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# Electoral blocks in Spain. A proposal of alternative model to overcome the conflict

**Joaquín Marqués-Pascual** [CV] [ORCID] [iGlobe] ESRP-Universidad de Barcelona (España)

[joaquim.marques@esrp.net](mailto:joaquim.marques@esrp.net)

**Joan-Francesc Fondevila-Gascón** [CV] [ORCID] [iGlobe] Universidad Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona (España)

[joanfrancesc.fondevila@upf.edu](mailto:joanfrancesc.fondevila@upf.edu)

**Clara de-Urbe-Gil** [CV] [ORCID] [iGlobe] Universitat de Vic, Barcelona (España) [clara.uribe@uvic.cat](mailto:clara.uribe@uvic.cat)

**Marc Perelló-Sobrepere** [CV] [ORCID] [iGlobe] Universidad Abat Oliba CEU, Barcelona (España)

[perello5@uao.es](mailto:perello5@uao.es)

## Abstract

**Introduction:** The relationship between mass media and political powers is always closely observed because it is about two fundamental powers for the satisfactory functioning of the democracy. In Spain (1983) began a practice during election campaigns: informative blocks fee, which still lingers today. It is the only democratic country of the first world that restricts the freedom of information, since one political organ (the Electoral Central Council) who controls the electoral information of public service broadcasters applying propaganda instead of journalist’s criteria. This practice weakens the democratic system and feeds the perception that the public mass-media do not accomplish the role of free and truthful reporting. **Methodology:** The research analyzes and compares the legislation of a dozen European countries on this subject to observe the different solutions provided. On the other hand, we proceeded to make a fifty interviews with experts (professionals, politicians and regulators) in order to obtain the minimum consensual elements. **Results and conclusions.** Finally, we propose a replacement model that will overcome the current conflict.

**Keywords:** mass-media; politics; elections; political-information; television; audiovisual.

**Contents:** 1. Introduction. The electoral blocs in Spain. 2. Methods. 3. 4. Conclusion. A proposal of a new model. 5. Notes and references.

Traslate by **Stephanie Gaspard**

## 1. Introduction. Electoral blocks in Spain

The level of quality of the democracy in Spain is in question for diverse reasons (Villoria-Mendieta, 2007). Every time there are more citizens who show their dissatisfaction with the limitations established by the current democratic frame for the effective development of the popular control over the delegated powers. This process has generated a continuous politic disaffection of the citizenship and an undervaluation of the paper played by the elected representatives.

Public opinion reviews have also been translated to journalism for the paper played in the transmission, in too many cases little independent, of the information. This process of disqualification of the mass media due to its independence with respect to the political powers, especially with respect of the Executive, it is even more obvious during the electoral processes.

The functions that democratic societies have assigned to MMCC go from the realization of a veracious, honest, complete and plural information, which is the base for the communities that life in democracy to really know the occurred facts. Through the information transmitted by the media to the citizens, these can fully and responsibly participate in the public live. Moreover, since public representatives and civil servants are potentially corruptible, as it has been demonstrated in numerous occasions, journalism assumes a vigilance and control function (*watchdog*) of the institutions and their responsables. Nevertheless, the order of the control factors is questioned (Blesa-Aledo, 2006).

The public media must claim all these functions in a more responsible way than the private media if possible because they have been especially designated for being at the community service (Andreu, 2005). After all, property belongs to all citizens.

In the case of the private media, despite they have to be governed by the neutrality principles and the informative interest, their room of maneuver is the typical of a private enterprise.

These principles belong to our constitutional legislation. The first point of the article 20 of the Spanish Constitution that recognizes and protects the right of the citizens to receive freely true information through any diffusion media the exercise of these rights cannot be restricted by any type of previous censorship. For its part, Law 17/2006, that regulates the public service of the radio and television of state ownership, indicates that these media have to be governed by a public service criteria, which implies the capacity of applying with freedom a monitoring function on the functioning of the institutions (Holgado-González, 2003: 476).

