

Réunion online pour le Chef de CAB de Mme Vestager (EVP3/2020/154)

- **On public service media's role in times of crisis (COVID-19).**

In the new reality of Coronavirus - with millions of people retreating to the safety of the media world for their news, entertainment, education, there is an insatiable demand for content.

As the COVID-19 outbreak has escalated across Europe, people have turned to Public service media (PSM) in record numbers. The role of PSM which helps keep people informed, educated and entertained, has never been more important, as the emphasis is on trusted information, informed analysis, educational content and high quality entertainment.

Public broadcasters evening news bulletins have doubled their audience when there are major breaking news announcements, and online news services have tripled their reach in key markets.

Public service broadcasters play a major role in supporting society in these difficult days. The majority of PSM have extended the number of news broadcasts - providing regular special broadcasts, fighting misinformation surrounding the virus and giving airtime to competent specialists and relevant authorities.

PSM have a central role also in supporting society on many other fronts – providing educational content for young audiences when schools are closed, launching humanitarian campaigns, supporting local communities and providing much needed entertainment for home-bound audiences.

It is also significant to see that PSM employees are categorized as ‘key workers’, essential for keeping society going in these challenging times.

There is another important aspect which concerns the key role of PSM to help preventing the spread of the virus. Many public service broadcasters released dedicated programmes and updates out of normal allotted schedules to provide the public with vital information, offering explainers with visual guides and infographics on reducing the risk of infection and what to do if you are suspected of having the illness.

The crisis is also accelerating the transformation of PSM's digital offer as the public turn online for fast, trustworthy news, educational content, and of course entertainment.

Tackling disinformation and reporting objectively are central public media mandates. As the public increasingly turn to online platforms to access up-to-date and reliable news and information, it's interesting to see how public broadcasters are utilising also their online platforms to compile national and international information from authoritative health professionals such as the WHO, Ministries of Health and government advice in one designated place.

BACKGROUND

- **European Broadcasting Union (EBU)**

Founded in 1950, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) counts 75 active members, from 56 countries in and around Europe, plus 45 associate members around the world. The EBU Headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland. The EBU is also represented in different countries through its offices in Beijing, Brussels, London, Madrid, Moscow, Singapore and Washington. The EBU represents its Members on European Union audiovisual policy matters of concern to the audiovisual sector. The EBU also works closely with the UN, UNESCO and the World Broadcasting Unions (WBU) on media policy.

- **The mission of Public Service Media**

Despite being well established and having pursued their mission for decades, PSM continue evolving and adapting, reinventing themselves to meet the challenges of new technology, competition and regulatory change.

This process of adaption comes with sensitive debates around what is the best model of funding of PSM and how should it evolve. Across EU Member States, PSM can receive money via public funds and/or licence fees paid by the citizens. Other models are in place elsewhere: for example, in the United States, funding is provided mostly through donations. Some even question why, in a world in which there is so much media choice, there is still a need for PSM funded by licence fees or taxation.

In Europe, the Protocol to the Amsterdam Treaty enshrines the freedom of Member States to design the mission and the architecture of their public service broadcasting systems. This is and remains the Commission's reference point in this domain.

The Commission attaches special importance to media freedom and pluralism, one of the pillars of our modern democracies. The Commission seeks to ensure respect for media pluralism within its competences.

The new Audiovisual Media Services Directive requires Member States to have independent regulatory authorities for audiovisual media services that fulfil specific criteria of independence listed in the Directive. It also includes new provisions on media literacy and on transparency of media ownership. In addition, the Directive invites Member States to take measures to ensure the appropriate prominence of audiovisual media services of general interest. All of these provisions are expected to have positive spill-overs for the media environment and for PSM..

The Commission is also active in this field through independent projects fostering media freedom and pluralism. One of these is the Media Pluralism Monitor, an independent project run by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom at the EUI (CMPF). This instrument measures risks to media pluralism across the EU and some Candidate Countries. One of the indicators relates to the independence of Public service media governance and funding.