

Christian S. Nissen  
Vesterled 20  
DK-2100 København Ø  
Tlf. +45 4027 3312  
Mail: [csn@christiannissen.com](mailto:csn@christiannissen.com)  
Web: [www.christiannissen.com](http://www.christiannissen.com)

## **Politics between Emotions and Reason**

- a case study on the Danish Media Political Settlement 2018

Christian S. Nissen

June 2020

**Abstract.**

The political setback that Public Service Media (PSM) in recent years have endured in several countries has by some observers been explained with the rise of populism and political ideology. However, the erosion of the political support to PSM might also be caused by incremental rationalism, a diminishing role of ideology and weakened political values. This apparent paradox is discussed in the paper based on a study of the policy formation during the process leading up to the 5-year political settlement (2018) on PSM in the Danish parliament, which marked a significant shift in Danish media-politics.

Especially the National PSM Institution (DR), which during its almost hundred years of existence has enjoyed a wide political support among all political parties in Parliament, was seriously hit by the settlement. Its funding was cut by 20%, two of its six tv-channels closed, and the remit narrowed in the direction of content not provided by the commercial media sector. Adding to that the license fee was replaced by tax financing over the state fiscal budget.

Through a close analysis of the decision making process and interviews with core actors in the years leading up to the political settlement it has been the aim of the study to explain why this policy shift happened and explore the forces behind in the span between on the one hand attitudes and ideology (“emotions”) and on the other rationality and factual knowledge (“reason”).

Although media politics and the decision making culture of the Danish parliament – like all other parliaments – have their specific characteristics, the findings of the study will hopefully be seen as relevant for understanding why the hitherto strong political support of PSM also in other countries seems to be dwindling in later years.

**Keywords:** Public Service Media, Media politics, Decision making analysis, Rationality / ideology.

**Introduction.**

The idea behind the study came from two very different angles, one being an apparent change in the relation between PSM and society, the other decision making theory, or more specifically the way politicians perceive PSM in the span between emotion and reason both – it’s argued in the paper – crucial to the future of PSM.

*A shift in the societal context of Public Service Media.*

Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) was (especially in North Western Europe) developed up through the 20th century in societies typified by the collective culture of the industrial age and characterized by for instance:

A technical distribution system, ‘broadcast’ with a zero-marginal cost structure providing all citizens with the same content at the same time. A solidarity-based mandatory funding method (license fee) detached from individual usage and – like other public services – explained and vindicated by welfare economics, “public goods” and so forth. The term “mass-” used in relation to both (industrial) -production, -culture, -movements and -media running parallel to a somewhat paternalistic mission of enlightening and educating the masses. PSB fitted in like a hand in a glove to the industrial welfare societies (Syvertsen et al 2014) (Nissen 2015).

However, the same match between society and an emerging new media system can be found in the more individualistic oriented post-industrial society. Here “new media” is based on a distribution technology (the internet) serving individual preferences both in substance (content) and in time (on demand) and an individual funding system (subscription) related to actual usage of content. A general societal culture where former citizens of a collective society are becoming individual consumers in a market.

Because of this shift in the societal context, the role and societal relevance of PSM has become more uncertain and controversial. For some the classic PSM obligation to sustain national culture and enhance social and cultural cohesion in today’s globalized world is regarded even more important than ever. For others the new (non-linear) media system is welcomed as an emancipation from the collective compulsion, from market distortion and experienced as a liberation from the patronage of the state controlled public broadcasters. This disagreement cannot be resolved by purely rational arguments (reason), because it relates to what kind of society, we want to live in. Basically, it has to do with political values and ideology (emotions).

*How do parliaments and governments handle rationality and ideology in policy formation?*

The question, however, is whether parliaments can handle conflicting values and ideology and develop them into a practical, relevant policy in day to day operational politics, where alliances are formed, and compromises sought between a government and political parties in parliament. The situation probably varies between different parliaments depending on traditions and culture. See appendix 1 with a brief description of the institutional decision-making culture and rather pragmatic political consensus tradition covering most policy areas of the Danish parliament.

Looking at the other extreme end of the “emotions – reason” span one can also ask to what extend parliamentary decisions are based on factual knowledge and rationality. It might be considered an ideal (in theory), but seldom practiced due to for instance insufficient knowledge of causality, just to mention one of many barriers. In economics such shortcomings have (with disputed success) been addressed with the help of abstractions like ‘the economic man’ used in econometric models. Similar attempts (also with questionable effect) are known in political (and corporate) decision-making, for instance the use of different types of scenarios (Nissen 2016).

*The Danish media settlement in the span between “emotions” and “reason”.*

The 2018 political media settlement can – in its substance and especially in the process leading up to it – be regarded as a surprising shift in Danish media politics. By some of the actors and analysts it was

explained and defended as a necessary and logic step to accommodate to a changing, international media market, by others as a result of neo-liberal ideology and reprisal directed against a critical public media institution not obeying its master's voice.

