THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND MEDIA PLURALISM IN A EUROPEAN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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STRESZCZENIE

Celem artykułu jest pokazanie głębokiej więzi normatywnej pomiędzy koncepcją sfery publicznej Jürgena Habermasa oraz pluralizmem mediów – jako jedną z podstawowych kondycji jej funkcjonowania. Artykuł w szczególności przybliża trzy wybrane kryteria generujące pluralizm mediów: podzielane wartości i przestrzeń wspólnej wiedzy, autonomię mediów oraz otwartość i inkluzyjny charakter sfery publicznej. Przestrzeń wspólnej wiedzy i podzielanych wartości (takich jak np. wolność słowa i mediów) stanowi szersze środowisko deliberacyjne, w jakim zachodzi wymiana poglądów, kształtuje się debata i formuje się konsensus społeczny. Z kolei autonomia mediów oraz ich samoregulacyjny charakter odnoszą się do funkcjonalnej niezależności mediów (działania w zgodzie z własnymi zasadami etycznymi i profesjonalnymi) oraz niezależnością wobec świata politycznego i nacisków środowisk społecznych i gospodarczych. Otwartość sfery publicznej przejawia się w inkluzji różnych grup społecznych, ich potrzeb i interesów, a także zasadniczych poglądów na rzeczywistość społeczną i polityczną. Artykuł pokazuje empiryczne badanie trzech wybranych wymiarów sfery publicznej w kontekście zastosowania MPM 2016 (Monitora Pluralizmu Mediów). W konkluzji podkreśla, że zaobserwowane i realnie występujące ryzyka w większości badanych krajów UE nie podważają zasadność przedstawionej w artykule koncepcji, ale mogą stanowić istotny wyznacznik trendów i zmian w dłuższej perspektywie czasu.

Słowa kluczowe: europejska sfera publiczna, pluralizm mediów, polityka medialna, wolność słowa

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The public sphere revisited

The concept of the public sphere introduced by Jürgen Habermas in 1962 has shaped major normative perspectives in media and political communication scholarship for more than 30 years. In its initial form, the public sphere was conceptualized as a social space where the exchange of information on matters of public concern contributes to the development of a public opinion that functions as political power.[1] The matters or events of "public" concern refer those that are "open to all in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs."[2] The concept of the public sphere was subjected to a number of scholarly accounts and critiques, many of which led to reconsideration of the notion of the public sphere in changing geopolitical conditions (the notions of global, European public sphere), a technological and media environment (the public sphere as a network) as well as evolving models of democracy (a monitory public sphere in the age of communicative abundance). Slavko Splichal argues that there is, nevertheless, no consensus among scholars and practitioners (e.g. politicians) what "the constituents of the public sphere are, how it is or could be established; who may or should participate in it and how; and whether the public sphere is a cause or a consequence of democratic developments."[3]

In his attempt to reformulate a definition of the public sphere, Habermas sets new contours for the space: he portrays it as "a network for communicating information and points of view."[4] In this network the streams of communication are filtered and synthesized in such a way that "they coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinions."[5] Accordingly, the public sphere refers neither to the *functions* nor to the *contents* of everyday communication but to the *social space* generated in communicative action.[6] The role of the media in all its forms is both constitutive and facilitating in the process of public sphere differentiation.

This chapter aims at an exploration of the Habermasian concept of the public sphere taking into consideration one of its constitutive conditions – diversity and pluralism, and the role of media pluralism in particular. It is argued that three principles are needed for media pluralism to fulfill its potential within the public sphere: shared values/shared background knowledge, autonomy/self-regulation and inclusiveness/openness. These three fundamental normative principles of me-

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[1] J. Habermas (1991). The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA; P. Dahlgren (1995). Television and the Public Sphere. Citizenship, Democracy and the Media. Sage Publications, London.

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 1.

[3] S. Splichal (2011). Transnationalization/Europeanization of the Public Sphere/s. In: M. Sükösd, K. Jakubowicz (eds.). Media, Nationalism and European Identities. CEU Press, Budapest, p. 23.

[4] J. Habermas (1996). Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, p. 360.

[5] *Ibidem*.

[6] *Ibidem*.

dia pluralism will be tested through an empirical assessment of selected aspects of media pluralism under the Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM).

