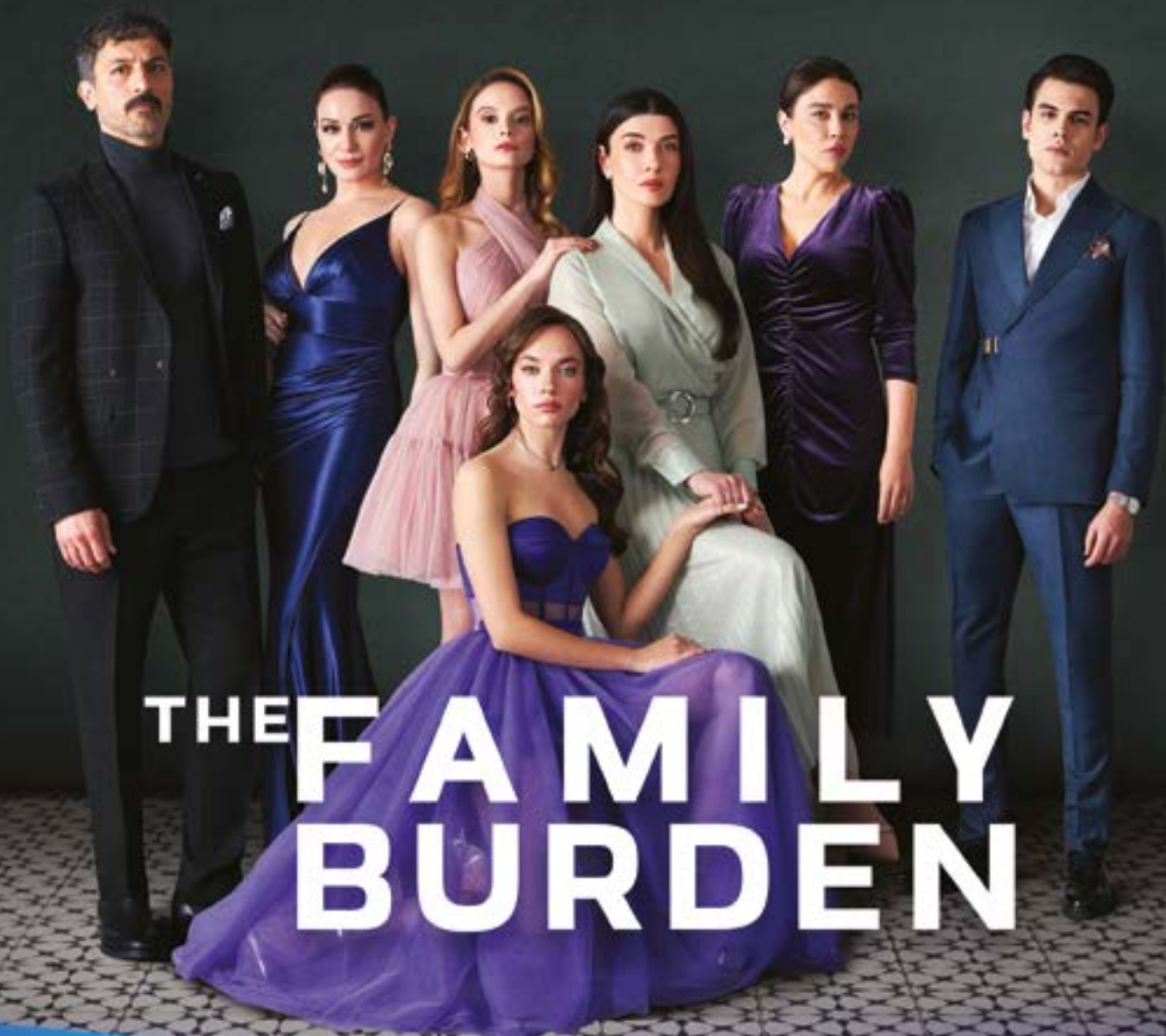


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# DYNASTY OF LOVE

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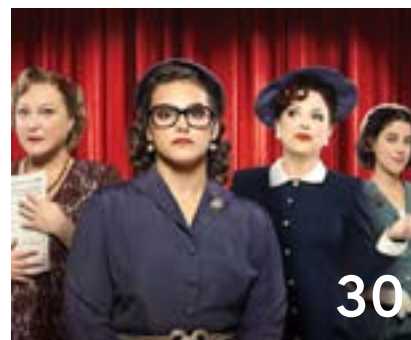
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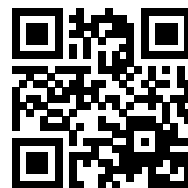
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**Georgi R. Chakarov**  
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## Streaming Giants Still Far from Conquering the CEE Markets



**A** year ago, there were lots of discussions about the rise of streaming platforms and how they could potentially revolutionize the CEE markets. Now we know – the revolution is not happening.

For NATPE Budapest 2024's edition of TVBIZZ Magazine, I wrote: "The ones trying to enter the market with a 'big bang' will soon realize that this is not possible, and despite the lower production costs (when compared to the Western markets), CEE is a tough region where you must make big and consistent investments in a lot of quality content to start gaining ground."

A year later, we have seen little progress or even worse a reduction of investments into local content by the streaming giants. If we disregard the fact that they mainly focus on Poland, even there these players seem to have lost their enthusiasm and when they offer local content it is predominantly acquired library series or newer shows from the TV broadcasters on the ground.

Investment is not just about content, it is also about localization and that part is missing on Netflix for most countries in the region. For that reason, local streaming services powered by the

traditional broadcasters continue to gain momentum and have started to cut the gap on Netflix with their diverse content offer driven by local hit series and entertainment shows and exclusive domestic and international live sports broadcasts.

The content offer without localization is just one part of the problem for the global streamers. The other one is their price which has been gradually increasing in a region where the consumers are used to getting high-quality pay TV and internet services at very affordable rates. Bundles could be a solution, and over the past year we have seen Netflix and SkyShowtime, for example, signing such important partnerships with the large operators in the region, but their impact has been barely felt – because of the price.

If Netflix, Max, Disney+, and others truly want to conquer and dominate the CEE markets they will need to significantly increase their investments in the region. However, even in markets with potential like Poland and Turkey this is not happening. Thus, traditional TV players with their own streaming platforms will remain the king in the region for many more years to come.





### CEO Pavel Stanchev leaves TV2 Group

Pavel Stantchev, who took over as CEO in May 2019, left the TV2 Group by mutual consent in April. As a result, the chairman of the board Miklós Vaszily took over the post. In May, the company also announced that Gábor Fischer has been appointed Chief Content Officer, and Bence Tóth has been appointed Chief Financial Officer & Chief Operational Officer. Both report to Vaszily.



### 3.1 million Czechs use SVOD services

In the second half of last year, 47% of Czechs aged 15–69 (i.e. approx. 3.1 million people) used at least one paid VOD service, Atmedia reported. On average, they used two different services at the same time. The top five most used platforms include Netflix, Voyo, Max, Disney+ and Prima+.



### STVR overhauls its content strategy under new DG

The Slovak Television and Radio (STVR) is set to undergo significant transformations under the leadership of its newly elected DG Martina Flašíková. As CEETV reported, popular STV1 show *I Love My Country* will be cancelled. The big entertainment projects *What Do I Know*, *Body Talk*, *Late Evening* and *The Great Bake Off* will continue to air as part of the new strategy which will focus more on in-house productions.



### IŽA wins case against the EC over LRT's financing model

The Internet Media Association (IŽA) has won the case in the EU General Court against the European Commission (EC) regarding the compatibility of the LRT funding model with the rules of State aid. This means that the EC will have to launch a formal investigation into the legality of LRT's funding model, has more than doubled the money allocated to LRT by the State.



### PRO TV remains the most profitable broadcaster in Romania

Recent data published by the Ministry of Finance reveals that PRO TV has solidified its position as the undisputed market leader, surpassing one billion lei (230 million euros) in revenue for the second consecutive year. Despite a slight decline, the network's profit remained strong at over 59 million euros. The Antena Group saw a modest increase in revenue, exceeding 140 million euros in 2024, with profit rising to 34 million euros.



### New HBO Max to launch first in several CEE countries

Warner Bros. Discovery has announced that HBO Max will launch direct-to-consumer in multiple new countries this July. The platform will become available in Albania, Armenia, Cyprus, Estonia, Georgia, Iceland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, and Tajikistan. The global expansion of HBO Max follows earlier 2025 launches in Australia and Turkey.



### RTSH has a new DG

In April, Eni Vasili was elected as the director of the Albanian Public Radio and Television (RTSH), receiving seven out of 11 votes in total from the Board of Directors. Vasili has a long career in the media field, which began in 1997 as a journalist in the news department at RTSH, former news reporter and host of the television show *Open* on various television channels.



### bTV premieres its first Greek series - a former CEE Breakout Hit

The Greek hit series *Sasmos*, which topped the primetime charts in Greece for over three years has arrived on the air of bTV. The hit Greek drama launched on June 10 in the early afternoon slot of the channel. *Sasmos* is also a former CEE Breakout Hit selected by the CEETV.



### Piracy costs Greece an estimated 400 million euros per year

The total annual impact on the country's GDP from audiovisual piracy is estimated at over €400 million, according to a study by the Center for Planning and Economic Research (KEPE) on behalf of the Society for the Protection of Audiovisual Works (EPOE). Tax losses from pay TV (VAT, special fee 10%) are estimated at up to €59 million per year.



### 113 media representatives killed amid war in Ukraine

A total of 113 media workers have been killed in Ukraine since Russia's initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014, according to the Institute of Mass Information. Fifteen of them have died since 2014 while performing their professional duties, 14 – as civilian victims of Russian attacks, and 84 – as combatants.



### Jupiter triples its users in five years

In April, Jupiter, the streaming service of Estonian pubcaster ERR, celebrated its fifth birthday. Marking the occasion, the public media announced that over the past 5 years Jupiter has become a daily companion to many – the number of its users has almost tripled since its launch. Content that was initially only available online has expanded to the large screens and more and more people, 25% of users, watch Jupiter's content via the TV app.

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# How The Bachelor Turned into a Show with an Important Social Mission in Ukraine?

Ukraine continues its fight for survival against the Russian invaders whose goals remain the same – annihilate as many cities as possible, and kill as many Ukrainians as possible, regardless soldiers or civilians. The large-scale terrorist attacks with drones and missiles take place every night three years later.

Against this horrifying background, somehow the Ukrainian television industry continues to function “normally” and successfully, fulfilling its mission of both supporting the resistance efforts and entertaining the people who are in strong need of positive emotions and occasional moments of a peaceful life. These two functions were merged perfectly into one when last fall Starlight Media’s STB channel brought back the extremely popular format *The Bachelor* with a new heartthrob to make girls’ hearts beat faster... Only this time, he was a war veteran who had lost his legs. This unprecedented season rightfully attracted the interest across the world and made the headlines on Variety, BBC, Washington Post, The Guardian, NPR, Reuters, The New York Times, etc.

Now, with the season over, showrunner Anna Kalyna and CMO Lidiya Pankiv talk to Georgi R. Chakarov about making the world’s first Bachelor with an amputee with the goal of changing how people view war veterans in Ukraine in a unique project combining purely entertainment elements with important social messages which had a huge impact on society locally and changed the perception of the hugely popular dating format on a global level.

This standout achievement will be also recognized with a NATPE Honors Europe Award this year in the Cause+Action category.



## Anna Kalyna, Showrunner of The Bachelor and The Bachelorette (Ukraine):

**A**nna, the last season of *The Bachelor Ukraine* redefined the global format in profound ways. What was your original vision for the show in the context of wartime Ukraine, and how did it evolve during the production?

To be honest, when the full-scale invasion started in 2022, producing *The Bachelor* felt completely out of touch with reality. The very concept of the show — a successful, desirable man women compete for — suddenly felt disconnected from what Ukrainian women truly valued. In a country at war, the most desirable man became the soldier defending it. That’s why we didn’t film the show for two years.



It was only after some time had passed — and it became painfully clear that the war wasn’t going anywhere — that we started to reconsider. Life had to go on. People needed some kind of normalcy, and women in particular deserved to have their Friday night guilty pleasure back — something warm, romantic, and a little magical to look forward to at the end of another difficult week.

But of course, we couldn’t pretend nothing had changed. The challenge was finding the balance: how do you stay true to the emotional core of *The Bachelor* while also acknowledging the trauma, the loss, and the very real presence of war in everyone’s life? The turning point was realizing we didn’t have to invent anything. Life itself had already shifted the format for us. In real life, soldiers who had been wounded were starting to return to civilian life. Among them were strong, charismatic men trying to figure out who they were outside the war. One of them was Oleksandr Teren — a double amputee, veteran, and an incredibly compelling human being. He embodied that intersection between resilience, vulnerability, and romantic hope. His story gave the show its direction.

In the end, we realized the biggest production decision wasn’t about how to “balance war and romance.” It was simply to stop resisting reality and embrace the way people actually live, love, and rebuild — even in the shadow of war.

**Choosing Oleksandr Teren — a veteran and double amputee— as the lead was both bold and deeply symbolic. What were the conversations like behind that decision, and how did you navigate such a personal and politically resonant choice within an entertainment format?**

That decision was surprisingly clear from the very beginning. When we made the choice to bring *The Bachelor* back, we knew the Bachelor had to be a veteran — someone who had served and returned.

We had already crossed paths with Oleksandr through several initiatives focused on supporting veterans, and we had seen firsthand the impact he had. His charisma, confidence, and



emotional intelligence — especially around women — were undeniable. He had a natural presence that went far beyond his military service or his injuries. So, he wasn’t just a symbolic figure — he was genuinely captivating in a very human, very romantic way. That made our choice both emotionally resonant and completely authentic to the format. There was no disconnect — Oleksandr didn’t need to “fit into” the role. He was the role, redefined.

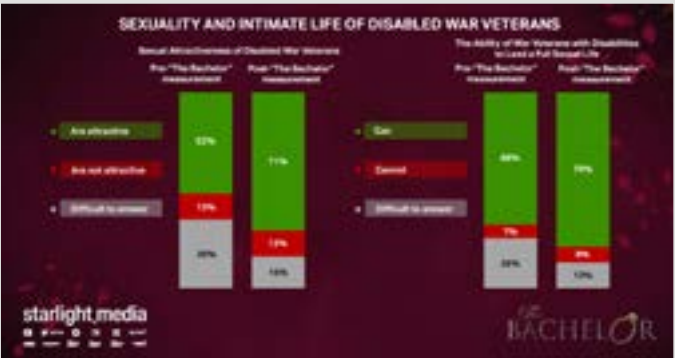
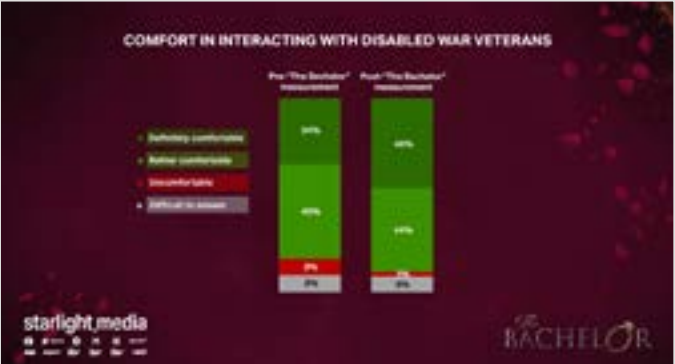
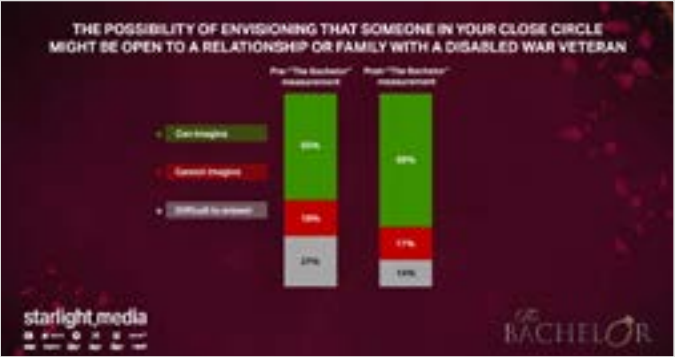
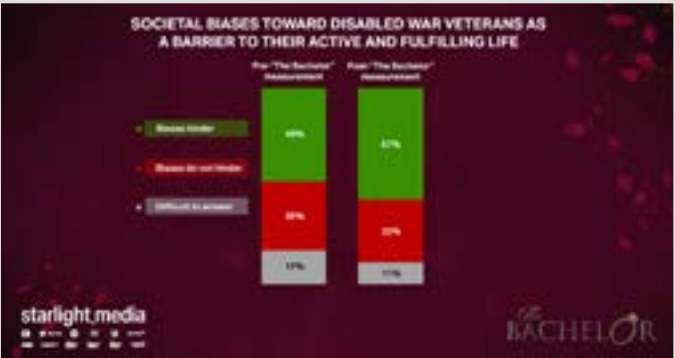
So, as I said earlier, it turned out we didn’t really need to “adapt” the format — because reality had already adapted itself. People fall in love during air raids. They volunteer, donate, knit camouflage nets, and talk about their new crushes over coffee. It’s all part of the same daily life now. Women go skiing in the Carpathians and end up taking lessons next to veterans with amputations who are learning to ski as part of their rehabilitation. That’s not a scripted scene. That’s Ukraine today.

Instead of trying to layer the war onto the show, we just allowed the show to reflect what was already true. We didn’t force anything. The war isn’t a backdrop — it’s part of the emotional landscape our characters live in. And love — even in wartime — finds a way to exist within that.

In almost every location we filmed, the reality of war was present in some form. Sometimes quietly, sometimes very directly. The real balancing act was simply to honor that without overwhelming the heart of the format — which is still about love, connection, and emotional vulnerability. We found that love stories in wartime aren’t less romantic — they’re often more profound.

Filming in a country under regular missile and drone attacks introduces unique logistical and safety concerns. What were the most difficult production challenges you faced, and how did your teams overcome them?

When we speak of filming in wartime Ukraine, it’s important to draw a line: we were not near active combat zones, but rather in the so-called “civilian” part of the country. Still, the war permeates every corner of



daily life, and production was no exception.

Russian attacks often target cities in the evening and at night—so the cast, the crew, and our participants lived and worked with that constant, unpredictable threat. *The Bachelor* is an incredibly fast-paced production, with multiple filming units working simultaneously across different locations. There would be a date filming on one set, while farewells and girl meetups were being shot elsewhere.

We rarely captured these alerts on camera—not because they didn’t happen, but because most of them occurred at night, outside our shooting schedule. Still, the impact was there. I recall one particularly difficult morning: we were meant to shoot a rose ceremony at an external location. But a large-scale air raid alert started early, and our crew couldn’t reach the cast. The participants sheltered in the basement of the house they were living in—a home we had deliberately chosen because it had a secure shelter. Our production team, too, waited out the danger in a designated safe space.

We ultimately had to cancel the external shoot that day. Instead,

Oleksandr—the Bachelor—came to the girls’ house that afternoon, after the alert had ended, and held the ceremony there. Because this is a reality format, the following day was already scheduled for family visits, so we couldn’t push anything back. We had to keep moving through the exhaustion.