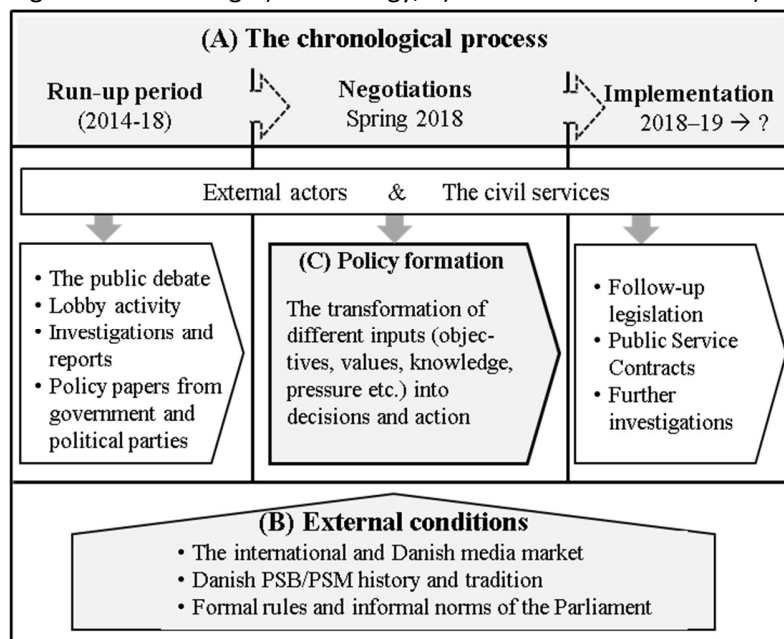
On this background the paper uses the "emotions – reason" dichotomy to analyse and describe, how different positions between the two extremes came into play and influenced the actors and the result of their decisions.

### Analytical set-up for the study of the 2018 media settlement.

The analysis of the policy formation up to, during the 2018 media negotiations and the implementation of the settlement was – as sketchily illustrated in figure 1 – based on a combination of three analytical perspectives: the chronology, external conditions and the policy formation in parliament.

A) *Chronology* – marked horizontally by three consecutive phases in the figure – is important, because not only does it provide a narrative red thread both to the analyst and the reader. It also ad explicatory value constituting the time-base for cause-effect relations between actions/decisions taken by the players in the political processes.

Figure 1: Combining A) Chronology, B) External conditions and C) Policy formation



B) *External conditions*, shown at the bottom of the figure, include a wide range of factors outside the direct reach/influence of the decision makers, yet elements which can substantively affect negotiations and decisions by being the cause of action and/or constraints limiting manoeuvrability during negotiations and the effects of decisions taken. Here the Danish and especially the international media market, the Danish PSM history i.e. previous political media settlements, and the formal rules and informal norms of the parliament can be mentioned as examples.

C) *Policy formation* is in the study conceptualised as the transformation of different inputs (objectives, values, knowledge, pressure etc.) into decisions and action in the period up to and during the

negotiations. The focus is set on factors with potential impact on the decisions, both interim (coalition formation and tactical manoeuvres) and the final outcomes of the negotiations. Particular attention is given to the rationale of decisions in the span between “emotions” and “reason”.

*Analysing policy formation.*

The academic literature on decision-making is overwhelming covering an area from a microlevel, for instance individuals choosing what to buy in the department store, over companies’ investment policies to the extreme complexity of the policy formation behind governmental decisions on legislative reforms and participation in an international conflict. It contains different blends of de- and prescriptive elements, concerning both how decisions are or should be taken and how research on decision making is and ought to be carried out. Harold D. Lasswell’s classic work: *A pre-view of policy sciences* (Lasswell 1971) is a good illustrating example.

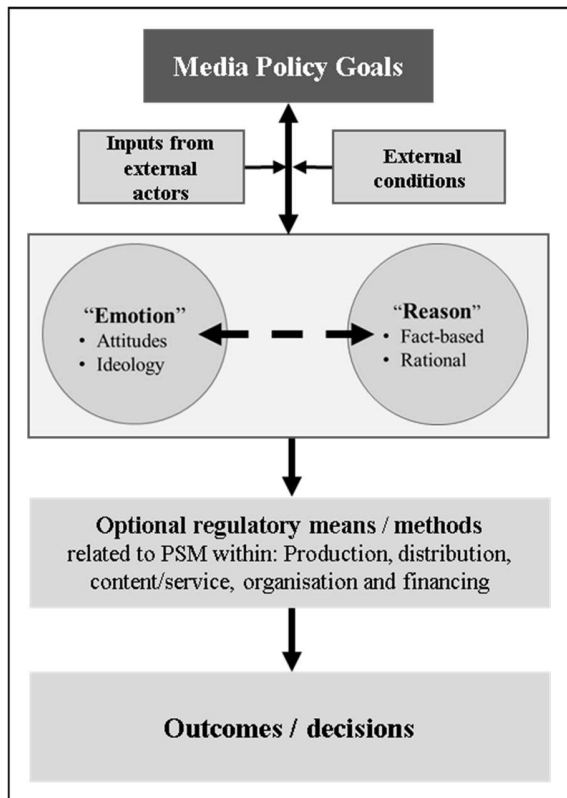
One of the most disputed questions – right from ancient Greece (Plato, Aristotle etc.) through centuries (e.g. Descartes, Hume, Kant) to our days – is whether decisions are/should be based on reason or ultimately arise from emotions. This long philosophical debate has significantly influenced the social sciences’ handling of decision-making analysis. In political science few (e.g. the “Rational choice School”) have placed themselves in the extreme rational position in the span between emotions and reason. Some have downgraded the requirement to rationality to obtain some pragmatic realism (Lindblom 1959), whereas others have argued for the importance of both reason and emotion in different contexts. Kahnemann for instance divides ways of taking decisions into two categories; a fast, emotional and instinctive, and a slow, thoughtful and more rational (Kahnemann 2011). In a lecture in 1919 Max Weber addressed the special responsibility of the politician – as opposed to citizens and governmental officials – to unite ‘warm passion’ (emotion) and ‘cool sense of proportion’ (reason) (Weber 1919/46):

“For the problem is simply how can warm passion and cool sense of proportion be forged together in one and the same soul? Politics is made with the head, not with other parts of the body or soul. And yet devotion to politics, if it is not to be frivolous intellectual play but rather genuinely human conduct, can be born and nourished from passion alone”.

