

## MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW MEDIA LEGISLATION IN SERBIA

# PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTERS ARE (NOT) IN THE SERVICE OF CITIZENS

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The Law on Public Service Broadcasting (2014) clearly defines the public interest that must be equally served by both public service broadcasters (PSBs), *Radio Television of Serbia (RTS)* and *Radio Television of Vojvodina (RTV)*. However, the law fails to define who, in what way and with what consequences will control the realization of public interest in PSBs and additionally professionally and ethically burden public broadcasters by proscribing state budget financing for them. Perhaps at this moment the state budget financing has contributed to the financial stability of the PSBs after difficult periods during 2013 and 2014 when the revenues from the subscription fees dropped to an insignificant level and the survival, especially of *RTV*, was seriously brought into question. But at the same time, as the results of this research show, independence and the balancing as well as diversity and pluralism in editorial policy of both PSBs, with state budget financing is compromised. That is true to a greater extent of the national *RTS*, which has larger coverage zone, audience and program production capacities.

This report aims to analyse how the public interest is reflected in the news programs of PSBs in Serbia after adoption of the new Law on Public Service Broadcasting in August 2014. It is based on the critical discourse analysis of central newscasts in the Serbian and Hungarian languages, aired by the Public Service Broadcasting of Serbia and Public Service Broadcasting of Vojvodina (*RTS* and *RTV*). Results were compared to the reports that were made deploying a similar methodology in the past three years.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Since 2006, Novi Sad School of Journalism regularly monitors work of Serbian media, especially PSBs. The results of these studies are available at: [http://www.novinarska-skola.org.rs/sr/?page\\_id=164&lang=en](http://www.novinarska-skola.org.rs/sr/?page_id=164&lang=en). Accessed 1 July 2015.

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This research was conducted during March 2015, six months after the adoption of a new set of media laws including the Law on Public Service Broadcasting (August 2014). This law is supposed to remedy all the shortcomings of the previous Broadcasting Law (2002) by which for the first time in Serbian media system the PSB was established. The new Law on Public Service Broadcasting obliges the RTV and RTS as the media funded, financed and controlled by the citizens, to realize the public interest through its news, educational and entertaining programs. Compared to the previous Law on Broadcasting (2002) it offers better solutions, especially in defining the public interest. But at the same time it violates the basic mechanism which should ensure PSBs independence from the political and economic centres of power – *financing by the citizens* – because it proscribes that RTV and RTS shall be financed from the state budget until the end of 2016.

Clear mechanisms of external control of RTS and RTV on the realization of the public interest are not defined either. Prof. Rade Veljanovski<sup>2</sup> pointed out that:

*“The law vaguely defines how in this way funded public service media will pursue the public interest, because in the part that defines the Relations of the public broadcasting service towards the public and in other provisions, this law does not offer any form of public control that is known in European media policies and practices. The authority which should have a role of the representative of the public is the Program Council, but its members are elected by the Board of the Public Service Broadcaster, which means that there are no external forms of control by the civil society, expert organizations or associations of citizens. The law stipulates that national and provincial assemblies should receive reports about the work of the national and provincial public broadcaster, but it is not even mentioned what might be the epilogue to reviewing these reports. Can the assemblies dismiss the reports and if they do, what are the consequences? Also, there is nothing new concerning the obligation of PSBs to broadcast program in minority languages, even though it is known that this obligation was not respected by the national public service broadcaster RTS, in contrast to the provincial public service RTV. In terms of broadcasting the programme content of independent production, the law stipulates only the European audio-visual productions, while the domestic productions are not mentioned. That is a great failure of this law.”*

2 Interview with Professor of the Faculty of Political Science, University of Belgrade, Dr. Rade Veljanovski, expert in the field of media policy and media legislation drafted for this survey, 20 April 2015.

Therefore it is important to objectively investigate to what extent the PSBs are devoted to realization of public interest defined by the Law on Public Service Broadcasting, despite the fact that they are currently financed from the state budget. The question from the beginning of this report, *Does media legislative reform provides better practice?* was operationalized and analysed in following manner:

In this report central radio and television newscasts of two PSBs (*RTS* and *RTV*) were analysed. Central newscasts of the public service broadcasters, as the most popular, represent the programs in which the extent of independence and commitment of the public service broadcasters to the public interest values can be clearly seen as well as the clientelistic relationship to the political and economic power centres as the dominant feature of the offered content. News programs of the PSBs are especially important “because *RTS* (and *RTV*, author’s remark) should be that part of civil society that critically reflects reality, space for public debate, not linked to any political option but to the wellbeing of citizens and community (...) In democratic society television cannot be the prize of the winners of parliamentary elections.”<sup>3</sup>

