached only 30% in 2021 (see below in the graph). It is not possible to prove the link between financial resources and the credibility of the media with certainty.

Serbia has long been among the European countries with the lowest overall trust in the media. In 2020, for example, only 20% of the population trusted the media. The same source states that half of the country's population actively avoids the news (N1 Info, 2020). Data from the survey Resilience - Civil society action to reaffirm media freedom and counter disinformation and hateful propaganda in the Western Balkans and Turkey states that "51% *of respondents to the survey tend to trust the media*". The same research points to the finding that roughly three-quarters of the population believe that the country's media is controlled by political and business moguls (Resilience - Civil society action to reaffirm media freedom and counter disinformation and hateful propaganda in the Western Balkans and Turkey - Media trust in Serbia: Polarized media, Polarized audience, 2021). A 2020 article published on the RTS website also points to similar data, according to which 15% of the population trusts the media and 38% partially trusts it (RTS, 2020b).

Additionally, the media's very low trust is shown, among other things, by the global research of the Ipsos agency among 27 countries from 2019, in which Serbia and Hungary came out worst. According to this survey, only 11% of respondents trust newspapers and magazines in Serbia, and 14% of respondents trust television and radio. Websites and online platforms are better off, trusted by 29% of the population, but this is still one of the worst results of the surveyed states (Ipsos, 2019).

10. Salary of Employees

The basic data related to the employees of individual media is their number. Despite the obvious disproportion in the number of inhabitants of the given countries (Serbia had approximately 7.2 million inhabitants at the end of 2022), the employee numbers are quite similar. This is especially true regarding Finnish and Czech media, whose number of employees in 2021 was close to 3000 and, in both cases, had an upward trend since 2017. Even in 2015, RTS had the largest number of employees from the compared media, over 3200. Due to layoffs, their number decreased to 2558 by 2021 (Annual reports of individual media).

In this respect, it is necessary to add that in Czech conditions, it would be appropriate to use the sum of the employees of CT and CRo in our calculations. This is because, when it comes to Yle and RTS, the employees are dedicated to both television and radio. Nevertheless, the total number of employees (roughly 3000 employees of CT and 1400 employees of Czech Radio as per Idnes.cz, 2021) is not a completely accurate figure, as it cannot be assumed that this Czech public broadcaster would have 4400 employees if the media functioned as a single unit. Their number would probably be significantly reduced due to the similarity of the workload across parts of the workforce. In the long term, the highest proportion of labor costs in the budget is shown by the Finnish Yle, stable between 37.5% and 38.7%. Czech Television also came close to these values in 2021 with a share of 35.7%. In 2016, it spent only a quarter of its budget on employee wages, which is a considerably disproportionate expenditure compared to Yle. Except for slight fluctuations in 2018 (27%) and 2020 (39%), RTS moves slightly above the threshold of 30% of budget expenditures (Annual reports of individual media).

Since Yle's income is tied to a percentage of the population's income, which has been increasing in recent years (Yle, 2022), the company maintains a stable salary level among its employees. It increases their income in accordance with the market environment. This is also evident from the increase in total expenditure on wages, which for 2021 reached €194.5 million. As a result, the average wage of a Yle employee is at least 68% higher than the average wage in Finland, as it is presented in **Table 3**. Yet, it must be pointed out that the reality of rank-and-file media editors can be very different.

The wages in Czech Television are also above average compared to the rest of the country. Yet, in this regard, it runs into certain limits, most likely also due to the absence of valorization of the concessionaire fee. Wages here are growing more slowly than in the rest of the Czech Republic. From a 40% positive difference in 2016, the positive difference shrank to 22% in 2021. Given the high inflation in 2022 and 2023, it is reasonable to assume that in these years, there will be a further reduction.

Wages at RTS have been slightly above the Serbian average for a long time, but its employees have been raising concerns about indecent working conditions for a long time. This happened, for example, in 2019, when the unions demanded a meeting with the RTS director but were not heard (Živanović, 2019). On June 1st this year, an employee strike with a similar motive occurred (Nova.rs, 2023b). The protests in 2019 may have precipitated the subsequent increase in their income. Unfortunately, it is impossible to prove the connection. Nevertheless, while in 2016-2019, the wages in RTS were above the Serbian average by only one percentage point, in 2020 and 2021, it was more than 20%.

