



We present here selected chapters from the Czech Television Council Annual Report. The full text of the Report (in Czech) is available at: [www.czech-tv.cz/ct/radact](http://www.czech-tv.cz/ct/radact).

### Council members in 1999

|                  |                 |                                  |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Jan Jirák        | Chairman        | František Schildberger           |
| Alena Kinclová   | Vice-Chairwoman | Petr Weiss (resigned 8 Dec 1999) |
| Vladislav Kučík  | Vice-Chairman   | Jiří Zajíc                       |
| Václav Erben     |                 |                                  |
| Pavel Kabzan     |                 |                                  |
| Juraj Podkonický |                 |                                  |

### Description of Czech Television developments in 1999

In its last Annual Report, the Czech Television Council analysed the situation of Czech Television at the end of first Director General Ivo Mathé's term of office, and weighed up the results that had been achieved between 1992 and 1997. It believed this analysis in the Report to be an essential element in order that it could explain in detail the motives that had led it to elect Jakub Puchalský the new Czech Television Director General. It identified (correctly, with hindsight) several basic shortcomings in the operations and internal organisation of Czech Television, and formulated a clear demand that these defects be eliminated. Although the Czech Television Council picked out the problem areas in Czech Television operations before 1998, the approach adopted by the new Director General to correct these patent shortcomings in the running and internal structure of the corporation did not come up to the Council's full expectations.

The new management failed to dispose of the fundamental imbalance in the organisational structure of the producer system. In December 1998, it presented a convincing analytical and conceptual document called *Czech Television on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, but the plans formulated in this paper were hardly pushed through at all. In its efforts to implement these plans, the management

opted for an extremely complicated approach in preparations to make the necessary reorganisation, based on a large number of teams compiled ad hoc in a complex structure organised as a hierarchy. This method proved inefficient and did not bring the desired result in the set time. The top management's approach was psychologically insensitive, and this played a large part in undermining what was originally a well thought out and promising concept of a highly functional arrangement for a purposeful, balanced organisational structure at Czech Television. What is more, the management failed to secure moral support from key Czech Television staff categories, already frustrated by poor internal communications, for its complicated processes connected with the planned adaptation of the producer system. The major aspects in the complex developments within Czech Television in the second half of 1999 are described in more detail in the next chapter.

On the other hand, Czech Television functioned as a highly effective broadcaster, addressing an unprecedented share of television viewers in the Czech Republic. In the second half of 1999, Czech Television's trend of slowly dropping viewing figures reversed, registering a sharp rise in its viewer interest share. This can be well illustrated in figures. In January 1999, the 24-hour share of ČT1 in viewer interest

was 24.02%, i.e. a fall from 26.51% in January 1998. In the peak broadcasting time (7 p.m. – 10 p.m.) this share was 25.91% in January 1999, down from 28.1% in January 1998. Up to and including July, there was a steady drop compared with 1998, but then in August this indicator showed a clear year-on-year rise. ČT1's share in viewer interest in October registered a year-on-year rise from 25.51% in 1998 to 27.87% in 1999 in the 24-hour average. In the same month, the prime time figure was up from 27.77% in 1998 to 30.75% in 1999. This trend culminated in December: ČT1's 24-hour share went up from 26% in 1998 to 28.92% in 1999; the prime time share was up from 27.86% in 1998 to 32.4% in 1999. The Czech Television Council uses this factor for its year-on-year comparison because, unlike the TV rating, the share does away with the seasonal fluctuations and mirrors the actual current distribution of viewer interest among the different television stations. At the very least, then, taken from this aspect the management at Czech Television performed very successfully following the change in Head of Programming in June 1999, and was able to reflect these good results in its finances too.

Bearing in mind the statistics presented above, the Czech Television Council cannot rate the work performed at Czech Television under the management of Jakub Puchalský entirely negatively, as the press, based on the opinions of professional and special-interest groups (FITES, ČFTA, Czech Television Trade Unions), would have it. The Czech Television Council must take all the results into account, as well as the opinions of those for whom the television broadcasting service is mainly designed – the normal television viewer and licence-fee payer. Therefore, the Czech Television Council ordered a special survey to outline what Czech television viewers thought should be the optimal format of public service television (a similar

survey had been carried out two years ago). This survey, performed by the Opinion Windows agency (see the Czech Television Council Annual Report on the Internet – Appendix No. 4) and comparing the situation in 1997 and 1999 on a representative sample of the viewing public, showed that viewers had absorbed many changes, especially the greater dynamism in broadcasting and the inclusion of several new types of programme, very positively. It also revealed a positive shift in the acceptance of Czech Television programming by younger viewers, i.e. there was a change in the trend since 1994 where the typical public service television viewer was growing older. Under Jakub Puchalský's management, then, Czech Television managed to improve its image in the eyes of the public and reverse the adverse trend in the sociodemographic specifications of the Czech Television audience.