However, these precepts are not always accomplished. One of the most notable evidences take place in the public media during the weeks in which the election campaigns are developed. Journalists of these medias, radios and public televisions, have conditioned their informative independence because of an specific normative that force them to cover all political organizations information with a no professional guidelines. Moreover, the campaign's agenda and its impact on the vote implies more pressure to the journalist (D'Adamo y García-Beaudoux, 2006: 8).

This practice was initiated in 1983. In that period it was proceed to an informative coverage of the local and autonomic elections (of May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1983) applying a proportional criterion of the time distribution dedicated to the information of the politic forces depending on the popular support obtained in previous elections. Back then that practice was named running time. However, that decision that initially was supported by the agreement of the political class it has generated many

controversies on having politicized in a considerable manner the informative labor of the public media during the electoral periods (Hallin & Mancini, 2008, 123 and ss.).

Since middle of 80's decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Organic Law 5/1985 of the General Electoral Regime (LOREG) was approved in the 19<sup>th</sup> of June, it was established that the competent authority for determining if neutrality and politic pluralism were respected in the information diffused by the informative services of the public MMCC will be the Electoral Central Meeting (JEC), delegating some decisions on boards of regional or local level, as framed in the state decentralization process that established the Spanish constitution of 1978. Since then, JEC and other electoral organizations of minor rank had the competences to decide which should be the informative procedures in the coverage of the information referred to the political powers during electoral campaigns (Rabadán, 2015: 161-162).

JEC, finding shelter in LOREG, established that the number of minutes dedicated to each political formation in the news of the public media during the electoral campaign must have a direct relation with the parliamentary representation of each political party. However, this criterion, more proper of the political propaganda rather than the journalistic information, does not appear in any article of the mentioned law. It is an interpretative, own and exclusive criterion, of the JEC members. At the beginning of the present century was originated the LOREG reform (through the Organic Law 3/2011, in 28<sup>th</sup> January) worsening it is even possible the situation because some of the responsibilities that initially only affected the public MMCC, were extended to the privates too. Moreover, the reform expanded the Electoral Central Meeting (JEC) responsibility in the definition of the contents and timing of the politic information during the electoral periods (García-Mahamut y Rallo, 2011).

This procedure, that has ended being renowned popularly as “the electoral blocks”, obliges that the electoral information of the radio and television informative during the campaign before the elections is organized in a determined manner: attending to a strict order and time depending on the parliamentary representation of each political power, giving more time and space to the forces with a major number of seats, which can easily generate an inbreeding little healthy in the political system (Castro 2008, 106).

It should be questioned the typical method of selection applied by the JEC members. For example, why one did not proceed in its moment to give the timing according to the number of votes of each political organization and not the number of representatives? CE establishes in its article 68.3 that the Spanish electoral system must be based on “*criteria of proportional representation*”. When it was defined the Spanish electoral law it was decided to apply the D'Hondt Law, that tends to favor the strongest parties in every district, in such a way that when JEC decides a determined allocation of timing according to its criterion it doesn't keep strictly to the constitutional order but the electoral method created by Victor d'Hondt that, as it is known, generates a series of distortions during the assignation process of the elected positions seats.

Also, we can question the following: why is it blocked the diffusion of the information of the parties that have not achieved to enter in parliaments? We cannot find a valid response beyond understanding that the situation is a result of the mutual mistrust of the political forces and the politicization of the own public media, carried out by every group that accessed to the power. This practice is no exclusive of Spain (Van Dalen, 2012a: 466).

Through the normative structure of LOREG and, above all, the restrictive interpretations of JEC, it is clearly visualized how the freedom of information is restricted at having applied political criterion in informative functions. With this decision Spain has turned in the unique European country and worldwide (Almiron *et al.*, 2010: 230) that applies this type of criterion so restricted. Even though we do not have enough data to raise the Spanish case to a worldwide category.

From the field of the information professionals' one has been claiming a change in these guidelines for decades, without achieving that this request has been accepted neither by the legislators nor for the executive power. For more than one decade, there are increasingly public media that refuse to sign the informative pieces that they make, related with the electoral processes, procedure known as, strike of signatures, in protest. They try to raise awareness about this arbitrariness among the citizens that has been producing in favor of the political parties with institutional representation (Casero-Ripollés, 2009).

