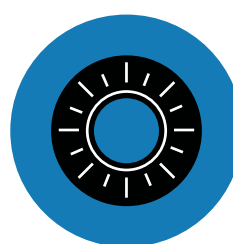


# A rescue of society's participation in brazilian public communication

An independent review of contents released by Empresa Brasil de Comunicação

► **REPORT 2021 - SUMMARY**



EBC  
**Citizenship**  
Ombudsman



## 2021 REPORT

EBC Citizenship Ombudsman is a civil society initiative, in defense of the Brazilian Public Service Broadcaster and public communication in general. It is composed of civil society members whose participation in the company has been unjustifiably suppressed and it consolidates a space for the debate about public communication in the country.

The initiative emerged with the launch of the first report, in December 2020, which analyzes the content published and broadcast by EBC, according to the principles of public communication, that should guide the production of TV Brasil, Nacional and MEC radios, Agência Brasil and Radioagência Nacional, as well as the profiles and posts of these vehicles on social networks.

Our website was launched at the beginning of 2021 and it served as a relevant platform to share our analysis and complaints, about misleads and irregularities committed inside EBC. In 2021, 33 content analyses, four signed articles and four public notes were published, in addition to news and support notes published by other entities.

We highlight the reviews of the interviews and statements made by president Jair Bolsonaro that were broadcasted without counterpoint, despite the numerous disinformation spread by him; poor coverage of anti-government demonstrations; coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic, which propagated denialist discourses, putting the population's health at risk and propagating fake news; the disrespect for religious diversity by broadcasting the soap opera *Os Dez Mandamentos*, a private broadcast network's production already aired repeatedly; the return of the reformulated program *Sem Censura* to interview ministers and pro-government personalities; and the use of journalism to cover topics without public interest.

But to be fair with the workers, we must also point out EBC's good productions in 2021. Some examples are the special news report on the centenary of playwright

Maria Clara Machado; the EBC's Collection; the coverage of the two-year Brumadinho's tragedy; the program Caminhos da Reportagem; and the fact that the radio stations Nacional AM is now available on the FM band in new cities.

In this report, we bring you a sample of what was published by EBC's Citizenship Ombudsman throughout the year. Full texts and analysis are available at <https://ouvidoriacidadaebc.org/>.

### **Support and complaints**

EBC, as a public communication company, has faced recurrent censorship and inappropriate interference under the management of the current federal government, and it was recently included in the National Privatization Program. Nevertheless, 2021 was a very productive year for those who have resisted the dismantling of the company.

Members of the Front in Defense of EBC and Public Communication articulated, with other entities, support against the company's privatization and to arise consciousness among congressmen about the constitutional mission of EBC, including public hearings on the subject at the Congress, the National Council of Human Rights (CNDH), at the Brazilian Press Association (ABI). Besides, the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science (SBPC), the Public Media Alliance (PMA), the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) and the Organización Interamericana de Defensoras y Defensores de las Audiencias (OID) made public statements defending the maintenance and autonomy of EBC.

Surveys about the misuse of EBC vehicles were sent to the Senate's Pandemia CPI, as well as to the Superior Electoral Court (TSE). EBC's Citizenship Ombudsman also denounced the censorship that the official EBC's Ombudsman started to suffer from EBC's own management and Directors' Board in 2021.

The survey about the interruptions in TV Brasil scheduling to transmit live broadcast events with president Bolsonaro had a lot of repercussions in the media as well as the denunciation of the use of "artificial intelligence" to translate Agência Brasil's articles from Portuguese into Spanish and English during the company's workers' strike, in the second semester of 2021, which affected 100% of the foreign-speaking staff.

Another event in 2021 that deserves to be highlighted is the Public Communication Course: Strengthening Society and Democracy, promoted by the Center for Research and Production in Communication and Emergency of the Fluminense Federal University (Emerge UFF), a research group that is part of the Front. The videos can be accessed on Emerge's YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/c/EmergeUFF/videos>) and the audios on the *Comissão Informa* podcast, produced by the EBC's Employees Commission (<https://linktr.ee/comissaoinforma>) - Only in Portuguese.