The basic question in the analysis of the Danish media settlement was, as illustrated in figure 2, how the politicians participating in the negotiations handled this difficult obligation dealing with their own political goals, the inputs from external actors and the underlying external conditions.

Or to be more specific: to what extent were political choices of means to regulate PSM (production, distribution, content, organisation and financing) influenced by on the one hand emotions (containing also party-bound, value-based attitudes and ideology) and on the other reason (in tactical manoeuvring as well as in more strategic goal-means-outcome thinking)?

Figure 2: Decision-making combining emotions and reason



#### *Data used in the study.*

The different forms of quantitative and qualitative data used in the study can roughly be grouped in the following four categories:

- Basic statistics from private and public sources, especially covering the Danish media market, (see for instance: Danish Agency for Culture, 2014-19).
- Reports from expert groups on the future development of the Danish media market commissioned by the Ministry of Culture in the years prior to the political negotiations
- Ministerial “answers” (numbering approx. 200) to questions posed to the Minister of Culture by the Parliaments Cultural Committee and individual MPs in the period January-October 2018.
- Interviews with MPs, commercial media executives, lobbyists, civil servants etc. Especially three rounds of structured interviews based on a questionnaire completed in advance (in 2017, 2018 and 2019) with each of the nine MPs, who as rapporteurs represented the political parties in the Parliament concerning media politics.

#### **Prelude – DR from calm waters to rough see.**

From the perspective of the Board and management of DR and the other Danish PSM institutions (see appendix 2) there were good reasons for optimism looking forward to the expected renewal of the PSM-favourable media settlement (for the period 2015-2018), which in 2014 was agreed upon by all political parties in the parliament. The 2014 settlement prolonged a decade’s relative stable license fee funding, measured at a fixed price level. Concerning audience share and reach DRs position was also stable at an

unusual high level compared to many other European PSM institutions. Finally, it should be mentioned that all surveys showed overwhelming popular support of DR's role and content offer. On that background, both the DR management and most observers expected calm waters in the years leading up to the political negotiations on renewing the settlement in the first half of 2018.

However, the lead-in to the 2018 negotiations evolved very differently. Already in August 2015 dark clouds began gathering, when the minister of finance (from the Liberal Party) in the center-right coalition, minority government launched a frontal attack on DR in an interview to one of the leading Danish newspapers. The tone and direction of the interview can be illustrated with the following significant statements: "DR is too big"; "DR provides too much entertainment instead of real public service"; "From its strong, strong position on the Internet, DR is inflicting damaging competition on private media's web-services" and "We need to discuss, whether DR gets too much money".

Although the Minister of Finance – to the surprise of most and the dismay of the Minister of Culture, in charge of media, also a Liberal MP – here was operating outside of his area of responsibility, the interview became a gamechanger. Only a week later the Danish People's Party announced their full support to his statements and presented a few further proposals for restrictions on DR. Very few at the time knew, that the influential trade organization, "Danish Media", representing the printed press, three months earlier in a technical response to a query from the Ministry of Culture had made the very – close to being words for words – same demands for restrictions on DR.

"Danish Media" had out of disappointment with the PSM-positive 2014-media settlement strategically decided to launch a comprehensive lobby activity targeting DR, consisting of several ingredients. During a couple of years, several "policy papers" were produced focusing on the negative effect on private media stemming from PSM-market distortion. "Danish Media" also rallied a wide and very diverse group of media stakeholders related to DR and developed amongst them a shared critical attitude concerning "...all the detrimental effects of DR's behaviour as a self-willed juggernaut". Apropos "juggernaut", that term was frequently used by critical politicians and in the newspaper's editorials as elements in apparently very deliberate framing of DR also naming the license fee the "coercion-fee" and the PSM-institutions "state-media".

Then in 2016-17, a veritable "shit storm" aimed at DR broke out in almost all newspapers and online media. Criticism for abuse of license fee funds for high management salaries and other benefits to top staff. Although most - but not all - cases were based on misunderstandings, misinformation or strong distortions, they had a detrimental effect on DR's image. According to longitudinal, yearly surveys, it affected citizens' perceptions of DR, however temporary. Except for most of the politicians who in the interviews conducted a year later, expressed their indignation over this apparent "blatant misuse of public funds".

### **The changing positions of the political parties up to the negotiations.**

Although the political parties prior to the negotiations on renewal of the media settlements usually of tactical reasons have positioned themselves rather diverse, Danish media politics has nevertheless for many years basically been characterised by a stable, rather pragmatic consensus. Five out of the nine previous media settlements, covering the period 1991-2014, have been concluded between parties

comprising both the government side and the opposition. This has been the case with governments led by the Social Democrats as well as those headed by the Liberal Party. New governments taking office have occasionally made changes in the previous settlements but usually only marginal adjustments.

According to the interviews with the party rapporteurs carried out in the Autumn 2017, a few months before the negotiations were expected to begin, the picture was rather diverse on both sides of the political centreline. The questionnaire completed by the nine rapporteurs of the political parties ahead of the interviews contained eighteen questions. Three concerning the purposes of the PSM (i.e. the reasons why the state intervenes in the free media market through PSM) and fifteen about regulatory means.

