

2004 NEWS ARCHIVE

Declaration EURO-MEI Executive Meeting on Czech Public Service Broadcasting

Declaration on Czech Public Service Broadcasting

Having listened to the contributions made during the EURO-MEI Public Service Broadcasting Conference held in Prague on 25-26 June 2004 by Martin Muchka, Antonin Dekoj and Jiri Hubicka, representatives of the Czech Public Service Media Trade Unions, the participants wish to express their view on the current situation of the public service media in the Czech Republic.

The unwillingness to provide an adequate means of financing the public service media, lead them to the brink of bankruptcy. As the licence fees have not been adjusted to inflation for seven years, the Czech Radio and Czech TV cannot fulfil their public service duly stipulated by law and cannot play the role of a cornerstone in a functioning democracy in the Czech Republic.

Given the situation, it would be naïve to talk about independent public service broadcasters resistant to political pressure.

A weak radio and television may please Czech politicians, but such a situation would be unacceptable within the European Union

Press Release Public Service Broadcasting Conference Prague, June 2004

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Public Service Broadcasting Conference

Prague, 25-26 June 2004

EURO-MEI UNI

Press Release

Brussels, 5 July 2004

Media workers call on the enlarged Europe Union to reaffirm and strengthen the role and independence of public service broadcasting

70 representatives from media unions from over 20 European countries participated in the EURO-MEI conference on Public Service Broadcasting and Enlargement in Prague, 25 and 26 June. Representatives from the European Broadcasting Union, EBU and the European Commission addressed the two-days conference. After debating the prospects of public service broadcasting in an enlarged European Union, participants adopted a comprehensive statement:

“The role of public service broadcasting in the creation of Europe remains as pivotal as ever. It is indispensable for the functioning of democracy and the informing of the people in a period when interest in political participation is said to be lagging. It is fundamental to any strategy for making the European Union globally competitive in the media and entertainment sector and for assuring the continued diversity of our cultures in a world where concentration of ownership and homogenisation of heritages continues apace. We hereby reiterate, particularly in the context of the welcome expansion, and expected further expansion, of the EU, our conviction that public service broadcasting can only survive if it is truly independent in service of the public and if all member states, by whatever means most appropriate in national circumstances, take measures to assure the necessary funding,” declared the participants (please see the entire text attached).

Meeting in the Czech Republic, the first session of the conference focussed on the situation of public service broadcasting in this country. Martin Muchka, Antonin Dekoj and Jiri Hubicka, representatives of the Czech Public Service Media Trade Unions described the difficult situation and underlined that insufficient funding over the past years led to a situation where the public service broadcasters cannot fulfil their public service remit. Responding to a solidarity request from the Czech unions the conference adopted a declaration in support of Czech public service broadcasting (please see the declaration attached).

Representatives from seven other enlargement countries presented the situation of public service broadcasting and discussed the prospects of working conditions and trade workers' rights in their countries. The speakers underlined that inadequate and insufficient funding of public service broadcasters in the new EU member states does not only impede the independence of public service broadcasting but also has a negative impact on working conditions. However, the independence of public service broadcasting is not only challenged in new member states. Pier Verderio (Italy), Heinrich Bleicher- Nagelsmann (Germany) and William Maunier (France) illustrated that problems also occur in their countries. The speakers all underlined that public service broadcasting must be

better protected against political pressure from governments and political parties.

During the session on the prospects of the EU social dialogue in the audiovisual sector with Adrian Fikentscher from the European Broadcasting Union, EBU and Christelle Maes from the European Commission's Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs, EURO-MEI President Marc Kerki (Belgium) highlighted the importance of the EU social dialogue process as a means to enhance the working relationship between EURO-MEI and the EBU. "It is EURO-MEI's objective to work closely together with the EBU in order to strengthen the role and independence of public service broadcasting in the enlarged European Union. Further, we seek a constructive dialogue with the employers on working conditions and workers' rights aiming at securing the European Social Model to the sector's industrial relations system and the employees, everywhere within the borders of the Union, Kerki said.

Emmanuel Joly, from European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture presented the state of European audiovisual policy and the revision of its cornerstone, the Television Without Frontiers Directive. Joly also informed participants about the medium term actions of the review of the directive and possible future actions regarding public service broadcasting at EU level.

