

Brazil goes BBC? – Guest Blog By Fernando Duarte

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 [TV in Brazil](#) is just over half a century old. It serves the fifth largest population who make up the 10th biggest economy in the world. Popularly known for micro bikinis, samba and football, Brazil is a booming country with a cultural leadership role in Latin America and increasingly, globally. We think they watch melodramatic soap-operas or tele-novellas, but what is the reality of Brazilian TV? Polis intern and journalist Fernando Duarte reports on how the Brazilian government tried to emulate British public service broadcasting with mixed results.

TV Brasil by Fernando Duarte In September last year, the Brazilian government announced the creation of [TV Brasil](#), a new public channel that would replace the under-funded and ailing state broadcasting system and provide viewers nationwide with a more diverse range of programs, not only in terms of content but also in regards to production. Brazilian commercial television, for example still has a domination of in-house production.

As an idea the new channel was hailed as something genuinely novel in a very concentrated market. In practice the project attracted criticism since day one due to the direct involvement of the government, who owns 51% of the shares in TV Brasil's parent company, ECB. Things did not get any easier after Franklin Martins, the minister for Communications, better known for his former work as a journalist and TV commentator, said that the new channel would be inspired by the BBC experience.

Commentators reacted quickly to point that the BBC model does not imply direct control by the British government. Also, as observed by Americo Martins, the Latin American editor for the [BBC World Service](#), one of the main characteristics of the corporation's history was its constant ability to unnerve politicians, prime ministers included. Although Martins and a series of other big names from national journalism hired for [TV Brasil](#) have pointed that the new channel would have its own version of a board of governors as a means to shield intervention from the government, there have been accusations of official propaganda in one of the TV Brasil's crown jewels – the news program "Reporter Brasil".

In a fiery article published at "[Comunique-se](#)", one of the country's leading independent media portals, professor Antonio Brasil, from [Rio de Janeiro Federal University](#), accused the new channel of airing what he called as "a bunch of good news about a country that doesn't really exist". The professor went further and compared the program to the daily radio broadcast "Voz do Brasil", a report on governmental and parliamentary activities that has been compulsory aired by stations in the country since 1938, by determination of the then president Getulio Vargas.

More petrol was thrown into the flames when Luiz Lobo, a journalist fired by [TV Brasil](#) went public to say that news about investigations of credit card expenses by public servants had been censored by direct order of the government. The accusations were denied by TV Brasil.

Apart from the political debate, TV Brasil's mission does not look easy in the financial side either. After a huge battle in parliament, the new channel received around 120 million pounds for its first year budget – which forced a lot of programs from the old state system into the schedule and limited the amount of new content.

Launched in early December, the channel did not have not enough transmitters to guarantee exposure to the entire country in the first few weeks of operations and also has been struggling to catch the attention of viewers. A poll published at the end of April showed that 62% of Brazilians did not know [TV Brasil](#). Amongst the respondents who had at least heard of the channel, only 8,5% said to be frequent viewers.

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