The public sphere, media and pluralism

Despite numerous reservations, in normative theories, the mass media are perceived as the central infrastructure for public communication that should ensure the formation of a plurality of "considered public opinions",[7] "enlightened understanding"[8] and the "simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself."[9] Plurality and variety is thus conditionally linked to the public sphere, where, as Hannah Arendt observed, "everything can be seen and heard by everybody."

In order to form a "considered public opinion", several institutional arrangements seem to be indispensable according to Jürgen Habermas: "a separation of a (tax-based) state from a (market-based) society, communication and association rights and a regulation of the power structure of the public sphere securing the diversity of independent media, and a general access of inclusive mass audiences to the public sphere."[10] Robert A. Dahl enumerates "alternative information" as one of seven essential institutions of polyarchy that are necessary for democracy.[11] "Alternative information" is referred to as a citizens' communicative right ("citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information"), empirical condition ("alternative sources of information exist") and a legal obligation ("alternative sources of information are protected by law").[12] In other words, as the institution of polyarchy – "alternative sources of information" would largely, although not exclusively, correspond with the pluralistic mass media that are to be recognized as a citizens' communicative right, but should also exist in a democratic system and be protected by law. In the words of Katrin Voltmer,[13] Dahl classifies this "institution" of media pluralism as a precondition for the realization of all the criteria of procedural democracy (except voting equality) and par-

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[7] J. Habermas (2006). Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research. *Communication Theory*, 16(4), p. 416.

[8] R. Dahl (1979). Procedural Democracy. In: P. Laslett, J. Fishkin (eds.). Philosophy, Politics and Society: Fifth Series. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 97–133; R. Dahl (1989). Democracy and Its Critics. Yale University Press, New Heaven–London.

[9] H. Arendt (1958). The Human Condition. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago–London, p. 57.

[10] J. Habermas. Political Communication…, p. 412.

[11] R. Dahl, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

[12] *Ibidem*.

[13] K. Voltmer (2000). Structures of Diversity of Press and Broadcasting Systems: The Institutional Context of Public Communication in Western Democracies. Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, p. 4 [http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.376.208&rep=rep1&type=pdf; 19.12.2017].

ticularly, the criterion of "enlightened understanding." The public discussion and opinion-forming derives its significance from diverse and alternative sources of information. Enlightened understanding implies adequate and equal opportunities of citizens for discovering and validating what their preferences are on the matter to be decided.[14]

Voltmer observes that the "enlightening" effect of diversity is often deduced from its competitive nature. The underlying assumption comes about that none of the different views in public bargaining can claim final prevalence, thus all opinions and views have equal and legitimate rights to public debate.[15] Hannah Arendt links a valuable potential of diversity with "the reality of public life." In other words, the reality of the public realm relies on diverse and multiple perspectives rooted in different locations in a society. Arendt shares the view that "being seen and being heard by others" derives significance from the fact that each person can see and hear from a different perspective.[16] "Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear."[17]

As already observed, the concept of media pluralism is viewed as an important condition for a well-functioning and democratic public sphere and the media, however it also incorporates political, economic and cultural value dimensions. In other words, a normative rationale for a policy action employs the understanding of media pluralism as *a desirable* and thus, not just *any* condition. Media pluralism functions as a value-ridden term, suggesting such an arrangement of a media system which supports a viable public sphere.

Shared values and shared background knowledge

Diversity and pluralism of views as a fundamental precondition of public sphere formation, stands as long "workable," constructive and enlightening, as there are three principles met. There are, certainly, other conditions or preconditions of a public sphere, but these three seem to be central for diversity and pluralism as generated in and through the media. The first of them lies in a source of vast shared background knowledge and social experience. For Arendt this common ground is represented by recognition that the public gathers in a *common* public space, thus *together*, ready to *listen* and *share* different views and experiences which everyone has gained thanks to the specific individual path but also a place occupied around the "common table."[18] Habermas argues that the ground of sha-

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[14] R. Dahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 104–105.
[15] K. Voltmer. Structures of Diversity…, p. 4.
[16] H. Arendt. The Human Condition…, p. 57.
[17] *Ibidem*.
[18] *Ibidem*, p. 57.

red knowledge refers to a "culturally familiar," unproblematic environment that helps to explain how the daily process of consensus building is time and again able to cross the threshold of the risk of dissent.[19] This implies on the one hand, the existence of shared values and common standards that safeguard the media infrastructure of public communications, such as freedom of expression and freedom of the media. In Habermas' view such liberties are thereby supposed to preserve an openness for competing opinions and representative diversity of voices.[20] On the other hand, the existence of shared "background knowledge" implies some common knowledge derived from the media, and especially exposure of issues of the common interest. In this regard, the public service media (PSM) have been normatively viewed as such sites of public debate and representation that generate or should generate a common deliberative space under their mission.