## Releases

During the on-line Social Forum of Resistances and the World Social Forum Justice and Democracy 2022, in Porto Alegre, on the 27th of January 2022, we launched the Public Communication Library and the Interactive Historical Map. Both can be accessed on EBC's Citizenship Ombudsman page.

At the library, we provide reading references on public communication, EBC and its vehicles, with download links. The Map is the result of Akemi Nitahara's master's research at UFRJ, a member of the extinct EBC's Curator Council, and it brings a timeline with the historical and legal milestones of the company's vehicles.

It's never late to remember: EBC does not belong to the government! EBC belongs to Brazilian society and we are going to fight to keep it that way.

*Front in Defense of EBC and Public Communication*

## **Letter to society: why EBC should not be privatized**

*Front in Defense of EBC and Public Communication*

The Ministry of Communications announced the inclusion of Empresa Brasil de Comunicação in the National Privatization Program (PND). The decision seems to be a message to sectors of the press linked to the financial system. Although the movement still involves studies on possible forms of privatization, it was a dangerous step towards the destruction of the state-owned company. In this sense, workers come to dialogue with society about its nature and importance.

From the beginning, in 2007, TV Brasil and EBC were targets of intense negative campaigns and, more recently, privatization threats. The arguments range from an alleged deficit in government accounts to the amount spent on wages and low valuation of their vehicles. Workers will tell their side of the story here.

The EBC was built on the basis of the Federal Constitution. Article 223 of the Constitution provides for the complementarity of public, private and state systems. The law that defined the state-owned company (11,652, of 2008) regulates this guideline. Thus, the EBC was not an achievement of a government, but the late materialization of what the Constitution had already determined since its promulgation in 1988.

Public communication exists in most Western countries. Countries with consolidated democracies (even with a very liberal character) understand and encourage the role of public communication to meet the right of citizens to information, invest in content without commercial appeal and guide topics of public interest. BBC in the United Kingdom, RTP in Portugal, NHK in Japan and PBS in the United States are examples of public communication.

EBC does not give "loss" or "deficit", as government officials say to justify its privatization. It is a dependent public company, like ministries and universities, and does not aim to be self-sufficient like the Correios or Banco do Brasil. Although it manages to raise funds through sponsorship and service provision, its funding sources do not and will never serve to make it autonomous. This would cause dependence on the market, threatening its editorial autonomy.

Only tax-funded companies such as the BBC in the UK or RAI in Italy achieve financial autonomy. The EBC has its own complementary source of revenue - Contribution for the Promotion of Public Broadcasting, which is not delivered to the company by the government in its totality.

EBC has two TV stations, eight radio stations, two news agencies, produces content and provides communication services to the federal government. Articles in the press reproduce the government's argument that the budget of R\$ 550 million per year is "a lot". And they always highlight the amounts spent on salaries. Most broadcasters, such as Band, Globo and SBT, hire their employees contradicting the labor legislation, with a type of

contract called legal entity (PJ). This generated millionaire fines from the Federal Revenue Service for these broadcasters and serious problems in the Labor Courts.

Columnists in the mainstream media and the government itself complain about what they consider low audience rate on EBC's channels. TV Brasil has already become the 5th national broadcaster and is the only one with current children's programming. It could have advanced in more visibility, but the lack of investment flattens the company's performance.

Despite the lack of support, Agência Brasil and Radioagência Nacional produce free content that supplies thousands of large and small private vehicles. Rádio Nacional da Amazônia serves hundreds of thousands of listeners in distant parts of the country. EBC has an educational character, broadcasts programs and reports to contribute to citizenship.

The EBC has great social relevance and the duty to fulfill the constitutional mission of producing public communication. The current government has captured the company for its political purposes. The solution cannot be to extinguish or privatize the EBC, but to correct errors and provide the appropriate structure. Brazil is experiencing an economic crisis that legitimizes the defense of the work of hundreds of people at the EBC, at a time when the country has more than 14 million unemployed.

## **Government and EBC Board censor the Ombudsman itself**

The bimonthly report published by the Ombudsman of Empresa Brasil de Comunicação (the official one, and not this Citizenship Ombudsman), referring to March and April 2021, brings a red alert to society as a whole: the body was CENSORED by the Board of Directors (Consad).