In addition, the principal political parties send with frequency to the editorial departments the informative pieces, already edited, so that they are issued without barely intervention of the journalists. The scenography is favorable to particular interests omitting important information not translated to the citizens. In some occasions, it is banned the entrance of the graphical MMCC to certain electoral acts in order to impede the acquisition of some unpleasant planes (Casero-Ripollés, 2012: 39), what alters an informative space that turn into political propaganda. The constitutional right "*to receive freely true information*" (art. 20) remains stained. Faced with this mass of arbitrariness, citizens faced with growing disinterest apathy when no such information (Berrocal, 2005).

From various petitions one tries to argue the situation to the political representatives, but no initiative has achieved to modify the situation attending to the criterion of neutrality, equity, balance and plurality. Because the measure is applied to all kind of elections in Spain (generals, autonomous or locals), and the Autonomous Communities that have an own electoral law they do not have legislated about the question, this seems to be endemic. The media, and especially television, are a key source of social influence (Torres, 2007: 710).

## 2. Methodology

Faced with the question, the researchers have been decided to create a model of resolution of the conflict exposed in the previous pages on the basis of a methodological approach and subsequent empirical work of investigation that has the following items:

- Study and document how a dozen of European countries have solved this difficulty through the enquiry with each of the regular organisms (in case of existing) or by the contact with the main mass media if they do auto regulation.
- Based on the different solutions contributed, we establish a series of surveys with depth vocation (from a non-probabilistic convenience sample) on the basis of mainly open questions done to the involved actors (legislators, regulators, journalists, experts and citizens). One of the priorities is that the sample selected is representative of the involved universe (half a hundred of the answers were received over an initial universe of 200 petitions).

- The in depth questionnaire (open and close questions) pretends to conduct towards the overcoming of the current situation through the proposal of the various measures approved beyond the frontiers, specifying the most viable option for the local reality.
- The final process is initiated with the tabulation of the answers and the standardization of the solutions. The next step is concentered in the development of a model of common minimum base of consensus, which will be sent to all the participants for their acceptance as central defining element of a new regulatory frame.

### 3, Results

#### 3.1. Electoral blocks in the international level

The informative task in electoral period in some European countries, like Spain, is characterized for being less rigid. Usually Europe fluctuates from the internal self-control of every media until regulative organisms. Nevertheless, professional criterions and not politics prevail. Some countries rely on institutions that monitor and observe the norms and regulate possible complaints and breaches *a posteriori*. In other situations, the vigilance is exercised from independent organisms.

Although it exceeds this work, point to the existence of practices similarities in other countries such as Moldova and Ukraine, which have not been analyzed as it is not in the scope of the European Union which is the focus where this research has focused (Castro-Herrero, 2016; Brett and Knott, 2015; Rybiy, 2013).

We have analyzed the most representative neighboring countries (12, without the Spanish case), to know those differences. So, in Germany, whose regulation hangs of the Constitution, the Inter-State Agreement of Broadcasting, Law of Mass media, Statutes and Recommendations of ARD, ZDF and Deutschlandradio, every lander regulates the question under where he has complete competences in education and culture. For supervising the accomplishment of the regulation it is established an internal control. About the electoral blocks, the law (Rundfunkstaatsvertrag) only cites a “reasonable time” for all the presented parties. The Rundfunkstaatsvertrag has an extra document written for ARD and ZDF (Redaktionell gestaltete sendungen zu wahlen, Recommendations for the news program editors in electoral periods) that both channels have to follow. One speaks to “balance” the time of the parties, but it doesn’t exist a specific time.

