

Attack on the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation False Claims and Mistaken Motivations

Abstract

Following his appointment as Israel's Communications Minister, Dr. Shlomo Karhi has repeatedly commented that "the public should not finance a particular channel" and that "there is no need for public broadcasting."¹ He also made various claims concerning the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, suggesting that it should be closed and asserting that "public broadcasting is improper."² The Legislative Memorandum: Communications Law (Broadcasts)³ published by the Ministry of Communications on 24 July 2023 should also be understood against the background of these statements. The legislative memorandum proposes significant changes in the media market in Israel, and relates both to commercial media bodies and to the public media bodies.

The declaration of intent of Israel's 37th Government concerning public broadcasting, as reflected in the Minister's comments and the legislative memorandum, invite an in-depth discussion on the role of public broadcasting in a democratic society and its significance in the contexts of competition, pluralism and diversity, criticism, political and economic independence, and technological innovation. In light of the importance of public broadcasting in democratic countries, and its longstanding presence in Israel, this document by Zulat – Equality and Human Rights will concentrate on public broadcasting and will seek to analyze the broad perception of the Ministry of Communications concerning the role of public broadcasting.

This analysis will be based on the identification of basic errors in the various proposals raised by the Ministry of Communications to close and/or restrict the activities of the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation Kan (hereinafter – "the Broadcasting Corporation") as presented over recent months. The document identifies five key claims embodied in the proposals of the Ministry and the Minister and shows that these are inconsistent with

¹ TOI Staff, [New Communications Minister Says "No Place" for Public Broadcasting in Israel](#), *The Times of Israel*, 9 January 2023.

² ICE Editorial, [Karhi Declares War on Corporation: "No Diversity, It's a Failure,"](#) ICE, 9 January 2023 (Hebrew).

³ [Legislative Memorandum: Communications Law \(Broadcasts\), 5783-2023](#), *Government Legislation Site*, 24 July 2023 (Hebrew).

research-based and empirical knowledge regarding the place of public broadcasting in the media market, in general, and the functioning of public broadcasting in Israel, in particular.

The document examines the following aspects in depth:

False Claim #1: Closing the Broadcasting Corporation will create commercial competition in the media market and foster diversity and pluralism

One of the main – but false – claims raised by the Ministry of Communications is that closing the Broadcasting Corporation, or weakening it by transferring part of its budget to other production bodies, will enhance competition between commercial media bodies and lead to the opening and diversification of the media market on the basis of equality between media bodies.

In practice, studies show that cutting the budgets and freedom of public broadcasting bodies impairs pluralism in the market of opinions heard in society. Unlike public broadcasting, commercial media outlets are obliged to prioritize the economic interests of their owners and advertisers. Accordingly, public broadcasting offers content that is more diverse and balanced and less sensationalist, providing its viewing public with more reliable information.

False claim #2: The Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation does not include representation of diverse voices, and accordingly a committee should be established to define and inspect diversity in content and staff

The Ministry of Communications claims that public broadcasting in Israel fails to reflect or to appeal to diverse sections of the population. Diversity in content and in the workforce is one of the core values of public broadcasting in general (as defined by the European Broadcasting Union – EBU) and of the public broadcasting in Israel, in particular. This value was defined explicitly in the original Broadcasting Authority Law as one to which public broadcasting is committed, and it is advanced in practical terms under the new Public Broadcasting Law, both in terms of representation and employment. The possibility to present on screen, employ, and serve people from different groups, and to create content intended for diverse groups among the public and for viewers who are not favored by advertisers on the commercial channels, is one of the goals and strengths of public broadcasting in Israel.

False claim #3: There is a need for tighter regulation (and politicization) of public broadcasting

The Communications Minister advocates the formation of a committee to define criteria for screening employees and content in public broadcasting, which he argues is subject to inadequate regulation. Such a committee would essentially give politicians free reign to appoint their associates and subordinates. The law explicitly states that "a person shall not be appointed to or serve on the Council who has a personal or commercial affinity to a government minister, is engaged in political or party political activity or was engaged in political or party political activity during the five years preceding the date of presentation of candidacy; for this purpose, participation in a demonstration or conference of a political character, or expression a public position on political matters, shall not in themselves be regarded as political activity" (section 10 of the law).⁴ The legislator's objective was to create a barrier between public broadcasting and politicians and their servants. Accordingly, establishing committees that will define criteria for the operation of the Broadcasting Corporation is tantamount to neutralizing the Corporation's Council as defined in law. Such a step will grant politicians the power to determine content and employment in the Broadcasting Corporation, contrary to the legislator's intention and the public interest.