In the section of the report intended for content analysis, there is a notice that "the Ombudsman's Analysis, sent to managers and to Consad, will only be published in the Annual Report of the Ombudsman, according to Consad/EBC Deliberation 12/2021".

Alongside the Executive Board, Consad is part of the EBC administration. It has a collegiate nature and the function of strategic deliberation, being composed of nine members: a representative elected by EBC employees, the company president, two independent members appointed by the "supervisory ministry" and five appointed by other ministries.

Consad's mission is to "watch over the continuity of services, observing the indices of reliability, quality, efficiency; for the transparency, effectiveness and legality of management; for the protection and enhancement of EBC's assets based on the Company's values and social function", as stated in the body's Internal Regulations. This mission, however, is being distorted.

The EBC's social function of producing public communication is defined by law. The existence of the Citizen Ombudsman became necessary after the extinction of the Curator Council provided for in the original law that created the company.

## ► SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

### **Quality public communication**



A good example of the work that EBC should do was broadcast on July 25. Caminhos da Reportagem, the episode about Public Communication: diversity for citizenship. Bringing international examples, from the Japanese NHK and the Australian SBS, the program talks about the democratic functions that these public communication companies perform in their countries. In Brazil, the program highlighted the importance of EBC, presenting data from Radioagência Nacional, Agência Brasil, and TV Brasil. The program also points the difference between public and state communication and the importance of financial autonomy to guarantee the editorial independence of public vehicles. Check out the episode: <https://tvbrasil.ebc.com.br/caminhos-da-reportagem/2021/07/comunicacao-publica-diversidade-para-cidadania>

Heir of the Brazilian broadcasting tradition, which is about to complete 100 years since the beginning of the first radio station in the country, Rádio Sociedade brings together a vast historical collection. Despite its rich material and the excellent conservation and research work carried out by the team, the EBC collection does not have its website and appears sporadically in the vehicles and agencies of public communication.

The centenary of Maria Clara Machado occurred in April. She founded O Tablado theater in 1951. Teacher, director, and playwright, her name was immortalized in Brazilian children's theater, with classics such as Pluft, o fantasma, A Bruxinha que é boa, and A Menina e o Vento. One of the first programs produced by the EBC predecessor, TVE, was precisely the series Pluft, in the 1970s. There were beautiful tributes, which occupied all EBC vehicles and agencies.



## TV Brasil's broadcast of Os Dez Mandamentos soap opera violates the Constitution



Broadcasting *Os Dez Mandamentos*, produced by TV Record, distorts the Federal Constitution and EBC's law, placing the public system as an auxiliary arm in the dissemination of a single perspective on religiosity.

EBC paid R\$3.2 million for broadcasting two seasons of the telenovela by the National Public Communication Network, composed of educational, state, and university channels. Also by the TV Brasil Play app and by TV Brasil, for one year and middle in the prime display range. The novel tells one of the most famous biblical passages: the saga of Moses, from birth to the arrival of his people in the Promised Land, according to the Christian faith. All black characters are performed by white people.

*Os Dez Mandamentos* has already been shown and replayed at least four times by the second-largest communication conglomerate in the country and was still available for three years on the platform Netflix. There is no way to put into practice the public mission, provided for in the Federal Constitution, reproducing this kind of content.



## **Public vehicles hide tragic mark of 400,000 deaths**

Brazil officially reached the tragic mark of 400,000 fatalities from Covid-19 on April 29, 2020. The Ministry of Health's Coronavirus Panel was updated at 18:55, indicating 3,001 new deaths recorded, totaling 401,186 accumulated deaths.

Agência Brasil published an article about it almost an hour later, at 7:40 pm, without going deeper into the topic. There was a lack of humanized materials and civil society that reflect the pain of families.

Radioagencia Nacional published an article with the fateful number at 9:53 pm. The mark of 400.000 deaths had not been mentioned in the newspapers of Rádio Nacional and TV Brasil on the 29th at night. The following morning, vehicles only quoted the numbers in a protocol form in Repórter Brasil on TV Brasil and in Repórter Nacional at 7:30 am, broadcasted by Rádio Nacional and TV Brasil.