In Belgium, the regulation comes from the Constitution, Broadcasting Law, federal laws, Protection law of the Philosophical and Ideological Associations and VRT’s publishing Statute. VRM (Flemish Regulator of Media) penalized VRT for not giving enough coverage to one party of extremist ideology (Vlaams Belang), and dictated that its information can only be omitted in the case of a reasonable justification, ambiguous concept. About the electoral blocks, 50% of the time it is proportionally divided to the parliamentary representation and the other 50% it is divided equitably (VRT), even though it is not always accomplished. Political party advertisements are banned in the television and the public radios. The regulation is different between the French-speaking and the Flemish area. Therefore, VRT Statutes demand impartiality at any time (it is in electoral periods or not). When the start of elections are five week away the reports can only contain images recorded by VRT, and does not exist specific rules for the electoral campaigns. VRM only regulates the Flemish

communication media, like VRT (Holland language). "Het Vlaamse Media Decreet" (Broadcasting Flemish law) establishes (chapter 6, section 2 and article 39) that the representation must be "equilibrate", but it does not exist a real method of calculation. It triggered controversy in 2012 due to the imbalances observed in the relation of time and representation (NVA, right wing political party, with 30% of voters, only had 16% of time in antenna in the politic coverage of the public broadcaster).

In Denmark, the regulation comes from "Media law and the DR Ethic Code". It exists internal control. About the electoral blocks, the political party representation during the electoral campaigns in DR and TV2 must have the same coverage (and the same time). This is stipulated in the DR ethical standards. In other journalistic programs and in debates of this rule it is not strictly followed, as it happens in Spain there are prime-time debates only with two politicians: the current Prime Minister and the opponent.

In the Finnish case, the regulation is stressed in the Constitution, the Law of Transparency of the Governmental Activity, Law of Mass media, Laws of YLE and Yleisradio, Law of Parties and YLE's Internal Code. The fulfillment of the regulation relies on the internal control (the Constitution specifies that cannot be external interferences; in fact, all the power relies on the chief editor). Electoral blocks does not exist and all is reduced to ethical and plurality principles.

In France, the regulation comes from the Constitution, Media's Freedom Law and Mechanism of control of the CSA (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel, Audiovisual Superior Council). Constitution does an explicit reference to the Declaration of Human Rights to certificate the freedom of expression. The Media's Freedom Law (1986) stipulates that the CSA has to do reports for the Parliament and the parties about how many times politicians appear in the television in order to guarantee the plurality. About the electoral blocks, during four decades, the blocks of political information in no-campaign periods followed the third quarter's rules: one quarter of the time for the government, another quarter for the parliamentary majority and the last one for the opposition. In 2009 it was simplified to an "X" time for the president, the government and the parliamentary majority, and the other "Y" for the opposition, that it will never be less than the half of "X". It is also said that the minor parties or extra-parliamentary must have a "fair" time, without specifying more. In electoral period, there are blocks and they distinguish per times. Therefore, three months before the beginning of the campaigns they talk about "fair" time: a proportional time is dedicated to the parliamentary representation. After these three months, from the beginning of the campaign until the electoral night, they are regulated by the "equality", that means that everybody has the same time. CSA says that they check these rules each election.

In Holland, the regulation comes from the Constitution and the Media Law. The current system is experimenting a change. The Dutch tradition with respect to the public broadcasting is based on a consociational structure of Holland. The consociational basic idea is the proportionality. The access to the public radio and television was depending on the size of its circumscription in the public sphere. Therefore, a catholic broadcasting company emits the programs that represent a catholic perspective, and a protestant broadcasting company represents a protestant vision of the world. The antenna time and the budget depend on the size of its members. It also exists an independent and neutral organism of state broadcasting similar to the BBC. The regulation depends on CvdM (Dutch Media Authority). About the electoral blocks, the political parties receive a space to advertise themselves in TV. It is enough to have only one seat in the parliament in order to have a right to the commercials. The order is decided by raffle for Zendtijd Politieke Partijen. All the parties receive the

same time. Regarding the debates or the news in TV and radio do not exist a limit. In news each media decides, and in the debates and interviews the time is agreed between the parties that are going to come, but there is not anything prefixed or predetermined.