If we were to characterise the activities of Czech Television in 1999 solely on the basis of the results discussed above, Jakub Puchalský's resignation in December as Czech Television Director General and the subsequent changes might seem unwarranted. Yet these results were achieved at the cost of a gradual slow down, and then complete standstill, in the necessary structural changes, and a deterioration in the working climate within Czech Television. Czech Television's communications with independent producers were also impaired. The staff measures taken in 1998 also played a negative role as they held up the preparations for terrestrial digital broadcasting by Czech Television and the drafting of the positional document necessary to formulate clearly its place in public service television services in the Czech Republic. These phenomena accumulated in the latter half of the year and led to an institutional crisis, and the only way out in the end was to change the top management at Czech Television.

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## **The institutional crisis: paradoxes, causes, and consequences**

In the second half of 1999 Czech Television found itself gripped by an institutional crisis that exploded with the resignation of temporary Head of Programming Gordon Lovitt on 24 November 1999 and culminated in the resignation of Czech Television Director General Jakub Puchalský on 15 December 1999. (This crisis had been preceded by an extensive public dispute on the implementation of the Thirty Returns project, part of which was a repeat of the Normalisation (socialist) serial called *Thirty Cases of Major Zeman*. On the surface, there could seem to be a direct link between these events. In actual fact, the campaign against the rerun of *Thirty Cases of Major Zeman* by the institution was a marginal affair and had very little to do with the actual institutional crisis as such.

Looking at the paradoxes emerging out of this crisis, the main point to focus on here is that during the crisis Czech Television came through in the Czech media as a very successful broadcaster, more successful than at any other time since the establishment of a dual model of television broadcasting in the Czech Republic. As we have already documented above, between January and December 1999 Czech Television increased its viewer share in Bohemia and Moravia by 4.9% in the 24-hour average and by 6.49% at prime time; the year-on-year comparison reveals an increase in the 24-hour average by 2.92% and at prime time by 4.56%. The share of younger viewers in the Czech Television audience also went up. According to all public opinion polls, Czech Television maintained its privileged position among Czech television companies as a highly trustworthy source of information.

The root of the institutional crisis that accompanied these positive developments in the acceptance of Czech Television services lay mainly in the Czech Television management's inexperience of human resources work, a lack of respect for the medium-term and long-term institutional requirements of Czech Television, and the vague concept for further developments in in-house production and purchasing. These were technical and administrative problems that complicated production considerably. The slow progress in preparing the broadcasting schedule and the production tasks for 2000 that would be necessary was caused by the gap growing in effective organisational communication and other

accompanying factors such as the change in Head of Programming (this staff switch slowed down the pre-production preparations of many programmes, threatening production deadlines and preventing producers from concluding the necessary contracts with independent production companies and external associates – especially actors – in time, and all this was reflected in the relations between these professional groups and Czech Television). The vague criteria applied in the decision-making on individual titles of periodic programmes and dramas proved a serious problem not just for Czech Television, but for independent producers too, who found themselves in the same situation as the producers at Czech Television's creative groups: they could not undertake rational planning, they had no clear and fixed idea of the needs and requirements of Czech Television in the year 2000, and they were unable to secure timely qualified assessments of the projects they presented to Czech Television. This state of affairs gave rise to protests from independent producers, professional associations, producers and script editors at Czech Television, and, in the end, the trade unions. In the course of the year (and especially in the autumn), several members of Parliament's Permanent Media Commission joined in with the public discussion, which heaped massive criticism on the approach of Czech Television's top management (and, in this respect, criticism on the Czech Television Council in the form of pressure to recall the Director General). No matter how much members of the Czech Television Council might have understood the words of the politicians as the natural right to express an opinion, they could not overlook the fact that these members of the Permanent Commission had added their weight to increase the pressure that was already afflicting the management at Czech Television. This was clearly exemplified when several Permanent Commission members attended a meeting with Czech Television employees before Christmas 1999. The inclusion of the political elite, however humanely and publicly legitimate, in a debate on public service television poses (and always will pose) the risk of an attempt at political (and ultimately party-political) requisition of control over this medium. Members of the Czech Television Council believe that the stance advanced by several politicians did nothing to stabilise the position of Czech Television as a public service medium, traditionally the cornerstone of open civic society in Europe.

The Czech Television Council carefully monitored and consistently contemplated both fundamental aspects of developments at Czech Television in autumn 1999: the high rise in viewer interest in the Czech Television programme schedule on the one hand, and the increasing edginess on the part of professionals and Czech Television employees on the other. At the end of November, the Czech Television Council decided that if things were to continue as they had been up until then the scope and quality of services the institution provided to the public would be in danger very soon, in spite of the clear current success Czech Television was enjoying as a broadcaster. The Czech Television Council was also unable to overlook the very real danger that the continuity in the development of Czech film and television output could be impaired; this output depended very much on the activities of Czech Television (in its decisions and as a public service). Accordingly, the Czech Television Council demanded that Director General Jakub Puchalský rectify the situation in the Czech Television Programming Department as quickly as possible. The solution lay in appointing someone Head of Programming, as this post had been held since June 1999 by Gordon Lovitt in a caretaker capacity, and in presenting a plan to revitalise functional communications with professionals and with Czech Television employees. The Director General met these demands by drafting written material

(see the Czech Television Council's Annual Report on its website – Appendix No. 5), and two weeks later he made a personal decision to resign.