Media autonomy and self-regulation

Secondly, the public sphere, because it operates as an intermediary system between state and society, should maintain its independence from any institutional realms contributing to the formation of qualified, representative opinion. Hanna Arendt observes that formation of opinion inside the political realm has its counterbalance in public institutions established and supported by powers, in which, contrary to all political rules, truth and truthfulness have always been the highest criteria of speech and endeavor.[21] These institutions include the judiciary (differentiated by the rule of law), academia (differentiated by creation and dissemination of knowledge) and the media (differentiated by journalistic professionalism). Yet, there are the media that would have to be protected against governmental power and social pressure more carefully than the judiciary and academia as for their immediate political importance. The sheer function of providing information should be fulfilled only outside the political realm strictly speaking and no political action and no decision should be involved in this process.[22]

In other words, the autonomy and self-regulatory character of the media condition a quality of a democratic public sphere: deliberative legitimation processes in complex societies can only be generated if "a self-regulating media system gains independence from social environments, and if anonymous audiences grant feedback between an informed elite discourse and a responsive civil society."[23] Functional independence means the self-regulation of the media system in accord-

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[19] Cited in: J. Mitzen (2005). Reading Habermas in Anarchy: Multilateral Diplomacy and Global Public Spheres. *American Political Science Review*, 99(3), p. 403.

[20] J. Habermas. Between Facts…, p. 368.

[21] H. Arendt (1969). Truth and Politics, In: P. Laslett, W.G. Runciman (eds.). Philosophy, Politics and Society: Third Series. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 104–133.

[22] *Ibidem*, p. 131.

[23] J. Habermas. Political Communication…, p. 412.

ance with its own normative codes,[24] but also the actual independence of the media from political and social pressure in order to be receptive to the public's concerns and proposals, taking up these and confronting the political process with articulate demands for legitimation.[25] The independence and self-regulatory character of the media would imply on the one hand, that different constituting elements of the media system itself (be that either media organizations, or providers of media services) are autonomous, independent from its social environment and at the same time, located in diverse and different sites of the system in terms of function, geographical location and scope, cultural and linguistic environment. Independence from a political realm in particular requires not only transparency of media ownership, but also from the rules protecting against direct control of political parties, groupings or politicians over media outlets. On the other hand, the functional independence of the media requires a high level of professional autonomy, broad acceptance of common normative codes and representation of common standards and needs through widely accepted and representative professional organizations.

Inclusiveness and openness

Thirdly, inclusiveness, is conditionally linked to the public sphere, which is supposed to reflect in an open manner various social actors, groups, their needs and interests, and also fundamental views on social and political reality. As regards social inclusiveness of the media this would not mean serving the audiences at the expense of lost independence and integrity, but rather offering incentives for citizens to learn, choose, and become involved, rather than merely follow the political process.[26]

Yet, in the age of a communicative abundance radically reshaping the media and communication environment, forms of the citizens' involvement and inclusion meet the pragmatic ground. Michael Schudson argues that "citizens scan (rather than read) the informational environment in a way so that they may be altered on a very wide variety of issues […] and may be mobilized around those issues in a large variety of ways."[27] Compared with the era of representative democracy, when print culture and limited spectrum audiovisual media were much more closely aligned with political parties and governments, the age of monitory democracy witnesses constant public scrutiny and spats about power where it seems that no organization or leader from a political system is immune from the effects of public surveillance.[28] Thus, social inclusiveness of the media, support-

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[24] J.B. Thomson (1995). The Media and Modernity. Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, p. 258.

[25] J. Habermas. Between Facts…, p. 378.

[26] Gurevitch and Blumler cited in: *ibidem*, p. 378.

[27] M. Schudson (1998). The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA–London, p. 310.

[28] J. Keane (2009). Monitory Democracy and Media-Saturated Societies. *Griffith Review*, 24(4), p. 15.

ing inclusiveness and openness of the public sphere, implies on the one hand, a high level of media literacy and media awareness reflecting conscious media use and involvement. On the other hand, social inclusiveness implies representation in and through the media environment of various social groups including minorities. At the level of a media system as a whole, social inclusiveness and openness presuppose the existence of the third sector of the non-profit, community media (in addition to mainstream private media and the PSM), closely tied with the social communities they serve.