In Italy, the regulation is originated in the Constitution, the Equality Law of Access to Media in Electoral Campaigns, Gasparri Law, Service Agreement and RAI's Ethic Code and Agreements of the AGCOM (Autorità per le garanzie nelle comunicazioni) which is the responsible of controlling the fulfillment of the regulation is AGCOM. As in the French case, AGCOM must elaborate the reports to explain how many times politicians and parties appear in the media but it does not set any criterion or recommendation for dividing the times beyond "being fair" and plurals. The own channels are the ones who establish the time calculation. About the electoral blocks, they exist for the debate programs and talk-shows under the premise of dividing the time equitably (to equal parts – *par condicio*). However, there is not regulation for the news program. With respect to that, RAI tries to balance the time, but without specific calculus. In campaigns they set blocks between 1 and 3 as a kind of advertisings. They are free in the public's but for a fee in the private's.

In the Norwegian case, the Broadcasting Law establishes certain frames to the public broadcasting, as for the commercial one. This law is principally related to questions relative to the license for the broadcasting, technical questions, limits for the commercials, the sponsorship and the advertising in radios and television. However, this law does not pronounce about the politic coverage. The law refers to a Broadcasting Council and Broadcasting Directive EEA, without specifying beyond their functions. A part from the Broadcasting law, there exist other laws with a certain relevance in the mass media, such as the Constitution (that guarantees the freedom of expression), the Criminal Law, Marketing and Public Relations Law and the Protection Law of Privacy. The European Declaration of Human Rights is an intrinsic part of the Norwegian legislation. In 2008, the Norwegian Parliament approved the Editorial Freedom Law, which establishes that no one else more than the editor must take decisions on editorial questions. In order to control the fulfillment of the regulation, the governmental organism Medietilsynet (Norwegian media authority) looks after the compliance of the Broadcasting Law, but it cannot interfere in editorial questions. If it did it, it will cause complaints in and out the mass media. NRK disposes of an Ethic Code and a Complaint Commission that help the internal regulation. It also exists a consulting body (or committee) named by the authorities and design to evaluate and give advice to the public television, NRK (Norwegian Public Broadcasting). The committee (Kringkastingrådet, Broadcasting Council) has little influence. About the electoral blocks, they existed in the debates of the past (60's, 70's and 80's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) where the time was indicated according to the parliamentary representation. From 90's and further on, they do not exist and both the news and the debates are done according to the journalist interest and internal criterions.

In Poland, the regulation is defined by the Broadcasting law, Regulation of the Advice of Broadcasting (a complete document that establishes all the programs and their duration in campaign periods, from 15 days before the day of the vote in forward) and the Election Act (2011). The first is entrusted with the legal-technic aspects of the broadcasting. The second looks out for the fulfillment of the law. The electoral blocks exist but they do not have dependency on the number of votes or members in the Parliament, as it happens in Spain. The blocks are divided by an equal time between all the registered parties with enough signatures in the national committee, both nationally and regionally, either national, regional or European elections.

In the Portuguese case, the regulation is marked by the Constitution, the Television and Radio Law, electoral Laws and the Law of Journalistic Coverage of the Candidates, besides the Statute of Journalists. They control the fulfillment of the ERC (Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social) and the CNE (Comissão Nacional de Eleições) regulation. About the electoral blocks, parties have own spaces in TV that produce themselves to launch some messages or responses to other parties. The duration of these spaces is proportional to its parliamentary representation. Parties with representation have right, annually, to ten minutes “in antenna” plus thirty seconds extra for each parliamentary member. Parties without representation have five minutes in antenna plus thirty seconds for every 15.000 votes that they obtained in the past elections. The government has 60 seconds and the opposition parties other 60 seconds to split proportionally with its representation. Parties can advertise in TV and radio paying for it, except in electoral campaign. In campaign is public TV/radio responsibility to talk about them to an own opinion. During electoral campaign period, operators reserve thirty seconds for all candidatures, about a daily base, equally divided in two parts of 15 minutes without interruption. Time is divided in identical parts. The Civil Governor determines by raffle the time distribution.