False claim #4: A redivision of the existing broadcasting channels in Israel will benefit the media market

As part of the Ministry of Communication's plan, which is riddled with contradictions, Minister Karhi has announced the opening up of national radio broadcasting frequencies to competition in the form of additional private/commercial stations. This confiscation of frequencies is tantamount to the closure of the stations that broadcast on national frequencies in the framework of public broadcasting. In other comments on the subject, the Communications Minister claimed, without offering any substantiation or proper explanation, that it is possible to reduce the quantity of frequencies attached to a national broadcasting station and thereby open additional stations without harming existing ones. The contradictory messages that continue to be conveyed by the Ministry of Communications on this subject create a vague and unclear framework for discussion of both technical and content-related aspects. The law regarding radio stations operated by

⁴ [Public Broadcasting in Israel Law, 5774-2014](#) (Hebrew).

the Broadcasting Corporation (Amendment No. 8, 5778-2018) guarantees the operation of radio stations in a foreign language and of the Moreshet station for the Haredi population. The comments from sources in the Ministry of Communications concerning changes in the national deployment of public broadcasting channels, and their possible confiscation for commercial broadcasting, mean that stations that whose existence is not guaranteed in the above-mentioned law face the danger of closure, dismissal of workers, and the elimination of cultural and local content that appeals to diverse populations in Israeli society on every day of the week and at all hours of day.

Discussions about policy changes concerning radio broadcasts in Israel may mark a turning point in the adoption of advanced communications technologies in the Israeli media market. In Israel, where many radio frequencies are used by military and security bodies, technological development in this context is particularly important. Action to adopt digital radio in Israel (in contrast to the ongoing allocation of the few frequencies available on the national level) will constitute an important and significant step forward in opening up the media market to additional commercial players, as the Communications Minister wishes, while preserving public radio activities that appeal to diverse groups within Israeli society.

False claim #5: The budgetary sources for public broadcasting should be reduced and should be linked to government budgeting decisions

The Communications Minister has called for possible cuts to the funding and budgeting of public radio and television broadcasts in Israel. As part of his wide-ranging comments, he has claimed that one of the steps that will be taken immediately by the Ministry of Communications will be the prohibition of the sale of advertisements and sponsorship in public radio broadcasts. In the long term, he advocates restrictions on government funding for public broadcasting as a whole.

Regarding the dependence of public broadcasting on the political arena, the introductory comments to the Public Broadcasting Corporation Law emphasize that the method of funding the Corporation's broadcasts constitutes an essential condition for its independence, and that this independence is vital in order to meet its public mission to preserve democracy. Minister Karhi's proposed steps are directly opposed to the substantive need to protect the independent budgetary sources of public broadcasting in

Israel and to ensure a clearer separation between the state budget, the funding of the Broadcasting Corporation, and the determination of content through budgetary committees.

In the context of the five claims discussed above, the official and unofficial steps proposed by Minister Karhi should be understood as part of various moves in Israel over recent years intended to curtail the strength of independent critical bodies such as the media. Responsible use of public funds means preserving a strong and independent public broadcasting presence, not its politicization and subjugation to content and staffing committees that have a governmental orientation. Strong public broadcasting serves the public interest, not the interests of political or commercial bodies. It must continue to promote technological innovation, high journalistic standards, and diverse and appropriate representation in content and staffing.

Introduction

Public broadcasting is a media modality that also embodies a social worldview. This worldview regards media broadcasts as a public resource whose allocation should aim, among other objectives, to preserve free public access to high-quality and reliable content, information, and entertainment. Diverse models exist for such broadcasts, but in general it can be stated that public broadcasting (in contrast to commercial or state broadcasting) is funded by the public and produced for the public. In the past, the limited number of free broadcasting frequencies and channels required the receipt of a broadcasting franchise from the state, today digital developments allow broadcasting and media consumption across a wider range of platforms.⁵

This reality raises a question mark regarding the need for public broadcasting today. Much criticism around the world centers around the question of technological innovation as a tool for casting doubt on the need for public broadcasting. Information and content are no longer rare and/or limited in scope, as in the past, and are now provided by private bodies in what ostensibly may seem to be a comprehensive and relatively accessible

⁵ O'Neill, B. O, [A Future for Public Service Television: Content and Platforms in a Digital World. A Report on the Future of Public Service Television in the UK in the 21st Century](#), Appendix Three: Public Service Broadcasting, Public Value, and Public Goods. In: D. Puttnam, pp. 171-174 (2016).

manner.⁶ However, such claims ignore criticism concerning the character of digital and online media platforms that broadcast in the hybrid media market. Reducing the question of the need for public broadcasting solely to technical aspects ignores the fact that the opening of platforms for broadcasting and the dissemination of information in online environments has undermined the credibility of the information conveyed, raised questions concerning its quality, and led it to acquire a more extreme, superficial, and offensive character than in the past.⁷

As these processes continue, the principal purpose of public broadcasting is becoming even clearer today: to serve as a significant and objective public institution responsible for preserving social cohesion and integration, for halting the decline in values, and for offering an accessible, high-quality, and critical alternative to commercial and state broadcasting while addressing the needs of diverse population groups.⁸ Significant and central public broadcasting bodies continue to operate today in most of the European countries, the best known of which is the BBC. Although the Kan Broadcasting Corporation has only been in operation for a few years, it is regarded as a high-quality and up-to-date public media body with an impressive digital presence.