In practical terms, our biggest challenge was perhaps the invisible toll of fatigue. Our crew worked from early morning until nightfall, often on very little rest, because the nights were frequently interrupted by air raid alerts and shelling. Many of us spent those hours sheltering in basements instead of sleeping. Many Ukrainians say they’ve gotten “used to” life in war, but the physical and emotional cost remains, especially on a project as demanding as this.

Another major challenge was the instability of the electrical grid during that period. Right before filming, Kyiv was experiencing frequent blackouts due to missile attacks. We had to constantly secure backup generators, ready to deploy on set at a moment’s notice, just to keep cameras rolling. Delays weren’t an option—because of the nightly curfew, we couldn’t risk running past a certain hour. This

was the reality of shooting a romance show in a war zone: a constant balancing act between safety, law, logistics—and love.

Anna, you’ve been with the franchise for over a decade. How did producing this wartime season personally challenge and change you as a showrunner?

My journey with *The Bachelor* began in 2013, when I produced Season 4, which aired in 2014. That was the same year Russia first invaded Ukraine—when it annexed Crimea and occupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In that sense, the shadow of war has been present throughout this franchise’s journey for me.

This season challenged me both professionally and personally. As a showrunner, I had to hold two truths at once: honoring Oleksandr’s military past and lived experience, while also protecting the joy, lightness, and emotional openness our audience seeks every Friday night. It was essential that viewers didn’t see a “wounded hero” in place of a man capable of deep love, intimacy, and desire. I wanted them to feel the real chemistry that unfolded between him and the wom-



en—because it was there, and it was powerful.

Behind the scenes, I also felt a deep responsibility to my team. Beyond physical safety, I worried about their mental wellbeing. The pressure of filming in such conditions—the lack of sleep, the constant awareness of danger—was immense. Ensuring that they felt supported and seen became just as important as keeping the production on schedule.

This season forced me to grow. It reminded me that television can hold multitudes: it can entertain, but it can also reflect reality with grace. It taught me that love stories don’t need perfect circumstances to unfold—they need truth. And in that truth, I found a deeper kind of storytelling.

**The pacing of how Oleksandr’s disability was revealed was strikingly deliberate and intimate. Can you walk us through the creative thinking behind that structure and what kind of impact you hoped it would have on viewers?**

We followed the natural rhythm of how real relationships evolve. When two people meet, especially those with very different life experiences, the connection rarely starts with a list of differences. It starts with a spark—something shared. A laugh. A

look. A curiosity about the other. And if that bond deepens, it eventually embraces everything: the visible and the invisible.

This is the approach we took with Oleksandr’s story. From the very start, we were transparent with the audience and the contestants: they all knew Oleksandr is a person with a disability. But that wasn’t the defining aspect of his identity on the show. What stood out were his charisma, intelligence, interests, and emotional openness. Like any other season, the journey began on the red carpet, where the Bachelor appears in a tuxedo—a symbol of timeless elegance that, here, simply let him own the moment.

But from episode two onward, we began to step into Oleksandr’s real life. He’s incredibly active, deeply passionate about physical challenges and new experiences—from ballet to rock climbing. That’s why his very first date was a climbing adventure. Later, he took contestants motorcycling—something he truly loves—and that shared thrill led to the season’s first kiss. These weren’t staged moments; they unfolded the way intimacy often does in life—gradually, through shared time, trust, and joy.

And as those relationships deepened, so did the physical closeness.

After emotional connection came pool dates, swimsuits, and natural vulnerability—because when people swim, they wear swimwear, regardless of their body. By the time we neared the finale, Oleksandr shared deeply personal, physical moments with a few women—just as couples do in real life when choosing whether to stay together long-term.

As for the intended viewer impact—we weren’t chasing shock or drama. We simply trusted that this life-paced approach would resonate. And it did. Even viewers without personal experience of dating someone with a disability could recognize the organic, emotional logic behind Oleksandr’s journey. They felt it. And that feeling is what mattered most.

**This season introduced community-driven dates—camouflage weaving, volunteering at shelters, and fundraising. How did these choices shape the contestants’ emotional journeys and the tone of the show overall?**

We very intentionally structured each episode around three types of dates: physical, romantic, and social. Physical activities allowed us to highlight Oleksandr’s remarkable strength and athleticism—qualities that shine all the more powerfully in the context of his double amputation. Romantic dates were essential to the format and to the emotional growth of the contestants. And social dates—like weaving camouflage nets, volunteering, or raising funds—grounded the



show in the reality of life in today’s Ukraine.

This mix reflects the emotional and societal landscape that Ukrainians live in today. Even when people are falling in love, they’re also collecting donations for their partners at the front, supporting family members displaced by war, or helping rebuild their communities. Love and war, resilience and romance—they coexist.

Oleksandr’s physical strength became a powerful metaphor for that resilience. Ukrainians often endure sleepless nights under shelling, and yet they wake up, go to work, raise children, and carry on. These are not conditions you can fully recover from—but you live anyway. You find inner reserves you didn’t know existed. That’s the spirit we tried to channel into our physical dates.

Importantly, this structure didn’t feel artificial or imposed. It mirrored what our audience lives every day. The contestants weren’t placed in some fantasy bubble; they were immersed in places and situations they know intimately. We simply gave them an extraordinary man—and let every-

thing else stay real. That authenticity allowed the women to show who they truly are.

**Casting during wartime clearly required a new approach. What were you looking for in the women selected, and how did their stories and backgrounds reflect modern Ukraine?**

We wanted the casting to reflect the many different realities Ukrainian women are experiencing today. Each participant represents a facet of this changed reality — women from various regions of Ukraine, as well as those who were forced to flee abroad due to the full-scale invasion. Some came from occupied territories, including one participant who managed to escape occupation herself. Another contestant was abroad at the start of the invasion. At first glance, it might seem the war hadn’t affected her directly — but the truth is, no Ukrainian has been untouched. She became an active volunteer, and her efforts were reflected both during and after the project.

We also featured participants still struggling to find their place abroad, who viewed their relationship with the Bachelor — a veteran — as a possible way to return to Ukraine with a sense of safety and support.

Mental health was another important aspect. One of the women shared her experience of taking antidepressants — something that resonated deeply in a country living under constant threat and trauma.

The cast’s geographic diversity also matters: women from “quieter” western regions had a very different day-to-day experience of war than those in Kharkiv, Odesa, or Kyiv. Even though Kyiv is far from the frontlines, it remains one of the most heavily targeted civilian areas due to its symbolic and political importance.

Importantly, we made a conscious decision to film the show inside Ukraine, not abroad — to highlight that joy, love, and emotional connection are still possible here, despite everything. This was our way of honoring the lived experiences of women who choose to stay and live through the war at home.







actually shifted perceptions. So, we did something unusual for reality TV: we ran a study. We asked people the same questions before the season aired and after it wrapped. And the results were remarkable. Before the show, 35% of respondents weren't sure if a disabled veteran could be seen as sexually attractive. Over a quarter doubted whether someone like that could lead an active and fulfilling intimate life. And only 14% believed that Ukrainian society treated disabled veterans well. These were not just numbers—they were proof of how limited the cultural imagination still was. After the season aired, everything changed. Emotional connection to Oleksandr Teren's story helped spark a real shift. The percentage of people who found disabled veterans sexually attractive jumped from 52% to 71%. Belief in their ability to have fulfilling intimate lives grew from 68% to 79%. And the number of people open to someone in their close circle marrying a veteran with disabilities rose from 56% to 69%. We also saw changes in empathy and awareness. Interaction with disabled veterans increased from 15% to 24%,

and comfort in those interactions rose from 34% to 46%. More people said they had veterans with disabilities in their inner circle—up from 49% to 60%. And then there's the emotional layer: pride in disabled veterans grew from 26% to 42%, admiration increased by ten percentage points, and hopefulness nearly doubled. At the same time, outdated stereotypes began to crumble. More people rejected the idea that disabled veterans are emotionally unstable or aggressive. Perhaps the most hopeful sign? The appetite for stories like this grew. Even before the season aired, 82% of people said they wanted to see disabled veterans as protagonists in media. After the show, that number jumped to 90%. So how do we measure the impact of an entertainment show? With data, yes—but also with the shift in conversations. When an entire country starts seeing love, intimacy, and masculinity through a new lens, you know something real has happened.

**How involved was Warner Bros. International in supporting or guiding this unique iteration of the format? Were there any creative boundaries,**

**or was STB given full rein?** I'd like to start by thanking Warner Bros International Television Production — this was the kind of partnership you can only dream of. Their team gave us full support and fully backed our idea to make the first ever inclusive version of *The Bachelor*. We understand they couldn't have been completely sure this project would succeed — there were a lot of risks involved. But we truly felt their support and their commitment to helping us carry out our main goal and mission.

**Looking ahead, do you see this season as a one-time response to wartime circumstances, or is this the beginning of a new, more socially grounded direction for reality television in Ukraine and beyond?** I truly believe that any project in Ukraine today must be relevant and reflect the pain of the times we're living through. We've changed — and we'll never be the same as we were before. I also remember a quote from The Guardian that literally said this season with Teren was the pinnacle of the format worldwide. I think this kind of shift had been coming for a while —

and who knows, maybe in a few years we'll look back at this story and realize we started something powerful. We set a trend that really changed things.

**Starlight Media has been honored with the inaugural Cause + Action Award, part of the NATPE Honors Europe initiative, which will be presented during NATPE Budapest in June. Ukraine's largest broadcasting group is recognized for supporting and amplifying the voice of veterans, notably putting a war vet in the spotlight in the most recent edition of *The Bachelor*. What does this recognition mean to you and the broader Starlight team, and how do you see it influencing future productions?** We are sincerely grateful to the NATPE Honors Europe initiative, to the organizers of the Cause + Action Award, and to everyone involved in selecting and supporting our work. This recognition is a tremendous emotional support for our team — and a deeply meaningful confirmation that we are moving in the right direction. It means the world to us that this story, and the people behind it, have resonated so strongly with the international community. Thank you for seeing its value. Of course, when we created this season of *The Bachelor* — featuring Oleksandr Teren, a veteran of the Russo-Ukrainian war and a person with a disability — we weren't thinking about awards. And this project wasn't the only one. Over the last years, we've been developing several initiatives aimed at fostering greater recognition, empathy, and respect for those who have served. Our goal has always been to support veterans not just with words, but with visibility, care, and dignity. We want to help reshape the cultural conversation — to build a space where veterans are not only seen but valued as an essential part of society. That's why this award matters so much. It's not just an honor — it's a signal that the message we've worked so hard to share has been heard. It's a reminder that storytelling can move hearts and shift perspectives. We are deeply touched, incredibly grateful, and more committed than ever to continuing this work. ■



Lidiya Pankiv, CMO, STB:

**L**idiya, from a marketing and audience strategy perspective, how did you approach promoting a season that combines romance with themes of trauma, heroism, and national identity? This was a real professional challenge for us. War and launching a romantic show — at first glance, it just didn't make sense. But based on what we saw ourselves and what the research showed, Ukrainian women were really missing that feeling — putting on a beautiful dress, putting on red lipstick, and going on a date. The bigger challenge, though, was sending a message: we've all changed. And yes, the idea of a "perfect man" today isn't a guy with a private jet — it's a veteran, someone who went to defend you from the very first day of the full-scale invasion. We had to do this with a very delicate balance — bold and careful at the same time. So that a veteran with a disability would be seen with

respect, not pity. So that society could feel — not just understand logically but feel — that people with disabilities can live full lives, that they're attractive, and that they're desirable partners.

**The Bachelor Ukraine sparked national conversations and even influenced perceptions around disability and veterans. How do you measure the societal impact of an entertainment show, and what feedback surprised you the most?** The biggest achievement for our marketing and production teams was this: by the time *The Bachelor* aired, viewers weren't talking about the lead's prosthetic legs — they were talking about how many times he kissed someone and with whom. In other words, we got to the point really fast where this became our new normal. But we didn't want to just trust our gut—we wanted to know if the show



# Bringing Emotional Revolution:

## Teodora Markova and Martichka Bozhilova on Bold Storytelling in CEE

In a region where funding is scarce and creative risk is often discouraged, Teodora Markova and Martichka Bozhilova have set up on a path of telling provocative and genuine stories. Markova, one of Bulgaria's most prolific screenwriters, and Bozhilova, an internationally acclaimed producer known for both fiction and documentary work, first joined forces on *Father's Day*—a six-part drama that broke new ground for Bulgarian television in tone, subject matter, and format. What began as a shared desire to tell bolder, more emotionally resonant stories quickly evolved into a creative partnership rooted in mutual trust and a hunger to challenge the status quo.

Now, with their latest project *Gold War* — a Cold War-era coming-of-age drama inspired by Bulgaria's iconic rhythmic gymnasts of the 1980s — they are once again proving that stories from Central and Eastern Europe can be both deeply local and powerfully global.

In this interview with Yako Molhov for TVBIZZ Magazine, Bozhilova and Markova reflect on their collaboration, the challenges of international co-production, and how real-life events continue to shape the narratives they bring to screen.

### PART 1

**Teodora, Martichka, you both come from distinguished backgrounds in screenwriting and producing. What drew you together creatively, and how did your collaboration first begin?**

**Teodora:** It started with the six-episode drama *Father's Day* for the Bulgarian National Television. At that time, I had already worked as head writer on four TV series, but I wouldn't say any of them had a particularly bold author's voice. Even though some were quite successful and sold internationally, I felt they were somewhat trapped in a conventional mainstream style, required by the broadcasters. Together with my co-writers Nevena Kertova and Georgi Ivanov, we decided it was time to create something with greater artistic ambition – something that wasn't just entertainment but also explored deeper personal and social issues. The script for *Father's Day* was born after months of research on traumatic family separations, where the child is used as a weapon in the conflict between parents, leaving lasting emotional scars.

None of the existing TV producers seemed like the right fit for such a serious, cinematic project. That's when

we thought of AGITPROP and Martichka - we felt they might recognize this story as something that aligned with their profile.

The series came at a time when BNT still had a different outlook on film-making and more ambitious goals. It's a pity that after Emil Koshlovkov became General Director of the television, the deal for international sales was canceled. Despite its promising festival selections, the project never left Bulgaria.

**Martichka:** *Father's Day* became the first high-end limited series in Bulgaria, introducing for the first time a 6-series format on Bulgarian National Television. I had already oriented myself towards the series industry and since my profile is international production, I started to explore international content markets and look for options for co-productions, since the money for series in Bulgaria is very little and it is practically impossible to produce an original quality series. Thus, *Father's Day* became the first Bulgarian series supported by the then new support for the development of series from the Creative Europe Media Program in Brussels. This first collaboration of ours was proclaimed the best Bulgarian series for 2019 and provoked many reactions from the audience, who associated themselves with the protagonists

of the series and constantly took sides and reacted. I remember that Teodora and I really liked the amazing miniseries that went on HBO at the time, like *Olive Kitteridge* and *The Night Off*, from which we were very inspired and wanted to do something with such emotional charge and quality.

**Let's talk about your latest project, *Gold War*. What can you tell us about its premise, and how does it reflect the kind of stories you want to tell together?**

**Teodora:** It's inspired by the Bulgarian Golden Girls of rhythmic gymnastics in the 1980s, who were undisputed World and European champions for nearly a decade. At the time, sports had become a new battlefield in the Cold War, and some disciplines, including rhythmic gymnastics, were developed specifically to show the "superiority" of the USSR over the West. Based on true events but with fictional characters, the series follows the lives and struggles of three young gymnasts and their coach. It portrays the inhumanity behind the facade of medals and fame. At its heart, *Gold War* is a personal coming-of-age story set against a politically turbulent backdrop, which is disturbingly reminiscent of today's world. As authors, we



**Martichka Bozhilova** is producer at AGITPROP, Bulgaria. Her high-end author-driven films have been selected and awarded at Cannes, Berlin, IDFA, Toronto, Sundance, Tribeca, Pusan and many others, and broadcast all over the world. Among her films are: *Touch Me Not* (Golden Bear Winner, Berlinale), *Palace for the People* – film (Dok Leipzig, Dok Buster Award) and four-part TV docuseries for ARTE, aired on BBC, ARTE, MDR, NHK, SVT etc.; *Exemplary Behaviour* (Dok Leipzig, Golden Dove), Georgi and the Butterflies (Silver Wolf, IDFA), *The Mosquito Problem* and other stories (Cannes), *Corridor #8* (Berlinale), *Omelle* (Sundance), *The Boy Who Was a King* (Toronto), *Dad Made Dirty Movies* (sold to more than 30 territories). Producer of successful factual TV series for National Geographic and HBO. Producer of *Father's Day* high end drama series for Bulgarian National Television, named Best Drama Series for 2019. Co-producer of the first official drama series co-production in Southeastern Europe – *Operation Sabre*.

feel a responsibility to remind viewers of how oppressive systems shape not just politics, but also personal relationships.

**Martichka:** *Gold War* is a project that we have dedicated a lot of time and attention to together with Teodora and we literally grew up with it. From the very beginning, when Teodora,

together with screenwriters Nevena Kertova and Georgi Ivanov (with whom they also co-wrote *Father's Day*), the project was noticed on the international market and over the several years of development and financing it became the most invited and awarded project from Eastern Europe. I guess what makes it stand out is that it

is inspired by real historical events in the '80s between the two iconic Olympics that became a battlefield of the Cold War - Moscow '80 and Los Angeles '84. This is a sports drama that tells the story of the young golden girls of rhythmic gymnastics and their coach and how they go to extremes to achieve their dream of Olympic gold.

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**Teodora Markova** is a film and TV writer and showrunner, based in Sofia, with several screenwriting awards. She has created and co-written some of the most successful TV series in Bulgaria, among which is the internationally acclaimed *Undercover* (2011), nominated for Best Foreign Series at Monte Carlo Television Festival and distributed in 187 territories. Her miniseries *Father's Day* (2019) was in the Official Selection of Série Series Fontainebleau and Venice International Film Festival – Gap Financing Market. She co-created and co-wrote the Latvian *Soviet Jeans*, which has achieved notable success, receiving the Audience Award at Series Mania 2024, as well as 12 nominations for the National Latvian Film Awards, a selection for Berlinale Series Market Selects and five other international festivals. Teodora has penned four feature films, with *Bubblegum* (2017) earning her the Best Screenplay Award at the Bulgarian National Festival Golden Rose. Her directorial debut *The Inspector's Debt* has received state funding from Bulgarian National Film Center on the last call for projects in 2024.





Soviet Jeans

But the ones at the top of politics have decided otherwise...

**You presented the project at this year's Media Play in Sofia. Have you secured financing, are there broadcasters and a distributor already attached?**

**Martichka:** *Gold War* already has funding from the Bulgarian National Film Center, Nova TV, Lithuanian and Estonian TV. We have serious interest from Beta Group, who were already behind my previous series, which I co-produced, *Operation Sabre*, and *Soviet Jeans*, which Teodora wrote and show-runs. We are currently expecting to fill the gap in the budget through international co-production, cash rebate and European gap financing.

**Martichka, you've been internationally recognized for your documentary work. What inspired the move toward fiction, and how does your documentary background influence your narrative decisions in scripted projects like RTS' period drama *Operation Sabre* about the assassination of Zoran Đinđić for which you provided crucial support in securing the financing?**

**Martichka:** Both *Operation Sabre* and *Gold War*, but also *Father's Day*, are seriously based on documentary research

and inspired by real events. AGITPROP is famous for its high-quality work on topics from the recent past, explored through innovative, profound and emotionally charged narrative. This is our trademark and know-how which we project to our work on the series.