In United Kingdom, regulation depends on Communication Law, Royal Letter and Agreements of the BBC, publishing Guide of BBC and OFCOM (Independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries). It exists an internal control and, in electoral blocks, exists a proportionality but with journalistic touches. It is intended that all political parties with parliamentary representation have the same time in antenna. About the extra-parlamentaries, it is being debated about including them or not in the blocks, and it seems to be that it will be a positive consensus soon.

In Sweden, the regulation comes from the Constitution, Television and Radio law, SVT State Letter and the SVT publishing Guide. The Swedish constitution is composed by four major laws, two of which do express mention to the freedom of press and the freedom of expression. The responsables of controlling the fulfillment of the regulation are GRN (Swedish Broadcasting Commission) and RTVV (Swedish Radio and TV Authority). About the electoral blocks, there are not notorious differences between the campaign periods and the normal one. The politic news must be impartial and objective. There are not blocks.

In general, we observe a predominance of the external control (Belgium, France, Italy, Norwegian, Holland, Poland, Portugal and Sweden) over the internal (four countries: Germany, Denmark, Finland and United Kingdom). Equally, about the availability of the electoral blocks, they are majority in the countries that do not establish them (Germany, Finland, Italy, Norway, Holland, United Kingdom and Sweden). Belgium do determine blocks (with external control), Denmark (internal control), France (external control), Poland (external control) and Portugal (external control).

Therefore, similar cases to Spain are the Belgium, France, Poland and Portugal ones, with favorable differences to these countries, because in Belgium the 50% of the time is divided proportionally to the parliamentary representation, and the other 50% equitably, and in addition five weeks before the elections VRT can only emit recorded images by the media and political announcements are forbidden; France, three months before the campaign, divides the time proportionally to the representation, but when the campaign starts the time is divided equitably; Poland includes parties with a minimum of votes; and Portugal divides the time equitably and the order is decided by raffle.

### 3.2. The opinion of the groups involved

There were conducted in-depth surveys with representatives of the implicated parties (journalists, politicians, regulators, etc). The central topics were the opinion of the current solution (blocks), opinion about the frozen conflicted, proposal of other alternatives (solutions provided in UE) and the level of acceptance of each one. In total, there were achieved more than half hundreds of answers, adding the different languages in which the surveys were send. Next there is exposed a summary of the answers obtained in each of the written down blocks.

A clear majority of experts involved are in favor of the suppression of the electoral blocks. Probably, it would be an optimal solution in order to concede the supremacy to the journalistic criterion, the relevancy one, proximity or the one considered the most convenient.

However, this ambition, traditionally defended for the professionals' representative organizations, has never been accepted in a clear manner by the different parliamentary majorities.

In this line, with the collected opinions, we suggest a model that contains those closeness points around which the new model can be hatched. We write down the main conclusions of the surveys.

The 62.7% of respondents are opposed to the electoral blocks, whereas 25.5% is in favor with this formula, but with a model different from the one in force. Barely, 11.8% of experts bets for the current model. In case of maintaining the current electoral blocks, there exist various options, statistically ordered in the following way: a mixed model (proportional part, equitable part) for 62.2%; a proportional model to the representation (in force model) for 20%; or an equitable model (the same time for everybody) (17.8%). Therefore, the mixed model is prioritized before the rest of alternatives.

At the moment of arranging the appearances of the political representatives, the specialists opt for doing it equally (journalistic criterions) (78.7%) and, with a great distance, by raffle (14.9%). The least defended option is the order from highest to lowest representation (6.4%). Curiously, this is the in force model.

When it is wondered if the model should be unambiguous for all the public media, a minority of experts (32.7%) consider that every media should be able to choose the model they preferred. In this way, they are opposed to homogenize a model for all the media, and they stand up for the informative plurality. There is a majority of respondents (67.3%) the one that maintains that a regulation or an agreement should exist in order that all of them were using the same model.

About if the political parties without representation but with notable interest should be part of the blocks, the answer is overwhelmingly positive: political parties without representation deserve the same conditions as the parties with representation (75%). In case of not being blocks, parties without representation should be part of the information of the electoral campaign with different parameters of the parties with representation (96.4%). Only a 3.6% of the respondents reject the presence of the parties without representation.