We used the definition of public interest as stated in Chapter II of the Law on Public Service Broadcasting, Article 7.<sup>4</sup> Out of 19 points we are highlighting the following: “The public interest (...) include[s] the following: 1. truthful, timely, complete, impartial, and professional provision of information for the citizens (...); 2. respect for and representation of basic human rights and freedoms, democratic values and institutions, and advancing the public dialogue culture; 3. respect for privacy (...); 4. respect and promotion of pluralism in political, religious, and other ideas and facilitation of the public’s familiarity with those ideas, without serving the interests of individual political parties or religious communities, or any other individual political, economic, religious or similar positions or interests; 5. fulfilment of the informational needs of all sections of the population without any discrimination, particularly taking into consideration specific social groups such as children, young and elderly people, minorities and ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, socially and medically disadvantaged, etc.; 6. fulfilment of the citizen’s needs for programming that facilitates preserving and expressing the cultural identity both of the Serbian people and national minorities and ethnic groups, showing consideration for the need of national minorities and ethnic groups to have access to certain programming in their own language and alphabet; (...) 9. affirmation of national cultural values of the Serbian people, national minorities and ethnic communities that live in the Republic of Serbia, as well as of meeting and intertwining of their cultures; (...) 15. nurturing of humanitarian, moral, artistic, and creative

3 Brkić, M., ‘Javni medijski servis odgovornost prema građanima’, in *RTS naše pravo da znamo sve?*, M. Aksentijević, Toplički centar za demokratiju i ljudska prava, Prokuplje, 2015, p. 64.

4 Zakon o javnim medijskim servisima [Law on public service broadcasting], *Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije*, No. 83/2014.

values; 16. fulfilment of the citizens' need for entertainment, recreation, sports, and other areas; (...)"

The method used in the analysis was the critical analysis of media discourse which according to Teun van Dijk (2009) is "not just any social or political research (...) It is premised on the fact that some forms of text and talk may be *unjust*. One of the tasks of critical discourse analysis is to formulate the norms that define such 'discursive injustice'. CDS aims to expose and help to combat such injustice. It is problem-oriented rather than discipline – or theory-oriented. Such a research policy presupposes an ethical assessment, implying that discourse as social interaction may be illegitimate according to some fundamental norms, for instance those of international human and social rights."<sup>5</sup>

Based on these 19 points stipulated in the Law on Public Service Broadcasting, a coding protocol for the critical discourse analysis of the Central newscasts of RTS and RTV was created. The codebook contained 19 categories and a total of 153 variables with a focus on who had the "chance" to be directly quoted in the central newscast, and the frequency of representing either the subject or object of the news - who had the chance to serve as a source of information. Or more precisely, who did the journalists recognize as a source of information of public interest, based on their own professional capacity and in accordance with the editorial policy? The basic premise is that the one who controls the public discourse (media) has the power in society.

Therefore the media integrity research should analyse the manner of approach and usage of discourse by those who have the power. In the research, the answer to following questions must be given: "who has preferential access to journalists, who will be interviewed, quoted and described in news reports, and whose opinions will thus be able to influence the public? That is, through access to the mass media, dominant groups also may have access to, and hence partial control over the public at large." (Van Dijk 2008). These concerns, according to Van Dijk,<sup>6</sup> primarily refer to the powerful and influential, and not to marginalized media, which have no influence on public opinion. And PSBs are the powerful media - by their coverage zone, mandatory presence in all cable and satellite networks (the principle of "must carry" and "must offer"), significant production capacities which they own, legal obligations on the category and content of the program, and the target groups that they must address (the entire population, from children to the elderly, including all marginalized groups).

At the same time, bearing in mind that the Law on Public Service Broadcasting is not clear on who will control the integrity of PSBs, the studies as this one importantly contribute to initiating a public debate on the functioning of PSBs. It should also answer the question whether slogans promoting the

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5 Van Dijk, T. A., 'Critical Discourse Studies: A Sociocognitive Approach', in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, (eds.) R. Wodak and M. Meyer, Sage, London, 2009, p. 63.

6 Van Dijk, T. A., *Discourse and Power*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2008, pp. 16–20.

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*RTS* (*RTS property of the citizens of Serbia; Your right to know everything; Public Service of European Serbia*) and *RTV* (*Closer to you, On the move; Primarily, Vojvodina; Save our public service media*) are reflecting their editorial policy as public service media for all citizens whose focus is exclusively serving the public interest.

The research corpus incorporates a total of 84 central radio and television newscasts of both public broadcasters (*RTV* and *RTS*) in the Serbian and Hungarian languages, sampled on even days of March 2015. The research was implemented by the monitoring team of the Novi Sad School of Journalism under the guidance of Prof. Dubravka Valić Nedeljković.