Addressing the conference on the prospects of public service broadcasting UNI-MEI President Zoé Lanara (Greece) re-affirmed that media unions across Europe would continue to campaign for the implementation of the principles of the Amsterdam Protocol against the pressure of EU competition and state aid policy. She reminded participants that public service broadcasting needs to counterweight the growing media concentration and its negative impact on media pluralism. "Public service broadcasting is playing a key role in providing objective information, and culturally diverse content accessible to all EU citizens. Against the background of the ongoing process of media concentration, public service broadcasting must also be able to reach citizen through new media services such as digital broadcasting and internet services", Lanara stated.

Public service broadcasters have reacted in different ways to the growing pressure of media concentration and growing competition in recent years. Outsourcing of key areas of programming and production has become reality across Europe. EURO-MEI affiliates voiced their great concern that outsourcing will not bring the expected financial gains in the long run but will limit the broadcasters programming capacity and diminish the diversity and quality of programming. In its final statement the conference underlined that stable employment, decent remuneration and dignified treatment of staff are also a critical component of flourishing public service broadcasting and underlined that where outsourcing is turned to,

conditions for all those involved should be, at least pro rata, equal or better to that of existing staff.

Comprehensive Statement Conference EURO-MEI, Prague, 25-26 June 2004

Comprehensive Statement

We, the representatives of the vast majority of public broadcasting staff in Europe, meeting in Prague, 25-26 June 2004, declare the following:

The role of public service broadcasting in the further development of a wider European Union remains as pivotal as ever. It is indispensable for the functioning of democracy and the informing of the people in a period when interest in political participation is said to be lagging. It is fundamental to any strategy for making the European Union globally competitive in the media and entertainment sector and for assuring the continued diversity of our cultures in a world where concentration of ownership and homogenisation of heritages continues apace.

The threat that public service broadcasting would be completely thrown aside in single-minded worship of the goddess Competition has to some extent been averted. But grave threats remain.

We hereby reiterate, particularly in the context of the welcome enlargement, and expected further extension, of the EU, our conviction that public service broadcasting can only survive if it is truly independent in service of the public and if all member states, by whatever means most appropriate in national circumstances, take measures to assure the necessary funding.

Our devotion to public service broadcasting does not imply that all interests of the workers who make it possible should be ignored in the process. Stable employment, decent remuneration and dignified treatment of staff are also a critical component of flourishing public service broadcasting. We recognise that structural and technological change are a necessary constant in our sector. We can accept, where necessary, the results of such changes if our interests are truly taken into account as well. For instance, where atypical work is brought in or outsourcing is turned to, conditions for all those involved should be, at least equivalent to that of existing staff.

National collective bargaining has served employers as well as workers in our sector well. We know that it will be a long time before European institutions can or should introduce such practices at the European level. But enough circumstances already exist to give real meaning to various forms of intra-European social dialogue. We particularly welcome at long

last the beginning of the audiovisual social dialogue committee in DG Employment and we see this as a means, perhaps not the only one but an important beginning, to apply sharing of points of view and debate and hopefully agreements on specific issues, at that level. To accomplish this, both the European Commission and our employer interlocutors will need to accept a considerable degree of flexibility and willingness to take the risk to engage in real discussions and not get bogged down in procedural or only "soft" issues indefinitely. While we fully accept that nothing can be discussed that both sides do not want to discuss we are convinced that both will lose if the dialogue is not allowed to be as organic and relevant as possible.

We are convinced that the dialogue will be most meaningful if, as at the national level, the greatest trust is given to the two sides.

Beyond and above the social dialogue, the public broadcasters and the unions active in that sector are in agreement that freedom of expression, freedom of association and similar principles of the European Social Model, plus more specific measures of the *acquis communautaire* must be precisely defined and defended in the new expanded Europe. It is not a question of the interests and traditions of the Europe of the 15 being expanded and enforced upon the new member states. Indeed, particularly in the private sector and in a-typical work generally many of these principles are observed by being absent in the 15 just as much as in the new or potentially new member states. Yet, both social partners now have particularly clear tasks ahead of them in assuring the complete respect for the European Social Model in the new circumstances.

For EURO-MEI's part, we must give particular attention to understanding our colleagues in the new member states and especially to help them assure freedom of association, by whatever legal means possible. Heroic efforts may be called for in some cases.

In conclusion, we declare that far from being fearful of the new situation, we welcome it. We look forward to the rightful entry of further appropriate new member states to the Union, including next Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, and to the remaining states of the Balkans as soon as circumstances allow. But none of this should be allowed to lower the principles of independent public service broadcasting. In those countries where the standards do not match these principles they should be raised.

This conference will have a concrete follow-up. More events on a bilateral or multilateral basis will be organised in order to learn from each other and this not in a one-way direction. Efforts will be made to bring in unions from other enlargement countries.