## **What has been relevant at EBC? Superfluous journalism?**

In addition to the censorship applied by managers and editors, denounced by the Censorship Dossier, another trick of those who hold power over the editorial line at the EBC has been to fill the agenda with unimportant topics. Such a stratagem can be observed in all the company's vehicles. The EBC Citizenship Ombudsman highlights, below, some of the articles that were produced with this objective.

- Interview about "digital slavery" aired on the program Tarde Nacional, on May 13, 2021, date when, in 1888, Princess Isabel signed the Lei Áurea, who abolished slavery in Brazil;

- In February, "Agência Brasil explains: how to clear the cache and browsing history", at a time when the country was going through issues such as the lack of protection of the Amazon region, the intervention in the state oil company Petrobras and the drop in the age group of fatal victims of Covid-19;

- In December 2020, articles in the Radioagência Nacional about "This Christmas Supper will be the time to allow yourself, says nutritionist" and "Virtual secret friend guarantees exchange of gifts and affection this Christmas".

The EBC bosses, although they often boast of the increase in access to content, are actually reducing the reach of the vehicles by prioritizing the so-called "cold agendas", which focus on subjects that do not need to be published immediately. They are, therefore, reducing the potential of journalism in two critical years, both because of the population's need to keep up to date and because of the infodemic, that is the disinformation pandemic.

With the adhesion of 257 employees to the Voluntary Dismissal Plan (PDV) completed in December 2018, EBC now has 1,705 permanent employees. Currently, the picture is even smaller. Therefore, it is time to choose well what is worth it to be reported.

## "Sem Censura" shameful return



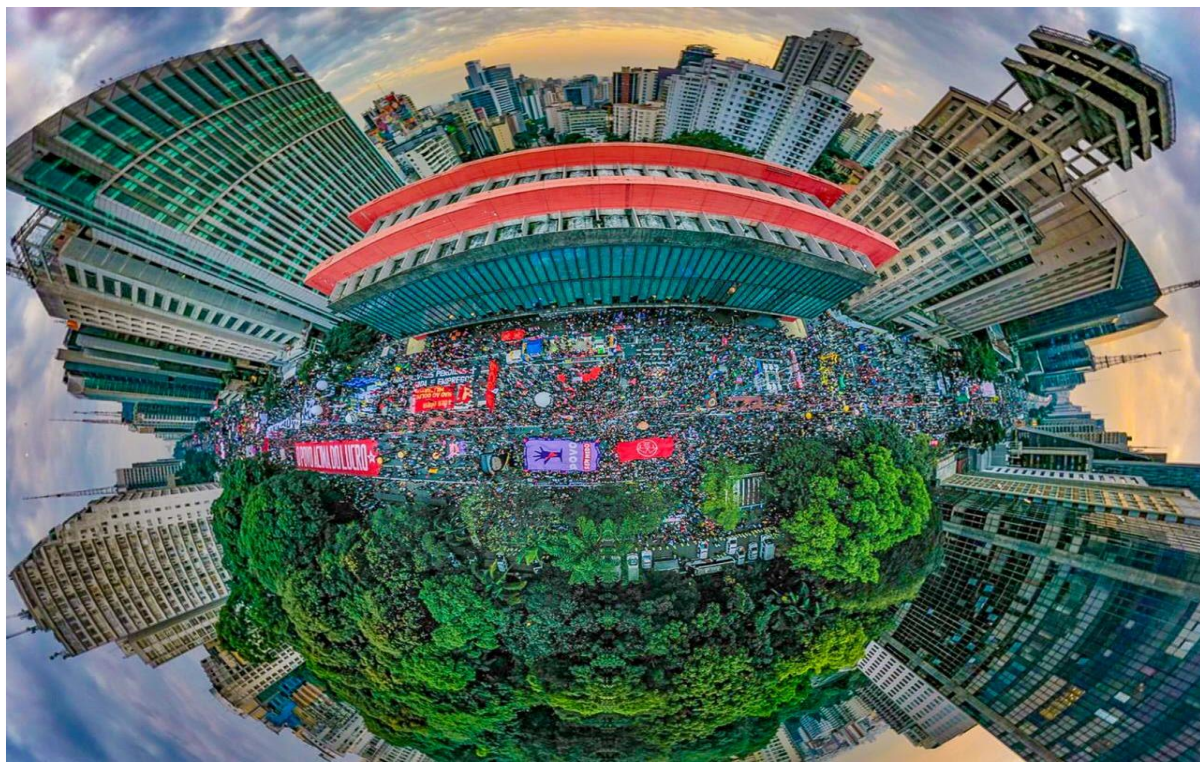
"Sem Censura" is a TV show created in 1985 amid the country's political reopening, after 21 years of military dictatorship. Hard time named "anos de chumbo", terror spread with systemic media's censorship. By this time, "Sem Censura" promoted political debates on TVE in Rio de Janeiro. TVE is one of the predecessor channels of TV Brasil.