The total duration of the recorded programs is 2520 minutes, out of which 840 minutes is in the Hungarian language.<sup>7</sup> The unit of analysis was a radio/TV report, from lead-in to lead-out, including all associated elements. A total of 1474 reports in Serbian language (742 television and 732 radio reports) were analysed, of which: 248 *RTS* radio reports, 232 *RTV* radio reports; 250 *RTS* TV reports, 294 *RTV* TV reports; and in the Hungarian language total 450 reports (252 radio and 198 television reports).

## 2 RESULTS OF THE MONITORING: PUBLIC INTEREST IN PUBLIC MEDIA

The results of the critical analysis of media discourse of radio and television central newscasts in the Serbian and Hungarian languages indicate both positive and negative sides of editorial policies of *RTS* and *RTV* in relation to the (lack of) realization of the legally established public interest in the context of budget financing after adoption of the new Law on Public Service Broadcasting in 2014. They also indicate some elements of clientelistic relations of public service broadcasters toward individual centres of power on whom their budgetary financing depends. At the same time, the discourse analysis reads messages at the implicit level that are not correlated with the declared mission of public service media expressed in the shortest slogans that *RTS* and *RTV* are daily addressing the wide Serbian audience in the form of self-promotion.

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7 Central newscasts in the Hungarian language were selected due to a fact that the program of *RTV* in this language is the most advanced and complex (radio program is broadcasted 24 hours per day, and television program 17.5 hours a week, in the last year a total of 91,201 minutes) compared to programs in other minority languages in Serbia. At the same time, Hungarian community is the most influential minority in Serbia. The political party with the prefix “Hungarian” (svm) is a parliamentary party on both provincial (7 delegates) and national levels (5 delegates). The leader of svm is the president of the Vojvodina Assembly.

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## 2.1

### POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS

Central newscasts showed a variety of *genres*. The most common are the *news* and *reports*.<sup>8</sup> Genre diversity indicates the editorial concept by which the significance to events, phenomena and people is given through *form* (media genre) of information processing, as well as by the *ranking* of the published content (the position within the central newscast). Genre diversity was also detected in earlier researches conducted by the Novi Sad School of Journalism from 2006 to 2014.<sup>9</sup>

*Authorship* as the category indicates the capacity of the personnel and technical/technological competitiveness of the media in the overall media scene in a given context as well as the level of journalistic engagement. In the analysed programs, authorship is known in high percentage in all of the observed reports (91 percent in the *RTV* central newscast in Serbian language, 64 percent in the *RTV* central newscast in the Hungarian language, 62.03 percent in the *RTV* radio central newscast in the Hungarian language, 54 percent in the *RTS* evening central newscast “Dnevnik”). Considering that unsigned news are mostly short agency news, world news taken from other media, as well as short sports announcements and reports from sporting events we can conclude that PSBs’ journalists are considerably engaged in covering the topics important for realising the public interest.

The observed central newscasts are *thematically diverse*. In this analysis, there were 14 groups of topics from Serbia. The global events were observed within one topic (“World”) as a 15th variable. In all observed central newscasts the most common topics were domestic politics, economy, world and sports. However, they were not represented in the same proportion in all observed

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8 Share of *news* was 55 percent in the newscast “Novosti” of *Radio Novi Sad*, *RTV*; 63.29 percent in radio programs on *RTV* in the Hungarian language), then followed by *reports* (43.94 percent in “Híradó” - television central newscast in the Hungarian language on *RTV*) and *statements* (10 percent in TV “Dnevnik” of *RTS*; 12.66 percent on *RTV* radio newscast in Hungarian); *features* have also been noted, which indicates the professional competence and well developed production capacities of PSBs, as well as the recognition of the importance of the topics explored because they serve the public interest (4.04 percent in “Híradó” *RTV* newscast in the Hungarian language, Radio Belgrade - “Novosti dana”); *radio packages* (26 percent in “Novosti dana” of *Radio Belgrade*, *RTS*), *TV packages* (23 percent “Vojvođanski dnevnik” *RTV*); *hybrid forms* (6 percent “Novosti dana” of *Radio Belgrade*, *RTS*, and 6 percent “Novosti” of *Radio Novi Sad*, *RTV*), followed by *interviews*, although in a small percentage (1 percent “Novosti dana” of *Radio Belgrade*, and 3 percent “TV “Dnevnik” of *RTS*).

9 All reports and publications are available at [www.novinarska.skola.ogr.rs](http://www.novinarska.skola.ogr.rs).

programs and on every media.<sup>10</sup> In terms of frequency, culture is the most common topic in “Vojvodanski dnevnik” on *RTV*, but real representation is actually smaller because in majority of cases it is represented in short flash-news and statements, with the lack of analytical genres and media initiatives. *RTV* central newscast in the Hungarian language is the only program which recognized the topic of language as a matter of public interest. In this way, the public service covers the themes which are of great importance for the minority as an element of the preservation of national identity and against assimilation.