The Kan Broadcasting Corporation has its roots in the Israel Broadcasting Authority (IBA). In their book *The In/Outsiders*,⁹ Dan Caspi and Yehiel Limor suggested that from its inception the IBA adopted the ethos of European public broadcasting and of the BBC as a model, including the value of diversity, which was worded as the goal of representing all parts of Israeli society. Following the introduction of commercial television stations in Israel (in the early 1990s), and as corruption, weak management, and strong political pressure weakened the IBA's legitimacy among the Israeli public,¹⁰ that IBA gradually lost most of its viewers across its channels.¹¹ In 2014, the Israeli government passed a new public

⁶ Mazzoli, E. M., "Online Content Governance: Towards a Framework for Analysis for Prominence and Discoverability," *Journal of Digital Media & Policy*, 11(3), 301-319 (2020).

⁷ Lotan, G., [Israel, Gaza, War & Data: Social Networks and the Art of Personalizing Propaganda](#), *Huffington Post* (7 August 2014); Pariser, E., *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You*, Penguin UK (2011); Stroud, N.J., [Polarization and Partisan Selective Exposure](#), *Journal of Communication*, 60(3), 556-576 (2010); Zelenkauskaitė, A. & Niezgoda, B., ["Stop Kremlin Trolls:" Ideological Trolling as Calling Out, Rebuttal, and Reactions on Online News Portal Commenting](#), *First Monday* 22(5) (2017).

⁸ Gardner, S., [Public Broadcasting: Its Past and Its Future](#), Knight Foundation (2017).

⁹ Caspi, D. and Limor, Y., *The In/Outsiders: The Mass Media in Israel*, Hampton Press (1999).

¹⁰ Caspi, D., *Due to Technical Difficulties: The Fall of the Israel Broadcasting Authority*, Tzivonim (2006).

¹¹ Caspi, D., [On Media and Politics: Between Enlightened Authority and Social Responsibility](#), *Israel Affairs*, 11(1), pp. 23-38 (2005).

broadcasting law that announced the closure of the IBA and the establishment of a new public media corporation. The Landes Committee, which recommended these changes, defined quality and providing visibility for a broad range of opinions and local cultures as the main objectives of the new Israeli public broadcasting corporation.¹²

The new Israeli public broadcasting corporation, Kan, was established in 2015, against the background of political pressure and a fierce struggle for legitimacy.¹³ The Broadcasting Corporation disseminates its content (in-house and external productions) both in the form of regular programs according to a broadcasting schedule and in digital form in podcasts, online series, and short, focused internet content. The Broadcasting Corporation is regarded as one of the public media bodies on the global level that makes the most extensive use of digital media, as well as media channels from the previous generation (three television channels and eight radio stations); this is accompanied by an extensive online presence, including an official website, social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Spotify, and Instagram), and applications for vehicles and cell phones.¹⁴ The establishment and design of these platforms became the subject of public debate as opposing political forces sought to shape the new statutory body in their own image. One of the main points of disagreement in this debate concerned diversity in terms of production staff and content and in social, political, and cultural orientations.¹⁵ These ongoing debates continue to this day, as reflected in the declarations of the current Communications Minister, and call for a deeper understanding of the various contexts raised by his comments.

Claims raised by the Communications Minister regarding public broadcasting activities in Israel

False Claim #1: Closing the Broadcasting Corporation will create commercial competition in the media market and foster diversity and pluralism

¹² [Report of the Committee to Examine the Future Format for Public Broadcasting in Israel](#), Landes Committee (2014) (Hebrew).

¹³ Klein-Shagrir, O., [Digital First! Reinventing Israeli PSB and Manufacturing Legitimacy Online](#), *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture*, 8(16), pp. 74–87 (2019).

¹⁴ Dorot, R., [Media Influence Matrix: Israel](#). CEU Center for Media, Data and Society (2020)

¹⁵ Klein-Shagrir, O., [Digital First! Reinventing Israeli PSB and Manufacturing Legitimacy Online](#), *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture*, 8(16), 74–87 (2019).

One of the main – and false – claims raised by the Ministry of Communications is that closing the Broadcasting Corporation, or weakening it by transferring part of its budget to other production bodies, will enhance competition between commercial media bodies and lead to the opening and diversification of the media market on the basis of equal competition between media bodies. Ministry representatives claim that the presence of the Corporation in the media market prevents fair competition and pluralism due to its character as a "strong" player that is not required to meet the rules of the game in the free market and is not subject to considerations of rating in the same manner as commercial channels in Israel.¹⁶

In practice, studies show that in democracies, public broadcasting channels tend to be freer of economic and political bias than privately-owned media and create a more diverse market of opinions. Indices indicating the presence of a diverse and pluralistic media market with significant funding and presence of public broadcasting have repeatedly been found to be associated with indices describing the resilience and stability of the democracy in which the market operates. Thus, the presence of public broadcasting channels in itself constitutes an essential tool for addressing the inherent failings of commercial media driven by profit and ratings; these channels ensure access and independence and mitigate against discrimination. Studies show that damage to public broadcasting leads to the narrowing of pluralism in the media market, impairs the ability of citizens to participate and engage in dialogue, and undermines the resilience of the democratic system.

