

Appendix



Public frames for Public Service Broadcasting in Sweden



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It was June 2006. I was pleased and looked forward to a well earned vacation. As the managing director for SVT – Swedish Television – I had worked hard for a couple of years for a strong and vivid future for public service in Sweden. Now parliament had voted for a new six year charter for the three public service companies. Five out of seven parties were behind the decision. The independence of the companies would be increased. We were allowed to continue to have a broad programming even if some parties and our commercial competitors had been working for a limitation. The Internet was included as an important platform.

Three months later there was a general election. The social democratic government lost and four bourgeois parties formed a new government. A new conservative Minister of Culture was appointed and public service was included in her commission. As soon as she had taken office she asked to see me and the managing directors for Swedish Radio and UR – Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company. At the meeting we were simply told that the new government had decided to re-examine public service in order to form a brand new charter for Swedish Public Service. A new committee was to be appointed where the “map for public service should be completely redrawn.”

We were speechless for a while. Even if we were well aware of this situation being the result of a democratic process, an election. Imagine our surprise when the minister resigned only ten days later as the result of the disclosing that she had refused to pay her TV-licence for 15 years. That was at least partly the end of a situation where Sweden after 80 years with radio and 50 with television as public service was close to get its charter completely changed.

The next minister appointed was more of a friend of traditional European public service, but she decided to set up a new committee instructed to investigate the future of Swedish Public Service. With that the three companies had to live in uncertainty about their future for another couple of years.

In the beginning of 2009 the committee had finished its work. The report then has been under consideration by more than one hundred institutions, offered to give their views on the proposals. Government in June presented a bill based upon an agreement by the four parties in government on the conditions for public serv-

ice. However, this time only for four years and furthermore with a checkpoint after one and a half year. Politicians do not easily want to let power go.

Once again this shows the delicate situation for public service when technology and the use of it is changing rapidly, competition between public service and commercial companies are increasing and the European Union constantly seems to have the issue on its agenda in one or another way.

In Hallin and Mancini's *Comparing Media Systems* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) Sweden belongs to a model called "Democratic Corporatist." This is characterized by a long democratic tradition, predominantly consensus in politics, strong welfare state, significant involvement of state in the market economy and strong development of legal authority. Public service is furthermore regarded as an important and central part of the system. Characterizing is furthermore a non-commercial-public service and a relatively high degree of autonomy for the public service companies. In the field of media as a whole a "Democratic Corporatist" model contains competition for print media in the market. In spite of that, market is ruled by several political measures, for example press subsidies. By the way EU is on its way to restrict or even ban these subsidies. Another example is a self regulating journalism where radio, TV and newspapers have their ethical rules in common.

The conclusion made by Hallin and Mancini is that in a country like Sweden there is an extensive and wide intervention in the media sphere by the state. At the same time the independence of media is highly valued. Owing to an open debate, including a wide openness for oppositional views, media in Sweden and the other Nordic countries are playing the role of an actor as well as an arena in their democratic model.

So what do the frames for the activities of Swedish Public Service look like in the latest governmental proposal, which probably will be approved by parliament late 2009 and come into effect 2010? And what changes have been made compared to earlier charters?

There are four instruments which give parliament and government influence over public service:

- *The Constitutional Act for Free Speech* which regulates the possibility for everyone to give secret information to a journalist and have legal right to anonymity and regulates that every programme must have a legally responsible person.
- *The Radio and TV Act* regulates that a charter has to be issued by the government and that the content in programmes should be "true and impartial." Public service must send corrections and replies and show respect for people's private life. A Commission approved by the government can examine programs after they have been sent. Half of the programs must have an European origin.
 - *The Local Radio Act* regulates extensive local radio operations.
 - *Charter* for public service companies. I will come back to the content of them.
 - *Yearly Supply* decided by parliament from TV-fees.

These laws, charter and supplies are the most striking examples of a state regulated TV- and radio operation. In the light of these laws and regulations it is easy to understand that some people call public service “state owned television,” “state owned radio.” SVT on the other side uses the phrase “Free Television” to describe its position on the Swedish TV-market. The company marketed itself under that slogan a few years ago. How do these very different characteristics go together?

First let us consider the process of working out a new charter. As was evident in the beginning of this paper a new charter for public service companies in Sweden always has a long way to go until it reaches its destination – the three public service companies.

The working process starts with a committee appointed by the government which is commissioned to prepare for a new charter. Such a committee has sometimes in the past consisted of members from all political parties, sometimes of one single person. The committee does its work “in close collaboration with the companies.” The result goes to the government which gives the draft to different institutions – mainly with cultural connection – for consideration and comments. After that it is time for government to prepare a proposal for parliament. When parliament has decided, government composes the charter in consultation with the public service companies. Earlier the charter was called an “agreement” between the companies and government but as far as most of the items are already decided by parliament the term has been changed to “permit” from the government, which is closer to facts. The main possibilities for the public service companies to have an influence on a new charter is during the work of the committee and later when government is formulating its proposal.

So why can Swedish Public Service be called “state owned” by some and at the same time free television and radio by others? Those who love to use “state owned” are mainly referring to the laws and regulations mentioned above. Those who argue that Sweden has a free and independent television and radio are referring to the ownership of the companies, the content of the charter and their non-commercial interests.

The companies are owned by a foundation with its members appointed by the government. The foundation has two main commissions:

- To defend the independence of the companies.
- To appoint the boards of the companies. The chairmen of the boards have until now been appointed by the government. From 2010 they will also be appointed by the foundation. This is to further stress the independence of public service.

Now let us discuss the new charter and its essential paragraphs which will come into force in 2010. Even if at this time of the process we only have a proposal from government, not much is likely to be changed by parliament.

The portal paragraph says:

- The activities of public service shall be exercised with independence and a strong integrity and be independent of state, economical, political as well as of other interests or spheres of power in society.

- Programming shall be exercised in an accurate and impartial way with a wide freedom of speech and a thorough control of facts.

- Programmes shall be characterized by plurality, everything from the broadest entertainment and sports programmes to niche programmes with a very small audience.

The government underlines public service should produce programmes less represented among commercial TV-channels. Government stresses specifically that public service shall pay attention to the cultural field. For this purpose the companies will get 10 million euro extra during the next four years of permit.

- News shall be characterized by a plurality in choice, analysis and commentaries. Programmes shall stimulate discussions and scrutinize authorities, organisations and companies with influence on society.

- Programmes have to be available on all platforms, mainly the Internet. (SVT Play today is the most used TV online service in Sweden).

- Public service has a special responsibility for the Swedish language and shall pay increased attention to the needs of handicapped people. Every programme shall be subtitled for the benefit of those who are deaf or have bad hearing.

- Attention shall be paid to minorities with special programmes.

- Public service is not allowed to send commercials with one exception. Sponsoring is allowed for sports events but the amount of sponsoring will be limited in the next charter. These limitations are a concession to the commercial channels who wanted sponsoring to be forbidden.

To conclude, the commissions for SVT, SR and UR are in many ways back on track after some unsecure turnarounds in the beginning of the millennium. Some conservative ministers obviously supported by liberal and center ministers in 2006 wanted to rewrite the charter for Swedish Public Service to a much more limited commission compared to what had been existing for decades. Those ministers have either changed their minds or just lost against more public service minded among their colleagues. This is at least the fact for the coming four year term for Swedish Public Service. Probably they have been influenced by the huge support among Swedes for public service – around 90 percent. A support which is important for every Director General when she or he is negotiating with politicians on a new charter.