The thematic diversity indicates that the PSBs focus in 2015 compared to the previous years<sup>11</sup> completely shifted towards economic issues, which is understandable when one bears in mind the deep crisis and unemployment. The election campaign of 2014 also had economic issues in the focus of attention of all participants (Pralica 2014). The shift from politics to economics indicates that political power centres understood a “question of all questions” for the citizens of Serbia is no longer Kosovo<sup>12</sup> but “how to find a job”.

Politics as such is also no longer the main topic, *RTV* and *RTS* are more focused on the economy. In television news in the Serbian and Hungarian languages of *RTV* a constant topic is agriculture, which is of great importance for predominantly agricultural Vojvodina. This is the first time since 2006 that the topic of agriculture is so systematically addressed in the central newscast of *RTV*, which in this way responded to the basic public interest of the citizens of Vojvodina, namely the development of agriculture as the chance for economic recovery.

Europe as a topic is reduced solely to the negotiations led by the officials and the conditions that are set by the EU. In the central newscast of the PSBs, fostering a European spirit and European values, so promoted in their promotional slogans is reduced to a minimum. Reports from Brussels are broadcasted only when Serbian politicians are attending the meetings or when reporting about some negative phenomena (strikes, demonstrations, fraud, plagiarism...). This “model “EU in small portions” (usually on the occasion of an excess) can

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10 “Novosti dana” on *Radio Belgrade* devoted majority of the aired time to the economy topics (18 percent) and world topics (18 percent); *Radio Novi Sad* to economy (14 percent) and sports (13 percent); central newscast in the Hungarian language on *RTV* to domestic politics (24.75 percent) and economy (27.27 percent); *RTS* central newscast “Dnevnik” to sport (19 percent), world (15 percent) and domestic politics (14 percent). *RTV* central newscast in Serbian language devoted majority of its time to the culture (17 percent) and agriculture (13 percent) topics. Within the *RTV* radio central newscast in Hungarian language greatest attention was dedicated to the economy topics (35 percent) and domestic politics (20.63 percent).

11 The monitoring results conducted from 2006 to 2015 by Novi Sad School of Journalism are available at: [http://www.novinarska-skola.org.rs/sr/?page\\_id=164&lang=en](http://www.novinarska-skola.org.rs/sr/?page_id=164&lang=en). Accessed 1 July 2015.

12 Kosovo, which in the earlier research positioned as a highly frequent topic, was not recorded as relevant topic in the central newscast of *Radio Novi Sad* and *RTV* in the Hungarian language. In other programs the presence of this topic is about 4 percent – the same as topics about education, human rights, justice, crime etc.

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not replace the strategic implantation/incorporation of the European way of thinking in the daily TV program and vocational (journalistic/editorial) DNA of modern media public service.”<sup>13</sup>

The topics concerning education, language, art, science and religion are marginally represented in the central newscast on *RTS*, and slightly more on *RTV*. Bearing all in mind, in the monitored period *RTV* fostered greater thematic diversity than *RTS*<sup>14</sup>. The Law on Public Service Broadcasting, Article 7 stipulates that programs must achieve “impartial coverage of political, historical, economic, social, medical, cultural, educational, scientific, environmental, and other issues, enabling equal encounters of different views.” According to the topic ratio we can conclude that this obligation of PSBs has not been fully met.

## 2.2

### NEGATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

*Subjects* imply the persons which media gave the chance to advocate their opinions as directly quoted source, present them straight to the public and enlist free publicity. In this research 17 “domestic” and one “foreign” subject variables were sampled. Among the *domestic* most frequent subjects were the decision makers – representatives of the government and the state apparatus.

Significant importance was given to the Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić especially in TV “Dnevnik” on *RTS*. In 14 observed TV central newscasts on *RTS*, Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić was directly quoted in 28 reports. He is also the most common subject in regards to the time of direct quotation. In addition to the topics on domestic policy, which is in the domain of his jurisdiction, the Prime Minister appeared as a relevant subject several times in the same program, commenting on the topics regarding economic issues, anniversaries (the murder of Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić), crime (child abduction), crisis situations (the fall of the helicopter, plane crash), foreign policy (Summit in Vienna), donations (on the occasion of opening the new building of the embassy, the Japanese government donated 150 ecological cars to the Serbian Government), International Women’s Day (visited women working in customs and congratulated them on their holiday), and even sports. According to Herbert Gans (1979), there are eight enduring values in news stories that the media builds their stories around and focuses on.<sup>15</sup>

According to the results of this research regarding the subject of media reporting of the PSB, we can conclude that the *leadership value* appears as a fundamental value represented in the editorial policy of a public service of Serbia.