**Teodora, as one of the creators of the Bulgarian hit series *Undercover*, how has your experience in long-form storytelling informed your newer international co-productions?**

**Teodora:** *Undercover* was an early chapter in my career, and looking back now, it feels quite distant from where I am today. I'm grateful for the opportunity I had to create and lead the writers' room on so many Bulgarian series. None of it would have been possible without the writers I worked with: Nevena Kertova, Georgi Ivanov, Tsonko Bumbalov, Teo Chepilov and Ivan Landzhev - talented people who were always searching for new and contemporary ways of storytelling.

We often participated in international workshops and tailored programs to understand how long-form storytelling works globally and then tried to develop our own authentic model of writing. Over the years, I've shaped my own approach to building characters and structuring stories,

but I think it's very important to keep experimenting and break your own rules.

**Both *Gold War* and *Operation Sabre* explore are based on real events. Do you see a common thread in the kinds of stories you're drawn to tell?**

**Martichka:** This is one of the trends on the market - to create IP based on real events. This brings immediately a big group of viewers that have memories and hopes related to the time capsules and the world of the story described in the series. The release of *Operation Sabre* coincided with the beginning of the big protests in Serbia, and it gave sense of freedom and hope for the people to fight for their lost human rights. Often based on true stories content is very emotional and nostalgic to generations of people and if it is made with talent and freshness, it can attract younger audiences like it happened with *Operation Sabre*.

**Teodora:** I am fascinated by *Operation Sabre*. I had the opportunity to meet the creators Goran Stankovic and Vladimir Tagic at several events and to discuss with them our understanding of storytelling. I hope that someday we could cooperate, as I believe that the future of high-quality series from the region lies in co-productions and connecting talents from different countries.

**Both of you have worked with producers and creative partners from other countries from CEE. Are there any territories you are particularly interested in collaborating with?**

**Martichka:** It happened that most of the recent collaborations of AGITPROP are with countries from Balkan and Baltic regions. There is a particular effort on behalf of these territories to expand and bring added value to our local content and bring it to the rest of the world through our common effort and great talents involved.

**Teodora:** I am an adventurer at heart, always open to discovering new galaxies. I believe that it is not about a particular country - it's about finding a person you could feel safe with. It takes boldness to open straight up your deeper reservoirs, as the most valuable ideas come from the unconscious.

...continues on page 56



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# Detective von Fock – Truly Estonian, Truly International

*Detective von Fock* is not only Estonia's most expensive and most complex TV series production to-date, but also an excellent example of how international co-production initiatives could bring to life some thrilling stories from small Estonia to the global TV markets.

In this exclusive interview with TVBIZZ Magazine, producer Jevgeni Supin and screenwriter Leana Jalukse tell Georgi R. Chakarov how this unique co-production on a pan-European level came to life and the impact it will have on the development of the audiovisual industry in Estonia and the Baltics as a whole. ZDF Studios is selling the show internationally and presenting it to buyers at NATPE Budapest 2025.

**J**evgeni, Leana, *Von Fock* is the first Estonian series to receive support from both the MEDIA strand of Creative Europe and Eurimages' pilot program for series co-productions and is also the country's highest budget series to date. How did this dual endorsement shape the development and production of the show?

**Jevgeni:** We began developing the show back in 2021. It was clear from the beginning that this project had strong potential for the international market and for a co-production model, which meant that, in order to fulfill this ambition, we needed to approach the series differently than usual. The typical approach involved utilizing resources available from the local market, but being a country with low production capacity meant that these resources wouldn't be sufficient to produce a period drama at the scale we had envisioned, and with the production value required for the international market. Several countries and production partners were needed to assemble the financing, and support from Creative Media TV Online and the pilot program of the Council of Europe for Series Co-Productions were cornerstones for our production. In fact, the Pilot Program of the Council of Europe became available as we were in the midst of development, and when we learned about this new addition, it was the final piece in our financing puzzle that made this project possible.

**Can you walk us through the process of securing funding for**



**the series and what is the total budget?**

**Jevgeni:** At the end the total budget of the series was approximately €4 million. It was a long journey to secure that amount but the first and very important milestone was securing local financing. Eesti Telefilm, part of Estonian Public Broadcasting and led by Toomas Luhats, made an unprecedented decision to commission the series with a significantly larger contribution than usual and also facilitated the attachment of the Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT to the project. The next logical step was attaching the local film fund, EFI. Finding co-production partners and finalizing the production setup took time, but at the end with the

help of consultants Carlos Hertel and Silke Wilfinger, we connected with the Italian production company movie.mento and producer Markus Frings, who came on board with one-third of the budget backed by IDM Film Commission Südtirol and a local tax-rebate. At this stage we had become eligible for the Creative Media Support, and the timing was perfect for applying. Our third partner, the Latvian production company Berghein Production / Nafta Films, helped us with Latvian cash rebates (LIAA and Riga Film Fund), which opened support from the Council of Europe. Finally, we secured a minimum guarantee from Distributor ZDF Studios, an essential component

of the financing plan that helped close the remaining gap.

**What impact did this European funding have on the scope and ambition of *Von Fock*, especially in terms of international filming and production values?**

**Jevgeni:** European funds are the cornerstone of our production efforts. Support from these initiatives signifies a recognition and provides a guarantee that could facilitate access to other financing possibilities. This backing might even become a decisive factor in securing further support of other funds and partners. Without this support, we wouldn't have been able to achieve the same level of production quality, as we simply do not have other financing sources. The Baltic region is still a grey zone for most of the European broadcasters and streaming platforms. They have heard about our work, but it has yet to be seen, and no one wants to be the first to take this step.

**The series was shot on location in Estonia, Latvia, and Italy by Zolba Productions, Latvia's Berghein Production and Nafta, Italy's movie.mento, Albolina Film and Eesti Telefilm. What were the creative and logistical considerations behind choosing these three countries and what were the main challenges during production?**

**Jevgeni:** *Detective Von Fock* is a series that has co-production at its core. It is based on a series of novels written by Estonian historian Ain Kütt, which are historically accurate. During the time depicted (the mid-19th century), it was common for the Estonian aristocracy (Baltic Germans) to send their children, especially girls, to study in their region of origin—German-speaking countries. In the initial novel, this tradition is often referred to, and one of our protagonists, Maria von Nottbeck, was studying in Europe, where she engaged in some misadventures that she would later come to regret. This allowed us to seamlessly extend our series to Italy and South Tyrol, providing wonderful opportunities to highlight the striking contrast between two landscapes: the lush, forested Estonia, with its quaint,



**Jevgeni Supin**  
producer



**Leana Jalukse**  
screenwriter

**Jevgeni Supin** is an Estonian television, film, and theater producer. Rising through the ranks, he became a full-time producer in 2005 and worked for one of the most prominent production houses in Estonia for 12 years, producing shows like *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, *Dancing with the Stars* and *The Last Cop* among others. Jevgeni established Zolba Productions in 2017 which has now turned into a leading producer of high-end series in the Baltics.

**Leana Jalukse** is an Estonian screenwriter and script editor. She has been active in the film industry since 1997. *Mother* – her debut as a writer on a full-length feature, premiered internationally in competition at Tribeca, won Best Feature in Kitzbühel, Best Estonian Feature at Tallinn Black Nights, Estonia, was selected Estonia's national entry for the Oscars, and nominated for Best Screenplay at Estonian Film and TV awards. She is currently working on a number of original feature films and series. Leana is a founding member of the Estonian Screenwriters' Guild and a member of the Estonian Filmmakers' Union and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain.







discovering uniquely looking and diverse gems that we are now excited to show to the world.

**From a storytelling perspective, how do these varied European locations contribute to the narrative tone and visual identity of the series?**

**Leana:** The Baltic German aristocracy is a uniquely Eastern European phenomenon that has never been explored on screen before. Its presence across varied locations — in countries that never became kingdoms themselves — adds layers of contrast, cultural complexity, and visual richness to the series. The Baltic German world reflected a blend of Germanic aristocratic traditions embedded in Slavic and Baltic landscapes, creating both aesthetic tension and thematic depth. Many of the actual remaining locations — manors, estates, rural churches — remain remarkably unchanged, allowing the series to lean into authenticity and offer a lived-in historical atmosphere not so often seen on screen. These surviving manors are not only architectural remnants but symbols of a forgotten social order that still shapes our cultural and economic heritage. Visually, the series introduces a tone and style that's completely new for our region: grand estates, elegance, and restrained opulence. It brings something closer to *Bridgerton*-like splendor into a film culture better

known for bleak, minimalist auteur cinema.

**How did you ensure that Von Fock remains both authentically Estonian and internationally appealing?**

**Jevgeni:** *Von Fock* is a classical romance tale that is framed with a classical “whodunit” crime story. Set in mid-19th century Estonia, a period seldom depicted in our cinematic history. The narrative unfolds during an era of nobility and national awakening, a period that is nowadays romanticized and sought after today. At the same time at the core of the story are timeless

themes of love, betrayal, corruption and crime, which resonate universally. Our story promises a secure and familiar genre, presented in a fresh visual and aesthetic setting that has not been explored before.

**With ZDF Studios on board as the global distributor, how did that partnership come about, and what does it mean for the series' international reach?**

**Jevgeni:** It all came down to chance. Such was the case when I had the fortunate encounter with wonderful Mirela Nastase, Director of Drama of ZDF Studios at Seriesmania. Initially as the conversations moved, I was unsure if our series aligned with their catalog. I was happy and surprised when I learned that I was wrong. Our discussions about production and distribution marked a significant advancement for us in partnering with them. From past experiences, I've observed that established central European broadcasters and distributors approach productions from new territories with caution, often saying “Yes, this is a very nice project, show us a pilot when you are ready.” Therefore, having a major company ready to commit to a yet-to-be-completed project is truly a form of recognition.

This partnership is not only a huge step for me as a producer but also for our entire region, as it clearly shows



that our stories are good and they can travel globally, aided by reputable distributors like ZDF Studios.

**Von Fock is set in the first half of the 19th century and blends historical drama with crime elements. What inspired this particular genre fusion, and what makes the character of von Fock compelling in today's television landscape?**

**Leana:** That was our way in — seeing the past not as something distant, but as a mirror. Questions of loyalty, shifting ideologies, and justice under pressure are just as relevant now as they were then. Blending historical drama with crime gave us the flexibility to explore both plot and character — viewers come for the mystery but stay for the people.

Von Fock is a man out of time, born into privilege, but emotionally and practically unprepared for the chaos around him. That fish-out-of-water quality makes him relatable today. Our female lead is ahead of her time, pushing against the limits of her world — and in doing so, reflecting struggles that women still face.

Throughout the writing process, we kept one eye on the present. In any era of social change, people are asked to hold onto ideals while working inside broken systems. That

tension is what makes the story feel timeless.

**The series tackles themes of loyalty, justice, and ideology in a volatile time. How did you approach crafting a story that feels both historically grounded and resonant with modern audiences?**

**Leana:** For the series, we expanded the world quite a bit — especially when it came to female characters, relationships, and the dynamics within families. We introduced themes like the discovery of sexual orientation, backstabbing within families, love reforming a character, and a spiral of deceit becoming a deadly vortex around one. The society we portray was far more complex — and in many ways, more liberal — than we might expect. Much of this character work, particularly the relationship storylines, was developed specifically for the series to make it more relatable and emotionally engaging for a modern audience.

Power dynamics remain universal: questions of who gets to decide what's “just” — and how ideology shapes that — are relevant now more than ever. In a time when borders, loyalty, and rule of law are again being tested, it felt right to revisit the moment when those systems were first being formed — and manipulated.

**The show is part of Zolba Productions' expanding international slate. How does Von Fock fit into your broader strategic vision as producers?**

**Jevgeni:** Zolba Productions' international slate is very diverse, featuring everything from gripping social dramas like *My Dear Mother* and *Breaking the Ice* to imaginative high concept series such as *Operation Silver Wolf*. We also journey through time with period crime drama *Detective von Fock* to mystical thriller with *Girl from Tallinn* and crime comedy like *Let It Snow*. At Zolba Productions, we embrace this diversification as a testament to our strength and dedication to quality storytelling and productions. We believe in the stories we tell as they resonate with audiences worldwide, as in its deep core they all have the same values. And hell, we just love telling good stories.

**What does this project represent for the Estonian and for the Baltic audiovisual industry?**

**Jevgeni:** *Detective von Fock* is a natural progression for us, an early bird standout from our region. This series marks several first for us in many ways: story originates from Estonia, with a delegate producer from Estonia, first co-production between all three states - Latvia providing physical production, Lithuania participating as a pre-buy partner. It also stands out as our first truly international series with a co-production with Italy, the first local series backed by Creative Media and the Council of Europe, and not to mention our collaboration with major European distributor ZDF Studios. I do want to believe that this project will serve as a gateway to many more great productions, awaiting to be discovered and introduced to the global market.

**Are there plans to expand the story beyond the initial two seasons?**

**Jevgeni:** Definitely. There are three more books in the series by Ain Kütt to explore. Moreover, there is a great opportunity to create a spin-off and in addition there is great possibility to create a spin off from our great female protagonist. We are already working on it. ■



# Fresh and Proven Hits Shine in Kanal D's Catalog at NATPE Budapest

Sangerim Zhakhina, Sales Manager for CIS, CEE, and Baltics, will be representing Kanal D International at NATPE Budapest 2025. In this interview, she tells TVBIZZ Magazine about the latest hits in the catalog of the Turkish distributor, the freshest deals in the CEE region and the company's strategy for its further international expansion.

**K**anal D International's catalog features a range of emotionally charged dramas. What type of stories resonate the most across the diverse international markets?

Kanal D International's emotionally charged dramas resonate globally due to their exploration of universal themes and high production values. These series delve into narratives that transcend cultural boundaries, making them appealing to diverse international audiences.

The most resonant stories often revolve around Cinderella Stories: narratives where protagonists rise from adversity to achieve success or happiness; Mother-Daughter Relationships: dramas that explore complex familial bonds, delving into themes of sacrifice, misunderstanding, and reconciliation; and Life Struggles: stories depicting characters overcoming significant personal and societal challenges, reflecting resilience and determination.

Additionally, there's a growing trend for romantic comedies (rom-coms) in certain territories. In times of uncertainty, viewers often gravitate towards lighter, uplifting content that offers escapism and hope.

**What are the newest titles in Kanal D's offer that you expect to turn into international hits?**

Kanal D International's 2025 slate features several standout titles poised to become international hits, blending emotional depth with compelling storytelling.

*Secret of Pearls* is a gripping drama follows Azem, a literature teacher whose

life is upended when he's falsely accused of his wife's murder. Upon release, he embarks on a quest to reunite with his children, navigating complex relationships and past traumas. The series has already been licensed to over 50 countries, including MENA, Serbia, Lithuania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia, with a third season launching in September 2025.

*The Family Burden* was initially a summer series, and its strong performance extended its run into the new season. The story centers around a powerful mother-daughter relationship, with a love triangle, buried past secrets, and a crime the mother didn't commit—but is forced to carry the weight of. It has been licensed to MENA, Romania, and CIS countries, more to come!

*Farewell Letter* is a premium drama that brings together generations through a heartfelt story of love, family, and past regrets resurfacing in unexpected ways. It has been extremely popular in CEE market and licensed in Hungary, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Estonia, among others.

We are bringing to the market two new movies as well, including *Grill and Cash* which is a 107-minute feature film blending absurd comedy with crime, following two brothers who find themselves in over their heads after a bag of cash—and a dead debt collector—land in their failing kiosk. The film offers a unique balance of humor, tension, and social satire.

*Crazy for Love* focuses on Ali is a young man who falls in love with Zeynep at first sight. However, Zeynep is

committed to a mental hospital as part of a malicious scheme. Determined to rescue her, Ali embarks on a series of wild adventures.

I have to highlight a very successful Portuguese adaptation of *Ruthless City* under the title *Broken Promise*. It has been nominated for Best Telenovela at the Rose d'Or Latinos Awards 2025, highlighting its international appeal.

These titles exemplify Kanal D International's commitment to delivering high-quality, emotionally resonant content that appeals to a global audience.

**What have been your latest deals in the CEE region?**

Our newest titles and evergreen library been extremely active on sales recently. Within these six months, we licensed to CEE countries the following titles in multiple deals: *The Family Burden*, *Love and Hate*, *Farewell Letter*, *Secret of Pearls*, as well as the library titles *Time Goes By*, *Leaf Cast*, and *Sweet Revenge*.

**What strategies have been most effective in distributing Kanal D's hit titles across the world - from CEE to MENA, and from Latin America to Africa and Asia?**

Kanal D International has effectively expanded its global footprint through a combination of strategic initiatives tailored to diverse markets like CEE, MENA, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Our key strategies include Regional Expertise and Dedicated Sales Teams - Kanal D International has appointed specialized sales





managers for different regions to ensure a deep understanding of local market dynamics and viewer preferences; Strategic Content Distribution and Format Adaptations. By offering both finished content and adaptable formats, Kanal D International caters to varying broadcaster needs. This flexibility allows for localized adaptations, making content more relatable to regional audiences. Notably, the adaptation of *Ruthless City* into *Broken Promise* in Portugal exemplifies this approach.

Our participation in key industry events like NATPE Budapest and NEM Dubrovnik enables Kanal D International to showcase its content portfolio, engage with potential partners, and stay attuned to global industry trends.

**Kanal D International is also offering several non-scripted titles. Are you planning to expand that segment of your distribution business?**

Absolutely. One of our standout non-scripted offerings is *Arda's Kitchen*, hosted by renowned chef Arda Türkmen. The show presents a delightful array of recipes from Turkish cuisine and around the world.

Adding a unique twist, we also

feature *Back to Back* with Arda, where Arda is joined by popular actors and actresses from our well-known series. Together, they cook the same recipe simultaneously, leading to entertaining and often humorous outcomes. It's an excellent promotional tool and serves as compelling interstitial content to support Turkish programming slots.

**Are there plans to engage in more co-productions in the near future? If so, which regions or genres are you focusing on for these collaborations?**

Yes, Kanal D International is actively expanding its co-production initiatives to enhance its global presence and diversify its content portfolio. The company is exploring various collaborative models, including co-financing, pre-licensing agreements, and joint development of original concepts.

**You recently announced the addition of fresh new talent to your global sales team. How is Kanal D International evolving its distribution strategy to meet the demands of modern viewers?**

To reinforce our global footprint, Kanal D International has recently made several strategic additions to our

sales team. Our approach is centered on gaining a deeper understanding of each market's unique and evolving needs. In line with this, we've expanded our team with key hires focused on the CEE and European regions.

I joined Kanal D International in January as Sales Manager for the CIS market, and as of April, I've also taken responsibility for Central and Eastern Europe as well as the Baltics. Our distribution strategy in these regions is rooted in deep market insight and a comprehensive understanding of our diverse content catalogue. With over eight years of experience in content acquisition—ranging from Turkish dramas and films to animations, documentaries, and formats—I bring a buyer's perspective that helps us forge strong, meaningful partnerships.

To further strengthen our presence in CEE and the Baltics, Önay Devrim has recently joined us as Sales Executive. She brings a rich and varied background in cinema and television, having worked in production, costume design, and international content sales—experience that enhances our ability to connect with partners on both creative and commercial levels.