Another angular axis is who should fix the characteristics of the electoral blocks. The answers are principally distributed between independent organisms (38.7%) and media auto regulation (style book, internal commission, publisher supervision, etc.) (34.7%). From distance there is placed the professional college (13.3%) and chamber of autonomic representatives (8%) or the state one (5.3%).

About who should safeguard the fulfillment of the electoral blocks and their contents, also dominates the independent organism (47.1%), auto regulation of the media (Style book, internal commission, publisher supervision, etc.) (30%), professional college (14.3%), chamber of autonomic representatives (5.7%) and the state one (2.9%).

In case of an auto regulation of the own media, the majority of the ones surveyed (60%) consider that this one should produce accounts to someone, in this case to an external and independent organism. The 21.5% defends that there would be necessary to produce accounts to an internal organ of the own media, the 10.8% to the state, autonomic or local government, and a 7.7% maintains that there would not be necessary to produce accounts to anybody.

In case of existing an external organ apart from the media, when it is wondered if this one should have the power to impose penalties, the majority of the answers (70%) advocate for this option, whereas 30% does not agree.

When one asks what the private media should do if a new regulation of the electoral blocks was reached, the majority answer is that they should be able to choose between adding or not to the regulation (65.3%). From distance there places the situation that they should be forced to accomplish the regulation, as the public media (34.7%).

In response to the question of whether they know how the electoral blocks work in some of the following countries, the most mentioned are United Kingdom (17.1%), France (16.2%), Germany and Italy (13.3%), Belgium and Portugal (7.6%), Sweden (5.7%), Finland and Holland (4.8%), Denmark (3.8%), Norway and Poland (2.9%).

In front of the affirmation “Electoral blocks limit the journalist freedom”, it predominates the “many” and “enough” (36%), doubling the “little” (18%). The last option is “not at all” (10%).

When the next affirmation is set out “Blocks, according to arrange, can be synonymous of impartiality”, a great balance is detected, even though it predominates “little” (38%), ahead of “enough” (34%), “not at all” (26%) and “many” (2%).

The assertion “Blocks, as arrange, can be synonymous of plurality” generates responses very distributed: “enough” (39.2%), “little” (29.4%), “not at all” (23.5%) and “many” (7.8%).

The sentence “Blocks should disappear in favor of the journalistic freedom” does position the experts in favor of the “many” (54%), overtaking the “not at all” (18%), “enough” (16%) and “little” (12%). It links with the priority positioning of the journalistic freedom to distribute the times and the order of appearance of the political parties in electoral campaigns. Of the same kind, though in the opposite direction, are the responses to “Public media perform independent from the political power”: the majority (60.8%) answer that “little”, 29.4% “not at all”, 7.8% “enough” and 2% “many”.

“No” (65.4%) prevails in the question: “¿Do you believe necessary that all autonomous communities have public media?”. The supporters that every autonomous community has a mean of own communication are the 34.6%. Finally, about how public media should be financed, the majority of responses stand for the public subsidy (38.5%), followed by the publicity (32.7%) and the canon (28.8%). The partner option and crowdfunding doesn't register any adept.

As global characteristics of the results, we observe that most of the sample would prefer the abolition of the electoral blocks, but assumes that, since it is practically non-viable, the current model can only be modified.

Finally, at the moment of organizing the electoral blocks, according to the experts, it must be pursued a proportional model to the representation, that is to say, that is used the current pattern, though changing it. The mixed formula (one part proportionally and the other equitably) also has a relevant support. The equitable model, that is to say, the same time assignation for everybody, stays in the last position.

#### 4. Conclusions. A proposal of alternative model

Our forecast is that, in order to resolve the conflict, both sides must give up their total claims and, in a negotiating process with concessions, find a point of agreement on new approaches. We analysed the data we propose a new model of management of electoral blocs which takes into account the quantitative and qualitative answers of the experts, belonging to the various groups involved.