13 Brkić, M., ‘Javni medijski servis odgovornost prema građanima’, 2015, p. 56.

14 Results of the thematic diversity of *RTS* are in high accordance with the results of the research “Citizens’ influence on media” conducted by Educational Center of Leskovac. See Edukacioni centar Leskovac, *Uticao građana na medije*, 2014.

15 Gans, H., *Deciding What’s News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*, Random House, New York, 1979.



Already registered in the previous research, frequency and duration of the direct quotation of the prime minister and representatives of the ruling coalition in the central newscasts has increased since the *RTS* is being financed from the state budget in accordance to the new Law on Public Service Broadcasting. For example, in 2014 during the election campaign, Aleksandar Vučić was absolutely the most frequently mentioned actor in the central newscast on *RTV* in Serbian language, he was present in 8.62 percent of the analysed corpus.<sup>16</sup> The increased frequency of his appearance can be explained by the pre-election campaign, but the fact that he was most frequently represented is indicative. In monitoring of the 2012 elections when his party was in opposition, they were, comparing to the results of this research, significantly less frequent in the central newscast on *RTV*. At that time the most frequently represented was the ruling party and its coalition partners *DS* - 29 percent, *SPS* - 10 percent while opposition *SNS* - 9 percent, which is about five times less.<sup>17</sup> In the central newscast of the *RTS* the ruling coalition was more frequently represented, but the imbalance was not as significant as on *RTV*: *DS* - 16 percent, *SPS* - 12 percent and the opposition *SNS*, 11 percent.<sup>18</sup>

However, in 2015 as it is indicated by the results of monitoring presented here, these numbers have significantly increased. Only in central newscast on *Radio Belgrade*, the presence and direct citations of the ruling party *SNS* is 56 percent and in television central newscast of *RTS* 66 percent. It has increased five times in radio newscasts and six times in television newscasts since this party came to power. Clientelism of the public service is evident ever since the volume of budget financing depends on the ruling party.

Unlike *RTS*, the provincial public service broadcaster *RTV* was not keeping the Prime Minister in focus, at least not to that extent (with the exception of the TV news in the Hungarian language). Much more common were the actors from the field of education, science, culture, media and trade unions. Even the Prime Minister of Vojvodina was very little represented, for example, in the

16 Koprivica, K., 'Rezultati monitoringa informativnog programa Radio-televizije Vojvodine redakcije programa na srpskom i hrvatskom jeziku tokom predizborne kampanje za parlamentarne izbore 2014. godine,' in *Koga su mediji izabrali, a šta su partije nudile: medijski monitoring predizborne kampanje*, (ed.) J. Matić, Novosadska novinarska škola, Novi Sad, 2014, p. 265. Available at: <http://www.novinarska-skola.org.rs/sr/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Koga-su-mediji-izabrali-a-sta-su-partije-nudile-2014.pdf>. Accessed 1 July 2015.

17 Pralica, D., 'Koga je izabrala vojvođanska televizija?' in *Koga su mediji izabrali... a šta su partije nudile? Monitoring medijskog izveštavanja, promotivnih političkih TV spotova i partijskih sajtova u predizornoj kampanji za lokalne, pokrajinske, republičke i izbore za predsednika Srbije 2012 sa uputstvima za bolju praksu*, (eds.) D. Valić Nedeljković and D. Pralica, Novosadska novinarska škola, Novi Sad, 2012, p. 26. Available at: <http://www.novinarska-skola.org.rs/sr/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Medijska-sfera-konacno.pdf>. Accessed 1 July 2015.

18 Ibid.

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“Novosti” on Radio Novi Sad not once, and in TV news of *RTV* in Serbian language 1 percent and in the Hungarian language 0.99 percent.

When we consider the *political orientation of the subjects*, the majority of media space in all monitored media (except TV central newscast of *RTV* in the Hungarian language which mostly represents Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians) is given to the ruling coalition, and within it, the SNS dominates.<sup>19</sup> Obviously, favouring the current republic government collides with the legal obligation of fostering pluralism of political ideas as the basic principle in meeting the public interest. For example, the oppositional Democratic Party has established a “shadow government” whose activities are only reported on *RTV*. *RTS* completely ignores this aspect of political advocacy. The current president of the DS and the initiator of the “shadow government” is the Prime Minister of Vojvodina, largely marginalized by the republic government in every aspect. The exception is *RTV* central radio newscast in the Hungarian language in which the subjects are rarely identified as political actors, and the political affiliation of objects is the most common with the DS and LSV by 33.33 percent and Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians 16.67 percent.