*Secret of Pearls*

We've also welcomed Mesut Özkeçeci as Sales Manager for Europe. Mesut combines a background in acting across television, theatre, and film with more than 15 years of sales experience across different industries. His fluency in English and Italian adds further versatility to our team as we continue to grow in key European markets.

These appointments reflect our commitment to building a highly knowledgeable, agile, and market-attuned sales force that can deliver the content modern audiences are looking for—wherever they are in the world.

Of course I must mention other members of our strong team, each of them is responsible for different markets and business areas, but we exchange insights and experience in order to meet high and dynamic standards of modern viewers.

**Given the global shift towards streaming platforms, how is Kanal D International leveraging OTT services to expand its audience base, and what role do digital platforms**

**play in your overall distribution strategy?**

As more viewers turn to streaming platforms, Kanal D International is focusing on digital and OTT services to reach wider audiences around the world.

One key part of this strategy is Kanal D Drama, our Turkish drama channel. It's already available in Latin America and was the first Turkish drama channel to launch in the U.S. through Comcast. We plan to expand it to more regions, including Europe, Africa, and Asia.

We're also working closely with global and regional OTT platforms to make our content available on-demand. This helps us connect with younger viewers and those who prefer watching on mobile or smart devices.

Digital platforms also give us valuable data about what people like to watch and how they watch it. This helps us make smarter decisions about what content to offer and where.

Overall, digital and OTT platforms are a big part of our distribution strategy. They help us share Turkish stories

with more people in more places, in ways that match today's viewing habits.

**How does Kanal D International gather and utilize audience feedback from various regions to inform future programming and distribution decisions?**

First, we work closely with our broadcast and streaming partners, who share valuable viewership data and audience insights. This helps us see which shows perform best, what genres are most popular, and how audience preferences vary by region.

We also pay close attention to social media engagement and online feedback, which gives us real-time reactions from viewers. Comments, shares, and trends help us understand what audiences connect with emotionally.

In addition, good old video calls of our local sales teams with clients and partners on the ground. Their feedback helps us fine-tune our strategy for each market, whether it's choosing the right title to promote or adjusting our release windows. ■



*The Family Burden*



Follow  
The Journey  
of Drama



THE FAMILY  
BURDEN



*Farewell Letter*



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Three  
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A FATHER'S  
PROMISE



SECRET OF PEARLS



# Pitch Perfect: How CEE Drama Projects Are Breaking Through Internationally?

## PART 1

In the ever-evolving landscape of European television and streaming, fiction projects from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) are increasingly finding their footing on the global stage—thanks in no small part to the dedicated co-production forums and pitching platforms that champion regional voices. Events like Series Mania's Forum, Berlinale Co-Pro Series, CineLink Drama in Sarajevo, the emerging Media Play in Sofia and

others have become important stops on the development calendar for producers seeking financing, partnerships, and visibility. These sessions serve not only as launchpads for compelling new narratives but also as essential meeting points where creative ambition intersects with market realities.

Other major events that will take place later this year, focusing on supporting and showcasing CEE scripted projects, include the Heart of Europe

International TV Festival and Forum, organized by TVP, which takes place from September 30-October 3 in Warsaw; NEM Zagreb which is slated for December 2025 in Zagreb; the TV Beats Co-Financing Market, part of the Industry@Tallinn & Baltic Event drama series strand TV Beats which takes place November 17-18; the Serial Killer International Festival of TV and Web Series taking place September 23-28 in Brno; also the Hypewriter pitch contest organized by Paprika



Maria: The Unknown Callas

Studios and RTL Hungary is usually held in October. The Pitch Copro Series 2025, part of Conecta Fiction & Entertainment, will also feature one CEE series this year – *Fake News Factory* from North Macedonia. The project comes from and was presented at the Series Killer TV Days conference, in collaboration with NEM Zagreb and is based on the same story as another project from North Macedonia called *Las Veles*, presented at Media Play Sofia 2025.

For creators from the CEE region—often navigating limited domestic funding and fragmented markets—such platforms offer vital exposure and access to international networks. They also foster a culture of collaboration that is increasingly shaping the future of European storytelling through co-productions. Whether a series is born in Budapest, Tallinn or Belgrade, the pathway to screens across Europe and beyond is increasingly routed through these curated events, where stories are shaped, champions are found, and deals begin to take form.

For the 11th time, the Berlinale Co-Production Market invited producers, editors, distributors and other series financiers to pitches and meetings at Co-Pro Series on February 18 and 19. Ten new, selected drama series projects were pitched and met with co-production and financing partners. The selected Projects for Co-Pro Series 2025 included only one title from CEE: *Our People* (Autor: Miro Šifra; Regie: Tereza Nvotová), Nutprodukcia, Slovakia, Nutprodukce & Czech Television, Czech Republic which was selected in cooperation with Series Mania. The crime miniseries will bring the mosaic-told story of the murder-for-hire of journalist Ján Kuciak, which shook the whole of Slovakia. The individual views are connected precisely by the execution and subsequent investigation of the murder, and they also follow the social scope of the entire case.

The Berlinale also held The Series Market Selects Label which provides an exclusive preview of the most anticipated series from across the

globe. This label showcases 12-14 series with substantial market potential, offering enhanced visibility and support for connecting with buyers, distributors, and reaching international audiences. This year there were two series from CEE: *Maria: The Unknown Callas* from Greece which shows the untold story of a common girl during WWII in Athens, who later became a world-class diva. This biopic explores Maria Callas' early transformation, focusing on her relationships with key figures that shaped her future and *My Dear Mother* from Estonia/Ukraine: when the brutally murdered mother of drug addict Alina (30) is found on the beach one day, the question arises whether Alina is a cold-blooded manipulator or a lifelong victim of abuse.

During the second day of the Series Mania Forum 2025 the Content Showcases strand was opened by the Coming Next from the Balkans session organized by the Sarajevo Film Festival – CineLink Industry Days. The content showcase presented five





My Dear Mother

of the most promising and upcoming drama series from the Balkan region in financing and pre-production stages looking for partners to come on board. As the organizers from Series Mania Forum noted the Balkan region is often underrepresented in panel discussions and the showcase offers an opportunity to get a new perspective from 5 promising projects which are at different stages of development.

The showcase was hosted by Kristina Jelicanin from the Sarajevo Film Festival, the leading festival in Southeast Europe with a spotlight on films,

drama series, and especially talent. CineLink's mission is to serve the current needs and shape the future of the film and TV business, which the festival does in three stages with three programs: CineLink Dramas, Avant Premiere Series and the Heart of Sarajevo Awards for TV series which CEETV and TVBIZZ have been extensively covering. Starting this year, the Heart of Sarajevo Awards will be replaced by the The Adriatic Film and TV Awards, taking place October 24-26.

Jelicanin commented that the region of Southeast Europe is dominated mainly by national telecoms, private

and public broadcasters, who have been working rapidly since 2016. "We have always been proud of mostly the quality of our series, not the quantity, since we are a bit of, let's say, underdeveloped region in comparison to maybe the rest of Europe and the world, but we proud ourselves with a couple of series that have been premiered at popular festivals and I hope this will happen also to these five series that we will present today."

The first presented project during the showcase was *The Home Resort* from Telekom Serbia and Adrenaline. Created by Gvozden Djuric and Uros

Tomic, this is a darkly humorous comedy-drama about a petty bourgeois family forced to spend ten days trapped in their apartment, pretending to be on vacation. Inspired by a true event in Banja Luka, the story explores the absurdity of their situation while unraveling the deeper question: who are these people, and what led them to such an extreme act? As the days pass, long-buried emotions and hidden truths emerge, exposing the impact of a flawed social system and the struggles of modern life. The project is a 5x45' comedy/drama series.

*The Vault* comes from RTV Slovenia which is both the producer and the broadcaster of the series. The 5x50' crime drama is directed by Matevz Luzar and starts shooting this fall. Security guard Sonja is found tied up in a vault, and several safes are empty. The investigation is led by two teams - crime scene inspector Deja Kolenc and insurance agent Sotler. Due to her troubled past, Sonja becomes the prime suspect. When she realizes that the system will not help her, Sonja takes her fate into her own hands. The project poses the question 'Who are the bigger criminals? Those who emptied The Vault or those who filled it?' The budget of the project is 1.4 million euros and expected delivery is May 2026.

*8 Days* is a true crime drama from Bosnia and Herzegovina, produced by SCCA/PRO.BA with BH Telecom attached as broadcaster. The 8x50' production follows police officer Mirza as she races against time to stop a relentless killer. What starts as a single murder investigation quickly spirals into something far more sinister when Mirza uncovers a chilling pattern: this murderer has struck before. Inspired by the real events of February 2019, when Bosnia and Herzegovina launched its largest-ever police manhunt, the series captures the intensity of an eight-day pursuit that ended with the demise of a notorious mass murderer. Each episode focuses on one critical day of the investigation, peeling back layers of the story as the truth unfolds. Each episode follows one day of the investigation, with one of the main motives being how people react to violence and how trauma, the complexities of navigating a patriarchal society and the blurred lines between war and peace, where yesterday's acts of violence still resonate in the actions of today. Estimated release date is mid 2027, BH Telekom is onboard with 50% of the budget.

*The Adventures of a Turbo-Folk Princess* was the most-unusual pitch with creators and directors Peter Vulchev and Andrey Volkashin and writer Sanya Arsovska presenting the storyline of the 10x30' comedy/crime/musical drama through the

eyes of the main character Vaska and two narrators. Vaska, a small-town Macedonian girl with a golden voice, is trapped between stage fright and her mother's belief that only marriage can secure her future. Engaged to a charming businessman—secretly a gangster—her world shatters when she accidentally poisons him. Fleeing, she meets turbo-folk legend Kuraima, who offers her a shot at the Balkanvision contest. With the help of Ebony, a fiery stripper-prostitute posing as a professional dancer, and a crew of misfits, Vaska embarks on a wild Balkan adventure—dodging danger, chasing dreams, and battling her deepest fears. The creators also noted that this is the first ever TV series focusing on the phenomenon of turbo-folk (a.k.a. chalga). OXO Production is producing the series with MRT being the broadcaster. The team is already working on a second season and shooting is planned for next spring.

*Brothers* was the last pitched project and the most-developed one, with the production looking mostly for sales partners. The 6x45' political crime thriller comes from Greece, Germany and Luxembourg. The series has already secured most of its 8.3 million euros budget from the Hellenic Film Commission, Media Slate Funding, Cosmote TV, the Luxembourg Film Fund, AGICOA Europe, RTL Luxembourg, ARD Degeto, local funds from Germany, Media TV Content, Producers Reinvestment, International Sales MG. The story: the son of a German politician is found murdered in the no-man's land that divides Cyprus. Two opposing detectives from either side of the divide—Eleni and Fatih—are compelled to work together. As EU countries urgently seek energy alternatives amid escalating instability in the Middle East, the detectives uncover a deep-seated political conspiracy rooted in corruption. The project is created and directed by Simon Farmakas who pitched it at the event and is also directed by Rotem Shamir; produced by Deal Productions, Blonde, Hager Moss Film. Broadcasters of the project are RTL Letzebuerg and Degeto. It is expected to premiere at the end of 2026.

...continues on page 66





*The Promise*

Markiza’s new daily access period drama has been dominating the audience charts since its premiere in early 2025. *The Promise* first broke the 40% share achieving its best result on the last day of April with 45.4% in the commercial demo. For comparison, the all-day average of the channel is around 24%.

# CEE Breakout Hits

We continue the tradition and present some of the biggest new success stories in the CEE region in the 2024-2025 TV season.





### The Floor

The hottest gameshow format of the moment also made its mark on TVN in Poland landing the best premiere of an entertainment project since 2022. *The Floor* replaced *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* in the slot and scored over a million viewers with up to 13.64% in the 16-49 demo.



### ATP Carriers

*ATP Carriers* became the highest-rated premiere on ICTV2 this spring. Overall, the premiere episodes of the crime comedy series gathered almost 4 million viewers across Ukraine. The average share was 9.0% in the commercial demo 18-54, 50.000+, which was 34% higher than the channel's average. At the same time, the series was available on Netflix Ukraine where it took 4th place in terms of views in its debut week.



### The King of Sumava

*The King of Sumava: The Phantom of the Dark Land*, the 2022 Voyo original miniseries, premiered on TV Nova in February, ranking first in all major demos, with 1.17 million viewers and 31.87% share in total, 27.69% share in the commercial 15-54 demo. The finale kept up with the strong results and got 25.21% and 19.98% share, once again beating the tough competition on Sunday nights.





### Shame/Skam

Several weeks after the premiere of the Croatian remake of *Skam*, the total number of views on SRAM/SHAME's official channels on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram reached the impressive 27.7 million. The reach of the series on social networks was 3.8 million unique users. The audience has also actively participated in the promotion of the series as evidenced by the over 554.000 interactions (likes, comments and shares). SRAM has had the most views and interactions on TikTok, while the highest reach was achieved on Instagram with as many as 1.5 million users.



### I Have Children

Mega's daily family comedy series *I Have Children* turned into a real breakout hit in the main primetime. After six months, on air it led its slot with 16.7% market share beating the channel's primetime average in the commercial demo.

### Our Father

This spring, Romanians indulged in the nostalgia of the 2000s and followed the beginning of the story of the most beloved characters from PRO TV's action series *The Clan*. The premiere scored 7.8 rating points and 20.9% share with nearly 1.4 million viewers from across the country tuned in.





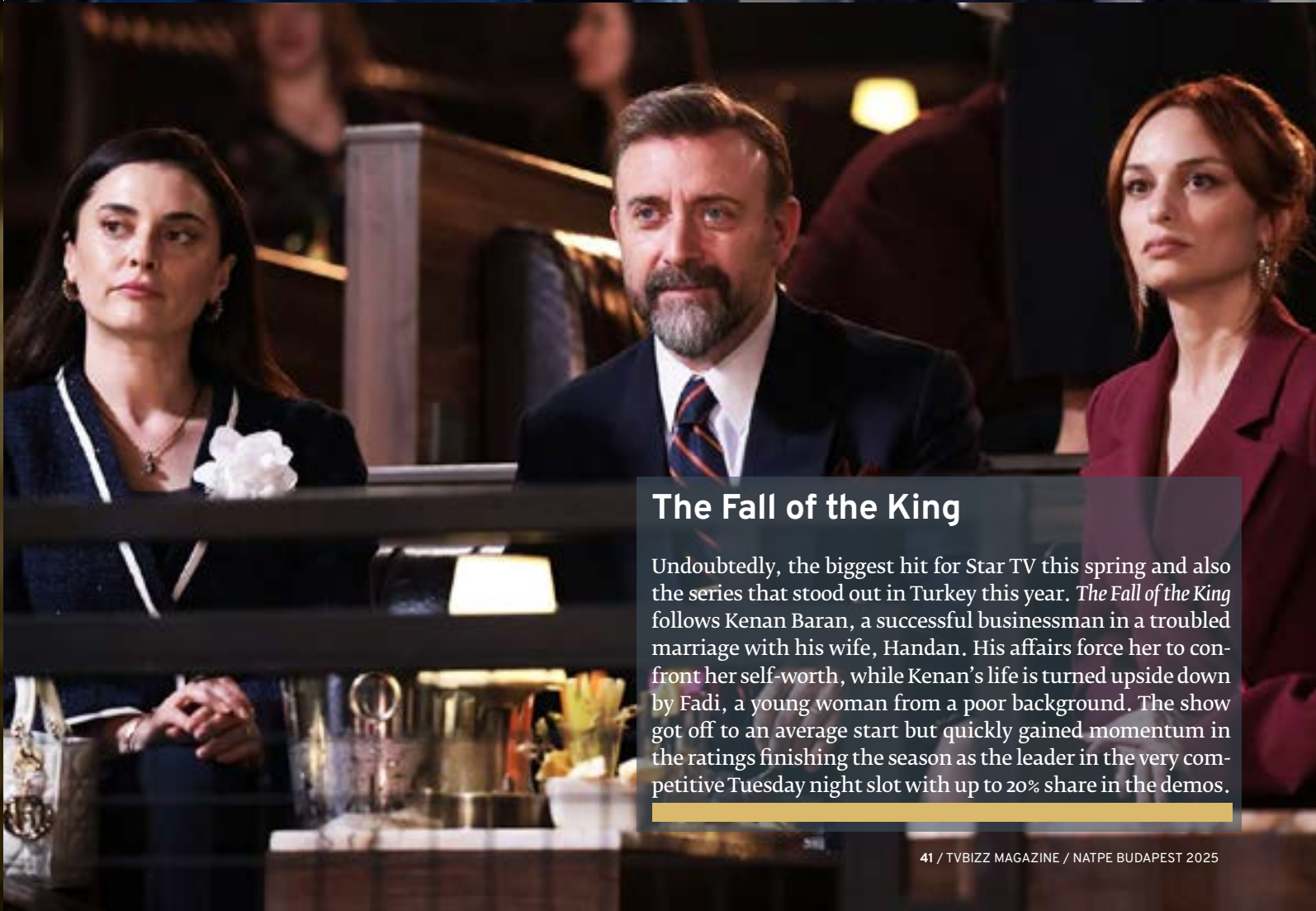
Rise of the Raven

*Hunyadi* (aka *Rise of the Raven*) currently holds the title of most watched broadcast of the year in Hungary. The Top 5 places in the annual program list covering the entire TV market are currently occupied by Hunyadi among 18-59 year-olds. The average share in the demo was 20.8%, doubling the result of main rival RTL in the slot. Among the total population, it became the most watched series since April 2021.



Von Fock

Despite the unusual access slot, *Von Fock*'s premiere scored an average of 136.000 viewers. For the start of the second season ETV reported an average audience of 113.000 viewers, or 10% rating in 4+. The series ranked third in the weekly chart of the public broadcaster.



The Fall of the King

Undoubtedly, the biggest hit for Star TV this spring and also the series that stood out in Turkey this year. *The Fall of the King* follows Kenan Baran, a successful businessman in a troubled marriage with his wife, Handan. His affairs force her to confront her self-worth, while Kenan's life is turned upside down by Fadi, a young woman from a poor background. The show got off to an average start but quickly gained momentum in the ratings finishing the season as the leader in the very competitive Tuesday night slot with up to 20% share in the demos.





# FAST Market Developments in CEE: Poland and Ukraine Lead the Way

By Yako Molhov

The FAST (Free Ad-Supported Streaming Television) market in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is showing signs of evolution, with two markets leading the way - Poland and Ukraine. Both countries demonstrate how local conditions—ranging from media consumption habits to advertising infrastructure—can shape the success of this digital distribution model. Yet, in much of the region, FAST remains a niche concept, facing structural, technical, and commercial hurdles.

In Ukraine, the rapid rise of FAST channels has been driven by necessity and innovation. Amid the challenges of war and a shifting media environment, OTT platforms like Megogo, Kyivstar TV, and Sweet.tv have leaned into the FAST model, integrating niche channels with uninterrupted linear-style viewing. As a result,

according to Serhyi Boyko of Big Data UA, the monetization of digital advertising through FAST now comprises a meaningful slice of Ukraine's growing digital ad spend which as of 2024 amounted to 886 million euros, as per IAB Europe. Measurement services like Big Data UA have begun tracking these channels, confirming their strong viewership. As of late 2024, FAST offerings attracted 5 million monthly viewers, with popular channels including The World Inside Out, SpongeBob SquarePants, and Supermama.

