

Open letter to the European Broadcasting Union

Tony Hall, EBU President

Noel Curran, EBU Director General

Delphine Ernott, Vice President of the EBU

Vanessa O'Connor, EBU Director of Member Relations and Communications

We are writing to ask you to speak out in defence of independent and impartial journalism in the public media in Poland. This is a cornerstone of public service media and has been under threat in Poland since the end of 2015 when our present ruling party – Law and Justice – came to power.

It was then that the new government took direct control over senior management appointments in both public television and public radio in a move which saw the European Broadcasting Union react by warning against the politicisation of the public service media which are mandated by Polish law to provide impartial coverage of news and current events.

The takeover was followed by the dismissal, resignation and re-assignment of over 300 journalists in the public media and their replacement by supporters of the new government. We, the board of the Society of Journalists and Authors of Public Radio, represent those who managed to stay in the public media and who remain actively committed to the fundamental principles of public broadcasting.

We also believe that public service media have a major role to play in the future despite the damage which has been done in Poland to these principles by the ruling party in the past four and a half years. And some of us have already paid the cost of defending this stance in demotions and sackings.

Since the autumn of 2018 we have had three elections in Poland, local government, European Parliament and a to our national parliament and on June 28 2020 we will have a presidential election. Each of these campaigns have seen the public media present a pro government view of the candidates, a bias which was noted by an OSCE/ODiHR national



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election monitoring team and by monitoring by non-governmental organisations. In each election Poland's media regulator, the National Council for Radio and Television (KRRiT), has refused to monitor election coverage even though it is bound by our media laws to implement the impartiality clauses of our media law.

Most recently a public debate about the role of the public media was sparked anew when officialdom sought to censor the broadcast of a song which was critical of the head of the Law and Justice leader Jarosław Kaczyński on the public radio Channel 3 (Trójka). The incident saw our members openly criticise top management of the public radio at a hearing of our Senate Culture committee which ended with a demand by the committee for the resignation of the director of both Radio 3 and Polish Radio by the committee. As a result of the meeting and the surrounding public outcry the authorities have taken a step back. Following the resignation of the director of Radio Channel 3 they have agreed to the appointment of a new management team at the Channel 3. The new team has declared it will uphold standards of public service broadcasting at the station which has seen the dismissal, resignation and re-assignment of 54 journalists since 2016. One of our members has agreed to head the news and current events team. This concession may well be temporary and does not represent a general change in government policy towards other public Radio and Television channels. But it is worth noting.

It is at this moment that we have decided to appeal to the EBU to speak out to defend public service media standards in Poland in line with its own standards and the message it sent in 2016 when it warned the new Polish government against its takeover of Polish Radio and Television.

This issue is not only about what is happening in Poland. At a time of populist challenges to democratic standards and growing polarisation of public opinion in many countries, the defence of public service media principles is an important element of the fight to defend democratic regimes. As you Noel Curran rightly said on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the EBU „as the world becomes increasingly polarised people need a media they can trust and rely upon to provide high quality, independent and trusted news and information”.

We agree that people have the right to be freely and impartially informed when taking decisions at election times and assessing the policies of their rulers. Public service media are an important element in this respect and

their standards must be defended. This is why it is essential in our view that the EBU publicly take a stand on the situation of our public media. Such a message would have a wider significance for journalistic independence wherever it is under threat in the public media.

The board of Association of Journalists and Authors of the Public Radio:

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