Initially the respondents' answers to the questions concerning the purpose of PSM were rather vague and diverse, as if this was a question many of them hadn't given much thought. Yet, assisted by being presented for six classic PSM-characteristics shown in table 1, there was almost full agreement across party boundaries to the importance of these PSM-defining characteristics.

The only exception was the answers to the question concerning public regulation, which usually constitutes a watershed between the right end left wing in politics. This consensus concerning overarching goals may seem surprising but is actually often the case when politicians are asked about such overall abstractly formulated purposes in different policy areas.

Table1: The nine party rapporteur's answers concerning characteristic of PSM

What is your opinion to the importance of these characteristics of Public Service Media?	Very important	Some importance	Less important	Not important
1) <u>Public regulation</u> of content, distribution and financing	●●●	●●●●●		
2) <u>Free and equal access</u> for all citizens to content	●●●●●	●●		
3) PSM content must be <u>diverse and versatile</u>	●●●●●			
4) The PSM offer must <u>impartially support citizen's participation</u> in the Danish democracy in a globalized world	●●●●●	●		
5) PSM institutions/companies must be <u>independent</u> of commercial and political special interests	●●●●●	●		
6) The PSM offer should help to strengthen <u>Danish culture, language and societal cohesion</u>	●●●●●	●		

Note: Blue dots symbolise answers by the four parliamentary media rapporteurs of government supporting parties (the "Blue block") and the red markings show the answers of the five opposition parties ("Red block").

When it came to the fifteen questions on regulatory means (concerning: production, distribution, content remit, organisation and financing), the picture changed. There was an overall tendency to "red block" (the



five centre-left wing opposition parties) being more in favour of preserving the present regulatory framework, whereas the parties in “blue block” (the three centre-right parties in the government coalition together with the supporting Danish People’s Party) were more in favour of reducing the PSM funding and giving the private media sector more space, for instance by outsourcing some PSM functions to commercial companies. Neither of the two groups though answered unanimously. Thus, based upon the answers to the questionnaire, it did not seem unlikely that an agreement could be reached between parties across the divide between the two groups of political parties.

A quite different picture emerged, when answers to a handful of sub-questions across the same questionnaire were gathered and adjusted into four more policy formulated statements running parallel to those formulated by the Minister of Finance two years earlier. As can be seen in table 2, the answers almost completely divided the nine party rapporteurs in two distinct groups.

The pattern of the answers in table 2 illustrate a shift in the political setup in the lead in phase to the media negotiations. Usually media politics in the parliament is considered “low politics” handled with considerable delegated autonomy by the parties’ special media rapporteurs. In the months leading up to the negotiations, however the rapporteurs of the governing coalition and the Danish People’s Party were placed on the side-line and held in tight rein by their party leaderships quite openly preparing significant interventions against DR. Probably as a reaction to that, the rapporteurs of the “red block” gathered in a more defensive position.

Table 2: Responses by the nine party rapporteurs to four statements concerning DR (Autumn 2017).

Four statements announced 2015-16 by influential actors	Response by the nine media rapporteurs	
	Agree	Disagree
1) DR is too dominant and inflicts damaging competition on private media.	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
2) Some of DRs radio and tv channels must be closed and its text news on the web stopped.	● ●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
3) DR should not offer content, which can be provided by private media.	● ● ●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
4) The license fee and DR’s funding should be reduced.	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Consequently, at the end of 2017, a few months before the negotiations were expected to begin, it looked as if the new media settlement would be agreed upon by a slight parliamentary majority consisting of only the three governing parties and the Danish People’s Party, which in spite of some mutual differences were

preparing for an offensive, announcing a comprehensive reform very much in line with the four themes of table 2. The five opposition parties were basically against making drastic changes, but apparently at the same time in doubt as to what position to take.

During the first months of 2018, the expectations changed once again, when the leading opposition party, the Social Democratic Party published its media policy proposals for the upcoming negotiations. Also, here the top political strategists had taken over the media policy rudder and placed the party's media rapporteur on the side-line. The proposal was in substance – if not in its tone – remarkably close to the government's line. It was now expected by most people that the media settlement would be concluded across the political divide in Parliament.

### **Negotiations surpassed by a pre-emptive strike.**

At this point in the process, everyone expected – according to the normal practice – the Minister of Culture to present the government's negotiating proposals. The minister had herself announced it would happen in early 2018 after a yearlong preparation with numerous meetings all over the country supported by a special web-service gathering questions and proposals from the interested citizens. These thorough preparations were now ended, but the minister's presentation of the government proposal was postponed again and again. The question, raised by many in the media political environment, was however if she and the media experienced civil staff of her ministry were losing control over the media policy arena.

#### *The Ministry of Finance takes over the reins.*

That turned out to be the case when the government mid-March presented a partial media agreement with the Danish People's Party. In charge of the presentation at a press meeting was the Minister of Finance (the successor to the one attacking DR in the 2015 interview, also him a Liberal), seconded by the group chair of the Danish People's Party with the Minister of Culture on the side-line. The partial agreement contained three main elements:

- The DR funding would be cut by 20 % over the years 2019-2023.
- The license fee would gradually in the period 2019-22 be replaced with tax financing of all PSM activities (besides DR also eight regional tv-stations and a contestable funding institution) over the state fiscal budget, instead of a special, independent fund as in the other Nordic countries.
- DR's content remit should be narrowed to "real public service", less competitive vis a vis the commercial media sector. At the press meeting the Minister of Culture explained it with a phrase often used in the following month: "DR will be transformed from a juggernaut into a slim modern lighthouse".