- Our first recommendation is to maintain the system of electoral blocks but establishing a mixed model that implicates a proportional part to the representation obtained in the previous elections and another part of journalistic criterion. Certainly, the obligation (even moral) of the public mass media of informing on the contents of the electoral programs and to show plurality confers to the electoral blocks in television and radio a certain utility, because without them a percentage of the population will not access to the information and to the proposals of the politic organizations, especially for certain social groups that use the classic and free means as central axis of their informative process.
- We understand that a proportionality must exist, even though it helps to consolidate the *status quo* of previous elections. In Denmark, Poland and Portugal, all the time dedicated to the electoral information is divided in an equitable way between the pertinent political forces. In fact, the trend of the results gathered in our investigation indicates that, if there were to opt for more extreme solution, this should be the chosen one. In Finland takes precedence plurality but it does not exist a fix norm. However, the results of the various elections and the democratic evolution in Spain reflect that, beyond the current formula until now in force of electoral blocks, deep changes have taken place, since the increasing use of social networks as an information alternative to the classic media minimizes the effect of the blocks. It was emphasized in the various electoral campaigns of 2015 in Spain. On the other hand, the greater emergency of the digital private media diminishes the importance that previously the public mass media had and, therefore, the incidence of the blocks in the configuration of the public opinion.
- Inside the mixed model, the part corresponding to the journalistic criterion must belong to the professionals of the information and communication, supported by an academic qualifications and a professional career that allows to deposit in them the trust at the moment of considering and valuing the proposals and innovations generated by the different political parties. It intensifies the responsibility and the importance of the journalist when he must analyze (at the time of creating the informative contents) or when he must moderate the interventions of

the political representatives. The balance of power confers to the mass media a controller role (gatekeeper) that anybody must usurp, and that the civil society demands and deserves since it is the necessary role for the democratic system. The health of this one it is measured by the freedom of expression and the plurality of mass media. And giving to the journalists the freedom of criterion when informing about the electoral campaigns is one of the more clear evidences in this sense.

- About the control, our proposed model opts for the existence of an independent organism that combines the internal and external supervision. This formula would be equidistant. If the criteria of professional college and media auto regulation were connected (through a book of Style, internal commission or publisher supervising) with a regulator body, of agile form, making fast decisions, in the 3.0 or 4.0 internet wave, there might be solved the contingencies that were appearing in the various electoral disputes. It would be a question of creating a public but independent organism that would be dynamic, with rotating members, opened to the proposals of the civil society and capable of taking decisions fluently. This entity of control should transmit a moderate, open, independent and plural image, in the line of what is requested to the mass media and in the antipodes of what civil society is used to associate to this type of entities (slowness, gentrification, immobility, obscurantism). In the organism that would be created it should be recollected the concerns (*ergo* representatives) of the diverse levels of the public administration (estate, regional and local). As the majority of expert's sample consider that each media should be able to choose the model they preferred, if the mixed formula was established the organism of control could create territorial delegations. The implications of that (organizational and economic) should be analyzed in another investigation.
- In this way, comparatively, the Spanish model will be similar to the Belgium, in which the 50% of the time is divided proportionally to the parliamentary representation and the other 50% equitably. It is curious that in the Belgian territory the public media collects the national, cultural and linguistic plurality, because they operate the VRT (Flemish), the RTBF (French) and the BRF (German). This world view has conducted to a new consolidated model that many of the consulted experts do not know but that it has been describing as an equilibrated solution from the opinions recollected from them. Even so, the formula of control in Belgium is external. For example, it is relevant the paper of VRM (Flemish regulator of the Media).
- This research aims to achieve a change in the current legislation, involving the legislature power (Parliament). The consequences of this processing capacity and absorption of certain social demands that would demonstrate the political forces, would help improve the health of our society democratic strengthening in parallel state institutions and developing more and better informed society.
- We understand that it is necessary to find a solution to the conflict. The overcoming of the situation will help to all the involved parts. On one hand, citizens will achieve a veracious information at any time. Political representatives will not see diminished its prestigious level and, therefore, we think that it will improve its public image. Media and their professionals will win in credibility. The quality of democracy, in short, will be benefited and the democratic health in our country it would be better.

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