Subjects and topics from Vojvodina are completely absent from the central newscast of *RTS*. The reporting is influenced by the fact that the ruling party in Vojvodina is still Democratic Party, while at the republic level the ruling coalition is led by SNS. For example on 16 March 2015 *RTS* did not report on the negotiations for the reconstruction of the Vojvodina government. Neither the public broadcaster on republic level reported in its central newscast that on the 18 March 2015 the Vojvodina opposition, including the active participation of delegates SNS in the provincial assembly, was outvoted when they initiated the change of the symbol of Vojvodina (coat of arms and flag). Belgrade centrality is characteristic of all central newscasts of PSBs.<sup>20</sup> All of this indicates that the dominant characteristic of *RTS* primarily, and to an extent, *RTV*, is omnipresent centralisation of information sources. Messages to citizens through public services (whose main task is the realization of public interest in informing all the citizens of Serbia) are sent by centres of political power which are, as

19 *Radio Belgrade* 56 percent, *Radio Novi Sad* 34 percent, TV central newscast on *RTV* in Serbian language 48 percent, *RTS* TV central newscast 64 percent.

20 The results of the analysis of the category “location” in all central newscasts of PSBs, in the monitored period are: in “Novosti dana” (*RTS*, *Radio Belgrade*) 50 percent of the published content is about the events from Belgrade, 0 percent from Novi Sad, 24 percent elsewhere in Serbia and 20 percent world news. In the *RTS* TV “Dnevnik” 26 percent of the content is located in Belgrade, Serbia in general (not naming a specific location) 30 percent, from Novi Sad only 1 percent, Vojvodina 2 percent, other cities in Serbia 13 percent. Belgrade is the most common location in central newscast of *RTV* (radio central newscast in Serbian language 29 percent, TV central newscast in Serbian language 25 percent, TV central newscast in the Hungarian language 40.91 percent, radio central newscast in Hungarian 30.38 percent).

SUBJECTS AND TOPICS  
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all institutions of political and economic power, concentrated in the country's capital.<sup>21</sup> Pluralism and diversity are absent.

Representatives of the European Union, the IMF, the World Bank, ambassadors and foreign investors most frequently appeared as *foreign subject* in the PSBs local news covering the topics in economics and foreign policy, while in the world news most frequent subjects were foreign officials and relevant local sources of foreign affairs. Other subjects from foreign countries are athletes, artists, scientists and others.

PSBs do not include views and arguments of the *representatives of general public* in the public debate on topics that are of interest of citizens. Representatives of the general public usually appeared as a non-personalized objects. As subjects and as objects they most frequently appeared as eye witnesses, victims or families of victims, or as a problematic actor in social crisis situations (strike, protest).

*Vulnerable groups* – women, people with disabilities, socially disadvantaged and other socially vulnerable and socially marginalized groups – are not recognized as relevant subjects in PSBs central newscasts.<sup>22</sup> In this corpus, children were more frequently represented than usual because of the nature of the current daily events (kidnapping of a child in a public place, a baby who was killed in an accident in a helicopter crash) which could not be ignored.

*Women* are significantly underrepresented as sources of information<sup>23</sup>, which makes them invisible in society, though they are the majority of the total population. Public service broadcasters, with a few exceptions, do not have gender-sensitive editorial policies<sup>24</sup> which directly violates Article 7 of the 2014

21 Similar results were obtained in the research of the Educational Center of Leskovac, which monitored the RTS news program in the spring of 2014. Also Blagojević, P., 'RTS "Vaše pravo da znate sve..."; in *RTS naše pravo da znamo sve?*, (ed.) M. Aksentijević, Toplički centar za demokratiju i ljudska prava, Prokuplje, 2015, p. 89.

22 They are most frequent in the "Novosti dana" on *Radio Belgrade* (children 21 percent, socially/medically disadvantaged 33 percent); in the "Novosti" of *Radio Novi Sad* (children 22 percent, women 13 percent and ethnic minorities 12 percent); the *RTS* TV "Dnevnik" (children 14 percent and the rest is negligible); in *RTV* central newscast in Serbian "Vojvođanski dnevnik" (children 29 percent and ethnic minorities 24 percent); in TV news in the Hungarian language (children 3.54 percent, ethnic minorities 4.55 percent), the radio news represent the young people 42, 86 percent which is an exception from the entire corpus, and also the national minorities 38.10 percent).