Developments at Czech Television between April 1998 and the end of 1999 were therefore very paradoxical. On the one hand, we should emphasise once more that Jakub Puchalský's management brought Czech Television good viewer responses and, despite criticism from the professional public, managed to encourage a positive viewer attitude to public service television. On the other hand, the same management failed to create the right conditions for forward-looking developments at Czech Television, and the lack of order in its moves led the institution into a serious communication crisis that took on dimensions threatening to weaken the identification of programme-makers and staff with their own activities. This situation could bring adverse consequences in the future (the essence of a functioning television station is that pre-production preparations and the production of the more difficult programmes require a number of years, not months). We can only hope that the thinning communication flows and the clear fading of the will to make decisions that became increasingly typical for the management in 1999 were of such a short-term nature that any consequences can be ironed over fairly quickly.

## **Czech Television activities in 1999: main conclusions of the Czech Television Council**

In its main conclusions, the Czech Television Council (just as it did in its 1998 Annual Report) summarises its assessment of Czech Television in a manner making it clear that Czech Television conducted its operations in line with

the relevant legislation that sets out the duties of Czech Television, mainly **Act No. 483/1991, the Czech Television Act**, as amended, and **Act No. 468/1991, on the Operation of radio and Television Broadcasting**, as amended.

**The Czech Television Council states that in 1999 Czech Television fulfilled its mission as a public service broadcaster and acted in accordance with Act No. 483/1991, the Czech Television Act, as amended.**



The Czech Television Council found that in 1999 Czech Television managed to 'find a new, more organised concept of drama output that better meets the needs of the viewer and enables the broadcaster to be more successful in meeting its legal duty to confront the poorer quality but more viewer attractive programming of commercial stations,' as it required in its 1998 Annual Report.

The Czech Television Council states that the support that Czech Television has given to the advancement of Czech film is fully in accordance with its mission to 'develop the cultural identity of the Czech nation' under section 2 of Act No. 483/1991, the Czech Television Act, as amended. It rates the dramaturgical contribution of Czech Television particularly highly, the result of which is that over a very short time (i.e. eight years) it has developed an archive of feature length films so extensive it can broadcast retrospectives the year round that have been awarded an extraordinary number of major prizes at Czech and international film festivals. The Czech Television Council therefore expresses the hope that Czech Television will continue its systematic and exceptionally successful support of Czech film in accordance with its mission.

The Czech Television Council states that in its original documentary output Czech Television is fulfilling its mission set out in section 2 of Act No. 483/1991, the Czech Television Act, as amended, in full and in accordance with the wording and letter of the law and the intentions of the legislative.

The Czech Television Council states that in 1999 Czech Television fulfilled its mission defined in section 2 of Act No. 483/1991, the Czech Television Act, as amended, by broadcasting current affairs programmes covering the full range and at the required quality. On the other hand, it brings attention to the fact that, although it made clear efforts, Czech Television failed to make good headway in its search for its own way forward in investigate journalism, in the management of this agenda, and in the search for typical, unmistakable features of public service in this type of programme.

In its 1998 Annual Report, the Czech Television Council stated that 'Czech Television in 1998 again failed to overcome the unfortunate trend towards dejected, thoroughly stereotypical entertainment, and failed to find the right conceptual standard for the fulfilment of its mission'. A year later, it found that Czech Television had

made improvements in this situation as far as marginal broadcasting times were concerned, but that the core of the problem had not been dealt with in 1999.

The Czech Television Council states that in 1999 Czech Television fulfilled its mission defined under section 2 of Act No. 483/1991, the Czech Television Act, as amended, by broadcasting the full range of children's programmes. On the other hand, the Czech Television Council brings attention to the fact that, although it made clear efforts, Czech Television is slow in finding a way to address children and adolescents on a more massive scale with good-value programmes.

The Czech Television Council can therefore state with satisfaction that, in the second half of 1999 in particular, by changing its broadcasting schedule Czech Television considerably improved its service to television viewers, reinforced its position on the media scene in the Czech Republic, and acted as a successful public service broadcaster.

To close, the Czech Television Council states that in its broadcasting of news, current affairs, and discussion programmes in 1999 Czech Television fulfilled its mission defined in section 2 of Act No. 483/1991, the Czech Television Act, as amended. It did so at the required quality and scope while maintaining the necessary impartiality, objectivity, and balance in the information it presented.

The Czech Television Council, based on its inspection activity, states that in broadcasting original documentaries in 1999 Czech Television fulfilled its mission defined in section 2 of Act No. 483/1991, the Czech Television Act, as amended.

The Czech Television Council states that the programme High Noon is optically balanced and is therefore broadcast in the spirit of section 2 of Act No. 483/1991, the Czech Television Act. In the opinion of the Czech Television Council, Czech Television therefore fulfils its mission in the provision of verified, universal, and balanced information for the free formation of opinions.

The Czech Television Council states that in its activities in 1999 the Ethics Panel helped public service television considerably, and its management in particular, in assessing ethically contentious aspects of broadcasting. In this sense it helped Czech Television fulfil its mission as set out in section 2 of Act No. 483/1991, as amended.