In 2021 the EBU presented an empirical study¹⁷ indicating the presence of a close correlation between the level of funding for public broadcasting and the quality of democracy in a given country. The study was based on four comprehensive indices for democracy and media consumption encompassing 180 countries around the world. The findings showed that a reduction in funding for public media outlets did not create a broader and more pluralistic media market. On the contrary: reducing the funding and freedom of public media outlets impaired pluralism in the market of opinions heard in society. Unlike public broadcasting, and as noted above, commercial media outlets are obliged to prioritize the economic interests of their owners and advertisers, rather than the public interest. Accordingly, an increase in the number of private, commercial players in

¹⁶ TOI Staff, [Communications Minister Wants to Cut "Hundreds of millions" from Public Broadcaster](#), *The Times of Israel*, 14 January 2023.

¹⁷ EBU, [Democracy and Public Service Media](#), *Media Intelligence Service Report* (2021).

the media market does not lead to greater pluralism. In this instance, quantity does not ensure diversity or openness in the media market. Gardner's study¹⁸ expands on this conclusion, showing that public news broadcasts provide content that is more diverse and balanced and less sensationalist, equipping their viewing public with more reliable information. People who watch public channels are more likely to vote in elections than those who watch commercial broadcasts, and they hold more substantiated knowledge about internal and external policy affairs. This finding provides empirical evidence of the basic flaw in Minister Karhi's threats to cut the budgets of the new division of the Broadcasting Corporation, or even to close it entirely, on the grounds that this will create pluralism in the local news market.¹⁹ Studies show that in a media market that includes the presence of stable public broadcasting organizations, pluralism becomes a meaningful standard that filters through from the journalistic and reporting work in the public media channels to work in the commercial media outlets. Ethical, critical, and meaningful journalistic work in the public media channels encourages high professional standards.²⁰

Moreover, in addition to the global studies on the subject, it emerges that in the Israeli instance, it was actually the Likud representatives who highlighted the importance of the Broadcasting Corporation as a balancing and diversifying force in the Israeli media market. On 19 March 2023, during a discussion in the Knesset Economic Affairs Committee on the conclusions of the Landes Committee, as part of the deliberations in the Knesset concerning the opening of the Broadcasting Corporation, then-Communications Minister Gilad Arden argued: "In a country with a small and centralized economy such as ours, when the private media outlets are controlled by... those with economic and commercial interests; and we are a multicultural society, private-commercial broadcasting suffers from market failures. It does not usually seek to reflect minorities or weaker populations. So, in

¹⁸ Gardner, S., [Public Broadcasting: Its Past and Its Future](#), Knight Foundation (2017).

¹⁹ Tausig, S., ["We Are Not Working for Those with Power or Capital,"](#) *The Seventh Eye* (31 January 2023) (Hebrew); [Communications Min: Public Broadcasting Budget to Be Massively Reduced](#), *Jerusalem Post*, 15 January 2023; [Karhi: "I'll Cut Millions from the Corporation; CEO of Kan in Response: "This Means Closure,"](#) *Ynet*, 9 January 2023 (Hebrew).

²⁰ Thomass, B., Fidalgo, J., Grönvall, J., Karadimitriou, A., & Nord, L., *Public Service Media: Exploring the Influence of Strong Public Service Media on Democracy* (2022); Trappel, J., Tomaz, T., *Success and Failure in News Media Performance: Comparative Analysis*, *Media for Democracy Monitor*, University of Gothenburg, pp. 211–230 (2021).

such a country, it is even more important that there be strong, relevant, influential public broadcasting that truly reflects all parts of Israeli society.”²¹

During a Knesset debate on 26 May 2014, Minister Erdan added: “The State of Israel needs public broadcasting; I believe in the importance and necessity of public broadcasting... broadcasting that manifests and reflects the different layers of Israeli society – all of them; broadcasting that responds to the market failures of the commercial channels, which are driven solely by considerations of rating.”²²

In such a reality, closing the Corporation entirely, or partially restricting its operations, effectively serve to increase control over public broadcasting, rather than to encourage greater commercial competition and/or tangible pluralism in the media market.

False claim #2: The Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation does not include representation of diverse voices, and accordingly a committee should be established to define and inspect diversity in content and staff

A further false claim made by the Communications Minister is that the Broadcasting Corporation fails to represent diverse voices in content and that its workforce itself is not diverse. On the basis of this false claim, Minister Karhi declared that he will act to establish a committee to determine criteria for diversity²³ and effectively proposed a selection committee for employees based on their opinions and positions.

Claims of political bias in the Broadcasting Corporation were already made at the time it was established, before it had begun to broadcast. Right-wing politicians argued that there were not diverse voices in the Corporation and that its employees represent only the extreme left-wing side of the political map. As part of an organized political campaign, it was alleged that Corporation employees identify with the Breaking the Silence organization. In response, the Broadcasting Corporation posted humorous video clips showing the diverse identities of its employees: secular and religious, Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, residents of the periphery and of the center of Israel.²⁴

²¹ Discussion of the Economic Affairs Committee, [Conclusions of the Landes Committee – Report of the Minister Responsible for the Implementation of the Broadcasting Authority Law](#), 19 March 2014 (Hebrew).