Monitoring of media pluralism

How does this normative framework correspond with the actual patterns of media pluralism, practice and regulatory framework? An empirical assessment of media pluralism has posed a longstanding challenge, both in academia and in the media policy field due to its complexity, necessity to balance various aspects (such as media ownership diversity, representative diversity of views and opinions, cultural, geographical diversity) and the rapidly changing conditions of digital communication environments.[29]

In the media policy field, the European Commission has attempted to address media pluralism and its assessment for a long time. On January 16, 2007 the Commission published a staff working document *Media Pluralism in the Member States of the European Union*.[30] This document initiated a monitoring process of media pluralism alongside an independent study on media pluralism indicators (published in 2009).[31] The study developed indicators for the measurement of pluralism and proposed a monitoring tool – the Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM), later adjusted and simplified by the Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF) affiliated with the European University Institute in Florence.[32] The MPM has been applied as a pilot study in 2014 and 2015, and in 2016 fully for 28 countries in the EU and in addition, Turkey and Montenegro.[33] The main aim of the tool is to measure risks to media pluralism in four basic areas including:

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[29] P. Valcke, R. Pickard, M. Sükösd (eds.) (2015). Media Pluralism and Diversity: Concepts, Risks and Global Trends. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke–New York; P.M. Napoli (ed.) (2007). Media Diversity and Localism: Meaning and Metrics. LEA Publishers, Mahwah, NJ–London.

[30] European Commission (2007). Commission Staff Working Document: Media Pluralism in the Member States of the European Union. 16.01.2007. SEC (2007) 32, Brussels.

[31] For more details see: K.U. Leuven et al. (2009). Independent Study on Indicators for Media Pluralism in the Member States – Towards a Risk-Based Approach. Prepared for the European Commission Directorate-General Information Society and Media. K.U. Leuven, Leuven [http://ec.europa. eu/information_society/media_taskforce/doc/pluralism/pfr_report.pdf; 20.11.2017].

[32] The author of this article participated in research activities of the independent group of experts preparing the methodology for MPM in 2008 and 2009 and implemented the methodology practically in MPM in 2015, 2016 and 2017 in Poland.

[33] For more details see: CMPF (Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom), http://cmpf. eui.eu/; 10.12.2017.

basic protection (covering regulatory safeguards for the freedom of expression, right to information, journalistic profession and protection, and independence of media regulatory authorities), market plurality (covering media transparency, monomedia and crossmedia concentration, media viability), political independence (covering political control over media outlets, editorial autonomy, media and democratic electoral process, independence of the PSM) and social inclusiveness (covering access to media of minorities, disabled persons, women, local and regional communities, condition of community media and media literacy).

Shared normative values and background knowledge: protection of freedom of expression and the role of PSM

The common ground of shared values and background knowledge is reflected in two important aspects of media pluralism and its assessment. The first of them refers to protection of the freedom of expression as an essential condition for the formation of a viable public sphere through the free exchange of information and views concerning issues of common concern. In this regard, freedom of expression and the media present a shared value, a need that has to be met in societies, and also a right, implying obligations and responsibilities, that can be demanded. The second aspect finds its expression in the concept of the Public Service Media (PSM), potentially offering a common media space for a distillation of shared background knowledge in an increasingly fragmented media environment. With the growing communicative abundance and fragmentation of the audiences, the PSM may eventually generate social cohesion, common ground for a rational political debate and a common space for the representation of culture in its diversity. This would require, however, a high level of professional quality of the PSM, integrity with its mission and grounding principles, as well as strong institutional autonomy and functional independence.

As regards to the protection of freedom of expression and the media, this indicator is measured in the MPM 2016 under the basic protection area. The main aim of this measurement is to assess the existence and effective implementation of regulatory safeguards for the freedom of expression in a given country.[34] The results of the monitoring show that legal protection of freedom of expression and the media is formally guaranteed in all of the researched countries, being enshrined either in constitutions or national laws. At the same time, results for 25 countries show a low risk, for four countries (including Poland, Hungary, Latvia and Romania) a medium risk, and for Turkey a high risk.