Quite apart from the fact that the partial agreement in terms of its content was an exceptionally hard blow to DR, the process leading up to it and its conditions were also very unusual. Key elements of PSM were taken out of their normal media political context and agreed upon behind closed curtains. The media rapporteurs of either side were kept at a distance hardly knowing what was going on. And further, the partial agreement was presented as a non-negotiable *fait accompli*. Acceptance was announced to be a pre-condition for participation in the upcoming negotiations on the broader media settlement.

*The government proposal.*

Three weeks later the Minister of Culture presented the government proposal. As one of her main goals the minister stressed the need of changing the balance between state and commercial media, i.e. "more market, less state". Besides incorporating the elements from the March partial agreement, it contained additional suggestions of which only a few will be mentioned here:

- Closure of two out of DR's six tv channels.
- The sale of 40% of the shares in the second Danish PSM company, the state owned and fully commercially financed TV 2.
- Establishment of a new tv-channel and a new radio-channel, both financed by tax and allocated to private companies after a public tender.
- Increased funding of the "Public Service-Fund" (contestable funding) from € 4 million to 30 million a year.

Although the proposal certainly contained surprising elements, they almost drowned in speculation about the impending tactical game.

**The media negotiations.**

Looking back over the nine previous negotiations on media settlements renewals since 1991 they have been concluded after an average of six sessions in the group of the parties' media rapporteurs. Negotiations have normally taken the form of an elimination process, where political parties gradually being marginalised and displeased with the prospects for an agreement have left the negotiation table. Those staying have progressively solved disagreements through compromises and a number of barter on a draft text (initially based on a government proposal) to a settlement ongoingly edited in the intervals between the meetings by the civil servants assisting the minister and participating in the meetings. This time it was quite different.

*Two months of "phoney war".*

A week after the presentation of the government proposals, the Minister of Culture and the media rapporteurs gathered for their first negotiation meeting. Although the pre-condition for participation (i.e. acceptance of the March agreement) had been heavily criticised by the opposition parties, they all joined the meeting even though none of them had accepted the clause.

During the first 10 meetings in the following two month nothing really happened. According to the interviewed rapporteurs no negotiations took place, and no one left the table. Several drafts to a settlement text were prepared by the minister's staff but were not discussed. The meetings resembled most of all a non-committal study group, as a couple of the rapporteurs recalled it.

The explanation to the "phoney war" was, that the policy-making in reality did not take place in the circle of the Minister of Culture and the parties' rapporteurs. It had moved right to the top of the three large parties, primarily taken place between the governing Liberal Party and the leader of the opposition, the

---

Social Democrats with the Danish People's Party in the background. The negotiations concerned the conditions for the Social Democrats to join the media settlement proposed by the government. The Social Democrats were willing to accept the main elements of the government line, also the 20% cuts (roughly € 100 million) of the DR funding, but wanted this sum, or a considerable part of it, re-circled back to other PSM purposes, for instance the Public Service-Fund. However, they demanded that DR, as an exception from the normal rules of the Fund, should be allowed to apply for funding within this specific sum of recycled funds. An idea which was totally rejected by the Danish People's Party. The negotiations between the three parties went on and off for several weeks. An obvious question, of course, was why the Social Democrats apparently were willing to conclude a settlement, which was fundamental opposed to the party's usual media policy. The answer was twofold.

The first one was pure tactics or rather a longer, strategic perspective. A general election was expected to take place within a year and the prospects for a new, Social Democratic-led government were promising. Everyone expected a new government being met with expectations and demands for a costly roll-back of numerous reforms and budget cuts implemented by the previous, liberal government. According to the so called "settlement norm" of the Danish Parliament (see Appendix 1) such claims could be avoided by joining binding political settlements with the outgoing government before the election covering policy areas conceived by the Social Democrats to have relative low priority. Media/PSM politics apparently belonging to that category.

The other, highly controversial reason mentioned was that the Social Democratic leadership was annoyed with what they perceived as a basically negative, critical line in media coverage of the party, especially by DR. This was far from being a special Social Democratic position. The same opinion was found among the leaders of other parties regarding the critical attitudes of media in relation to government power. As is known in other countries, both mature and weak democracies, this has been countered by governments and political parties establishing their own media outlets and/or by impelling the journalistic line of established media. Publicly owned PSM media are particularly vulnerable in this regard.

During this long period of secret negotiations, the other four parties in "red block" hoped the Social Democrats would stay out of a media agreement with the government. Not only because they were all basically against the government proposal. But primarily because a settlement concluded by a parliamentary majority (the parties in "blue block" and the Social Democrats) according to the "settlement norm" (see appendix 1) would probably survive a change of government after a general election. That would be the case, if the same group of parties still held a majority in the new parliament, independently of which party taking office. And even worse, political parties not participating in such a settlement would find themselves without any influence on media politics in the five-year period of the settlement. Only the parties behind the settlement would take part in the follow-up meetings on its implementation and eventual adjustments.

For some of the four parties in "red block" it was very much like a "Prisoner's dilemma" situation. They were utterly against accepting the government's proposals, but should they nevertheless join a settlement to secure some (probably only marginal) future influence? Or should they stick to their media political beliefs and refuse to join the settlement with the consequence of being marginalised? The rapporteur of the Socialist People's Party revealed that his party would follow the Social Democrats if they decided to participate in the government's media settlement.

*The endgame toward the final settlement.*

With the Social Democrats still in doubt whether to join or not, the Minister of Culture finally, in mid-June gave the parties in the "red block" an ultimatum: either join a settlement on the condition given or leave the negotiations. Three parties left immediately, although still being in doubt of the tactical cleverness of the decision. Conversely, the Social Democrats and the Socialist People's Party showed up to negotiations the day after the expiry of the minister's deadline without having accepted the minister's conditions.