23 In the central newscast of *Radio Belgrade* women are represented as subjects only in 18 percent of cases and in 14 percent of cases as objects; in the news programs of *Radio Novi Sad* women are subjects in 21 percent of cases, and objects in much the same; in the TV *RTS* 19 percent as subjects, 22 percent as objects; in "Vojvođanski dnevnik" of *RTV* 21 percent as the subject and 27 percent in the role of the object; in the central television newscast in the Hungarian language on *RTV* 39.41 percent as subject and 19.44 percent as object; and on the radio as relevant subject 16.58 percent, and as object 41.67 percent.

24 The same was concluded by Educational Center Leskovac, in the 2014 study "Uticaj građana na medije" (The citizens' influence on the media).

VULNERABLE SOCIAL  
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IN THE PSBs CENTRAL  
NEWSCASTS.

Law on Public Service Broadcastings and the 2009 Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination.

Not a single directly quoted subject in the observed PSBs central newscasts was speaking in one of the minority languages in official use. This indicates a substantial marginalization of minorities, and ignoring the equality of languages that are in official use, but also the non-inclusion of national minorities in public life and public debate on issues of public interest.

It should be noted that public service broadcasters have *not sufficiently critically reflected and analysed the everyday events* (politics, economy, culture, health...) in the monitored period (March 2015). The attitude of the subjects towards the objects, observed in all programs, was predominantly positive. For example, in the “Novosti dana” on Radio Belgrade, closely twice more often than negative, while the RTS even two and a half times more positive than negative; in TV central newscast of RTV in Serbian language 2.8 times more often positive. Only the radio central newscast in the Hungarian language has equally distributed the attitude of actors to objects.<sup>25</sup>

Besides the attitude of subjects towards objects, this conclusion is supported by the finding that *media initiative* in this corpus is very low. Given that the media initiative is a reflection of the independent editorial selection of the topics to be analytically processed and put on the social agenda as a matter of public interest on which the community should discuss, the absence of this kind of a good practice implies a decrease of the media integrity. Compared to the analyses of the RTS “Dnevnik” in 2013/2014 when the “third of the total number of reports were media initiatives”<sup>26</sup> in this corpus in the same central newscast, they are presented in only 8 percent of cases, while the reporting on actual events takes 81 percent of the cases. So the role of the media is reduced to the transmission of information on the functioning of government in which a large percentage are protocol-related news, more precisely, when did someone meet somebody, without analysis of the results of those events.

The state is on various grounds the biggest advertiser in Serbian media<sup>27</sup>, which enables the direct influence on the editorial policy. The *analysis of the advertising blocks* within central newscasts on RTV and RTS found that broadcasted TV commercials were, among others, advertised by economic entities from the field of insurance, gambling, telecommunications, whose owner is still the state of Serbia (DDOR, the State Lottery of Serbia and Telekom Serbia). This kind of advertising is an additional form of state financial control of PSBs.

25 It was 29.67 percent positive, 22 percent negative, 20 percent positive and negative and 27 percent neutral.

26 Educational Center Leskovac, “Uticaj gradana na medije” (The citizens’ influence on the media), 2014.

27 Savet za borbu protiv korupcije, *Izveštaj o vlasničkoj strukturi i kontroli medija u Srbiji*, Beograd, 2015. Available at: <http://www.antikorupcija-savet.gov.rs/Storage/Global/Documents/izvestaji/izvestaj%20mediji%2026%2002.pdf>. Accessed 23 April 2015.

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### 3 CONCLUSIONS

Three new media laws were adopted in August 2014, which is a clear improvement in media policy compared to the previous period, when the legislation had been expected for more than six years. Among the new laws, the Law on Public Service Broadcasting clearly defines the public interest which must be realized by *RTV* and *RTS* equally. However, the law fails to define who and in what way, or, to be precise, with what consequences will control realization of the public interest in *PSBs*. The law additionally burdens public broadcasters in professional and ethical terms by proscribing the state budget financing for them. All the shortcomings of the law, including the socio-political context in which they are being implemented (visible centralized model of governance), contributed to the fact that *PSBs* are still not the open space for dialogue and confrontation of opinions on topics of public interest. Public service broadcasters, primarily the national *RTS*, proved to be a clientelistic media biased towards the government and extremely Belgrade-centric (capital city oriented). The ruling coalition with *SNS* as leading party dominates as a source of information (both as subjects and objects). Since they have been elected as a ruling party, their presence in central newscasts of *PSBs* has increased for more than five times (*Radio Belgrade, RTS*) and six times (*TV RTS*). The most frequent person appearing in central newscasts is the Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, leader of the *SNS*, who was quoted uncritically by the *PSBs* on any occasion, with or without a valid cause, and on any topic – from domestic politics to sports. Imbalance with regard to political affiliation, location, gender, the neglect of marginalized groups, insufficient presence of media initiatives, and prevalence of positive attitude of subject toward object – are the basic characteristics of news programs of public service broadcasters, with a note that the provincial public broadcaster is closer to serving the communication needs of citizens than the national broadcaster *RTS*.