Only a large organisation will increase solidarity, the basis of effective successes. The Management Committee will ask the approval of the

Executive Committee to work along these lines. EURO-MEI will also campaign to strengthen their network with those Members of the newly elected European Parliament who support a strong social Europe in general and the defence of public service broadcasting in particular.

Speech of Martin Muchka of Prague conference EURO-UNI-MEI

Introductory speech to participants of Prague conference of EURO MEI on the support of public broadcasting taking place in 25.-26.6.2004.

Dear Sir president, dear Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues dear guests, let me to welcome you on behalf of OS Media union, which associates workers of the Czech public service media on our Prague conference. We have the honour that this great conference takes place just in Prague, and just in the year of 15th anniversary of comeback of the Czech republic to democracy and thus as well to freedom of speech.

Our OS Media union was established on Constituent Congress in February 1990, as yet previous to the Federal All-union Congress. The delegates of the Congress decide on the independence of the union and later as well on the co-operation with Confederation of Trade Unions. Our trade union has participated on the drafts of the medial law and currently is mandatory amendment subject in amendment procedure for medial law. International activities of the union are accomplished just by the way of membership of OS Media in UNI MEI.

The Czech Republic shortly after November, 1989, made a claim to dual system of broadcasting, standard in Europe, whereof according to familiar definition broadcast the private sector which „broadcast“ for „earnings“ and public sector which on the contrary „earns“ for „broadcasting“, respectively programs of public services. However, these programs in their substance and their minority specialization largely cannot be profitable. This resulted in different models of financing broadcasting of public service in the world as well in Europe, and in the Czech republic is currently used combination of concessionary fees and advertisement.

For the first period after November, there were characteristic, for the Czech media sector, mainly efforts of accelerated denationalisation of TV and radio, which were according to Acts applicable from 1964 under supervision of state quasi totalitarian authority over it and they had as well broadcasting monopoly. In the Czech republic was, hereby in addition to new legislation on the radio and TV in 1991, adopted also the first Act on Operation of the Sound and Television Broadcasting, regulating licensing and other rules including also legalization of dual system of broadcasting.

At that time massive political promotion of emerging private sector however leads by steps to the situation where the operating broadcasters under granted licenses in the second half of the ninetieths nearly got out of any regulation and as follows started attacks aimed at nationalization of public sector, which broadcasts by law. Approaches alias „governmental ripple“ and other attempts to reach political inherence made in previous years culminate at the end of year 2000, when the former chairman of parliament and at present the president of the republic in his declaration dated 18. 12. 2000 called for entrance upon the work in respect of privatisation of Czech TV. It was followed by familiar events and the strike of workers of the Czech TV, leaded however absolutely non traditionally, not for better social conditions of workers but for the freedom of speech and independency of public media.

The result of strike, which ended by our achievements mainly by virtue of wide international support organized by UNI MEI under direct participation of Jim Wilson, is deemed up to this day on the part of opposite political spectrum as unpardonable. Al the time are ongoing and intensifying low attacks and political pressure mainly against the Czech TV, in which are practically every year changed directors and without regard to inflation rate the resolution of financing of public media is deferred, as it was last demonstrated by disapproval of the amendment of the concessionary act by Chamber of Deputies and it inter alia with Pharisaic pointing out on the defence of purses of our inhabitants. For the possibility of comparison it requires to notice that the draft of increasing of radio a TV charges deal with amount of CZK 33 monthly (cca EUR 1), also approximately CZK 1 daily at average wages in the Czech Republic cca CZK 16.700 Kč. The same chamber however in the same breath by its own production arrange for inhabitants drastic increasing in price of services and some products as a result of amendment of VAT, and for a wonder in no way saves purses of inhabitants in the course of stopples and continuous increasing of the energy prices, car fare, postal charges, prices of banking operations and other items, which in contrast to concessionary fee for every one inhabitant of the Czech republic represent monthly more significant increasing of costs on a level of hundreds of crowns!

The reality that without respect for inflation and increasing of operating costs the charges for radio and TV have stayed until now on the level of the year 1997, in the long term result in consecutive and currently already conspicuous oriented wind-up of the Czech TV, because the short of funds lead to restriction even to fail to fulfil a tasks of public service and thus to breaking a law. Consequences are of course logical because each breaking a law call for sanction.

In our case it should be done consecutive privatisation of public Czech TV. In addition to it, it provides according to the Czech legislation the released technical facilities, that is to say frequencies, on which we today

broadcast, to sell at a profit in a way of licensing other national private broadcasting.