This became the end of the long stalemate. The two opposition representatives left the meeting after an hour or so. Whether it was on their own volition or they were asked to leave is still an open question. During the following week the remaining four parties in the "blue block" held very difficult negotiations, because the Danish People's Party – notorious for their stubbornness in such situations – in return for securing a majority behind the government proposal, won acceptance to several of their demands, of which some were rather far out. The media settlement was concluded by the "blue block" late at night June 29-30.

**The 2018 media settlement and the following DR Public Service-contract.**

The media settlement – and the subsequent Public Service-contract between the Ministry of Culture and the DR-board – was in several ways a break with the past. Both in substance and in the process leading up to it. The final result was, however, far more complex - close to being contradictory - than one would have expected from the initial process. As will be further discussed below, this may be understood better by relating it to the interplay of the decisionmakers' different positioning - both from actor to actor and at different times - on the scale between "emotions" and "reason"

*A changed balance between state and market?*

The settlement did result in a shift of the balance between state and market, however not as clear cut as one would have expected from a liberal government. The unusual high degree of "state involvement" in the Danish media market (see appendix 2) was certainly reduced by the significant 20% cut in the DR funding, the requirement to outsource more of its content production and to close two of its six tv-channels. In the longer perspective, the injunction on DR to focus its content remit to programming not provided by the commercial media sector might be more serious, as the aim allegedly was to give DR a less prominent position (market share and reach) in the Danish media consumption.

However, most of the other components pointed in a direction of more state intervention in the market, both concerning the allocation of more government subsidies and regulatory control, that usually follows.

- The government's plan to partly privatize TV 2 and reduce the state funding of other, smaller PSM institutions would have reduced the state involvement, but was abandoned because of resistance from the Danish People's Party.
- The creation of two new, privately run flow channels (radio and tv), regulated and financed by the state (tax) in combination with the right to income from advertising in an ad-market already under severe pressure from global tech. giants.
- The Public Service-fund was increased – though not as much as the government had proposed – with a number of additional regulations for instance a new clause demanding free admittance (i.e. no pay walls) to content funded by the Fund after a certain closed period.

- Establishment of a new streaming App managed by DR gathering children- and youth content produced by DR itself and by commercial companies, mandatory for content produced with support from the “Public Service-Fund”.
- Also, the introduction of tax funding over the state fiscal budget as a substitute for the direct transferred license fee can be seen as a step from civil society to “more state”.

One may wonder why a liberal government, eager to limit public engagement in the market and proudly announcing it as an overarching goal, ends up with continuing many years of incremental expansion of state involvement. Apart from pure inertia, one of the explanations might be that legislators apparently are bearers of a built-in urge to do something whether it’s needed or not. Or as one of the interviewed rapporteurs expressed it during an interview: “We politicians are expected, to leave our fingerprints on legislation, also when there is no obvious reason for change”. Within the framework of the existing regulatory setup as for instance the existing PSM-system, it can however, simply put, only be done by turning either of two, rather crude regulatory control levers: by turning up or down the tap for funds or by making more rules with subsequent (bureaucratic) control of compliance.

#### *The Public Service-contract – beyond reason.*

The Public Service-contract (i.e. a performance contract), which was concluded between the Ministry of Culture and the DR Board in September 2018 as a follow up of the media settlement, exemplifies some of the difficulties using the rule-control lever. Such contracts – according to the above mentioned “settlement norm” unitedly decided only by the parties behind the media settlement – covering the period of a media settlement which have existed since 2002, are not contracts between two equal parties in the normal sense of the term. Rather the “contract” is a document implementing the rulings of the political settlement into more detailed clauses stipulating what DR is supposed to do and/or obtain during its four or five years of duration.

The development of the more and more detailed regulation on the PS-contracts since 2002 can roughly be illustrated by the raising trend in the total number of injunctions in the texts formulated by stating that “DR must ...” in sentences as for instance: “*In its Public Service offerings, DR must strive for quality*”, “*On radio DR must offer a high proportion of Danish music at least 48% annually*” and “*DR must enrich Danish cultural life with original content*” (underlining by this author). From 32 of such “DR must”s in the 2002 contract the number of these ministerial “orders” to DR grew, adding layer by layer, to 76 in 2006, to 122 in 2010 and topped in 2015 at 136, amounting to more than a quadrupling over four Public Service-contracts.

Without going into the discussion about the effect of performance contracts in general, it is hardly too much to say that '(key) performance indicators' of that kind and number are of dubious value as a steering tool. Many of them are very unclear and impossible to measure and control. Others, such as the 'Danish music percentage' at 48% (raised from 43% in the previous contract) may well be controllable but are quite absurd in a radio context.

During the interviews, several of the rapporteurs expressed their frustration over the apparent unwillingness of DR to comply with the PS contracts provisions and pointed to that as a major reason why they

previously had stated ever more detailed rules and also now would continue to do so. The rapporteurs mentioned however additional reasons for incorporating such demands into the contract. They could (also) on specific issues act as a “receipt” to the lobbyists documenting that they had been heard, and more generally carefully formulated demands could – especially if they led to public debate – “send a signal” of ideological or normative value to their constituencies. Considerations of this nature were probably behind the two injunctions in the 2018 contract, which attracted the most public attention, also abroad:

- “DR can provide text-based news on the Internet, but must refrain from long, in-depth articles”. This injunction, quite unusual in a journalistic context, was an attempt to meet the previously mentioned request of the trade organisation “Danish Media” for a ban on DR’s text-based news on the Internet. The formulation was a compromise because the three governing parties were against any restrictions whereas Danish People’s Party wanted a total ban.
- “It must be clear in DR’s programming and platforms that our society is based on democracy and has its root in the Christian cultural heritage”. It was here “Christian cultural heritage” that provoked criticism. Not so much because of the substance, as church and religion also were mentioned in previous contracts, but because its repetition five times in the contract’s text was perceived as deliberate identity politics.