Table 3. Wage difference in the monitored media compared to the average wage in the country.

Yle						
Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
The average salary in Yle	5031	5052	5411	5422	5450	5618
The average salary in the country	3001	2816	3079	3139	3228	3314
Percentage difference	**+68%**	**+79%**	**+76%**	**+73%**	**+69%**	**+70%**
CT						
The average salary in the Czech Republic	38,669	39,620	42,284	43,693	44,735	46,239
The average salary in the country	27,689	29,504	31,885	34,125	35,611	37,839
Yle						
Percentage difference	**40%**	**34%**	**33%**	**28%**	**26%**	**22%**
RTS						
The average salary in RTS	68,090	69,485	72,163	81,704	106,474	113,858
The average salary in the country	63,474	65,976	68,629	75,814	82,984	90,784
Percentage difference	**+7%**	**+5%**	**+5%**	**+8%**	**+28%**	**+25%**

Source: Serbian Statistical Office, Finnish Statistical Office, CT annual economic reports, Yle and RTS annual reports. Note: The data from Serbia and the Czech Republic cover the gross salary in the given months. In terms of the data on the average salary in Finland, it is the so-called median average salary.

11. Conclusion

Starting with the simplest tasks, it is just right to answer the research question and confirm or disconfirm the applied hypothesis. As for the research question, we can see that in some variables, there is a clear and unanimous leader in Yle, which is a clear leader in the Finnish market. Apart from that, it creates a tremendous gap in the Finnish media market in terms of wages of the employees (the difference between the average salary in Finland and Yle is usually around 70% in favor of Yle). However, this gap may not be real. During his research, the authors found out through word of mouth that the salaries of employees in the media production of Yle (journalists, anchors, etc.) are similar to those in the rest of the Finnish media sector. This would consequently mean two things. First, all the management of Yle may be well paid. In terms of management salaries, there is evidence, for example, in Yle's Annual Report 2022. According to the document, the salary of CEO Merja Ylä-Anttila in 2022 was EUR 333,840 (approximately five times the average salary in the whole organization), while the rest of the management group consisted of ten people (eleven, if we include the Public Service Director Ismo Silvo, who retired in spring 2022) received EUR 1,808,472 (approximately three times average salary in the whole organization). Considering the same date for Czech Television, as reported by web Hlidacipes (Cerny, 2020), whose CEO received approximately EUR 220,000 in 2019 (approximately ten times the average salary in the whole organization), this does not seem to be probable. Secondly, the salary structure of Yle would be a topic for further research as there are many unclear factors. However, there are variables that are quite similar for Yle and Czech Television, e.g., the level of trust in media. While media trust in Serbia is constantly low and difficult to measure.

This brings us to the point of assessing the hypotheses. The first hypothesis, stating "Level of trust in PSM will be the highest in Finland, followed by Czech Republic and Serbia", can be considered partially confirmed as the level of trust in PSM in Finland and Czech Republic is undoubtedly higher than in Serbia. Still, there is almost no difference in the trust in PSM in these two countries. The second hypothesis, stating that "Yle in Finland will have the best market position, followed by the Czech Republic and Serbia", was fully confirmed as there is a clear correlation between the budget of the media and its market position. Although shares of Yle are constantly more than 43% and even increased in 2022, which makes it by a margin the most viewed television in the country, Czech Television hovers around 30% and has a slight advantage over the two biggest Czech commercial broadcasters, Nova Group and FTV Prima, who both had slightly less than 27% in 2022 (MediaGuru, 2023). RTS is the leader in the Serbian TV market, but as its position gradually decreases, it seems to be a matter of time before it is overtaken by the commercial opponents led by Pink Media Group.

Considering the financial variables between individual states, this study suggests that CT and RTS should catch up or get as close as possible to the Finnish Yle. This is understandably a very simplified way of thinking about the micro-environment in which the given media operate. Still, this notion encourages reflection on the disproportions between the Finnish public broadcaster and the Czech and Serbian ones.