²² Nineteenth Knesset, [Plenum Session 138](#) (26 May 2014) (Hebrew).

²³ Keller-Lynn, C., [Dumping Regulator, Media Overhaul May Open Press to Political Meddling, Experts Warn](#), *The Times of Israel*, 1 September 2023.

²⁴ Klein-Shagrir, O. [Digital first! Reinventing Israeli PSB and Manufacturing Legitimacy Online](#), *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture*, 8(16), pp. 74–87 (2019).

As noted, diversity in content and in the workforce is one of the core values of public broadcasting in general, and has been so in public broadcasting in Israel since its inception. This value was defined explicitly in the original Broadcasting Authority Law as one to which public broadcasting is committed, and the same is true under the new Public Broadcasting Law: "The content provided by the public broadcasting corporation shall be independent, shall address all the citizens and residents of the State of Israel, shall reflect and document the State of Israel's essence as a Jewish and democratic state, its values, and Jewish heritage, and shall give fair, egalitarian, and balanced expression to the range of views and opinions common among the public in Israel."²⁵

Public broadcasting is regarded as a key factor in democracy since it provides citizens with free and extensive access to unbiased, reliable, and diverse information. In democracies with strong public broadcasting, citizens from different groups have a stronger place in public discourse. The study from 2010 by Iyengar et al.,²⁶ among other studies, shows that free and well-funded public media outlets facilitate greater and more diverse access to hard-core news. Citizens who enjoy this access are better informed and play a more active role in the public and political domain. Moreover, the study shows that in countries with stable and free public broadcasting, citizens tend to be exposed to more diverse voices, and accordingly to trust each other more even in situations of political disagreement.

Empirical studies in the field, such as that by Castro-Herrero, Nir, and Skovsgaard from 2018 and that by Thomass et al. from 2022,²⁷ have shown that public broadcasting permits political pluralism in democracies regardless of the character of the leading party; this finding is closely related to the exposure of citizens to voices from the opposing political side to their own position. This association is not dependent on the level of political interest of the center, showing that in countries with stable and strong public broadcasting, both

²⁵ [Public Broadcasting in Israel Law, 5774-2014](#) (Hebrew).

²⁶ Iyengar, S., Curran, J., Lund, A. B., Salovaara-Moring, I., Hahn, K. S., & Coen, S. "Cross-national Versus Individual-Level Differences in Political Information: A Media Systems Perspective," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 20(3), pp. 291-309 (2010); Strömbäck, J. "Does Public Service TV and the Intensity of the Political Information Environment Matter?" *Journalism Studies*, 18(11), pp. 1415-1432 (2017).

²⁷ Castro-Herrero, L., Nir, L., & Skovsgaard, M. "Bridging Gaps in Cross-cutting Media Exposure: The Role of Public Service Broadcasting," *Political Communication*, 35(4), 542-565 (2018); Thomass, B., Fidalgo, J., Grönvall, J., Karadimitriou, A., & Nord, L., "Public Service Media: Exploring the Influence of Strong Public Service Media on Democracy" (2022) in J. Trappel and T. Tomaz, *Success and Failure in News Media Performance*, The Media for Democracy Monitor (2021).

citizens with a strong interest in politics and those with little interest are indeed exposed to a greater range of voices and are significantly more inclined to trust each other.

In incomplete comments made during various interviews,²⁸ the Communications Minister suggested two solutions that he argued would enhance diversity in the Israeli media in general and in the Broadcasting Corporation in particular. The first proposes opening the broadcasting market to as many broadcasting bodies and channels as possible; the second proposes to establish a committee under the Minister's auspices to supervise the implementation of diversity in the Broadcasting Corporation. Both these proposed solutions are mistaken.

Firstly, opening the media market to as many commercial channels as possible may, perhaps, increase the competition between the various channels for the dwindling cake of the advertising budget. However, past experience shows that competition between commercial media outlets encourages them to appeal to the broadest, and hence lowest, common denominator in order to attract large audiences for advertisers; they also appeal to the population groups prioritized by the advertisers. Such broadcasts ignore minorities and peripheral groups that are regarded as having inferior economic power. Encouraging additional commercial media channels at the expenses of public channels will reduce rather than expand diversity in the media market.

Secondly, the solution by which a committee appointed by the Communications Minister will define criteria for diversity is also mistaken. Granting the authority to screen employees and content in the Broadcasting Corporation through such a committee is tantamount to giving politicians free reign to appoint their associates and subordinates. The Communications Minister claims that his goal is to create diversity and the provision of a platform for varied voices in Israeli society. It is difficult to take seriously the claim that politicians will encourage diversity in the media given previous comments from members of the coalition demanding that they must "control the Corporation" or advocating the closure of all the commercial television channels.

