



COMMON FUNDING PRINCIPLES FOR PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Acknowledging the importance of Public Service Media for the democratization processes in the EU accession countries in the Western Balkans;

Reiterating CoE standards on PSM funding, the EBU Public Funding Principles for PSM and best practices in Europe;

Acknowledging the importance of PSM to develop in line with social economic and technological developments and the need to adjust to them and provide PSM a crucial role in society on all platforms;

Underlining the importance of the production of high-quality content as a credible tool in the fight against disinformation and the respective necessary investment in PSM and in particular in news production;

Underpinning the important role which PSM plays as a major contributor in the production of local national and European high-quality content and the role of PSM in consolidating society and supporting social cohesion, including in its coverage of major sporting and cultural events of national importance;

Underlining the importance of stable, independent, adequate and sustainable funding of PSM which allows it to fulfil its public service remit;

Understanding the importance of PSM for the development of national creative industries and talents;

Underlining the importance of investment in innovation in all aspects of the work of Public Service Media as a driving force of the media industry;

Acknowledging that the importance of PSM is regularly acknowledged by the EU as an integral part of media developments and media freedoms in Chapters 23/24 and Chapter 10 of the EC Progress reports within the framework of the negotiations on the progress of the countries in the accession process to the EU;

Representatives of parliaments, regulatory authorities, civil sector and PSM in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia have agreed on the following common principles for funding of PSM in the Western Balkans:

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Empowering
society

Technical Assistance to
Public Service Media
in the Western Balkans



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1. **Serving public remit and democracy**
2. **Independent**
3. **Legally sound**
4. **Politically supported**
5. **Stable and fair**
6. **Future-oriented**
7. **Accountable**
8. **Responsible**
9. **Publicly discussed**

Serving public remit and democracy

1. Public Service Media are crucial for the democratization process in EU accession countries and its funding should be considered as an **investment** in society and democracy.
2. Investment in high quality, independent and credible Public Service Media should be seen as an **investment in developing a democratic culture**, discourse, knowledge, and society.

Independent – not reliant on political favour, thereby promoting trust in PSM and its role as a truly indispensable service

3. Only **independent**, stable and appropriate funding will enable PSM to realize its important **role in society** for informing, dialogue, educating, entertaining and connecting citizens.
4. Independent funding of Public Service Media is a major prerequisite for the **institutional and editorial independence of PSM**.

Legally sound

5. Legislative frameworks regulating PSM should ensure efficient, practical, feasible and implementable in practice mechanisms for the funding of PSM.
6. Respective PSM legal frameworks should provide sufficient safeguards for the funding of PSM, free from political interference or pressure.
7. Where it is not yet possible to introduce licence fee and funding from the state budget is used instead, strong safeguards should be introduced to avoid political interference, including fixed funding for long periods (eg 5 years), a guarantee of a fixed percentage of the GDP and automatic inflationary adjustments, avoiding any direct reliance on the discretion of the government pursuant to a specific contract or otherwise.

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8. Amendments to legal provisions on PSM funding should only be carried out following an appropriate impact assessment and analysis by an independent body and following broad public consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including PSM and civil society.
9. Countries' **media strategies** developed by governments and parliaments in a dialogue with all major media players should emphasize the importance of public service media and their independent, stable, adequate and predictable funding.

Political support

10. Politicians and the public in general are encouraged to regularly assess the proper implementation of respective legal provisions regarding the funding of PSM.
11. Politicians and public figures in Western Balkan countries should abstain from advocating for the abolition of licence fees, and from using this as a tool to gain voters in political campaigns. Independent funding is crucial for the establishment of independent and credible PSM as a key element in the democratization of societies.

Stable and fair

12. Licence fee funding is the preferred mechanism for funding of PSM, which ensures a direct link with the audience and creates a direct bond with the audience.
13. Discussions on the funding of PSM should be done only in connection with the remit of PSM in society and with an agreed mid-term Strategy of the PSM.

Future-oriented

14. Funding of PSM should ensure investment in new technology, digitization, and innovation and should boost the capacity of PSM to be the driving force of the media industry in the respective countries.

Accountable

15. PSM funding should ensure the highest degree **of transparency** and accountability through the regular engagement of internal and external audits and the publishing of financial plans and reports.

Responsible

16. PSM should apply and demonstrate relevant efficiencies and a cost-sensitive approach when developing their strategies and programme production plans.
17. PSM should implement good accountability mechanisms to ensure PSM top management and the relevant governing bodies are responsible for decisions on financial matters.

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18. PSM should report on and organize regular discussions with society to explain the implementation of their remit and mission and the respective necessary financial framework.
19. The prerequisite for solid business plans and establishing of financial needs /costs of PSM are a coherent Strategy (vision, mission, the short and midterm definition of content and functional strategies, program and production standards and normative) all transparently/ publicly agreed and instantly verified.

The principles have the aim of establishing an independent, sustainable, adequate and predictable funding framework for the quality and future-driven functioning of Public Service Media in the Western Balkans and of supporting countries' endeavours to align their PSM with European standards and best practices and support membership in the EU.

The progress in the implementation of these principles will be measured and evaluated annually.

Note: The above common funding principles for PSM in the Western Balkans were agreed upon and adopted by all key stakeholders representing the six Western Balkan countries at the regional meeting on “PSM Funding” held in Sarajevo on 28 May 2019. The participants also expressed their will to follow up the implementation of the above-mentioned principles with the aim of accession to the EU by 2025.

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