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[34] CMPF (2017). Monitoring Media Pluralism in Europe: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor 2016 in the European Union, Montenegro and Turkey. European University Institute, Florence.
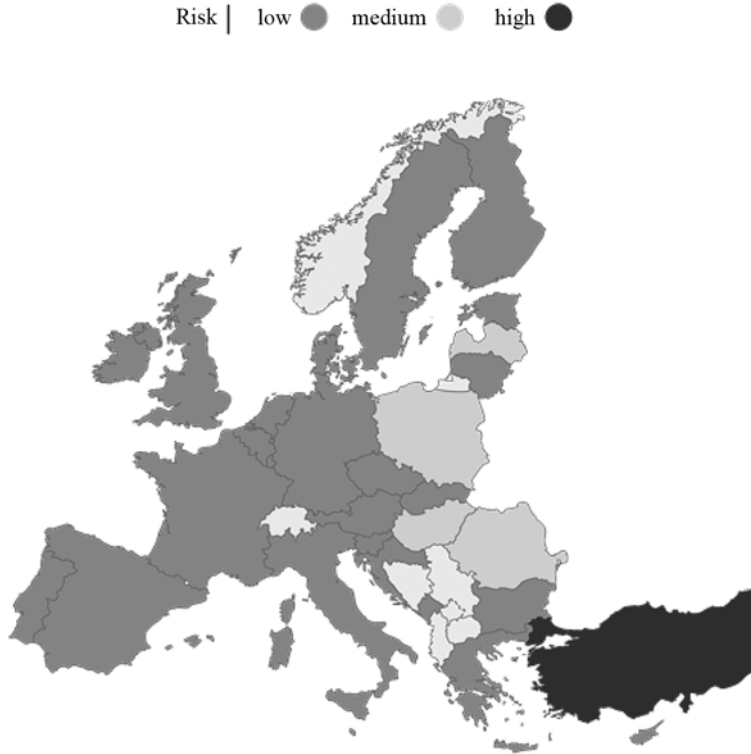
Figure 1: Protection of freedom of expression in the MPM 2016

Source: The Media Pluralism Monitor, http://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/mpm-2016-re-sults/basic-protection/; 10.12.2017.

The main differences among the countries lie in the legal solutions concerning limitations of freedom of expression and the media, and in the proportionality of these limitations. For instance one of the most problematic issues in this regard remains the criminalisation of defamation. Standards developed by the Council of Europe[35] point to the fact that criminalisation of defamation may be easily misused, producing a chilling effect on the freedom of the media, in particular in cases in which public officials are involved. The MPM results demonstrate that most of the countries guarantee special protection to public officials and heads of states against defamation.[36] Speaking from the normative perspective, however, we should expect from public figures a higher degree of exposure to public criticism than ordinary citizens.[37]

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[35] See e.g. Resolution 1577 (2007) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Towards decriminalization of defamation [http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17588&lang=en; 3.01.2018].

[36] CMPF. Monitoring Media…

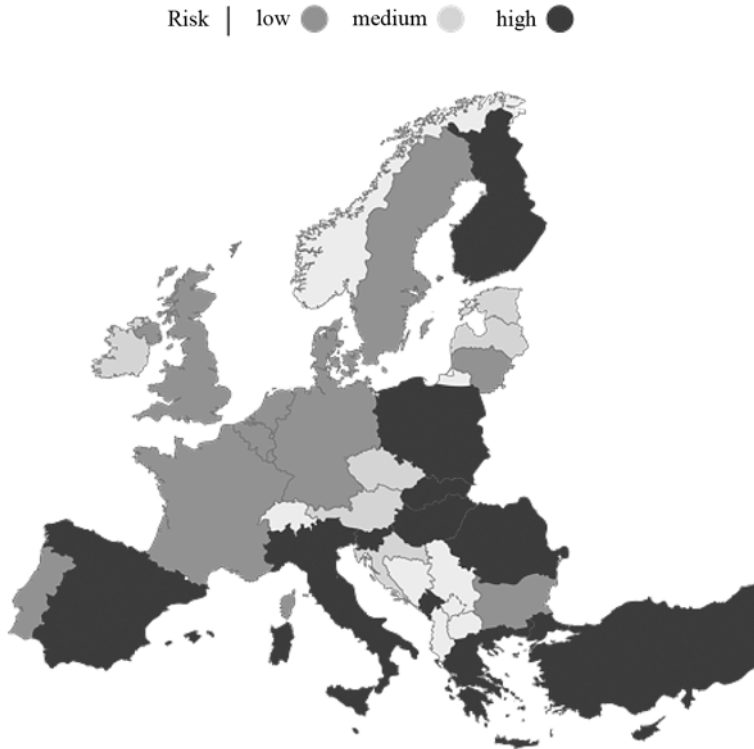[37] K. Voltmer (2013). The Media in Transitional Democracies. Polity Press, Cambridge.