Ukraine's FAST ecosystem is supported by a hybrid monetization model—advertising supplemented by content licensing and royalties. Major sales houses like Vidzone, Infinitas (Iplus), and Media International Service have played crucial roles in monetizing content, with

revenue sharing split between platforms and rights holders. Despite a lack of unified measurement akin to Nielsen, the platforms' own analytics departments ensure data-driven advertising, while initiatives to create a unified panel are underway. Notably, Kyivstar TV and Sweet.tv are open to such collaboration, recognizing the need for standardized metrics to build advertiser confidence.

Poland, on the other hand, is experiencing a boom in FAST driven by international giants. Rakuten TV has emerged as a leading force in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) FAST market, particularly in Poland, where it launched its first owned and operated FAST channel, Top Movies Polska, in June 2023 and now has over 70 FAST channels. TVN Warner Bros. Discovery is at the forefront among the local players,

having launched 22 FAST channels on its Player platform, including thematic channels like TVN Brzydula (Ugly Betty) and TVN Mam Talent (Got Talent). Pubcaster TVP (Telewizja Polska) has followed suit, recently launching its first FAST channel focused on the long-running series *Na dobre i na złe* (For Better or Worse), with plans for 20 more. These offerings complement Poland's already vibrant OTT ecosystem, which includes Polsat's plans for 20 FAST channels via Polsat Box Go. Together, these developments are creating a robust, competitive FAST landscape.

Despite these positive developments, there are limitations. While TVN and TVP offer their FAST channels free of charge, Polsat's are currently locked behind paywalls. Meanwhile, other players like Canal+ remain hesitant, citing strong performance in traditional TV advertising and a lack of incentives for moving into FAST. Similarly, major smart TV providers like Samsung and LG have yet to launch their FAST services in Poland, limiting international integration and reach. And while Samsung says it is looking

into the Polish market, LG has no such plans.

The appeal of FAST in Poland lies in its cost-free access to linear and on-demand content, particularly as inflation has made paid subscriptions less attractive to some consumers. Additionally, Polish broadcasters, including TVP and Polsat, have begun experimenting with FAST as a way to monetize their content in new ways.

Beyond Poland and Ukraine, FAST penetration remains modest across most of CEE. Countries like Romania, Bulgaria, the Western Balkans, and Slovakia have not seen the same level of investment or innovation. Several barriers persist: fragmented markets, limited advertising budgets, lower smart TV penetration, and a slow transition from linear to digital viewing. In many of these countries, pay TV and basic OTT services remain the dominant content delivery models, while rights holders are yet to fully embrace FAST as a monetization strategy.

Even in Ukraine, the sustainability of FAST is being questioned by some media executives. While platforms are bullish, major media groups like

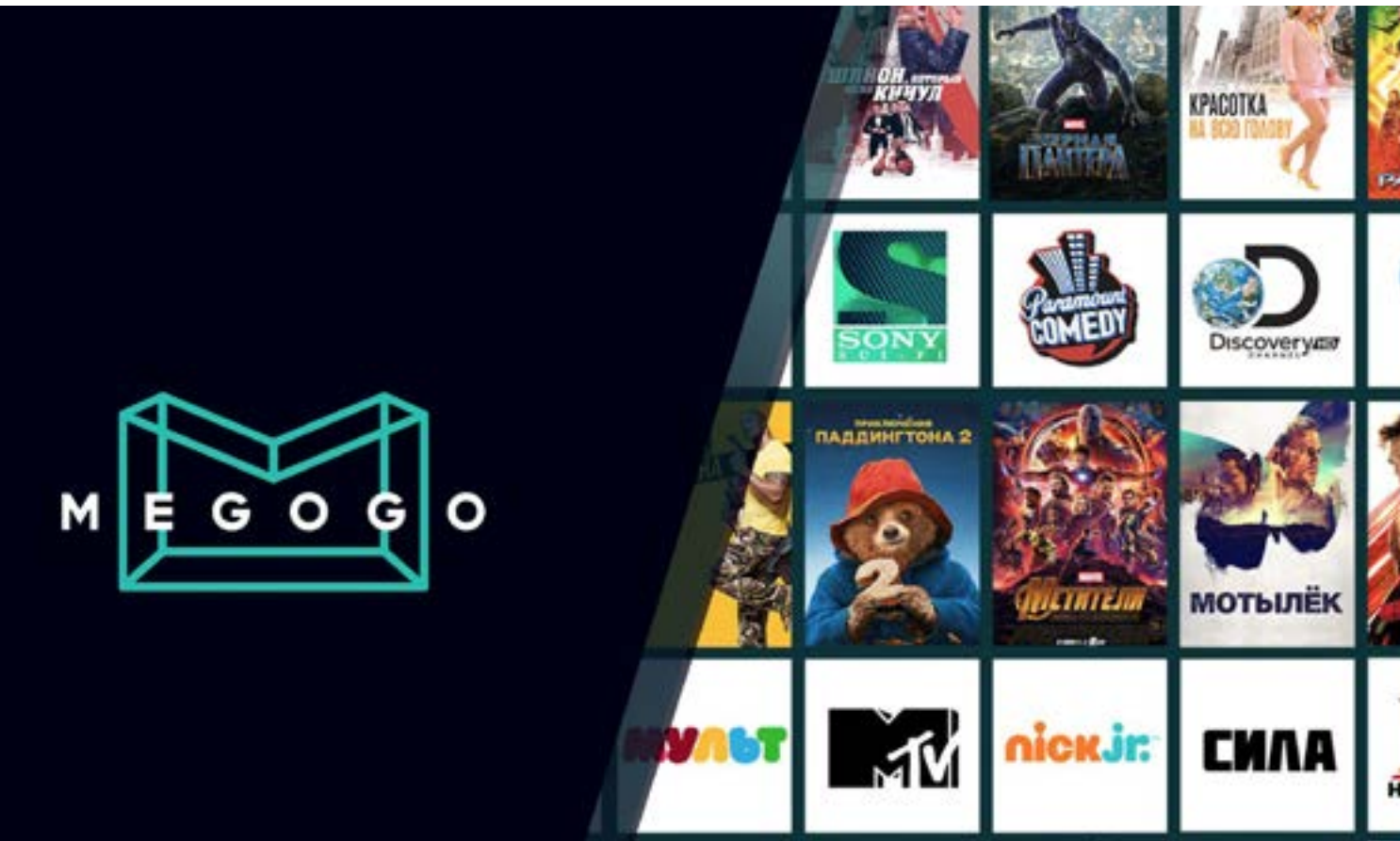
Starlight Media are taking a more cautious approach. Their focus remains on content monetization through paid channels and YouTube, citing concerns about FAST's long-term profitability and the saturation of the market. According to Vitaly Sperskach of Starlight Media, launching FAST channels requires careful cost-benefit analysis—especially in a media landscape still recovering from war-induced disruption.

Meanwhile, the advertising landscape continues to evolve. In Ukraine, OTT platforms are transforming how ads are sold and targeted. Technologies like StarAds by Kyivstar TV allow for real-time ad campaign adjustments, addressable TV, and geotargeting. As advertisers look to reach younger, digitally native viewers who are moving away from linear TV, FAST offers an attractive solution—especially when YouTube Premium blocks conventional advertising.

In Greece, the FAST market is still in its early stages, but significant developments are underway. Major commercial broadcasters, including United Group (Alpha, Star Channel),







and Mega Channel, are reportedly in talks to create a joint free streaming platform that will include both traditional channels and new FAST channels. This platform, supported by advertising and without a subscription fee, would mark a substantial shift in the Greek media landscape, which has been dominated by linear and pay TV services. The initiative, reportedly spearheaded by United Group's Dragan Šolak, suggests a growing recognition of the FAST model's potential to engage broad audiences while offering new monetization opportunities through digital ad sales. If successful, this could position Greece as another promising FAST market in Southern Europe.

At the same time, players like pubcaster ERT and ANT1, have their own successful streaming services which can be used as a launchpad for FAST channels. ERT has several such services on ERTFLIX and HbbTV, including occasional pop-up channels for events like the Eurovision Song Contest.

The Czech Republic and Slovakia have seen moderate FAST growth but

those channels face competition from established pay TV services. However, Czechia has been identified as holding potential by some big international players. In Hungary and Romania, FAST is still in the early stages. While RTL Hungary and PRO TV have experimented with free streaming on RTL+ and Voyo, traditional TV and SVOD dominate. As for the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania): FAST adoption is low, with Netflix and local VOD platforms like Go3 (Baltics) leading the market.

In countries like Bulgaria, Serbia, and Croatia, FAST remains underdeveloped. Pay TV and piracy dominate, and local broadcasters have been slow to invest in free ad-supported streaming. Factors such as underdeveloped digital advertising ecosystems, lower smart TV penetration/connectivity, regulatory ambiguity, and limited local content production for digital-first environments hinder its expansion. Broadcasters in these markets continue to prioritize traditional pay TV or basic OTT services, often without the infrastructure or strategy to build sustainable FAST models.

Looking ahead, the growth of FAST in CEE will depend on broader adoption of smart devices, unified measurement standards, and a steady pipeline of relevant, local content. While Poland and Ukraine demonstrate that FAST can be a profitable model with the right market conditions, other countries will need stronger commercial incentives and better infrastructure to catch up. As content libraries expand and digital ad spending increases, more broadcasters may find FAST an irresistible avenue for both audience engagement and revenue generation.

The coming years will determine whether this model can establish a lasting presence across the region or remain limited to its early adopters. If more viewers cut costs and advertisers seek digital alternatives to linear TV, FAST could become a major force—especially in price-sensitive economies. However, its success will depend on local content partnerships and overcoming pay TV dominance in slower-adopting markets where it remains largely affordable for the vast majority of the households. ■

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Sram

# Coming of Age in CEE

By Yako Molhov

In recent years the landscape of young adult and coming-of-age dramas in Central and Eastern Europe has undergone a dynamic transformation, marked by local original or adapted series that resonate not only with teenage audiences but also with their parents. Netflix's breakout UK hit *Adolescence*, a bold and emotionally raw drama, has struck a chord across the globe, including with audiences in CEE.

Tackling themes such as identity, mental health, family pressure, school life, sexuality, violence and the struggle for self-expression in often conservative societies, *Adolescence* has become a cultural touchstone for a new generation. Its success proves a growing appetite for authentic, youth-centered storytelling that reflects the real-life complexities faced by teenagers all over the world.

Similarly, young adult (YA) and teenage-focused series are carving out their own space in the region, blending local nuances with timeless themes of identity, societal pressure, and the bittersweet transition into adulthood. Whether original or adapted formats, these productions highlight the unique cultural perspectives CEE brings to the global conversation about growing up.

Let's look at some of the most-popular teenage-centered series from the region, focusing not only on drama but also on the lighter side of things.



## The Mothers (International title: Shattered Bonds)

Drama, Nova TV Bulgaria/Beta Film

Rooted in Teodora Dimova's acclaimed novel from 2005 and reframed for contemporary audiences, the Bulgarian drama series *The Mothers* (sold internationally as *Shattered Bonds* by Beta Film) takes an unflinching look at youth violence, fractured families, and the silent wounds passed down through generations. The series premiered on March 20, 2025.

Six teenagers—Andrea, Leah, Dana, Alexander, Nikola, and Deyan—form an extraordinary bond with their new teacher, Yavora. At first, she seems unremarkable, just another face in the faculty. But under her guidance, their grades improve, their camaraderie deepens, and they transform into kinder, more empathetic individuals. Their closeness, however, alarms the kids' parents, who see Yavora as a threat. As the pressure to break them apart grows, the teens cling to her, viewing Yavora as their only refuge in an increasingly hostile world. Through the lens of the six teens' personal and family struggles, their stories reach a climax on the day Yavora invites them to meet her in a park near the school. But the meeting, meant to bring solace, leads to devastation as they're torn from their last source of unconditional support.



The Teacher

## The Teacher

Sitcom format, Sony Pictures Television

This sitcom, originating from Germany, has been adapted by Paprika Studios for Voyo/Nova in Czechia, RTL in Hungary, Markiza in Slovakia and for POP TV in Slovenia. The show also saw two seasons on Romanian market

leader PRO TV between 2019 and 2021, which puts it among the most-adapted fiction formats in the region.

A charismatic professor with heart and "not so classical" teaching methods helps his students alongside their vital issues and questions.

The German *Der Lehrer* revolves around the teacher Stefan Vollmer who teaches German, Science and PE. After 10 years

he comes back to be a teacher again. His new school turns out to be very problematic with students hanging around in the halls and not listening to teachers. Vollmer becomes expert for the so-called "G-Kurs" which is the most chaotic class in the school. With new and unconventional methods, he finally succeeds to come through to his students and change their attitude against school.



## Belfer (International title: The Teach)

Crime thriller, Canal+

This Polish series which saw a total of 3 seasons and premiered in October 2016 follows Paweł Zawadzki, a high school teacher who moves from Warsaw to a small town and becomes a private investigator after a student's mysterious death.

The show delves into secrets, lies, and dark events in a school setting, exploring themes of youth rebellion, crime, and societal pressures. While it focuses more on mystery than explicit school violence, it touches on the darker side of adolescent life and school environments.

The first season of ten episodes was a rating success for Canal + as it broke their all-time record and won two awards, including Best TV Series at the Polish Film Awards. A second season of eight episodes began in October 2017. After a gap of six years, a third season of eight episodes was broadcast from September 2023.



## The Teacher

Drama, NOWTV/Medyapim

*Öğretmen* (*The Teacher*) is a Turkish television series of the youth, psychological thriller and drama genre, produced by Medyapım and MF Yapım, whose first episode was released on March 4, 2020. It is adapted from the Japanese format *Mr. Hiiragi's Homeroom*. The main character is an unassuming art teacher who came to the school two years ago. It is ten days before graduation and the students' high school days are about to come to an end uneventfully--or so it seemed. The teacher gathers his 29 students and says, "From this moment, you are my hostages."

A blast rips through the campus and the kids are flustered. In an instant, the teacher-student relationship turns into a criminal-hostage relationship. This is the beginning of their "final class," which is about the truth behind the suicide of their classmate a few months ago.



## Shame/Skam

Drama, HRT/Beta Film

A Croatian adaptation of the Norwegian series *Skam*, *Shame* (*Sram*) delves into the lives of high school students in Zagreb, exploring themes of friendship, romance, and mental health. The first season centers on Eva, a new student navigating complex social dynamics, while the second

season shifts focus to her friend Nora and her evolving relationships. The series was immediately renewed for a second season, which premiered on April 26. It centers on Nora, who became Eva's friend at the start of the first season. The season continues the storyline between Nora and Roko, which began in the first season.

In addition to these topics, the format of the series is also intriguing as it consists of at least 5 sequences

posted on social networks marked with the day of the week and the exact time, which creates the impression that the main action takes place in real time, while the complete episode is shown on TV once a week. The title of the series describes a feeling, which is typical for adolescence and the process of maturation, which includes challenges such as the lack of self-confidence and finding one's own place in the world.



## The School

Drama, 1+1

As Ukraine's first teen drama, *The School* portrays the everyday challenges faced by students in a contemporary Ukrainian school. The series gained significant popularity, becoming the highest-rated Ukrainian TV series during its initial run in fall/winter 2017-2018. The final, third season *The School. Graduation* was broadcast in March 2019.

A couple of young teachers by an accident get a job in one of the Ukrainian schools. Successful businesswoman Kateryna becomes an economics teacher to get along with her daughter. She gets acquainted with a new English teacher, Alex. Soon this job changes their lives because they've never experienced it before. The school challenges them. In school they act like they act in everyday life, and an incorrectly written lesson plan or a school journal attendance log not filled in on time can be the reason for dismissal.



Much attention is paid to the actual problems which schoolchildren have to deal with: bullying, misunder-

standing in the family, bribes, and cabals in the teaching staff and among the schoolchildren.

## Early Swallows

Drama, Novy

This groundbreaking series tackles sensitive issues such as bullying, online harassment, sexual identity, and suicide. *Early Swallows* was lauded for its candid portrayal of adolescent struggles, leading to a substantial increase in calls to mental health helplines in Ukraine.

The first episode aired in November 2019. The televised episodes attracted a viewership of six million viewers on live-to-air television and millions more viewers online. According to BBC News the series was "pretty much the first time that adolescent LGBT identity had been portrayed on Ukrainian TV". The second season of the show was broadcast in December 2020.

The series focuses on the contemporary life and the problems Ukrainian high-school students face - growing up, puberty, self-acceptance and the formation of personality. The plot revolves around the investigation of Olha Makarova, who is tasked with revealing the death of a teenager. She will have to delve into the terrible secrets of schoolchildren and their parents to find out: it was a suicide, or a guy was deliberately pushed from the roof of a high-rise building.





## Sexta

Drama, JOJ

In April Slovak net JOJ announced a new original family series project called *Sexta* which it started filming the same month. Local media call it a “rival” to Markiza’s *The Teacher*.

The series will have a large Czech-Slovak overlap, both in the creative team and among the actors. One of the central faces will be the young 20-year-old Czech acting star Tomáš Sean Pšenička who played one of the main characters in the teenage series *Sex O’Clock* on the Voyo platform.

He recently won the Czech Lion award for a supporting character in the film *Vlhy*. In *Sexta*, he will play a student, his parents will be played by Vica Kerekes and Stanislav Majer.



## The Defender

Drama, CT

This impactful series presents ten standalone episodes, each depicting real-life inspired stories from Czech schools. Topics include religious expression, mental health, and teacher-student relationships, providing a raw and authentic look into the challenges faced within the educational system.

The ten-part series based on real cases which shook the Czech education system premiered in 2021. All the affairs are dealt with by the School Ombudsman, Aleš Pelán, who seeks a just solution for all, often in defiance of the system and accepted customs. For example, he

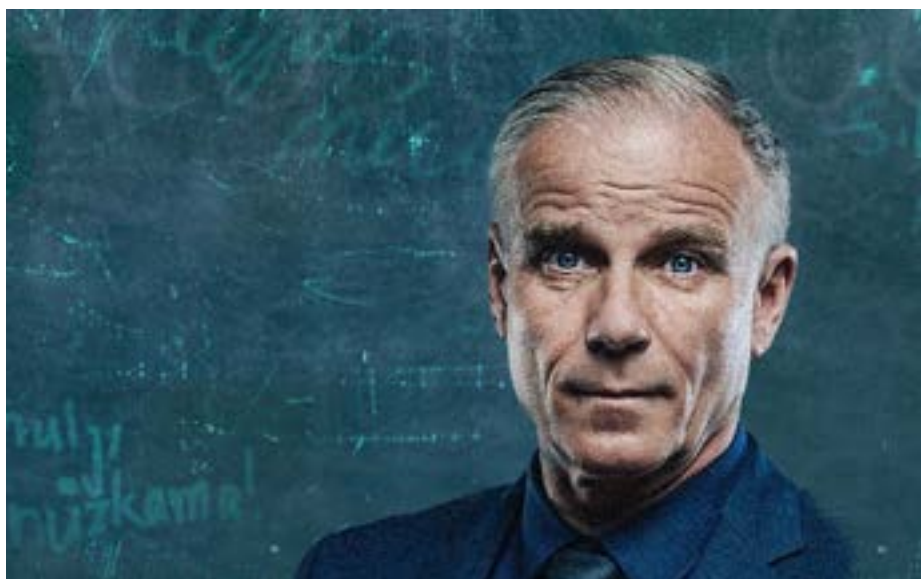
attempts to discover what led to the murder of a care worker in a children’s home, what one can do when an aggressive child joins a class, who carries the guilt when a child dies on a school outing, what can possibly be done with a 13-year old girl who has never gone to school or uncovers sexual abuse of teenage boys at a Secondary School. His task, above all, is to protect, in other words, establish who is the victim and who the aggressor. Where lies the cause in the given environment in which children, as well as adults, are the victims more often than we like to admit to ourselves. Amongst the parents, teachers, students and pupils are inconspicuous heroes on a daily basis. Highlighting their stories and defending those in dire straits is the

aim of the series.