An empirical study by the authors of this document, in which they analyzed all the minutes of the parliamentary debates in committees and in the Knesset plenum regarding the

²⁸ Weiss, D., [We Are Focusing Our Energy on the Reform Issue](#), *N12* (26 March 2023) (Hebrew); Segal, A., [Communications Minister Karhi: "We Will Cut Millions from the Corporation's Budget,"](#) *N12* (15 January 2023) (Hebrew).

closure of the IBA and the opening of the Broadcasting Corporation for a period of a decade, show that politicians define the concepts of diversity and pluralism in a narrow and politically biased way. For them, "expressing different voices" means including in the workforce of the Broadcasting Corporation individuals from their political group and/or representing their views in the content. These positions have also been made repeatedly in the media by right-wing politicians who criticize the Broadcasting Authority for failing to represent the coalition's 64 Members of Knesset. It is worth recalling in this context that the definition of diversity and pluralism in the media is far broader and more complex, and includes reference to ethnic origin, the center versus the periphery, gender, religious belief, sexual orientation, language, culture, and so forth, rather than merely the number of seats in the Knesset or party-political affiliation.²⁹

Around the world it is generally accepted that the unique character of public broadcasting outlets, as compared to commercial outlets, lies in the diversity they offer in terms of content. Competition between commercial media outlets will not secure this diversity. The possibility to show on screen, to employ, and to serve people from different groups, while at the same time creating content intended for diverse groups in the public, is one of the goals and strengths of public broadcasting in Israel.

Moreover, establishing a committee under the control of the Ministry of Communications to supervise the implementation of diversity in the Broadcasting Corporation is tantamount to the aggressive politicization of the Corporation, which is supposed to be free of political interference (regarding the dangers and damage of politicization in public broadcasting, see the next section).

False claim #3: There is a need for tighter regulation (and politicization) of public broadcasting

The Communications Minister has mentioned on several occasions in the past, and more recently in the media legislative memorandum, the need for additional external inspection of the Broadcasting Corporation and its budget, on the grounds that "this is public

²⁹ EBU Media Intelligence Service, [Gender Equality and Public Service Media](#), *European Broadcasting Union*, 2021a, (25 February 2022); EBU Media Intelligence Service, "Diversity and Public Service Media," *European Broadcasting Union* (2021b).

money.”³⁰ He also argues that there is a need to establish criteria for diversity in content and employees through a “professional team” external to the Broadcasting Corporation. External inspection of the Broadcasting Corporation place in the hands of politicians inherently causes mortal damage to the independence of the Corporation and implies the politicization of its budget, workforce, and content.

In the introduction to his book *Due to Technical Difficulties: The Fall of the Israel Broadcasting Authority*, the late Prof. Dan Caspi – a media researcher who served as a member of the executive committee of the IBA – observed: “The main cause of its decline is politicization. The broadcasts are supposed to be conducted under public inspection, but the political echelon enjoys the status of super-inspection and activate the dual normative system of interference in the guise of public inspection.”³¹ The rehashed proposals of the Ministry of Communications to establish external committees to inspect the Corporation have the character of re-runs for political interference under the guise of public inspection: the phenomenon that led to the politicization of the IBA, and ultimately to its closure.

The Broadcasting Corporation was structured and established to be as free as possible of political interference and inspection. During the discussions in the Knesset committees on the establishment of the Israeli broadcasting corporation, it was Members of Knesset from the Likud who recognized the importance of ensuring independence in public broadcasting. During a meeting on 19 March 2014, for example, Member of Knesset Reuven Rivlin noted the substantive difference between state broadcasting and public broadcasting: “I want to say in the clearest and most unequivocal way, as a member of the liberal Herut movement founded by the National Military Organization, that public broadcasting is the very essence of democracy. Public democracy, not doctrinal broadcasting; public broadcasting, not state broadcasting, because the state is manifested in the ability of the government and coalition to do whatever they wish... Honorable Minister, you know as I do that state broadcasting comes from power. Power is manifested in the majority held in the Knesset. The majority in the Knesset is the coalition. Thank God,

³⁰ [Legislative Memorandum: Communications Law \(Broadcasts\), 5783-2023](#), Government Legislation Site, 24 July 2023 (Hebrew).

³¹ Caspi, *Due to Technical Difficulties*.

in Israel power changes occasionally... We must not delude ourselves. Public broadcasting is not state broadcasting. Power changes occasionally. We must absolutely not do this.”³²

Other Members of Knesset, as well as professionals involved in drafting the new Public Broadcasting Law, were convinced of the need to ensure the freedom of the Broadcasting Corporation from political influence. Accordingly, the law defines the establishment of the Corporation Council, whose rule is “to set the policy of the Israeli Broadcasting Corporation, including general broadcasting policy, in order to meet the functions of the Israeli Broadcasting Corporation as stated in section 7 and in accordance with its approved budget.”³³ Although the members of the Council are chosen by the Communications Minister, the law explicitly establishes that “a person shall not be appointed to or serve on the Council who has a personal or commercial affinity to a government minister, is engaged in political or party political activity or was engaged in political or party political activity during the five years preceding the date of presentation of candidacy; for this purpose, participation in a demonstration or conference of a political character, or expression a public position on political matters, shall not in themselves be regarded as political activity” (section 10 of the law).³⁴ The legislator’s objective was undoubtedly to maintain the independence of the Broadcasting Corporation and to create a barrier between the Corporation and politicians and their servants. Accordingly, as is now being proposed, establishing committees that will define criteria for the operation of the Broadcasting Corporation will denude the role of the Council as defined in law of any content. Such a step will grant politicians the power to determine content and employment in the Broadcasting Corporation, contrary to the legislator’s intention and to public interest.