Figure 2: Independence of PSM governance and funding in the MPM 2016

Source: The Media Pluralism Monitor, http://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/
mpm-2016-results/political-independence/Media autonomy and self-regulation: the
journalistic profession and the political independence; 10.12.2017.

As regards the role of the PSM, independence of PSM governance and fund-
ing is measured under the political independence area. A main aim of this indica-
tor, is to measure the risks which stem from appointment procedures for the top
management positions in the PSM, risks arising from funding mechanisms, as
well as risks of political influence under which the PSM are no longer able to
fulfill their mission. The results of measurement display a relatively high number
of countries (13) with a high risk, associated mainly with the appointment pro-
cedures of managing boards and directors general.[38] The countries with the high-
est level of risk include among others: Cyprus, Hungary, Romania, Turkey and
Montenegro. On the other hand, the group of countries with a low risk, includes
UK, France, Sweden, Germany, Denmark and six other countries.[39] This picture
shows not only a highly diversified potential for generating shared background
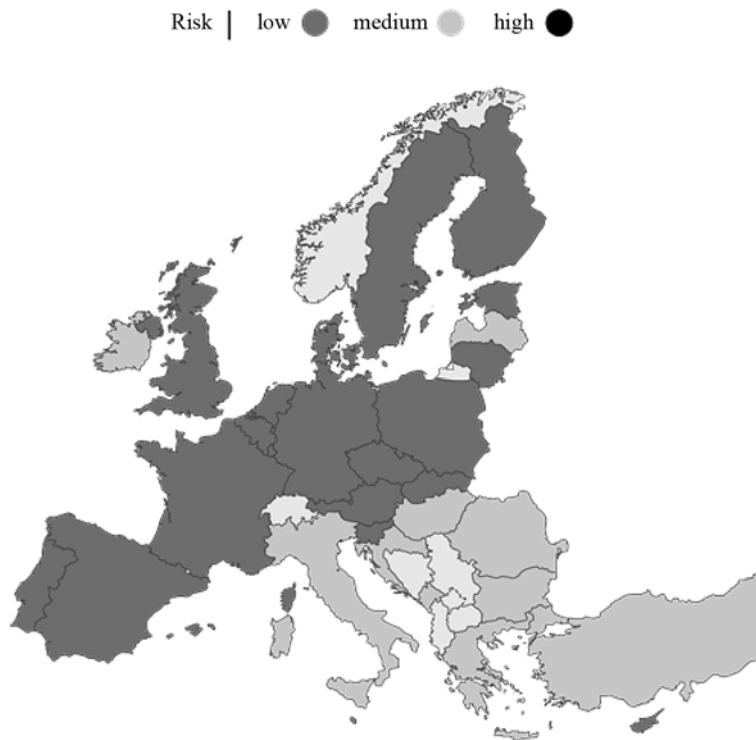
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[38] CMPF. Monitoring Media…
[39] *Ibidem*.

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Figure 3: Journalistic profession, standards and protection in the MPM 2016

Source: The Media Pluralism Monitor, http://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/
mpm-2016-results/basic-protection/; 10.12.2017.

knowledge by the PSM in Europe, but suggests that varying technical dimensions
(appointment procedures and management, accountability, financing mechanisms
and performance) are rooted in the various traditions of PSM legacy and perfor-
mance.

The formation of a plurality of considered public opinions within the public
sphere relies on a functionally specific and *self-regulating* media system.[40] In the
MPM such a condition is reflected in the indicator assessing journalistic profes-
sionalism, the standards of the profession and protection. In addition, autonomy
and self-regulation implies political independence and a lack of political control
over media outlets.