EBC was formed by a merger between TV Nacional (Radiobrás) and TVE Rio de Janeiro. Since the 2000s, the focus has changed from political debates to a variety's TV shows. "Sem Censura" was maintained on the TV Brasil schedule since its creation in 2007 and engraved its name in Brazilian television's history.

"Sem Censura" went off the air between November 2020 and April 5. It used to last three hours every day in the week and returned to the programming schedule lasting one hour only on Mondays.

Despite the presenter, Marina Machado, informing the intention of promoting a frank and reliable debate in a moment of "polarization" it never had a dissonant voice throughout the year during a parade of ministers, secretaries, and other government members and govern' sympathizers. A mockery of debates with a governmental nature.

## Protests against the government before and now: where is the editorial autonomy?



Popular protests against the government are part of democracy. It has been frequent in Brazil since 2013, with the journeys that started as protests against the increase in bus fares and began to question public spending on the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics in the country. In 2015, part of the population adopted the yellow jersey of the Brazilian soccer team as a symbol of those who wanted the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, as opposed to those who wore red and supported her permanence in office.

As a news agency of Empresa Brasil de Comunicação and which, by law, has autonomy from the federal government to define its editorial line, Agência Brasil should have portrayed the acts against President Jair Bolsonaro with the same prominence and space as the acts against Dilma.

On May 29 and June 19, Agência Brasil's coverage of the protests against the management that President Jair Bolsonaro has been doing in the Covid-19 pandemic was something like "not to say that we did not give the subject".

In the 2015 and 2016 protests, Agência Brasil's coverage was quite different. Reporters and photographers in loco brought the details of the events to readers, with stories from different cities on the same day, including abroad. With the speech from organizers and people.

Adequately covering anti-government acts is an obligation for the public media. Even more so when a pandemic causes initiatives that generate agglomeration and risk of contracting a fatal disease must be very well considered. And in the end, tens of thousands of people in hundreds of cities concluded that the government is more dangerous than the virus and worth the risk to speak out.



## Exclusive interview for electoral platform and denialism



TV Brasil broadcasted an exclusive interview with President Jair Bolsonaro on the night of July 19. But what could be a great opportunity to ask blunt questions and clarify obscure points in the country's management, in the face of so many controversies denounced daily by the press, proved to be a space for the president's typical negationist platform, who also took the opportunity to defend himself against accusations that were not even asked, reinforce environmental destruction projects and narrative dispute.

In a 36-minute interview, the president undervalued the life-saving effect that vaccination against Covid-19 is achieving, continued advocating what he calls early treatment against the disease, with chloroquine and azithromycin, which at this point in the pandemic had already proved ineffective, and insisted on the thesis that indigenous people are responsible for the forest fires that have been ravaging the country since 2019. Not even in the president's lies did the interview present any news.

The interview was announced as an exclusive for Rádio Nacional da Amazônia and the speech was used for a text by Agência Brasil and also in Radioagência Nacional.

In the interview, Bolsonaro criminalizes social movements, declares that corruption in the country started when the Workers' Party was at the presidency and that indigenous people want to exploit their land with small hydroelectric plants and mining, adding the fallacy that "Brazil has a lot of land for a few indigenous people". The president speaks of an "environmental penalty industry" and an "indigenous land demarcation industry", that according to him are promoted by foreign organizations.