The pure signaling purpose of both formulations can be seen by the fact that they did not really matter. The Minister of Culture subsequently indicated that the two clauses mentioned were not demands she would pursue eagerly. Also, the DR Director General took these formulations quite relaxed and openly stated that they would not lead to changes in the DR’s program policy. In spite of that, few were in doubts that the Public Service-contract had developed into a new battleground for the political control over DR.

The contract institution has here been commented rather detailed because it – as a lead in the next section – illustrates the complexities of policy formation and subsequent implementation

### **In the twilight between emotions and reason.**

In the introduction to this paper it was asked to what extent the political decisions during the media negotiations were based on emotions and reason respectively. Not because the one is better than the other but for the reason that the interrelationship is crucial, whether they mutually are in conflict or harmony.

#### *Emotions and attitudes – with weak political grounding.*

Beginning at the *emotion* end of the span, the above assessment shows that feelings in the form of anger and revenge certainly were in play among leading members of several parties. It is however a much too narrow an understanding of the role of emotions, as they play a key role in all modern political communication, especially in relation to the electorate. Also, while emotions in the form of feelings often can be personal and somewhat erratic, they appear more permanent and broadly based in the political parties’ *basic positions* and *attitudes*. In this form they function as a kind of template in decision making, providing initial guidance to the rapporteurs during the negotiations.

---

A similar sorting mechanism appeared in the interviews with the rapporteurs when it came to their reading of reports (Ministry of Culture , 2016-17) (Nielsen, R.K, Fletcher, R., Sehl, A., Levy, D., 2016) and other factual material prepared to them before and during the negotiation process. "I - or our assistants in the party secretariat - have read these reports. The pieces of text that correspond to the party's basic position were duly noted. The rest went into the trash can", was the honest reply given by one of rapporteurs and several of his colleagues revealed the same attitude-determined differentiation in their reading. That is probably one of the reasons why the rather large factual based material given to the rapporteurs describing the significant changes in the market conditions of media policy – not at least the challenges from the international tech.giants – left very few traces in the media settlement.

Finally, emotions understood as comprehensive, systematically coherent political values in the form of *ideology* were largely absent in the negotiations. Slogans like "less state - more market", "protection of Danish culture and language" was often used, but were largely overshadowed by the game of making restrictions on DR and as earlier mentioned, the long list of additional elements and technical amendments.

*Bounded, fractional rationality.*

The skepticism found in the literature regarding the theoretical rational goals-means-outcome decision models was fully confirmed in the study. First, the overall goals were very unclear, close to non-existent. Cultural-political attitudes regarding the growing or diminishing future societal role of the Danish PSM were certainly at play but were never operationalized into specific objectives for the negotiations and consciously paired with the means chosen. Rather, the inertia ruled along the lines of: we have had PSM for almost 100 years, so we should probably, one way or the other, continue with that in the years to come. Besides that, there was – in spite of the afore mentioned factual based material presented to parties – limited insight in the conditions and challenges of the media market and because of that also only vague and unrealistic expectations to the effect of the various regulating ingredients in the political settlement.

However, this is not to claim that the participating politicians didn't act rationally at all, it was though only in bounded areas. For instance, with regard to the interventions against the DR, a clear target and selected means had been set, which with probability would fulfill the objectives: to diminish the future role of DR. The same fractional rationality could be found on the politicians' home field, so to speak, where the sophisticated tactical games were played. Here – for instance in relation to the "settlement norm" – they operated as chess players calculating in depth the consequences of any movement of the pieces on the board.

**Concluding remarks.**

In summary it can be said that both "emotions" and "reason" were in play during the negotiation process, but in a rudimentary form and separated from each other, as if they belonged to two different worlds. The politicians playing the lead roles, were not able – or didn't want – to take upon them the special responsibility, mentioned by Max Weber, for uniting emotions ("warmth and passion") and reason ("cool sense of proportion") regarded as a distinctive feature of the political profession.



This neglect is probably the most significant explanation of the unusual Danish 2018 media settlement. Much more than mere populism and anger in some parties or neo-liberal attitudes in others. Should that line be continued in Denmark and also be found in other European countries, it constitutes a vulnerability to the future role of PSM much more challenging than the invasive new tech.- and streaming platforms.

As a postscript one could add, that this analysis of the Danish media settlement also raises questions to the way academia relates to policy formation, both as participating actors in expert commissions writing factual reports and giving advice and in the role as cool, neutral observers operating at an analytical distance. How do we relate to a substance, which like Public Service Media should be understood through reason - and yet justified by emotions?

### Epilogue

A year after the media agreement had been concluded, a general election brought down the Liberal led government and a new minority government led by the Social Democratic party took office on June 27 with support from the center-left parties. One of the points in the "document of understanding" forming the basis of the alliance, was a cancelation of the 2018 media agreement and an announcement, that the government would invite all parties to deliberations in order to "strengthen Danish public service". Apparently not an urgent matter, because these meetings have so far (June 2020) not begun.