In 2024 Czech Television announced series *Ratolesti* which was called the-matical sequel to *The Defender*. It is set for broadcast in 2025.

Other teenage drama titles from Turkey worth noting are *One More Chance* (*Tozluyaka*), set at an elite high school, where three kids from the wrong side of the tracks investigate their friend’s suspicious suicide. They start by following a mystery but eventually discover an exciting new life among Istanbul’s super-wealthy – and a glimmer of hope for their future. The FOX series aired in 2022. Also older popular titles include *Arka Sıradakiler* (*Those at the Back Row*) – again on FOX 2007-2012; *Kardeşlerim* (*For My Family*) – ATV (2021–present); *Duy Beni* (*Hear Me*) – Star TV (2022); etc.

Numerous Central and Eastern European YA series, much like Netflix’s *Adolescence*, follow universal teenage experiences—angst, love, and the search for identity mixed with the region’s distinct historical and social landscape. These shows capture the essence of youth with a sincerity that rivals *Adolescence*’s global impact. As global audiences increasingly seek authentic, diverse narratives, CEE’s contributions to the genre prove that the struggles and triumphs of adolescence know no borders. ■



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# The Rapid Expansion of OGM UNIVERSE Continues

OGM UNIVERSE is among the youngest but also among the fastest growing Turkish distributors on the international market. Ekin Koyuncu Karaman, Global Distribution & Partnership Director, tells TVBIZZ Magazine about her company's strategy which led to its rapid expansion and the importance of OGM's approach to storytelling which guarantees the international appeal of the series in the catalog, including the latest hits *The Fall of the King* and *Six of Us*.

**OGM UNIVERSE has rapidly expanded its global footprint since its inception. What strategic decisions have been pivotal in establishing your presence in key international markets like LATAM, MENA, and CEE?**

From the beginning, we've focused on thoughtful, deliberate growth—building not just a catalog, but a meaningful brand. One key strategic decision was to prioritize regions showing a strong appetite for premium Turkish drama, such as LATAM, MENA, and CEE. These are territories where audiences connect deeply with emotional, character-driven storytelling, which aligns perfectly

with our content DNA.

We also invested early in talent. Hiring experienced executives like Mikaela Perez, Mina Aslan, and, most recently, Canan Koca, allowed us to develop strong, local market relationships and offer personalized attention to each territory. This localized approach, supported by globally minded strategies, helped us scale rapidly and authentically.

**With series like *The Fall of the King* and *Six of Us* gaining international acclaim, how do you balance local storytelling nuances with universal themes to appeal to diverse audiences?**

Our guiding principle is that specificity breeds universality. Series like *The Fall of the King* and *Six of Us* are deeply rooted in Turkish culture, whether through setting, character dynamics, or moral conflicts, but they explore themes like love, trauma, redemption, and resilience that transcend borders.

For example, *The Fall of the King* combines gripping emotional drama with the high production values international buyers are looking for. Set in the visually rich world of 1990s Turkey, it delivers a sophisticated blend of power struggles, psychological tension, and deeply human transformation. Its elegant cinema-







tography, star-studded cast like Halit Ergenc, Merve Dizdar, and Aslıhan Gürbüz, and emotionally charged narrative make it an ideal fit for audiences seeking prestige drama with a universal hook.

Similarly, *Six of Us* tells a very local story about a family torn apart and rebuilt, but its emotional core—love born from sacrifice—is deeply human and widely relatable.

**OGM UNIVERSE has been proactive in participating in international content markets. How do these kinds of events influence your content strategy and networking efforts?**

These events are more than just showcases for our catalog—they're opportunities to listen. They allow us to understand emerging trends, get direct feedback from our partners,

and identify regional preferences that influence how we package, pitch, and even greenlight new titles.

They're also invaluable for nurturing partnerships. We don't just sell content; we build relationships. These markets help us connect face-to-face with broadcasters and platforms, refine our positioning, and form long-term strategies that benefit both sides.

**What are your highlights for the leading CEE content marketplace this year?**

We're excited to present a powerful slate of titles that blend emotional depth with international appeal. Leading the lineup is *The Fall of the King*, a gripping psychological drama of power and redemption starring Halit Ergenç, already drawing strong interest across Europe. Another

standout is *Six of Us*, a moving family saga about resilience, sacrifice, and unexpected love—currently a prime-time leader on Star TV.

We're also introducing *Çarpıntı*, our newest drama led by Sibel Taşçıoğlu. With its bold, emotionally charged storytelling, we believe it will resonate strongly in CEE and beyond.

Among our international titles, we're spotlighting *Another Self* (*Zeytin Ağacı*) and *The Tailor* (*Terzi*)—both Netflix Turkey successes produced by OGM Pictures and featuring stellar casts, including Tuba Büyüküstün and Çağatay Ulusoy. These titles continue to perform exceptionally well on global platforms. Lastly, we're proud to showcase *Dilemma* (*Düğüm*), the first Turkish original for Prime Video. A tightly woven thriller starring Bergüzar Korel and Caner Cindoruk, it's a bold, high-stakes

story about justice, motherhood, and moral boundaries.

**OGM UNIVERSE has recently expanded its global sales team. How do these strategic hires align with your vision for global expansion?**

This expansion reflects both our confidence in the strength of Turkish drama and our long-term vision to become a leading global Turkish content provider. With an expanding catalog and increasing demand across regions, we knew it was time to deepen our footprint.

Bringing on Canan Koca to lead our efforts in CEE, the Baltics, and Europe was a strategic move. Her market insights and extensive network have already brought new energy to our partnerships and accelerated our presence in key territories. Each team member brings

regional intelligence and passion to our global vision.

**Given the economic challenges and high inflation rates in Turkey, how has OGM UNIVERSE adapted its production and distribution strategies to maintain growth and profitability?**

Economic volatility has certainly impacted the industry, but it's also highlighted the importance of strategic agility in distribution. At OGM UNIVERSE, we've responded by reinforcing our international sales strategy—focusing on titles with strong global appeal, exploring more co-production opportunities.

Our close collaboration with OGM Pictures gives us a unique advantage. As their global distributor, we're involved early in the creative process, allowing us to shape content positioning and identify international potential from the start. This alignment ensures we can bring high-quality, resonant stories to market, even in a challenging economic environment.

**OGM UNIVERSE emphasizes storytelling that goes beyond traditional character patterns and story flows. Can you elaborate on how this creative approach has been received in international markets?**

International partners have responded very positively to our focus on emotionally authentic, layered storytelling. There's growing demand for narratives that surprise viewers, challenge norms, and explore morally complex characters—exactly where our titles stand out.

Take *Six of Us*, for example. It's not just a family drama; it's a transformative journey where duty evolves into love, and survival gives way to emotional rebirth. Its portrayal of enemies becoming soulmates and the redefining of family roles resonates deeply across cultures.

Similarly, *Lost in Love* explores a love triangle shaped by childhood promises, unfulfilled promises, and emotional scars. It's a romantic drama rooted in psychological realism, where love isn't idealized, but interrogated.

*Broken Destiny*, on the other hand, blends classic melodrama with a

modern identity crisis: a man wakes from a coma with no memory and is caught between two women—one from his past, and one from a life he doesn't remember. It's a story of fate, grief, and second chances, told with emotional nuance and strong visual storytelling.

These kinds of narratives—unpredictable, emotionally rich, and character-driven—are helping us build strong traction in international markets. They're familiar enough to connect, but bold enough to stand out.

**With the increasing demand for Turkish content globally, how does OGM UNIVERSE ensure the quality and originality of its productions while scaling up its operations?**

We prioritize quality and storytelling impact over sheer volume. Each title we bring to market is carefully selected for its creative strength and international potential, and developed in close collaboration with top-tier writers, directors, and talent. Our focus is on meaningful, high-quality growth, championing originality, and the emotional resonance scale.

We also invest heavily in the development process, ensuring every script is both emotionally grounded and globally relevant. For us, quality control, creative integrity, and distinct storytelling are non-negotiable—no matter how much we expand.

**Looking ahead, what are OGM UNIVERSE's key priorities and goals for the next few years in terms of content creation, market expansion, and technological innovation?**

Our priorities revolve around three core pillars:

Expanding our catalog with premium drama that pushes boundaries both creatively and thematically.

Strengthening our global presence, particularly in emerging territories in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Embracing technology to improve content delivery, data-driven decision-making, and audience targeting.

We're also exploring co-productions and original projects tailored for international platforms, with the goal of positioning OGM UNIVERSE not just as a distributor, but as a global storytelling powerhouse. ■



# Bringing Emotional Revolution:

## Teodora Markova and Martichka Bozhilova on Bold Storytelling in CEE

In the second part of this conversation, Martichka and Teodora talk about the main obstacles they face when developing and later finding the funding for their projects thru co-pro events and film agencies, as well as what's in the pipeline for both of them.

### PART 2

**Co-productions are sometimes key to getting ambitious projects off the ground in CEE. What has your experience been like with international co-production models, and what lessons have you learned along the way?**

**Martichka:** Co-production is key for smaller territories like Bulgaria, in which broadcasters have too limited budgets. Most TV series aired on the territory of the Balkans are soap operas and sitcoms, which can be produced on the basis of full commission. Bulgaria is one of the countries, in which Bulgarian National Film Center minoritarian support was opened also for series. In addition, European financing from Eurimages and Creative Europe Media is possible only in the presence of European co-production and at least two TVs supporting the series. This makes it possible for series

from our part of Europe to be produced with the relevant budget and to be competitive on the international market. Now besides *Gold War*, I co-produce two international series with great potential for international distribution, which received support from Bulgaria - *A Girl from Tallinn* (Estonia, Bulgaria, Ukraine) with ETV, Go3, BNFC, Creative Europe Media, as well as *The Last Divorce of Communism* (co-written also by Teodora Markova) - Latvia-Bulgaria, with LTV and BNFC. Currently they are in pre-production phase.

**What are some of the major hurdles you encounter when developing and financing projects in Central and Eastern Europe?**

**Martichka:** We have to all the time break the taboos and stigmatized perceptions regarding our territories. It comes most of the time because of lack of knowledge or out of pure ignorance. Within the last years this has changed considerably because of our constant

presence on the international market offering high-quality relevant stories that can enrich the international TV landscape with great and unique storytelling.

**Teodora:** Our budgets are still very low compared to other countries in the region, and it is extremely difficult to create something meaningful within such financial constraints.

I hope that Bulgarian private TV channels will begin to see the value in this kind of cooperation and shift their focus. I also hope that, in the future, there will be a new management team at BNT - one that embraces the European approach and spirit: larger budgets, more transparent procedures, and support for high-quality projects with international potential. The most positive development in recent years is the funding scheme for series from our National Film Center, which - despite the low grant amounts - opens doors for international collaborations.

**You've both participated in major development labs and pitch forums. What current pitch projects are you most excited about, and what kind of international response are you seeing?**

**Martichka:** The market has opened for projects from CEE and we had the chance to pitch at the most important pitching events in Europe. The awards and selections of *Gold War* include European Producer's Club & Netflix Award for Best Female Producer - Venice Film Festival; Paramount Plus MIA Market Best Project Development Award; HypeWriter Development Award for scriptwriting - Budapest; etc. At the MIA Market pitching a jury member even declared the series the best IP of the season.



*Soviet Jeans*

**Teodora:** I am usually excited about all my projects. If I lose passion for any of them, it means something is wrong and I should probably reconsider continuing with it.

I'm currently working on our new TV series with Stanislavs Tokalovs, *The Last Divorce of Communism* (Tasse Film), for Latvian Television, which will be an international co-production. On the Bulgarian side, we are once again partnering with Martichka and AGIT-PROP, and we're happy to announce that we've just received funding from the Bulgarian National Film Center, so the post-production will most likely take place in Sofia.

We also hope to begin production on *Soviet Jeans 2* next year.

Another upcoming project is *The Judgement of Solomon*, written by me and Nevena Kertova, with producer Katya Trichkova and director Konstantin Bojanov. It's the only Bulgarian project so far to have been selected for the Series Mania Co-Pro Pitch in 2024. This year, we received funding from the Bulgarian National Film Center, and we are now beginning our search for international partners.

**There's been increasing interest in stories from the CEE region. What trends are you observing in the regional content landscape—both in fiction and non-fiction?**

**Martichka:** I am observing a great presence of stories provoked by the major contemporary issues that have a particular local perspective and are tack-

led with a lot of talent and innovation by our writers and directors. The locality is our main asset, and this makes us appealing to the international market. One of the trends are the character-driven stories that bring uniqueness with their big emotional drive and pay off for the viewers in the end.

**Teodora:** As an author, I don't believe in trends. If there are trends, I think the best thing you can do is run as far away from them as possible and search for your own inner need and unique perspective.

**Major streaming platforms like Netflix, Disney+, Max, SkyShowtime, etc. are increasingly talking about their "CEE strategy" but in reality, they shoot original fiction projects only for Poland. Do you think this might change anytime soon and do you think local and regional streaming platforms like Voyo, Go3, etc. are more likely to fund projects from local CEE authors outside of Poland?**

**Martichka:** We are here now and there is no point to wait for the big players to change their strategies. This will most probably happen sooner or later. In the meantime, we have so many good stories to tell and so many talented and skilled people to bring. What makes more sense is to unite our efforts regionally, as we are doing it already, and to convince our broadcasters and local platforms to allocate funding for more original programming.

**Teodora:** I don't see why not. The mantra that we are small markets is

no longer valid, especially after the international success of project like *Soviet Jeans* and *Operation Sabre*. They proved that a local story could be significant and compelling for global audiences, if told with originality, boldness and honesty.

**Securing funding remains a challenge for many regional creators. How are you approaching financing today—are European funds or private partnerships playing a bigger role?**

**Martichka:** European funding is demanding and bureaucratic, yet it is one of the few options through which producers from low-capacity countries and underrepresented TV industries can co-finance their budgets properly. It plays crucial role in today's financial planning of our TV series along with the national funding schemes that are already available in some of the countries like Bulgaria and Czech Republic, for example.

**Teodora:** In my experience state and European funds are invaluable for this market, also because we are witnessing a global decline in the industry and I think that private investors will be increasingly cautious which makes public funding even more crucial.

**Looking ahead, what kinds of stories are you most passionate about telling next, and how do you hope to influence the regional or global narrative space through your work?**

**Martichka:** For sure the stories I want to tell aim at bringing emotional revolution to the viewers. What is important to me is the stories to provoke, to make you think or react within your personal life or the community. So far, the results have been really rewarding, which makes me believe in the huge impact that serials storytelling can bring to audiences for a really short time.

**Teodora:** If a story is not just a product designed to fit the market but comes from an inner space - from the authentic fears and desires of the author—it becomes unexpected and genuine. That's what I'm passionate about. It's not restricted to a specific theme or genre... those layers come later.

I've never really thought in terms of influencing the industry. But if viewers can gain a new perspective on something that's usually treated as a stigma or prejudice through my work, then that's already deeply fulfilling. ■



*Operation Sabre*



# Cineflix Rights Brings a Diverse Catalog Aligned with CEE Viewers Preferences

Cineflix Rights has made a name for high-quality content which enjoys steady popularity among CEE viewers. Lucy Rawson, VP, Sales, Benelux, CEE, and Southern Mediterranean, tells TVBIZZ Magazine about the latest titles in the catalog, the distributor's strategy to track the evolving preferences of their clients and the breakthru of reality format *Tempting Fortune* in Greece and Romania, and pretty soon in other countries in the region.

**Lucy, how would you describe Cineflix Rights' overall content strategy for the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region?**

**Are there specific genres that perform particularly well in the region?**

We have a breadth of new programming and long-running hits that spans scripted alongside a wide range of factual genres which appeals to broadcasters and streamers across the region. Engineering and history remain strong especially for public broadcasters, World War II in particular plays well, and our key brands such as *Mayday: Air Disaster* will often work for multiple windowing opportunities, especially in markets like Poland.

Strippable daytime lifestyle, such as cookery and property does really well. Our well-known *Property Brothers* brand is always in demand, and I'm looking forward to launching a new, recently announced show in the franchise, *Property Brothers: Commitment Issues*.

Long-running UK brands *Château DIY* and *Help! We Bought a Village* have already had traction in the region, and we're excited to launch the latest seasons. Pan-regional and local channels are always looking for true crime with titles like *Crime Scene Investigators* and *Spring Break Murders*, and our buzzy Lifetime biopic movie *I Was Honey Boo Boo* which will also launch to buyers at NATPE.

**Which countries in the CEE region are your top priorities, and why? Do you adjust your sales approach for different markets based on local broadcaster preferences?**

Poland has always been a key terri-

tory, largely due to the sheer market size and scope. Our content finds a home on one of the many channels and streamers there from premium pay, through to a number of secondary windows across free TV and the established VOD market. Hungary and the Czech Republic are also key across both the factual and lifestyle space. Despite local productions being strong and often forming the backbone of schedules in all these regions, international series from our slate are always in demand.

We are seeing a lot of growth in the Baltics as well, where there has been a rise in digital platforms. True crime, lifestyle and factual entertainment are

all popular across linear and streamers.

We always tailor our pitches to reflect the varying programming needs across regions, but content preferences are constantly evolving. That's why maintaining close relationships is essential and markets like NATPE provide valuable opportunities to stay aligned with buyers' shifting priorities. While some operate closely within their financial year cycles, others are more flexible and able to acquire content on short notice. Being agile and responsive is crucial to meeting these differing demands effectively.

**Can you share some of the latest titles in your catalog that you believe**



*Sunny Nights*

**have strong potential in CEE? What makes them a good fit for broadcasters and platforms in the region?**

*Sunny Nights* (8x60', Jungle Entertainment and Echo Lake Entertainment in association with Cineflix Rights for Stan, Australia) is a darkly comedic crime drama directed by Trent O'Donnell and starring Will Forte as a strait-laced American who teams up with his loose cannon sister played by D'Arcy Carden, to set up a spray tan business in Sydney. Procedural dramas consistently rank high on buyers' wishlists in the region, though there's also growing interest—particularly among streamers—in serialized crime content. *Sunny Nights* offers a unique blend of both, combining a comedic twist with recognizable Hollywood talent. We're aiming to build on the strong international momentum the show has already achieved in other territories.

*Trace, Track, Get My Car Back!* (16x30', Rare TV for BBC, UK) is an eye-opening series following the specialist police recovery teams who combine the latest tracking technology with boots-on-the-ground detective work to swipe

stolen vehicles back from under the noses of the crooks who stole them. Blue light, fast-paced, male-skewing content is a performer on the pan-regional channels, as well as it being a genre that often windows with local commercial broadcasters. Plus, the series provides volume to strip for daytime.