Concerning the journalistic profession, standards and protection, this indicator
is measured under the MPM 2016 in the basic protection area. It seeks to detect
risks resulting from conditions to access the journalistic profession, working con-
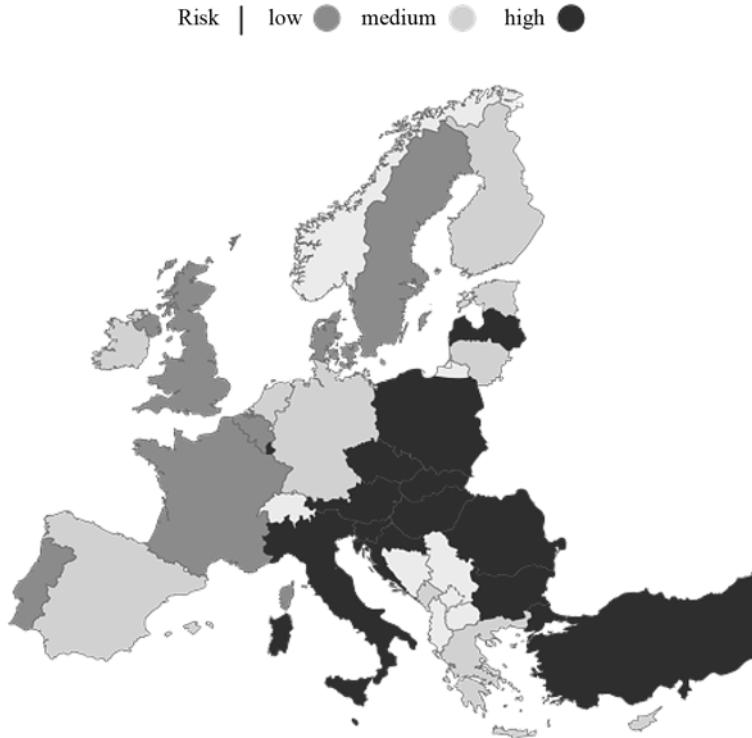
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[40] J. Habermas. Political Communication…, p. 412.

Risk | low ● medium ● high ●

Figure 4: Political control over media outlets in the MPM 2016

Source: The Media Pluralism Monitor, http://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/mpm-2016-results/basic-protection/; 10.12.2017.

ditions, the effectiveness of professional organisations to guarantee professional standards and autonomy, the existence and implementation of rules guaranteeing the safety of journalists (both physical and social). The empirical results demonstrate a considerable number of countries with a medium risk (including among others Italy, Hungary, Romania, Greece and Turkey). As regards the effectiveness of professional associations and journalistic unions, the measurement shows an overall medium risk 46% across the 30 countries, at the same time, progressively fewer journalists are represented by professional associations.[41]

The sub-indicator on the protection of journalists scores an alarming average of 52% of the risk as most of the countries manifest a medium or high risk for the safety of journalists.[42] The problems with the safety of journalists denote both attacks on the physical integrity of the journalists as well as threats coming from

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[41] CMPF. Monitoring Media…, p. 17.
[42] *Ibidem*.

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online surveillance. The countries with the highest risk in this regards include Turkey in first place, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro and others.

Political control over media outlets is measured under the political independence area, designed to assess the risks of political interference on the level of a media system, media organisation, newsroom and content.[43] Political control over media outlets is measured through consideration of availability and effective implementation of regulatory safeguards against the direct and indirect control of the media by politicians. The notion of control encompasses both direct media ownership by politicians and indirect control assuming media ownership by intermediaries connected with political parties or the politicians themselves. Overall, six countries display a low risk (including Sweden, the UK, France and others), 10 countries manifest a medium risk (including Germany, Spain, Greece and other countries) and the largest amount – the remaining 14 score a high risk (including Poland, the Czech Republic, Italy and other countries).[44]

The CMPF Final Report observes that very often high risks emerge from the lack of transparency of media ownership and a lack of public knowledge about the political affiliation of the owners.[45]

These results suggest that limits to journalistic autonomy and political independence still define the conditions for journalistic practice and media operations in a relatively large number of countries in the European Union. Such circumstances certainly influence the self-regulating character of a media system, in which a growing dependency on external domains such as politics, confines the formation of plurality opinions within the public sphere.

Openness and social inclusiveness

Social inclusiveness of the public sphere, and social inclusiveness of the media in particular, reflect the participatory and diverse character of the public sphere, being a constitutive condition of deliberative practices. In this respect, the openness and diversity of the public sphere manifests themselves at the level of access and representation of various social and cultural groups in the media as well as in a structure of the media system, consisting of mainstream as well as minority and community media. The social inclusiveness indicators in the MPM 2016 examine access to the media by various social and cultural groups such as minorities, legal/regional communities, people with disabilities and women. In addition, the social inclusiveness area monitors conditions of the third media sector – community media and media literacy – both at the level of a regulatory design and policy as well as practice and implementation.