Faced with so many inaccurate and wicked-statements, EBC Citizenship Ombudsman checked the president's statements, which were never questioned by the interviewer or minimally contextualized. Check it out (in Portuguese): <https://ouvidoriacidadeabc.org/exclusiva-para-palanque-e-negacionismo/>

## Everyone saw the misuse of TV Brasil



Once again, President Jair Bolsonaro used the EBC public channels as an electoral platform. This time, he disguised it by opening his weekly live show to the press, which is broadcast every Thursday on his social networks. For over two hours Bolsonaro, alongside the Minister of Justice, spoke without being questioned, as if it were a pronouncement.

On July 29, the Social Communication Secretariat released a "Notice of Agenda" with a requirement for accreditation, participate in the "Weekly Live with the - LIVE broadcast only".

Despite the explicit warning that the event would be "expository" and that there would be no "space for questions", the press call was enough for TV Brasil and Agência Brasil to join the broadcast and air the direct and uncut signal of the president.

On the Agency's link, the notice appears that "the president spoke about possible fraud in the 2014 and 2018 elections". TV Brasil link only mentioned "President Jair Bolsonaro makes a presentation to the press at Palácio da Alvorada".

At the occasion Bolsonaro presented inferences and conspiracy theories that bubble up from social networks against the Brazilian electoral system, without any evidence of fraud. The fact that TV Brasil transmitted it reverberated in commercial vehicles, and several journalists denounced the misuse of public TV. Among them, O Globo, Folha de São Paulo, Agência Pública, CBN, Uol and Band News.

## Paulo Freire



Educator Paulo Freire is one of the most honored personalities in Brazilian history, with at least 40 titles of Doctor Honoris Causa from universities in Europe and the Americas. Always remembered as a theoretical reference for his emancipatory ideas, he spread the view that the classroom is a mechanism for social transformation and that education is an instrument for awareness and the formation of a critical sense.

However, the importance of the patron of Brazilian education, celebrated in September 2021, was not highlighted by the EBC vehicles on the centenary of the educator, one of the most important events of the year. Nothing was produced by the journalism division of any of the company's vehicles.

Only the radios mentioned the date. We found two contents about the intellectual's birthday on Rádio MEC and Nacional, but they were not produced especially for the date, only interviews related to the topic.

Isn't Paulo Freire a subject for public communication? Someone whose ideas encourage critical thinking? Of course it is! So much so that TV Cultura de São Paulo released an unprecedented documentary about the educator, produced by the station's journalism department. In the case of British public communication, the BBC also remembered the centenary of the educator, republishing content from 2019, as well as Educational TV (TVE) from Bahia, with an exhibition of films and actions on social networks.

With that little visibility for such an important date, it is clear that EBC gave up producing qualified content.

## TV Brasil schedule interruptions for events with Bolsonaro amount 165 hours



The interruptions of TV Brasil's programming schedule for the entry of events with President Jair Bolsonaro on live amount 165:10:44 throughout 2021, with a total of 209 events broadcast illegally on the public TV. Throughout 2020, there were 157 events, which occupied TV Brasil for 109:17:40.

These interruptions began in April 2019, after the EBC 216 internal ordinance unified the broadcasts of the public broadcaster TV Brasil and TV NBR, the federal government TV, both operated by EBC. The act extinguished the separation that existed between the public channel and the state channel. In 2019 alone, from the entry into force of the rule, interruptions on TV Brasil for events with Bolsonaro totaled 51:44:01, with 90 live broadcasts.

Many of these events broadcasted by TV Brasil do not meet the public interest or newsworthiness criteria. Graduations of military schools, religious ceremonies and inaugurations of constructions are common, these ones with a strong character of electoral propaganda. Among the total of events in these three years, we count 68 solemnities and military ceremonies, which took up a total of 72 hours of public TV broadcasting.



## Brazil and the EBC being ashamed

Agência Brasil Foreign Language Service Manifest

December 2021

*\*Published on the occasion of the strike by EBC workers, which had 100% support from the translation team*



Anyone who accesses Agência Brasil's pages in Spanish and English today will see dozens of articles "translated" by "artificial intelligence", in this case a fancy term for automatic translation, that is, that type of translation done by Google. The use of this resource, in the way it has been done, disqualifies the work carried out for more than a decade by the Foreign Language Service, the sector responsible for selecting, contextualizing, preparing and translating the Agency's materials, in English and Spanish, targeting the foreign audience. To do this work, we have an experienced editor and translators who are qualified for this type of task and much more, as we also meet demands for corporate translation and audiovisual content from TV Brasil, among others.

