



Communicating Europe – The role and impact of public service broadcasters

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Speakers: Christophe Pr  ault (Managing Editor, *Toute l'Europe*, France), Clara Rivero (Journalist for *Europa 2017*, RTVE, Spain) and Max Beverton (Public Policy Manager, Sky Media, United Kingdom)

Moderator: Zoran Medved (Editor-in-Chief, RTV Slovenia, Member of the Executive Committee of CIRCOM, European Association of Regional Television, Slovenia)

European public service broadcasters operate in a rapidly changing environment, faced with the emergence of new digital business models and platforms that are particularly attractive to younger viewers. Nevertheless, in most countries across Europe, public broadcasters are still the key source of information that people turn to for news about the European Union. The aim of this workshop was to share successful and less-successful experiences of public broadcasters in this context, with a view to understanding how they select news about Europe, what stories are considered important to present and discuss, and what kind of feedback they receive from their audience.

Zoran Medved opened the session by presenting public broadcasters, the first channels in the history of television to produce news and explain current affairs. In Europe, around 60% of what is shown daily on TV is produced within the EU. Public service broadcasters are thus a fundamental part of our societies, informing and making people aware of the current state of affairs in Europe, but this also raises some questions and issues regarding responsibility.

Christophe Pr  ault, managing editor for the French website *Toute l'Europe*, was the first speaker. He started his presentation by describing the role of his website, which is to teach French citizens about the EU and European affairs. He also argued that the role of *Toute l'Europe* was to provide independent and reliable news, counteracting fake news and what could be found on social media. Indeed, the editorial team's starting point was a general feeling that the public had many questions and needed explanations. Therefore, they launched the format "Qu'est-ce que" (*what is?*) to allow these questions to be asked and convey demands for explanations from the public. This format became particularly relevant after Brexit.

Finally, Christophe Pr  ault discussed the configuration and methodology used to create content on *Toute l'Europe*'s website. The website uses a wide variety of articles, such as press reviews, videos and interviews. It is also developing partnerships with public radio stations in order to extend its audience. Mr Pr  ault also explained that *Toute l'Europe* is trying not to be sensationalist but rather informative, covering all the "hot topics" related to EU affairs. The website is also developing partnerships with public radio stations in order to extend its audience.

Clara Rivero, journalist for the Spanish TV channel RTVE, was the next speaker. She started her career in 1968, when Spain joined the European Union, and has been linked to Europe at various levels: at regional level as she is from the Canary Islands, at national level as she worked in Madrid, and at European level as *Europa 2017* is a programme on the EU. Ms Rivero insisted that Europe has to be shown and explained, and while the EU offers a wide range of facilities for journalists, she highlighted several challenges. First, despite the efforts of the EU to promote its messages, what is found in the media is often negative. Second, the stories



shared rarely generate enthusiasm and finally, the citizens of the EU know little about how it functions and what it does.

Ms Rivero further said that journalists need to become intimately familiar with the role of each institution in the EU, in order to be able to convey the information properly to the public. She then argued that the Internet is a very important tool for sharing information about Europe from Brussels.

Ms Rivero's final remarks pointed to the difficulties faced by Europe on how to communicate itself. Her first point concerned languages, and the lack of translation of important pieces of information. She argued that, in that regard, it was not easy to find translated versions of all EU documents, which should be a right for all EU citizens. She went on to ask three fundamental questions: why does the media keep providing messages giving a negative image of Europe? Why are citizens not interested in the EU except when difficulties arise? And why do people still not understand the EU?

Max Beverton, the third speaker, emphasised the power of television and culture, saying that most people care about culture and entertainment and that is what they spend the most time talking about. Therefore, Sky News selects stories based on their importance, analysing complicated subjects with experts and giving special attention to images. He also stressed the importance of systems that regulate TV platforms and advertisers. As such, he said that regulation is an important part of the broadcasting process, so that news coverage remains impartial and meets high quality standards. He went on to say that regulations make broadcasters more responsible and produce high quality journalism, considering the exponential increase in available media platforms.

Lastly, Mr Beverton emphasised the importance of listening to their audience, and creating content that they are interested in, can relate to and that engages the public.

Mr Medved then opened the floor, and started by saying that there was a major turnover from institutions to citizens when reporting about European matters on a broad variety of topics. The discussion then focused on the quality of information online and offline, on advertising and the responsibility for public broadcasters to provide balanced news.

A second round of discussion investigated strategies to reach people who are not interested in EU affairs. Overall, the panel stressed the need to simplify Europe's message and to be able to present it to the audience. Lastly, the audience asked for speakers' views on the changes in the press conferences at the European Parliament over the last year, and about language communication inside the EU.