As it looks to be, our politicians anyway never mind that the point is evident fail to fulfil government programme. It is wonder that even some superior figures of governmental parties namely by then readily are subject to lobbying of private operators of broadcasting for monopoly of private sector in advertisement, regardless of serious warnings of responsible bodies in the sector of competitive communications.

It is also impossible not to see that current situation, when time-outs of solution in the matter of financing of public service media and continuous political pressures endanger basic existence of Czech TV and radio, considerably complicate for us – Czech media unions as well their main mission – the combat for continuous development of social conditions of his own members in conditions of collective bargaining. But more about it latter in following speeches of my colleagues.

What to say in conclusion? In December expire 10 years from the 4th ministerial conference of the Council of Europe, which accepts the resolution and political declaration „Media in the democratic society“ and resolution „The future of public service broadcasting“ and „The freedom of journalists and human rights“. As a direct participant of then running meeting I must express deep regret about that from those documents hitherto fall through in the Czech republic to realize fast nothing. In case if this trend will continue, it will be in the foreseeable future in the Czech republic any of discussions about public service broadcasting idle, because the public service media in the Czech republic under state-applause simply slip off from the world. For the next period one of our priorities is effort not to follow this scenario.

We should like you in the course of our proceedings ask for assistance in our as yet unsuccessful effort for keeping of existence of public media in the Czech republic. However, at present already restrainedly we perceive namely position of some of our lawmakers about public service broadcasting as a rather peculiar exhibition of profitability of the new member EU for European culture. This land in the centre of Europe thus follows Balkan-way, and by far not only in the media sector. The reason will be probably the reality, that our a little naive democracy is experiencing in his 15 years conspicuously any political adolescence. We will to believe that this stage will not sustain long time and generally, that it do not leave fixed and irreparable consequences.

In conclusion let me express the desire of effectiveness of our conference and herewith to wish nice stay in Prague to all participants. Thank you for your attention.

Done in Prague at 25. 6. 2004.

Martin Muchka

OS Media chairman

Discussion break of A.Dekoj of conference UNI-MEI in Prague

Dear Sir president, dear delegates, dear guests,

Let me too as well I to welcome you all in hundred-spired Prague by my name and on behalf of trade unionists - employees of the Czech TV. Seemingly smooth running, beginning summer of the year 2004 is for Czech TV, I am sorry to say, the enter into eighth year of liquidation. Arbitrariness of politicians for a while suspended by strike on the break of the years 2000/2001, repeatedly take effect in full vigour. More frequently they interfere in broadcasting, call for cancellation of programme. Endless delay of Act on the financing of this medium of public service they accomplish his liquidation. Could it be possible to call by mildly term the state, when the institution is out of money for needful volume of its production? If it is out of money for renovation of technologies? If it is not provided for its innovation necessary for maintenace of competitiveness in market environment? The politicians have in his hands powerful instrument, which is the fee assessment and advertisement quantity permission. Since 1997 the fee was not adjusted for inflation, its purchasing power is below the level in the year 1982. The Czech TV has in Europe the lowest costs and the lowest number of employees per broadcasting hour. The Czech TV has only one per cent of broadcasted advertisement. The Czech TV has at the second highest capacity of his original production the lowest fee in Europe. These all facts are on the part of our politicians ignored. Their aim is clearly weak, unwatched TV broadcasting only on one circuit. TV, which will not criticise politicians and will not preclude private broadcaster from monopolisation of advertising market. They aim to this end by all legislation measures, digitalization of broadcasting not excluding.

Almost two months we are participating members of the European union. Free media as TV and radio should be, are essential pillar of democracy. In EU, it its more westerly part, the citizens take it for matter of course. We try hardly to reach it. Sure enough it will not be reached without intensive help all of you, which are able to help. If Brussel is able to supervise on a quantity of vineyards in the Czech republic na množství vinic v České republice, is there as well officer, which is in charge of survival conditions of public media service? Unless it is the case, I shall vote in favour for necessity of such supervision.

Discussion break of J.Hubička of conference UNI-MEI in Prague

Dear friends, dear colleagues!

I will greet you on behalf of Czech public radio organization.

It is the mere coincidence that this meeting dedicated to the question of public media takes place the only one day thereafter, when the Parliament of the Czech republic interfere in the destiny of the Czech public media in a way as interfere.

This interference is uniquely disastrous and in consequence this implies endangering to basic function all both media, and in the worse case even endangering to their mere existence.

Inasmuch as you dear colleagues have had possibility to get down a bit under cover of these awkward play-parties and auctionarious plays, which the Parliament of the Czech republic is playing in relation to public media, thereafter you know that the main wildcard in this round is the Czech TV. However, it would be a mistake to believe that the public radio and its public functions are out of danger.