It is true that the current situation of the Agency's pages in English and Spanish, which began to receive a flood of random and poorly translated texts precisely in our absence, when we joined the strike, not only humiliates our professionals but also demoralizes the company and makes Brazil to be a great shame. The artificial intelligence that signs the texts without supervision is a compliment to ignorance. How did we get to this point?

Contrary to what one might think, translators are not old-fashioned people, averse to technology, afraid of being replaced by machines. The work of the modern translator incorporates advanced technologies, including, but not limited to, machine translation. This

is because the so-called automatic translation is not automatic at all. Its correct use in a production environment depends on translators with specific linguistic and technical skills, in addition to a set of processes and tools suitable for the job. Therefore, to imagine that an application alone can produce sufficiently reasonable journalistic texts in another language, without any previous preparation and just a "review" by the translator, shows ignorance.

As a result, Brazil and the EBC are ashamed. We have listed some of the articles recently translated by "artificial intelligence" and published in Agência Brasil. In addition to incorrect and/or inappropriate translations, there are problems on several levels, such as the total disregard of all EBC's editorial standards and conventions (measurements, currencies, acronyms, translation of proper names), the absence of any contextualization, including the title, and the coverage of subjects that are not in EBC's foreign audience agenda, such as local events and issues that has no relation to Brazil.

Read the full manifest here (in Portuguese): <https://ouvidoriacidadaebc.org/o-brasil-e-a-ebc-passando-vergonha/>

## **International Association for Media and Communication Research supports Brazil's EBC**

*By IAMCR on 29 November 2021*



The International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) stands in solidarity with workers at Brazil's national public service broadcaster, the Empresa Brasil de Comunicação (EBC), in its fight to safeguard the Brazilian people's right to public broadcasting reflecting the interests of society, consistent with Brazil's Federal Constitution.

Constitution Article 223 on the principles of radio and audiovisual broadcasting in Brazil sets out the complementary nature of the country's public, private and governmental broadcasting network system. The public mandate of the system is fulfilled by EBC, a public company charged with the administration of several public service media outlets: television channel TV Brasil, eight radio stations, and the news agency, Agência Brasil.

Since former President Dilma Rousseff was impeached in 2016, the principles set out in the EBC's foundation law have been under fire. First to be targeted was the Curator Council, the main organisation for participation of society in the management of public outlets which was abolished. In 2019, under President Jair Bolsonaro, the situation has deteriorated with the EBC under constant threat of closing and public broadcasters being used for government propaganda purposes.

The EBC's Citizenship Ombudsman Office, created by the Frente em Defesa da EBC e da Comunicação Pública (Front for the Defence of EBC and Public Broadcasting), has taken on the role no longer played by the EBC's ombudsman office since it is constrained in its mission to preserve and defend the quality of public interest content.

IAMCR declares its full support for EBC workers, who, with other representatives of society are fighting to protect the EBC, the rights of audiences, and the fundamental principles of public broadcasting that must govern its outlets.

Link to original: <https://iamcr.org/clearinghouse/brasil-ebc>

## Why Brazil's public media must remain public

By Akemi Nitahara & Mariana Martins

Published in Public Media Alliance on November 22, 2021



It is certainly nothing new that Brazil is going through one of the most challenging moments in its recent history. The advance of world conservatism has had its effects in the country since 2016, with the coup d'état against then-president Dilma Rousseff, of the Workers' Party. Since then, a neoliberal agenda has imposed setbacks to important economic equality and democratic development policies. In 2018, the advance of conservatism entered another dimension with the election of Jair Bolsonaro, an

ultra-right politician and retired military officer, who holds serious accusations of connection with the paramilitary militia.