12. Catching up Yle

The first reason for the disproportion is quite clear—concession fees in the Czech Republic or Serbia do not reach the same level as the Yle tax in Finland, and therefore, a lower amount of funds naturally flows into the media in question. These considerations are also supported by the reports of the European Broadcasting Union (Europan Broadcasting Union: abbreviated EBU) from 2020-2022. According to them, both countries lag the European average in terms of the amount of the fee. The Czech Republic also lags the EU average. However, Chart 8 below points to the fact that the gap has been decreasing over the years. Yet, this is not primarily due to the involvement of specific media but rather the gradual departure of countries from the system of concession fees. While 25 EBU member countries (44%) collected the fee in 2020, it was only 22 (39%) in 2022 (see **Figure 3**).

A question arises as to whether an increase, especially one that would mean approaching the level of the Yle tax, would be realistic and feasible in the countries in question. When searching for an appropriately set fee, it would be possible to use, for example, the ratio of the financial amount to the GDP per inhabitant in the given country as a metric. Nevertheless, as **Table 4** below shows, this indicator is practically identical in all three states. From this perspective, it cannot be unequivocally stated that the low concessionaire fee causes insufficient revenues for PSM in the Czech Republic and Serbia.

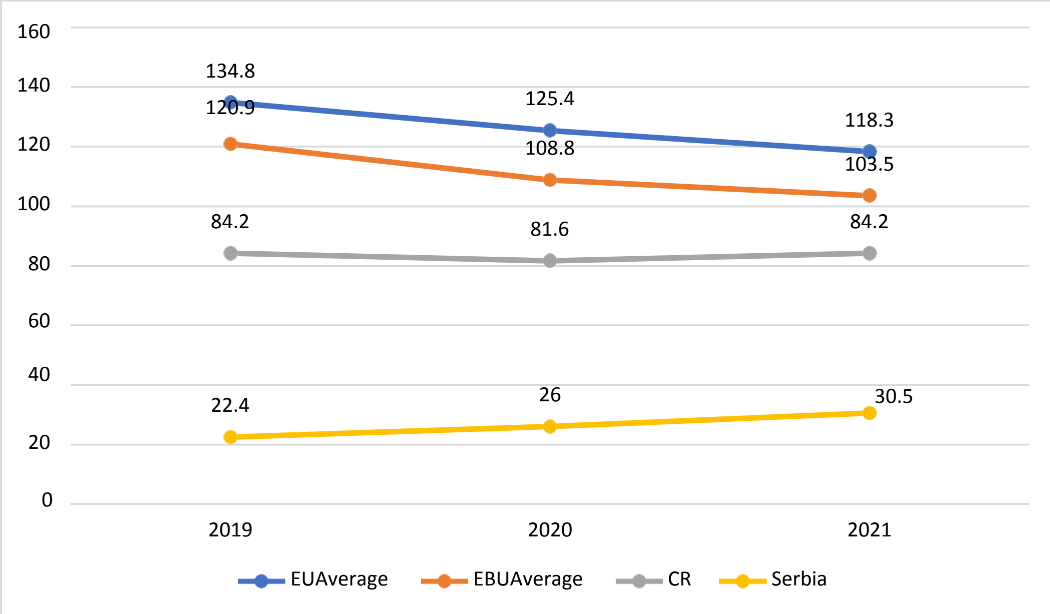

Figure 3. Comparison of fees in the Czech Republic and Serbia with the EU and EBU in 2019-2021. Source: EBU: Media Intelligence Service report 2020, 2021 and 2022. Note: The data are given in €. The reason for the difference in the sums for the Czech Republic and Serbia compared to Graph 6 above is their own processing in the above graph and the difference in the exchange rate of the euro. The reports used then consider data from previous years.

Table 4. Ratio of the PSM fee to GDP per capita in selected countries.

Earth	GDP	GDP per capita	The fee's share of GDP per capita
Finland	€257.8 billion	€46,388	0.35%
CR	€267 billion	€25,369	0.36%
Serbia	€58.3 billion	€8622	0.35%

Source: The source of GDP data is www.worldbank.org (World Bank, n.d.). All data were subsequently converted from USD to EUR at the exchange rate, valid on July 4, 2023.