Perhaps the budget financing of *PSBs* has contributed to the current financial stability after a difficult period from 2013 and 2014 when the revenues from the subscription fees have dropped to an insignificant percentage, and survival, especially of *RTV*, was seriously jeopardized.<sup>28</sup> But, at the same time, according to the results of this research, independence and the balancing as well as diversity and pluralism in editorial policy of both public broadcasters is clearly endangered with state budget financing. This is true to a greater extent of the national *RTS* which has larger coverage zone, audience and program production capacities.

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28 More details in: Matić, J. and Valić Nedeljković, D., 'Srbija', in *Značaj medijskog integriteta: vraćanje medija i novinarstva u službu javnosti*, Novosadska novinarska škola, Novi Sad, pp. 57–137. Available at: <http://www.novinarska-skola.org.rs/sr/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Znacaj-medijskog-integriteta.pdf>. Accessed 1 July 2015.

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In the analysed corpus of the newscasts in the Hungarian language, the promotion of the Hungarian language and customs preservation as well as education has been emphasized. *Multiculturalism* is not yet on the agenda, that is, it has not been strategically positioned in the program creation. Fostering dialogue with other communities is present only when the interviewees had to be chosen with regard to their competence or function, and not according to whether or not they speak Hungarian.

The year 2015 is very significant for the Serbian media system in many ways. This is the first year of application of new media laws, including the transition to the project financing of media and budgetary funding of public service broadcasters.<sup>29</sup> Also, this is the year that should bring a new media strategy. Serbia was digitalized in the first half of 2015. At the same time, this year was an election year for the General Director of the national public broadcaster RTS which had for a long time been led by an Acting Director, and kept weak because of that. In May 2015, the RTS Administrative Board chose a reputable journalist Dragan Bujošević as a new general director of RTS.

In 2015, the members of the Administrative Board and Program Council of both RTS and RTV will be elected. This year the Administrative Board of the Vojvodina public broadcaster RTV elected the chief editors. Among them are the journalists who have violated the ethical code by participating in the war propaganda during the war in former Yugoslavia in 1990s. Also, this is an election year for the members of the regulatory body for electronic media. All these developments will certainly influence the (re)defining of the editorial policy of public service broadcasters in the socio-political context, which, judging by the indicators, does not favour the separation of the media from the state, neither on the explicit nor on the implicit level.

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29 During the preparation of this report the administrative boards of *Radio Television of Serbia* and *Radio Television of Vojvodina* decided that the license fee for public service will be 500 RSD (approx. 4 euro), starting from 1 January 2016. Information available at: <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/Dru%C5%A1tvo/1959455/Taksa+za+javne+servise+500+dinara.html>. Accessed on 25. 05. 2015.

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1. Modality of independent financing of public service broadcasters (licence fee collected from citizens) established by the Law on Public Service Broadcasters should be strictly respected. The mechanisms for efficient collection of the fee have to be established by the Government in consultations with the public broadcasters, but also civil society and independent experts. Before the deadline, the government and PSBs should carry out a campaign to raise public awareness of the importance of the model of independent financing of public services.
2. The editorial, management and governing structures of both public service broadcasters in Serbia should adopt editorial policy values and introduce mechanisms for control of their implementation to provide that the public interest provisions from the 2014 Law on Public Service Broadcasting are strictly applied. Within the process of adoption of these values and mechanisms the public debate should be organised, enabling various parts of the society to contribute. The efforts should be made by public broadcasters to invite and encourage citizens – viewers and listeners – (for instance through campaigns in the programs of PSBs) to contribute their views and suggestions.
3. Respect for and promotion of political, cultural and geographical pluralism should be strongly integrated in the editorial policy values of public service broadcasters, and its implementation regularly checked by editorial and programming governing bodies of the broadcasters. The observations of citizens in this area should also be checked through surveys or focus groups, and the findings used by editorial and governing bodies in their evaluations and strategic planning.
4. When preparing and adopting the 2016 annual plans in terms of finances and programming, the editorial, management and governing bodies of both PSBs should strategically allocate significant portion of finances and time in the programming schedules for analytical and complex journalistic genres, specifically supporting investigative journalism. Public service newsrooms should employ the best investigative journalists, form a sections of investigative journalism, and support their work in order to fulfil a watchdog role of the public media and serve the public interest.
5. Technical and technological possibilities offered by digitalization shall be used by public service broadcasters for advancing the program diversity and greater cooperation with the media in the region and in the EU. This should lead to better integration of the Serbian PSBs programming in the EBU as a relevant partner to offer quality content of regional and European relevance for exchange.

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