Bolsonaro's government has deepened neoliberal policies with an agenda of privatisation and destruction of the minimum Welfare State that Brazil had preserved in the last two decades. We are currently watching perplexed, as the country collapses down the rankings of economic, social, and democratic development indicators. Concrete examples of this setback are the return of thousands of people to poverty – aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the irresponsible way in which the government addressed the issue – the increase in Amazon deforestation and other tropical biomes, the weakening of democratic institutions, and the systematic attack on the media, especially the public media.

It is about this latest attack that we dedicate this article. First, it should be put into context that the creation of a public media company in Brazil, Empresa Brasil de Comunicação (EBC), came to be only in 2007, almost 30 years after it was predicted in our federal constitution. Created under the then-president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the EBC was one of the most important communication policies of the labor government, responding to a demand from the national movement for the democratisation of communication.

*Brazil did not have enough time to know and understand the importance of public media.*

Previously in Brazil, the popularisation and consolidation of the mass media took place through private companies. Government communication has also been present, though more timidly, since the 1930s. Public service broadcasting, on the other hand, was born late and without the autonomy and investment necessary for conquering Brazilian audiences. Even with that, in its first 10 years, EBC was fulfilling an important role in bringing a plurality of voices, content, and formats, besides encouraging critical thinking and investment in local productions. In addition, with the representation of society through a Board of Trustees, EBC was gradually overcoming its limitations. Brazil, however, did not have enough time to know and understand the importance of public media.

The first attack against EBC's maintenance was taken by Michel Temer's government, in 2016, who changed the law that regulates the company, extinguishing the Board of Trustees. Two years later, still in the electoral campaign, Jair Bolsonaro announced his intention to privatise EBC. His election, in 2018, quickly deepened the process of EBC's misconfiguration, both regarding its guidelines and autonomy. Civil society and workers,

however, remain vigilant and denounce the political use of public communication structure for government propaganda and personal promotion of the president 1.

### **Risk of privatisation**

In April of this year, EBC was included in the National Privatization Program (PND). On November 3rd, the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) advanced in yet another stage of the Company's privatisation project and opened a public call to "map the companies that have the necessary skills to prepare specialised studies to structure and implement the privatisation process of EBC".

At first, the project considers four possible scenarios: maintaining the company as it currently stands; the resizing of the company, with the readjustment of functions and/or sale of assets; the privatisation of the company; or liquidation, which would be the closure of activities.

Although there is still the possibility of keeping EBC as it is, the government already showed its real intention in doing away with the public media. In October, the special secretary of the Investment Partnership Program (PPI) of the Ministry of Economy, Martha Seillier, stated that the privatisation model to be adopted for the EBC should be defined by mid-2022. And, in May, the Minister of Communications, Fábio Faria, affirmed that privatising or extinguishing the EBC was a campaign promise by President Jair Bolsonaro and that, therefore, the process would continue.

What civil society, academia, and EBC workers are fighting for at the moment, is to maintain the Company structure, even if uncharacterised, so that in a future resumption of the country's democratic development, the public media can contribute to it. We understand that without democracy there are no free media and no autonomous public communication service. We also recognise the fundamental role of this type of media in promoting citizenship and human rights, as well as we are aware of the incompatibility of this type of service with authoritarian governments.

Privatising the Brazilian public media company will probably interrupt the service for good, as the permissions to use the spectrum might be granted to private actors, who already occupy the majority of this broadcast service sphere. Not to mention that there are chances of these spectrum bands being granted to government supporters, religious or conservative broadcasters, as has already been done with other concessions.

Hence, even if state broadcasters are currently fulfilling the vexing function of serving the interests of the president of the republic, to keep portions of the spectrum is an important resistance. Radio and television concessions in Brazil last for 15 and 10 years, respectively, and for a concessionaire to lose the right to exploit a concession it is necessary that a large majority of the National Congress take a nominal position against such renewal, which in practice is almost impossible.

*We also recognise the fundamental role of this type of media in promoting citizenship and human rights.*

We reiterate the importance of the EBC in promoting a more diverse and democratic media environment amidst the huge concentration of private media in Brazil, as well as offering diversified content, free of advertisement and nationwide. There is no provision of public communication service by a private company. Privatising EBC means removing society's



right to information and entertainment without the influence of the market or the governments.

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Link to original: <https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/brazils-government-goes-on-with-its-public-broadcasting-privatisation/>