Internal resources, which until now allowed to maintain the level of radio programme on the very high level, are already a considerable long time near the border line of depletion but rather already a long way beyond it. The fact that receipts from concessionary fees were not valorized for 7 years, not a crown, has every year heavier impact both on the quality of programme (see e.g. gradual and evident attenuation of dramatic works, resignation from stimulation of new stagings, increasingly distinctive repeat performances), and on the position of employees. Average salaries in many pure specialised professional radio-broadcasting occupations are gradually declined under national average amount.

There are multiplied withdrawals of superior and professionally perfect functioning workers; in its state it is not realistic under present scale of salaries to find adequate alternative workers.

We meet us here on the union land just in the time when the workers of the Czech radio and Czech TV are experiencing - in perspective view of public broadcasting - sceptic and pessimistic feelings. If we, in the course of our two-days proceedings, will find at least successful suggestion for the way out of above mentioned – for us so severe - situation, it will be then assuredly one of the successful hits of this conference.

The Information for Union Network International - Media & Entertainment, London 16.1.2004

January 14th, 2004

Dear Colleagues,

It is sad irony now that we are to organize our next conference in Prague, it may be that the Prague meeting will also become a commemoration ceremony in honour of independent Czech Television. What we mean is that those of our politicians who did not succeed in taking over the public service television by means of the appointed and controlled management of their own at the turn of 2000/2001, want to achieve its liquidation so now through economic pressure.

Constant struggle over preserving the independence of the public service television in the Czech Republic has been going on since 1997. The TV Council that was most obviously manipulated by certain politicians called off the TV management of that time. Moreover, the same individuals whose interests were to weaken the position of Czech TV also managed to repeal the provision of the bill proposal concerning inflation indexation of the television fees. Czech TV, thus, became a hostage to the Parliament and it was just a matter of time until the politicians would exert pressure on TV institution. The time has come now.

Provided that the television fee was 75,- Czech Crowns per month in 1997 which represented 0,78 percent of an average salary, one may see the fee costs ranked among the lowest ones, if compared with other European countries. Now that the average salary increased and the fee has retained, it makes only 0,46 percent of today's salary. Moreover, the inflation in the Czech Republic between 1997-2003 reached over 30%, therefore the real value of 75,- Czech Crowns has dropped down to today's 50,- Crowns.

Just for your reference, we would like to add that the costs for signal transmission which Czech TV must pay increased by more than 30%. Originally, 647 millions crowns were raised to 846 millions in the year 2003! Similarly, gas and electricity costs also increased in price. One cubic meter of gas costs now about 150% more, while electricity costs raised by more than 130%. Not only this illustrates how the development of prices evolved in recent six years, but it also clearly demonstrates the rise of operation costs that must be covered out of lower and lower real income funds of Czech TV.

As a sort of humorous irony, we would like to illustrate the following fact. The Members of the Parliament raised their own salaries from original

33,700,- Czech Crowns to today's 46,500,- Czech Crowns which represent growth of 38%. The same Members are able to criticize Czech Television for insufficient implementing of duties which are set by the law. For instance, it is a duty of Czech TV to be a guarantee of the future development of Czech cinematography. In other words, it means to be the one who represents the basic commercial source for financing the new Czech feature films.

Now that the state of matters has become unsustainable even for the public, the Czech Herostrates' have come up with another idea. We shall raise the television fees, however, we will deprive Czech TV of 1% of broadcasting time provided for commercial space. The original 3% were reduced to 1% to secure smooth start of the private television Nova which was being established in 1993. Czech TV was supposed to get back to its former 3% of advertisement time. Instead, it should be deprived of the last percent completely. Implementing this intention would mean that the TV advertisement market would be in one hands because the both private televisions that – apart from Czech TV – represent the only other subjects broadcasting in the whole state, are clearly connected as far as the property is concerned.

The above gives a picture of how the current situation in Czech Television looks like. What is left is an explanation, dear colleagues, why we address you today concerning the desperate situation of the public service television in the Czech Republic. Not definitely because we would be waiting idly for salvation coming from you. Hopefully, we have already demonstrated in the past that we were able to defend the independence of Czech TV along with the representatives of wide public by all democratic means. All we kindly ask of you is support in the form of an accentuated written appeal addressed to the entire political scene of the Czech Republic, particularly to the Members of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. The upcoming conference of EURO-MEI in Prague may be a great opportunity for such appeal.

Executive Committee

of Independent Trade Union

of Czech Television Prague