Responsible use of public funds requires the maintenance of strong and independent public broadcasting, not its politicization and subjugation to government-dominated committees. Strong public broadcasting serves the public interest, and not the interests of political or commercial bodies.

³² Discussion of the Economic Affairs Committee, [Conclusions of the Landes Committee – Report of the Minister Responsible for the Implementation of the Broadcasting Authority Law](#), 19 March 2014 (Hebrew).

³³ [Public Broadcasting in Israel Law, 5774-2014](#) (Hebrew).

³⁴ [Public Broadcasting in Israel Law, 5774-2014](#) (Hebrew).

False claim #4: A redivision of the existing broadcasting channels in Israel will benefit the media market

As part of the Ministry of Communication's plan, which is riddled with contradictions, Minister Karhi has announced the opening up of national radio broadcasting frequencies to competition in the form of additional private/commercial stations.³⁵ Without getting involved in a detailed technical discussion, because of the use of outmoded and extremely FM and AM frequencies, the range of national broadcasts is very limited. On various occasions, the Communications Minister has declared that opening up the existing radio frequencies to new commercial players in the national market would require the confiscation of three existing frequencies from the Broadcasting Corporation. Without any substantiation or detailed explanation, the Minister essentially claimed that it is possible to reduce the number of frequencies allocated to a national broadcasting station, and thereby to open additional stations without harming the existing ones. The contradictory messages that continue to be conveyed by the Ministry of Communications on this subject create a vague and unclear framework for discussion of both technical and content-related aspects. The legislative memorandum published leaves the issue open and proposes that it be discussed at a later stage, without offering any explanation or guidelines for an action liable to damage the radio frequencies of public broadcasting in Israel.³⁶

The wording of the law regarding radio stations operated by the Broadcasting Corporation (Amendment No. 8, 5778-2018)³⁷ guarantees the operation of radio stations in a foreign language and of the Moreshet station for the Haredi population. The contradictory comments from sources in the Ministry of Communications concerning changes in the deployment of public broadcasting channels, and their possible confiscation for commercial broadcasting, mean that stations whose existence is not guaranteed in the above-mentioned law face the danger of closure, dismissal of workers, and the elimination of cultural and local content that appeals to diverse populations in Israeli society on every day of the week and at all hours of day. Such declarations manifest a threatening managerial style that constitutes an obstacle to the flourishing of unbiased

³⁵ Tausig, S., [Another Piece of the Karhi Plan Revealed](#), *The Seventh Eye* (13 February 2023) (Hebrew).

³⁶ Israel Communication Association, [Reservations on the Proposed Law: Communications \(Broadcasts\), 5783-2023](#) (14 August 2023) (Hebrew).

³⁷ [Public Broadcasting in Israel Law, 5774-2014](#) (Hebrew).

public broadcasting that serves the public, and not the current mood in the Ministry of Communications.

However, discussions about policy changes concerning radio broadcasts in Israel may mark a turning point in the adoption of advanced communications technologies in the Israeli media market. In a report written for the Kohelet Forum by Dr. Yitzhak Klein, the author suggests that "with the spread of the internet and additional broadcasting technologies, it is possible to maintain broadcasting channels without limitation and according to diverse economic models. The commercial audio-visual broadcasting market has become a sophisticated one, with numerous suppliers and without any significant technological restriction on their multiplication."³⁸

In Israel, where many radio frequencies are used by military and security bodies, technological development in this context is particularly important. Action to adopt digital radio in Israel (in contrast to the ongoing allocation of the few frequencies available on the national level) will constitute an important and significant step forward in opening up the media market to additional commercial players, as the Communications Minister wishes, while preserving public radio activities that appeal to diverse groups within Israeli society.

Accordingly, the question arises: why is there a need to relocate the radio broadcasting channels for Israeli national radio? As noted, the expansion of the internet and other broadcasting technologies allows Israel to adopt digital radio broadcasts.

False claim #5: The budgetary sources for public broadcasting should be reduced and should be linked to government budgeting decisions

The reform in radio channels proposed by Minister Karhi is accompanied by possible cuts to the funding and budgeting of public radio and television broadcasts in Israel. As part of his comments, he has claimed that one of the steps that will be taken immediately by the Ministry of Communications will be the prohibition of the sale of advertisements and sponsorship in public radio broadcasts.³⁹ These declarations are not made in a vacuum, and follow previous steps by Minister Karhi, who just a year ago tabled a bill to private the

³⁸ Klein, Y., [Policy Proposal: A New Model for Subsidizing Original Israeli Productions for Broadcasting on Audio-visual Broadcast Channels](#), *Kohelet Forum* (2023).