*Help! We Bought a Village* (Seasons 1-3, 80x60', True North for Channel 4, UK), follows couples and families as they restore abandoned villages across Europe. It's a high-rating Channel 4 lifestyle series, long-running, bingeable, and set in beautiful European locations, but also with historic experts featured and great takeaways, so it appeals to both public and commercial channels. We've sold it to a number of territories in the region including Hungary and the Baltics but still have availability. It is also gaining traction as a format.

*Choir Games* (4x60', Husk Media and Spacific Films for Sky, New Zealand and Super Channel, Canada) is an inspiring series from award-winning filmmaker Leanne Pooley following the teenagers and conductors of two

remarkable choirs—the Young People's Chorus of New York City and New Zealand's Kaitiāia Community Voices—as they embark on a life-changing journey to the 2024 World Choir Games, the largest choral competition on Earth. At a time when the world seems to be pulling apart, this series shows how the power of music brings people together. A compelling documentary series, it taps into the universal appeal of human stories—consistently a priority for buyers, particularly among public broadcasters.

*Cape Carnage: Killer Catch* (10x60', McAvoy Media for Seven Network Australia, UKTV, TVNZ) which follows Captain Bruce and the Davey family, who make a living from one of the most dangerous and remote jobs on earth: hand-line fishing in the treacherous waters of northern Australia. A brilliant adrenalin filled dangerous jobs series that would typically appeal to male-skewing channels in the region, but with the whole Davey family joining it has co-viewing appeal.

**Let's focus a bit more on Tempting Fortune which has now been adapted in Greece and Romania. Are you satisfied with the result of the show in these markets and are you seeing interest in other CEE countries for the format?**

Feedback has been great for the series which have aired – Acun Medya produced for Skai in Greece and Kanal D Romania. For Kanal D in Romania it was the #2 show nationally when it premiered, exceeding the slot average by +48%. We were thrilled with how Acun Medya adapted the format for these regions to include more gameplay than the UK version, and more episodes too without losing the pace/excitement. Several other markets in the region have shown interest with options in place in a number of them. With first seasons in production for NRK in Norway and already airing on Sky Italia, together with Season 2 for TV Azteca in Mexico airing, we are confident we will be announcing more CEE versions shortly. Stay tuned.

**How important is NATPE Budapest in your calendar, and what are your main objectives when attending the market this year?**



*Choir Games*





NATPE Budapest is a strategic moment in the calendar—falling between the London Screenings and MIPCOM—making it an ideal platform to showcase new launches and offer a preview of what's to come, particularly in drama. I'll be introducing *The Walsh Sisters* to buyers in Budapest ahead of its official debut at MIPCOM. In addition to our new slate, I'll also be presenting fresh seasons of our key returning brands.

**How does Cineflix Rights differentiate itself from other distributors in the CEE space? What unique advantages does your catalog offer to regional buyers?**

Cineflix Rights is the UK's largest truly independent distributor so we can select the best content from creative producers all over the world to sell to a wide range of buyers. With more than 6,000 hours of shows

spanning scripted and a very wide range of factual genres, we have the scale to offer programming solutions that suit every platform across the region.

**What novelties can buyers expect from Cineflix Rights in the future? What is in development?**

I'm excited about our new BBC / RTÉ comedy drama series, *The Walsh Sisters*, which we'll be launching at MIPCOM. It's based on the characters from Marian Keyes' bestselling novels, a chaotic, dysfunctional but deeply loveable family of five sisters, their mother and bemused father, set in their Dublin hometown.

Another upcoming title is drama series *Hildur* based on the well-known novels – which is a perfect example of the increasingly popular Nordic Blue genre – a thriller with strong characters unravelling a complex case, but combined with warmer themes of love and friendship, humor and mysticism, all set against the beautiful backdrop of one of the world's most scenic locations.

On the factual side, we have a number of new shows launching in the run up to MIPCOM spanning history, documentaries, crime, lifestyle and more, which I will tease at NATPE Budapest! ■



*Hepl! We Bought a Village*

# SEE YOU AT NATPE BUDAPEST



 **cineflix**  
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TABLE 44  
MARKET FLOOR



# Pitch Perfect: How CEE Drama Projects Are Breaking Through Internationally?

## PART 2

Media Play Sofia, which took place April 23-25, delivered a dynamic series of sessions spotlighting co-production strategies, regional successes, and bold new fiction projects. The TV Fiction Pitching Session showcased six stand-out projects, including *South Stream* (Serbia), *Gold War* (Bulgaria), *The Adventure of a Turbo-Folk Princess* by Andrey Volkashin (North Macedonia), *Las Veles* by Sasho Kokalanov and OXO Productions (North Macedonia), *Good Enough* by Jean-Nicolas Gilles Hopfer & Marta Hopfer-Gilles (Norway-Poland), and *Ian Bibian* by director Iavor Gardev (Bulgaria).

The first presented project was crime thriller *South Stream* – a Serbian-Bulgarian production by Concept Studio, created by Marko Popovic and Iva Mitrovic. It has already attracted the support of United Group and United Media during its development stages and was selected to take part in the Sarajevo Film Festival.

Acclaimed Bulgarian journalist Christo Grozev, who is also an Oscar winner, has joined the Serbian creators and Concept Studio for this political thriller. *South Stream* is the name of the controversial gas pipeline, which was built under the pressure of Putin in order to circumvent Ukraine, providing an alternative route for the Russian gas, and ultimately enabling Russia to invade Ukraine and to start the war. *South Stream*, in countries like Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Greece, has actually become a remarkable symbol of corruption, because at almost every stage of the construction of the gas pipeline, we find really remarkable stories, corruption, extortion, illicit pressure, abuse, and even several murders.

The storyline of the project: Florin (33) and Simona (28), a Romanian couple, travel to the island of Crete, Greece, for a vacation. But when Simona suddenly vanishes, Florin's world is turned upside down. That same night, the bodyguard of the Serbian Minister of Energy is murdered on the island, and Simona quickly becomes the prime suspect. Desperate to find the woman he loves, Florin, an ex-con, taps into his underground connections back home. Meanwhile, Greek police inspec-

tor Amalia (55) uncovers a link between the murder and a corruption scheme surrounding a controversial EU proposal to drill for gas near Crete's shores.

The second project presented was the *Gold War* period drama series coming from Bulgaria. The project is penned by Teodora Markova and is produced by Martichka Bozhilova and her prod-co Agitprop. The 6x55' sports drama focuses on the competitive world of gymnastics. During the Cold War, the battle for supremacy was transferred

to sports. Hundreds of athletes have been subjected to mental and physical pressure to allow the Socialist bloc to show its superiority. In this impossible political atmosphere, Vera, a rhythmic gymnastics coach from a small satellite country has created a team that becomes a world champion and has taken away medals from Soviet gymnasts. The Russians are trying to eliminate Vera, her enemies are sabotaging her, the secret services are following her closely. Her gymnasts love and hate her and are about to betray her but the dream of an Olympic medal gives them the will to continue... Until the USSR made a surprising decision to boycott the games and the communist countries were forced to obey. Vera's Golden Girls remain without the Olympic gold. The project was one of the finalists of the Hypewriter pitch contest in 2021 and also got the Paramount Plus Award at MIA Market in 2021 and selected for the Tallinn TV Beats Co-Financing Market 2021.

The "anti-fairytale for a generation raised on illusions and cheap lyrics"

called *The Adventures of a Turbo-Folk Princess* was the third project presented at Media Play Sofia. The Bulgarian/North Macedonian series was also pitched earlier this year during the Series Mania Forum in Lille. The project which is based on a short film by the creative duo has received notable recognition, including the Croatian Audiovisual Center Drama Award at CineLink Drama, Sarajevo Film Festival 2023, and the Council of Europe Development Award at Conecta Fiction & Entertainment 2024.

OXO Productions are also working on another project which was presented at the event – the 6x50' political drama *Las Veles*. The series presented by producer Pece Taleski and coming from North Macedonia is written by Sasho Kokalanov and directed by Marija Apchevska. In 2016, the small Macedonian town of Veles becomes an unexpected global hotspot when hundreds of fake news websites supporting Donald Trump emerge from its digital shadows. A decaying industrial city turns into a gold rush frontier—where teachers, teenagers, ex-cons, and mobsters chase viral headlines and easy profit. As the fake news factories grow, local mafia demands a cut, foreign agents arrive with hidden agenda and personal lives spiral out of control. *Las Veles* is a gritty, character-driven drama blending political intrigue, organized crime, and moral collapse in the age of misinformation—where every click carries a price, and truth is just another product. Interestingly enough there is another project from North Macedonia being developed, using the same story called *The Fake News Factory*. It was presented at the Serial Killer Festival in 2024 and will be presented at Conecta Fiction&Entertainment this month in Cuenca.

The pitching session included the steamy, R-rated dramedy about a Polish expat navigating love, perimenopause, and identity in Norway's unforgiving landscape called *Good Enough*. The 8x25' project, which comes from Marta Hopfer-Gilles - Producer and Screenwriter and Jean-Nicolas Gilles Hopfer - Creative Co-Producer and their Autoriverse Productions, tells the story of Pola, a Polish expat living in Oslo, trying to fit into the life of her Norwegian partner, Øystein. While their love is strong (at least it seems so), his teenage twin

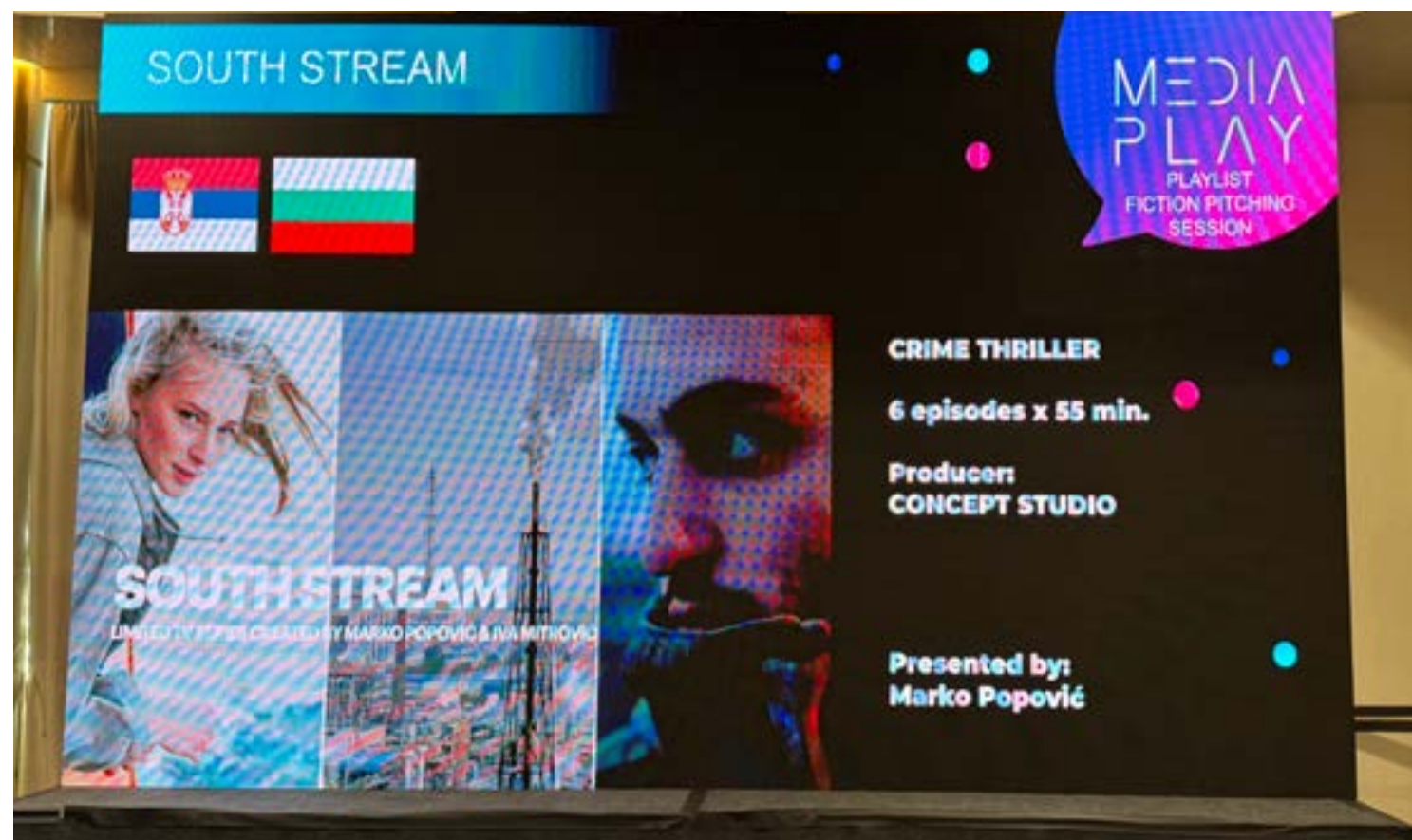
daughters, his ex-wife, his country, and its job market are not necessarily welcoming. And then there is the perimenopause that hits her out of nowhere and makes things, well, even more complicated. Along the way, they're trying to navigate their identity crisis with passion, love, honesty and humor. Occasionally breaking their legs (literally), fucking other people, finding unexpected friends, finally coming of age with a little help from a 16-year-old and becoming a revolutionary meme. At the end of the day, Pola is just trying to understand who she is. Maybe a bit late, but who said that you need to know everything from the get-go?

The pitching session concluded with the presentation of a feature film project coming from Concept Studio, directed and written by Javor Gardev and based on the popular Bulgarian novel *Ian Bibian* by Elin Pelin. The "Faust for Adolescents" movie focuses on the caught between his good heart and wicked wit Ian Bibian who runs away from home and meets the Archdemon of the Lower realm, who has a special mission for the boy. Rushing to save his father's life, Ian embarks on a dangerous journey through the underground realms, but with the help of the little demon Füt and the enchanted crow Ia, he finds his way back to goodness. The film has already attracted a couple of Bulgaria's most-popular actors: Zachary Baharov and Samuel Finzi.

In May, CineLink Drama unveiled seven promising drama series from Southeast Europe for its upcoming lineup. Five of these projects will be refined during an on-site workshop in Slano, Croatia, with a focus on script development and story editing with an aim of better positioning these projects in the market. The selected projects will be presented at a highly anticipated pitching session during the Sarajevo Film Festival on August 19 where additional projects will be featured. Details on these selections will be announced in the coming weeks. Furthermore, CineLink Drama offers three prestigious awards: Council of Europe Series Co-Production Development Award (€50.000), the Croatian Audiovisual Center Drama Award, which includes a prize of €15.000, and the TV Drama Vision Pitch Award,







where one project is selected for presentation at the TV Drama Vision event in Gothenburg.

This year's CineLink Drama features seven titles, highlighting a diverse range of genres—from political thrillers and crime dramas to socially engaged comedies and coming-of-age stories. After participating in the CineLink Co-production Market with her project *Hysteria* last year, Asimina Proedrou returns to CineLink with *Beneath the Surface*, a political thriller developed through the Series Mania Institute program. This year's Bulgarian entry is *South Stream*, a crime drama by Marko Popović and Iva Mitrović, produced by Krastyo Lambev. Vladimir Tagić, one of the creators of *Operation Sabre* (developed through CineLink Drama, where it won the Film Center Serbia Award and received accolades at Canneseries), presents an intimate comedy *Wonderful*, story about a small town teacher who gets a chance to change her life. Representing Greece is *P.I.G.S.*, a socially engaged dramedy created by Theo Papadoulakis and produced by Ioana Davi. From Montenegro, *Homeboyz*, a coming-of-age comedy about two rising hip-hop musicians by creator Stefan Bošković

and producer Ivan Đurović, is featured. A significant portion of this year's selection is dedicated to literary adaptations, including *Red Water*, created by Ljubica Luković and produced by Danijel Pek. This adaptation of Jurica Pavičić's novel also sees Pavičić writing the screenplay. This Croatian bestseller tracks the protagonists as they navigate political turmoil, war, and its enduring effects, all within the structure of a crime drama. Additionally, *Gorila*, a period crime drama by Gábor Krigler, adapts the Yugoslavian bestseller by Dušan Savković, exploring two unsolved crimes linked to Alain Delon's bodyguard, produced by Serbian company Firefly.

Another important festival for the CEE series market is the Karlovy Vary IFF (KVIFF) which takes place July 4-12 and namely its Works in Progress program which, unfortunately, has been discontinued. This year the festival presents a new initiative called Pop Up Series Incubator - a fresh development program designed at supporting European producers and scriptwriters whose aim is to boost their series projects through hands-on development, expert mentorship and financial support. Pop Up Series Incubator is

presented in partnership with Tatino Films. The first selection was already revealed and includes 5 projects, with 3 of them coming from CEE territories: *Angelmaker* from Romania, produced by Anda Ionescu (Tangaj Production) and written by Cristina Grosan; *The Three Burials of Irma* from Greece, produced by Fenia Cossovitsa (BLONDE S.A.) and written by Elina Psykou, and *Therapies* from Lithuania, produced by Dagnė Vildžiūnaitė (Just a moment) and written by Birutė Kapustinskaitė.

As the demand for distinctive, high-quality storytelling continues to grow across global markets, pitching sessions, workshops and festivals play an important role for the development for CEE fiction. These platforms not only help bridge financing gaps but also validate regional talent on an international scale, offering producers and creators the momentum they need to bring ambitious projects to life. In an industry where visibility and partnership are as crucial as creative vision, these events play a vital role in shaping the future of the region's audiovisual output—ensuring that bold, locally rooted stories have the means and the stage to reach wider audiences. ■

# Business CONTENT

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# ZDF Studios' Czech Affair

Czech series having been making their mark on the international TV scene first by winning major awards and more recently by entering the catalogs of some major distribution companies. ZDF Studios jumped on that new trend at the end of 2024 by picking up the rights to two TV Nova/Oneplay hits – originals *The King of Šumava* and *The Markovic Method*.

Mirela Nastase, Director Drama at ZDF Studios, tells TVBIZZ Magazine about the decision to pick up the Czech hit series and what is their potential to make waves on the international market as part of the diversified content offer of the distributor.

**Z**DF Studios has acquired worldwide distribution rights for Voyo (since March 2025 Oneplay) originals *The King of Šumava* and *The Markovic Method*. What attracted you to these two Czech titles, and what potential do you see for them on the international stage?

We were drawn to *The King of Šumava* and *The Markovic Method* because they exemplify Oneplay's strong commitment to high-quality original storytelling. These two titles stood out for their compelling narratives—*The King of Šumava* as a gripping period drama rooted in regional history, and *The Markovic Method* as a sharp, character-driven crime drama. Both genres resonate well globally, and the exceptional production values make them suitable for international distribution. Their strong domestic reception further convinced us of their potential to connect with audiences beyond the Czech Republic.

**Both series have strong historical and political elements deeply rooted in Czech culture. How do you approach positioning them for global audiences without losing their local authenticity?**



Czech culture, history, and politics offer rich elements that resonate not only in Germany but across Central Europe. For buyers outside of Europe, these productions represent deeply rooted and authentic European stories. We believe their emotional depth, thrilling narratives, and entertainment value will transcend cultural boundaries and captivate a global audience.