Specifically, in the case of the Czech Republic, it is possible to see gaps mainly in the definition of the taxpayer and, therefore, in the amount of collected fees. While in the case of Yle, the citizens of Finland are informed that part of the service provided for the Yle tax is also the online media service, when it comes to CT, the taxpayer is only a person or company that owns the television set. This happens even though CT has been operating an online broadcast for many years, which, especially in connection with certain sports broadcasts, causes its website to become overcrowded and down. It also runs a news service on social networks. This service is provided completely free of charge to people without a television set, and the number of facilities for which CT collects fees has been decreasing in the Czech Republic for a long time (data for RTS in this regard are not known) also corresponds to the finding mentioned above.

Nonetheless, the lack of clarity in the definition of a taxpayer primarily concerns the Czech Republic since Serbia collects the concession fee together with electricity and hence does not consider the device on which RTS content is consumed (but like the Czech Republic, it has difficulties with sufficient "extraction" of commercial subjects). The Czech Republic is thus among only 32% of EBU members collecting a fee only for traditional equipment, and in the Czech Republic, Italy, and Austria also tuners (EBU: License Fee and Household Charges, 2022). As the same source adds, the Czech Republic is also among the 60% of EBU members who only need to pay the fee once, in the case of the Czech Republic, for one household. If a person has multiple addresses (e.g., their own cottage or another apartment), they do not have to pay the fee again.

Although CT has been calling for an increase in the concessionaire fee for a long time, their approach to the problem of insufficient funding may need to be corrected. The obtained data indicate it is necessary to collect funds from a larger number of taxpayers rather than collect more funds from taxpayers. At the same time, the previously stated applies, i.e., that the nominal value of the fee for CT in 2023 reaches the value of CZK 56. Similarly, it is true that the steps to counter the effects of increasing inflation, which Finland undertook before 2012, did not come in Serbia either, and the fee for the public media remains at the same level for the third year.

Here, it is necessary to note that this fee is only extracted from individuals, not companies. This fact can cause a fundamental difference in the result, as some companies in Finland pay up to €3000 per year, while in the Czech Republic, the fee for companies is the same as for individual payers, even though they pay for each device used. A similar situation prevails in Serbia, where the law regulates only the maximum fee, which is RSD 500 per month.

In the case of Serbia and RTS, it is appropriate to state that, under current conditions, it does not represent a suitable subject for comparison, at least in terms of "hard" data, i.e., financial indicators. This happens because of the non-transparency of funding, especially until 2015, as well as due to the degree of political pressure affecting the functioning of the media. The conducted investigation does not indicate that RTS is explicitly underfunded. Still, due to its deteriorating market position, it is clear that the current level of funding "only" guarantees it relative competitiveness both in the media market and from the point of view of the employer's position since RTS employees are evaluated slightly better than the average gross salary in Serbia. Still, the amount of employees' wages does not change their repeatedly criticized unsatisfactory working environment (e.g. Danas, 2019).

13. What Comes Next?

It is clear from the research carried out that specific recommendations for functioning from the economic point of view are addressed almost exclusively to Czech Television. In the case of the Finnish Yle, only the consideration of the efficiency of human resources is offered since it works with almost the same number of employees as Czech Television, with Finland being roughly half the population of the Czech Republic (although, as mentioned above, the data are not 100% comparable). In the case of RTS, many structural changes are necessary before partial adjustments of economic variables can be considered.

There still needs to be more discourse in the Czech Republic about the appropriateness of this financing model. The development of the financing of public media in the EU clearly indicates a gradual departure from the "traditional" concession fee to other forms of collecting funds from the population. Here, it is necessary to point out that the potential modification of the funding model should be a consequential step toward further changes in the context of the systematic anchoring of the media. Ideally, the most fundamental one should be the amendment to the Act on Czech Television, which has been valid without change for 30 years (in reality, it has never been amended) and is, therefore, one of the oldest media laws in the Czech Republic.

The points that should be revised relate to the meaning of the public media, its target groups, and the definition of the taxpayer. However, such structural changes must naturally be preceded by the will of political representation to better communicate with the public the meaning and function of public media in the 21st century and, at the same time, build a stronger "watchdog", which in many cases is in stark contradiction to political interests. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether the current or future governments will decide to take this step.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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