### References:

- Danish Agency for Culture: Reports on Media Development in Denmark, Yearly reports 2014-2019. [https://mediernesudvikling.slks.dk/fileadmin/user\\_upload/dokumenter/medier/Mediernes\\_udvikling/2019/Overblik\\_og\\_perspektivering/PDF-filer\\_Overblik\\_og\\_perspektivering/Summary\\_Discourse\\_2019.pdf](https://mediernesudvikling.slks.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumenter/medier/Mediernes_udvikling/2019/Overblik_og_perspektivering/PDF-filer_Overblik_og_perspektivering/Summary_Discourse_2019.pdf)
- Kahnemann, Daniel (2011): Thinking slow and fast. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).
- Lasswell, Harold D. (1971): A pre-view of policy sciences. (N.Y. American Elsevier Pub., 1971)
- Lindblom, Charles E. (1959): "The Science of Muddling Through" Public Administration Review, Vol. 19, No. 2. 1959.
- Ministry of Culture (2016-17). Reports from three expert groups:
  - A. Public Service in the coming 10 years (Public service i de næste 10 år). Ministry of Culture 2016
  - B. The Globalisation of the Danish Media Business (Globaliseringen af den danske mediebranche) Ministry of Culture 2017
  - C. The future Danish content production, (Fremtidens danske indholdsproduktion). Ministry of Culture 2017.
- Nielsen, R.K, Fletcher, R., Sehl, A., Levy,D.(2016), Analysis of the Relation Between and Impact of Public Service Media and Private Media (The Reuters Institute for Study of Journalism (RISJ) University of Oxford) . Prepared for the Danish Ministry of Culture as part of the report 'Public Service in the coming 10 years' (Ministry of Culture 2016-17, A). <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/Analysis%2520of%2520the%2520Relation%2520Between%2520and%2520Impact%2520of%2520Public%2520Service%2520Media%2520and%2520Private%2520Media.pdf>
- Nissen, Christian S. (2015): "Digitization and Public Service Media: What Service for Which Public?" in Public Service Media in Europe. A Comparative Approach, eds. Karen Arriaza Ibarra et al. pp. 89-107. (Routledge 2015).

- Nissen, Christian S. (2016) "Working with scenarios of future Public Service Media - a tool for political decision making?". Paper to the RIPE 2016 conference:  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/508d6291e4b01df297a13497/t/5858151d29687f89dc95cc03/1482167594673/RIPE%402016+working+paper+NISSEN.pdf>
- Nissen, Christian S. (2020): Politik mellem følelser og fornuft – Spillet om danske mediers fremtid (Politics between Emotions and Reason - The Game of the Future of Danish Media). (Gyldendal. 2020)
- Syvertsen, Trine; Enli, Gunn, Mjøs, Ole J; and Moe, Halvard. The Media Welfare State, Nordic Media in the Digital Era. (The University of Michigan Press 2014).
- Weber, Max (1919/46): Politics as a Vocation" ("Politik als Beruf" 1919). Eds. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. (Oxford University Press, 1946)

### **Appendix 1: The Danish parliament, its decision-making culture and the "Settlement norm".**

For more than a hundred years, Denmark has had governments based on majority coalitions or minority governments, which - either through long term deals or on a case-by-case basis – have had to seek support from other parties in parliament to secure a majority. This explains why a special consensus culture of decision-making has developed, based on widespread use of compromises and rather broad political settlements. Today approx. 80% of all legislation is adopted by 70-90% of the 179 MPs., in 2018 grouped in 9 parties.

Over the years a set of informal rules, the so called "*settlement norm*", have evolved establishing the principles for concluding and complying with parliamentary settlements. Very briefly they are as follows.

To secure a majority vote in parliament prior to the presentation of legislative proposals, typically, a settlement on the content of the proposal is concluded between political parties behind a minority government and opposition parties, which together constitute a majority. The text of the settlement is binding for all parties giving each of them a veto right, either for a given period or without specific expiry date. If, however, a general election leads to a new composition of parliament, where there is no longer a majority behind the settlement, it is repealed.

As long as a settlement is in force, all negotiations for any amendment to the legislation in question and/or the settlement itself will be made exclusively between the parties behind it, leaving all other parties outside the door without influence and access to the minutes of meetings and other documents related to the settlement. This exclusivity of the norm constitutes a very strong motivation to join a settlement even if a party is basically against its content.

### **Appendix 2: The Danish PSM system (up until the 2018 media settlement)**

Thirty years after the abolition of the Public Service monopoly, the publicly owned (and/or financed) radio- and television companies still have an unusual strong position counting for approximately 60% of television viewing (divided roughly equally between DR and TV 2) and 75% of radio listening (from DR Radio alone) in the Danish media market. Also, the Danish television advertising market is dominated by one of the public service companies, TV 2, with about 60% of the total television advertising revenue.

- **DR** (the Danish Broadcasting Corporation) is the "old public broadcaster" established in 1925. Today it runs 6 television channels, 3 FM- and 4 DAB (only) radio channels together with an extensive web and "new media" activity. DR is fully license fee funded.

- **TV 2** was established in 1988 at the time of the abolition of DR's broadcast monopoly. It's a state-owned limited company purely commercially funded through advertisement and subscription. Of TV 2's 6 tv channels, only the main channel has public service obligations.
- **8 regional TV stations** cooperating with TV 2, which provides "windows" on its main channel for 8 regional news broadcasts. The 8 regional stations also have their own regional 24h TV channels and webservices. They are eight individual, public institutions each financed by license fee.
- **Radio 24/7** is a privately owned, yet fully license fee funded talk radio working on an eight-year concession with the government.