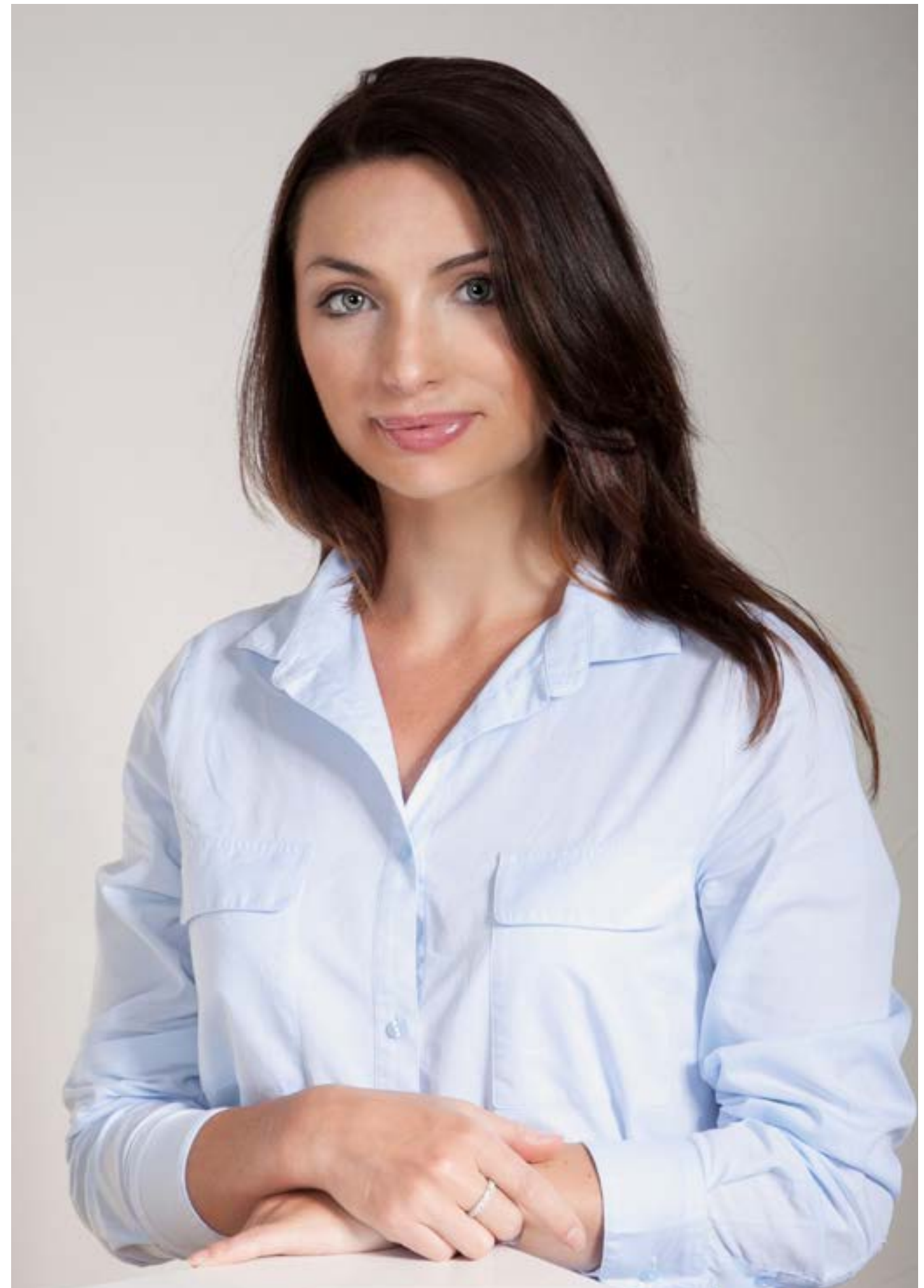
**What types of buyers or platforms have expressed early interest in**

**the two series? Are you targeting both traditional broadcasters and streamers?**

Not surprisingly, the interest varies from a diverse range of buyers, including VOD platforms, Free TV, and Pay TV channels both local and pan-regional. We are indeed targeting both traditional broadcasters and streaming platforms, as the content appeals across different distribution models.

**The King of Šumava has already seen multiple seasons. How important is that continuity for buyers, and does it increase its appeal as a returning series?**

The continuity of *The King of Šumava* as a returning series can be a significant advantage, depending on the market and the buyer. Some partners prioritize limited series to create a focused broadcasting event and diversify their content offering. Others value the volume and reliability that come with returning series. In our experience, having multiple seasons has not been a barrier, in fact, it has enhanced the show's appeal for buyers specifically looking for recurring content with proven audience engagement. ■





# Q2 TRENDING STORIES ON TVBIZZ

These are the most  
read news stories on  
TVBIZZ from April  
to June 2025.

[www.tvbizz.net](http://www.tvbizz.net)

## PROGRAMMING



### ITV developing new cooking competition show

ITV are developing a new cooking competition show which is on the look out for members of the public to help judge the contestants' dishes. Hosted and judged by "two famous faces", the show sees contestants battling it out in the kitchen and serving members of the public, who provide feedback on each of their dishes, in a bid to be crowned the winner. Meanwhile, *Cooking with the Stars* is set to return for a fifth series on ITV. Each series sees eight celebrities are paired with professional chefs who will mentor them in a bid to transform them from amateur to expert in a matter of weeks.



### Verona Pooth hosts new reality show on Sat.1

Verona Pooth will host a new Sat.1 reality show titled *Villa of Temptation* (*Villa der Versuchung*), filmed in Thailand and set to air this summer. Unlike typical dating shows, it's about competing for €250,000. Pooth described the experience as chaotic but authentic. Sat.1 hopes for a hit after past reality flops. Banijay Productions Germany is producing the new format.



### Viaplay announces workplace reality *The Mine*

Viaplay has commissioned a new workplace reality series under the title *Gruvan* (*The Mine*). It will premiere this fall and will follow to f"the people, machines and technology that keep Sweden's industrial heart pulsating" when the cameras are present during work in the iron ore mines in Kiruna and Malmberget and the Aitik copper open pit mine outside Gällivare. Alaska Film TV is producing.

## RATINGS



### New entertainment show *Song vs Dance* shines on TV Asahi

The groundbreaking new talent competition show *Song vs Dance* which premiered on Friday 28th March 2025, at 11.15pm on TV Asahi's, Channel 5 has taken Japan by storm, garnering excellent ratings and tremendous social media engagement. *Song vs Da ce* which gained a 3.5% rating and a 15.9% share\* achieved remarkable success securing the second most watched program during its time slot amongst the six terrestrial channels in Japan. The show also delivered the highest share among artist performance music shows aired in 2025.



### *The Couple* premieres well on Canale 5

*The Couple*, the local version of the Spanish *Big Brother Duo*, kicked off last night on Canale 5 scoring 2.234.000 viewers and 18.6% share in its 21.36-01.23 slot. The show aired partially against Rai 1's docu show *Ulisse - Il Piacere della Scoperta* which returned with 2.843.000 viewers and 17.4% share in the 21.37-23.48 slot. On Rai 2, *Truth or Dare* got 702.000 viewers and 4.5% share.

### Rai drops show with former beauties due to low ratings

*Ne Vedremo delle Belle* will be cancelled by Rai 1 due to its low ratings on Saturday night. The goal of the nostalgia format was to remember some of the most remarkable Italian beauties from the 90s. However, the show clearly lost the competition with Canale 5 and will be pulled from the air. Last Saturday, *Amici* had 3.858.000 viewers and 27.9% share, while *Ne Vedremo delle Belle* got only 2.007.000 and 13% share.

## M&A/FINANCIALS



### RTVE to spend €8 million on its Catalan channel

RTVE will allocate a total of €8 million to the creation of its channel in Catalan. The budget is planned to increase to €11 million in 2026. The project, which was approved unanimously in the Council, responds mainly to one of the demands that pro-independence parties made to the Government in exchange for their votes in the last investiture of Pedro Sánchez. The project will be led by Oriol Nolis, with Laura Folguera as content director. They will have the task of creating 'a generalist channel with a vocation for proximity and to show a diverse, modern Catalonia that is proud of its roots'. The launch is scheduled for September 11.



### Proposed Netflix levy to save the SABC

Sportscape Media founder and director Gary Rathbone supports implementing a levy on international streaming services to help fund the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Speaking to Cape Talk, Rathbone explained that players like MultiChoice, the SABC, and E-tv are restricted in their ability to operate in South Africa. "Whether it's MultiChoice, the SABC, or E-tv, they have restrictions that we place on them because they're South African broadcasters, and they have dues to pay to the South African public to be able to operate," he said.



### FT: Bertelsmann chief seeks to revive €3.6bn French TV merger

The head of Europe's largest media company wants to revive an aborted merger between French broadcasters M6 and TF1, as the bloc's regulators consider taking a less stringent approach to corporate consolidation. Thomas Rabe, chief executive of German conglomerate Bertelsmann, told the Financial Times he hoped to revisit his plan to merge France's two biggest privately owned broadcasters, which was abandoned in 2022 as a result of stiff regulatory opposition. Rabe said a tie-up between Bertelsmann-owned M6 and its larger rival TF1, owned by French conglomerate Bouygues, would be "highly" synergistic.

## APPOINTMENTS



### Prime Video has a new Country Manager in Italy

Viktoria Wasilewski has been named Country Manager of Prime Video Italia three months after Marco Azzani left the position to search for new opportunities. Wasilewski's journey within Amazon began 14 years ago, following the acquisition of LoveFilm, one of the first European digital rental and streaming services. At the time, she worked in PR, branding and marketing. Originally from Germany, Viktoria was a pioneer on Amazon's Content Acquisition team. In 2017 she arrived in Italy, joining the Prime Video Italia team as Head of Content.



### Canal+ announces a change in the scope of its management board members

To address the group's development plans and strengthen the synergies between the various Canal+ regions, now operating in 52 countries, Maxime Saada, CEO of Canal+, has chosen to extend the missions of the Management Board. Since March 1, Jacques du Puy, Amandine Ferré and Anna Marsh have taken on new responsibilities: Jacques du Puy, Member of the Management Board, is now in charge of Global PayTV, a new division bringing together all CANAL+'s pay TV activities, namely those in France, Poland, Central Europe (Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania), Africa and Asia.

### Candidates for the Presidency of France TV present their projects to ARCOM

On May 12-13, ARCOM heard the 4 candidates for president of the France Televisions group: the current president Delphine Ernotte Cunci; producer and former deputy Frédérique Dumas; Irène Grenet, Executive Vice-President of the State Real Estate Management Agency and former Deputy Director General of FranceTV Publicité and Jean-Philippe Lefèvre, former director of broadcasting, programming and programs at the Public Sénat. All of them presented their respective strategic projects to the regulator.

## DISTRIBUTION



### CBS loses rights to *Jeopardy!* and *Wheel of Fortune*

Which channel was accused of breach of contract and lost the right to distribute *Jeopardy!* and *Wheel of Fortune*? Answer: CBS. In a tentative ruling, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Kevin Brazile denied CBS' bid for a court order that would have allowed it to maintain control over the popular syndicated game shows, per The Hollywood Reporter. Sony, which produces both series, is now in control and "need not deliver episodes to CBS," the order stated. Sony initially took over distribution duties in February after accusing CBS of breaching its contract and entering into a number of unauthorized licensing agreements.

### Keshet International announces format deals for *Save the Date* in Greece and Germany

Keshet International (KI) has completed a raft of sales for Israel's highest-rating drama of 2024, the romantic comedy *Save the Date* (*Bekarov Etzli*), which has just been greenlit for a second season in Israel by Keshet. KI has licensed the format of *Save the Date* to Alpha TV in Greece and Cyprus, where the Greek adaptation is currently in development by the FTA TV channel. Keshet Germany is also developing the romcom format for the German TV market, following its successful adaptation of the Israeli comedy format *Messiah* (*Massiach*). *Messiah Superstar* is currently premiering on ProSiebenSat.1's streaming platform Joyn now.

### Germany's streaming success *30 Days of Lust* scores French remake

Beta Film's *30 Days of Lust*, one of the most relatable series about the essence of navigating life at almost thirty, has cracked records on ARD's streaming service and heads to France for a remake. With 9 million+ views and an extraordinary average of over 1 million views per episode, *30 Days of Lust* has become one of the best-performing dramedy series on the platform. While the French production company Black Sheep Films (Mental, Seeds, The Rose Family) snatched the dramedy for a French remake, Beta also sold the ready-made to NOS' TVCine channels for Portugal and several Portuguese-speaking African countries

## ADVERTISING



### Germany's streaming success *30 Days of Lust* scores French remake

TV4 Sweden will be handling the ad sales of SkyShowtime's Standard with Ads package. "SkyShowtime, just like us, has a goal of contributing to long-term growth for its advertisers by creating safe and ad-safe environments with high-quality content. That's why I'm very happy about this collaboration. It will be a valuable addition to our advertising offering and strengthen both TV4's and SkyShowtime's position in the Swedish advertising market," Rikard Sjöberg, VP B2B Sales & Marketing at TV4, said in a press release. TV4 has a similar partnership with Disney+ as well.

### Mediaset Spain sees decline in ad revenue in Q1

MFE-MediaForEurope has published its results for Q1 during which its net profit almost tripled, reaching €51.4 million, which represents an increase of €34.7 million compared to the €16.8 million in 2024. Meanwhile, Mediaset Spain's gross ad revenue was €167.9 million in Q1 of 2025, down from the €180.2 million recorded in the same period of 2024. The company's EBITDA went from €28.3 million in Q1, 2024 to €6.2 million in the same quarter of 2025, which stands for a 78% decline, while its net profit went down from €198 million to €185.5 million in Q1, 2025 (-6%). The Spanish subsidiary of MFE also cut its total costs by 1.6% (€665.4 million).

### TF1 Pub and Reworld Media strengthen partnership

The group Reworld Media (Marmiton, Doctissimo) has enhanced its partnership with TF1 Pub initiated in 2018 and reinforced at the end of 2023. TF1 group's advertising agency can now activate Reworld Media's segments on all of its digital offers, including linear through segmented TV. This new collaboration will allow advertisers to access precise targeting on different topics such as cooking, health, fashion, high tech, cars or gaming. "The strategic extension of this partnership strengthens our One Data data collaboration offer, giving a new dimension to advertisers looking to maximize the impact of their campaigns," they said.

## DIGITAL



### KCC: Competition between broadcasting and OTT services has intensified

The Korea Communications Commission (KCC) and the Korea Information Society Development Institute (KISDI) announced that they will release the results of the "2024 Broadcasting Market Competition Assessment" and report the findings to the National Assembly. Highlights: Demand for domestic broadcast video production has weakened, along with a significant decline in the broadcast advertising market. Competition between broadcasting service providers and OTT providers has become fiercer across the broadcasting market.



### ITV seeks Fresh Cuts for 2025

Fresh Cuts is back and for 2025, ITV are seeking to commission six People of Colour (POC) led and/or Deaf, Disabled or Neurodivergent (DDN) led production companies to each produce one individual x 22 mins, unscripted program for ITV's YouTube channel and ITVX. Fresh Cuts is funded through ITV's Diversity Commissioning Spend, a ring-fenced £80 million for diverse projects over the next three years.



### Fremantle announces the launch of Imaginae Studios

Fremantle announced the launch of Imaginae Studios. A brand new, standalone label designed specifically to harness the power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) - to service and support our creative talent, pushing production boundaries and driving innovation in storytelling. Imaginae Studios will be dedicated to leveraging all AI solutions, technologies and tools for the creative community, embracing experimentation, innovation and vision





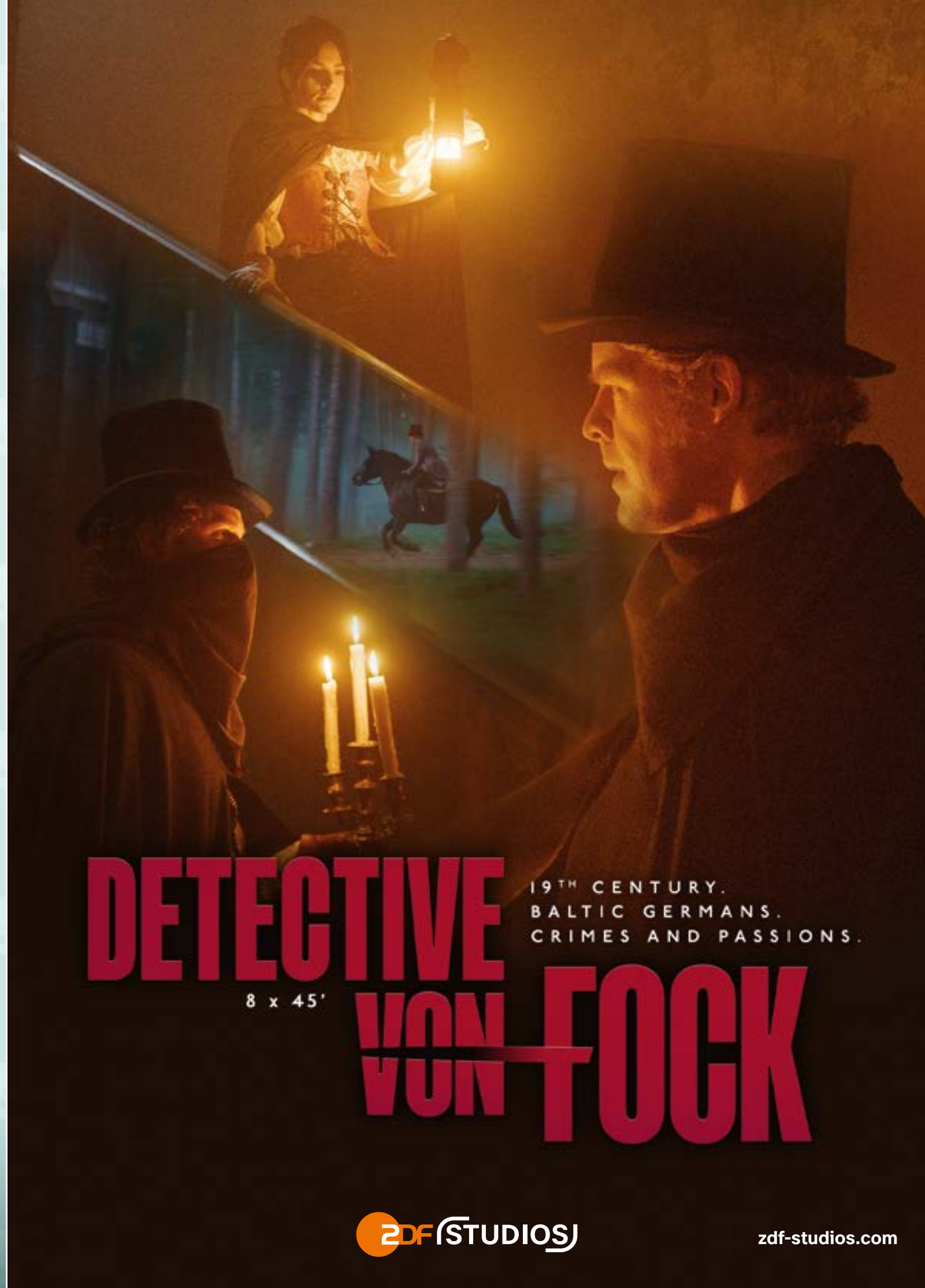
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