³⁹ Schwartz-Altshuler, T., [Karhi's Broadcast Legislation – Reform or Ruination?](#), op-ed, *Israel Democracy Institute*, 3 August 2023; Tausig, S., [Another Piece of the Karhi Plan Revealed](#).

Broadcasting Corporation and sell it to a private commercial body. According to his proposal, if no private buyer were found, the Broadcasting Corporation would end its broadcasts and close within two years. Thus the Communications Minister creates an atmosphere of constant threat to the activities, employees, and consumers of the Broadcasting Corporation.

At present the Broadcasting Corporation's income from sponsorships and advertisements on its various channels is estimated in the tens of millions of shekels. Cutting the Corporation's income from sponsorship and advertisements will heighten its dependency on the sums transferred by the state. Thus the Ministry of Communications is jeopardizing the independence of the Broadcasting Corporation while grossly ignoring the letter of the law. The emphasis in the law on the independence of the Broadcasting Corporation is no coincidence; its purpose (as presented above) is to preserve the independence of creativity and production and to separate content-related considerations from narrow, party-political, and government-oriented considerations of funding.

The Communications Minister has also declared that he intends to establish a foundation to support Israeli productions.⁴⁰ The foundation will be managed and budgeted by one of the government ministries and criteria will be established for funding content, while those who fill this function will have a party-political affiliation. Persecution of this kind regarding content and budgets marks the further subjugation of the Corporation's broadcasts to party-political politicization.

The budget for public broadcasting (Amendment No. 2, 5775-2015 and Amendment No. 4, 5776-2016)⁴¹ comprises the following components:

- a. The budget from the Ministry of Transport is forwarded through the payments of the license fee (this amount is not included in the state budget and is established in law as a fixed, separate sum, enshrining the separation of budgeting for public media from party-political decision making).
- b. Income from advertising, announcements, and sponsorships.
- c. Income from the commercial use of archive materials, as defined in the Archives Law, 5716-1955.

⁴⁰ Baz, I., [Plan of Karhi and the Kohelet Forum to Eliminate Public Broadcasting Exposed](#), *The Seventh Eye* (30 January 2023) (Hebrew).

⁴¹ [Public Broadcasting in Israel Law, 5774-2014](#) (Hebrew).

- d. Income from products developed in research and development projects in technological fields in which the Corporation is active, funded by the Corporation as detailed in section 83 of the Law.
- e. Additional income (such as sale and rental of equipment).

Reducing the Corporation's share of income from advertising, which the Minister has stated will be imposed alongside the transfer of the annual budget to full state control, will create an undesirable political dependence on the government. In various comments, Minister Karhi has argued that "the removal of advertising income will lead to the transfer of these budgets to private media outlets, enhancing these and nurturing the press, freedom of expression, and diversity of opinions and supporting the quest for a free and competitive market. Against this budgetary reduction, the radio operating expenses in the Corporation will be reduced in favor of the free market... Moreover, this move will effectively increase state income, since commercial radio stations pay tax to the Treasury on their income from advertising."⁴² Thus Karhi is heightening the dependency of public broadcasting channels on governmental decisions. As presented in this document, this type of dependency was one of the factors behind the closure of the IBA. The enactment of the current Public Broadcasting Budget Law was a tool for separating the government from the funding of the Corporation and for ensuring that the government will be required to locate (or to create from scratch) a budgetary source of several hundred millions of shekels within the state budget – sums that are not currently available.

As for the dependence of public broadcasting on the Israeli political system, the introductory comments to the Public Broadcasting Corporation Law emphasize that the manner of funding of the Corporation's budgets, as presented in the law, is an essential condition for its independence; in turn, this independence is essential in order to meet its public mission to preserve democracy. Accordingly, at a meeting on the subject on 29 June 2015, Minister Ofir Akunis of the Likud expressed a forceful opinion on the matter: "I believe that there can be a democratic country anywhere in the entire world, and Israel is a democratic and enlightened country, that does not have public broadcasting. We need commercial broadcasting, we need more diversity in commercial broadcasting... but alongside commercial broadcasting, we must have public broadcasting. I tell you that this

⁴² Official letter from Minister Karhi to Finance Minister Smotrich, [Opinion of the Legal Advisor to the Finance Ministry Concerning the Opening of the Radio Market to Competition and Changes in the Budget of the Broadcasting Corporation](#) (14 February 2023) (Hebrew).

broadcasting must also be strong. Mr. Chairman, it must be independent. It must be independent, and this is our goal."⁴³

This important comment highlights the substantive need to continue to preserve the independent budgetary sources of public broadcasting in Israel and to enhance the separation between the state budget, the funding of the Broadcasting Corporation, and the determination of its content through budgetary committees.

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⁴³ Discussion of the Economic Affairs Committee, [Broadcasting Authority – Further Discussion](#) (26 June 2015) (Hebrew).