

DATE

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Czech Republic

**Pressure on PSM governance threatens independence of Czech Television
and an erosion of media pluralism**

Your Excellency,

The EBU, Europe's largest alliance of Public Service Media organisations, is closely monitoring serious risks to media pluralism in the Czech Republic and is particularly concerned by increasing pressure on the independence of Czech Television (CT) in a year of parliamentary elections. Public Service Media play a critical role in providing a diversity of opinions and voices and as such are essential for democratic debate and fostering an environment that enables citizens to build an informed choice at all times, and never more so than during the election process.

Concerning Czech Television in particular, the EBU has seen a ramping up of efforts to politicize the governing Council and to challenge and undermine the senior management team, which might be perceived as the first step to weaken the roots of political independence of CT. We believe this is damaging to the independence of public service media in the Czech Republic and to its reputation as a modern European democracy that embraces core European values such as freedom of the press.

Czech TV has delivered exceptional levels of trust with Czech viewers over the last 12 months. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report CT News is the most trusted news brand in the Czech Republic with 62% of respondents trusting the brand.

Despite this public endorsement, we note that on March 18, during the selection process for the next Council election, the Electoral Committee of the Chamber of Deputies only shortlisted candidates with political affiliations to the ruling party. We are obliged to recall that Article 4 of the Act on Czech Television provides that "the Council members shall be elected and recalled by the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic with a view to due representation of important regional, political, social and cultural opinion trends within the Council." Should the composition of the Council lack a balance of opinions, it may no longer be considered impartial and may severely undermine the independence of CT's governing body and its management.

As a reminder, independence is boldly emphasized in various Council of Europe Resolutions and Recommendations. CoE Recommendation N R (96) 10 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Guarantee of the Independence of Public Service Broadcasting stipulates that: "The rules governing the status of the supervisory bodies of public service broadcasting organisations especially their membership should be defined in a way, which avoids placing the bodies at risk of political or other interference".

Czech Television is an active Member of the EBU and is to be commended for its sustained commitment to our core values, in particular independence. In 2014 the organisation submitted itself to an assessment of its adherence to independence and other EBU values by Austria's ORF, Germany's Bayerischer Rundfunk, Rai from Italy and YLE from Finland and implemented a set of recommendations to validate ongoing coherence.

The EBU sees increasing confrontation directed by the Council towards CT and notes that a move to dismiss the Director General on allegations of conflict of interest was rejected by a majority of the Council on 16 March. We are alarmed by the increasing politicisation of Czech Television's governing body and alignment around one political option and urge the Czech parliament to ensure independence of the broadcaster so it can remain a model for public broadcasting in the Czech Republic and more broadly in Europe.



Delphine Ernotte Cunci
President EBU
President France Télévisions



Noel Curran
Director General

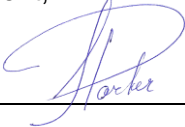
Members of the EBU Executive Board:



Thomas Bellut
Director General, ZDF



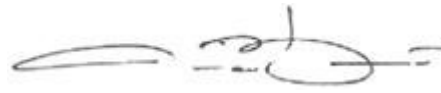
Marcello Foa
President, RAI



Sebastian Sergei Parker
Deputy Director General, C1R



Alexander Wrabetz
Director General, ORF



Cilla Benko Lamborn
Director General, SR



Monika Garbaciauskaite Budriene
Director General, LRT



Fran Unsworth
Director, News & Current Affairs, BBC