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43 *Ibidem.*
44 *Ibidem.*
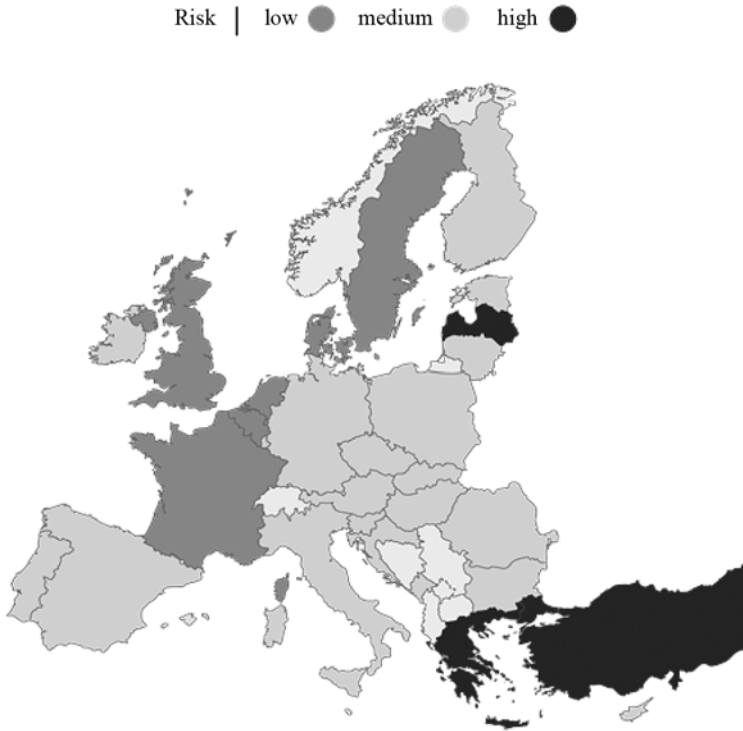45 *Ibidem*, p. 39.

Risk | low ● medium ● high ●

Figure 5: Social inclusiveness area in the MPM 2016

Source: The Media Pluralism Monitor, http://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/mpm-2016-results/social-inclusiveness/; 10.12.2017.

The results of the measurement show that most of the countries – 21 – score a medium risk for the whole social inclusiveness area. Three countries detect a high risk (including Turkey, Greece and Latvia), while six countries display a low risk (including among others France, the Netherlands, the UK and Sweden). One of the most problematic indicators in this area proved to be "access to the media for minorities" demonstrating that only four countries (the Netherlands, Belgium, Estonia and Hungary) score a low risk. The issue of minorities' access to the media also reflects to a great extent the question of legal and policy recognition of various ethnic, cultural and national groups. In many cases, the official status of "national minorities" or "historical national minorities" is enjoyed by a relatively small number of minorities (e.g. in Germany) that might be entitled to claim communication rights such as access to the PSM or commercial media, or be supported in order to produce their own media.[46]

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[46] The Media Pluralism Monitor, http://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/mpm-2016-results/social-inclusiveness/; 10.12.2017.

The indicator on access to the media for local and regional communities and community media shows that almost two thirds of these countries (17) are in a medium or high risk. On the hand, the indicator points to the strengths and weaknesses of the local and regional media vis-à-vis the national media, while on the other hand it reveals the condition of the third sector – the community media. Both these aspects stem from various circumstances – such as is in the case of the administrative structure of the country (the stronger the position of the regions is in an administrative design, the stronger might be the regional media and regulatory solutions supporting them), historical tradition and background, the congruence between ethnic/cultural differences and the political or administrative autonomy of regions.

Finally, the media literacy indicator demonstrates significant differences between the North-Western part of the researched EU countries and the South-Eastern part. The group of countries with a high risk includes Turkey, Italy, Romania, Bulgaria and Montenegro, while the group of countries with a medium risk includes Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia, Croatia, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Cyprus.[47] Media literacy plays a principal role in media use, and more generally in participation in the public sphere equipping media users and citizens not only with the abilities and skills to access and critically "read" media contents, but also making the users *aware* and *conscious* of their personal goals. As can be seen from the application of the MPM in 2016, there still seems to be a difference between the media literacy policies as well as the skills demonstrated by media users in the EU countries.

Conclusions

A communication model of deliberative politics taking shape through the formation of a viable and democratic public sphere proves valuable for an interpretation of empirical findings concerning media pluralism in a cross-national European perspective, especially when three of its key aspects (shared values and background common knowledge, self-regulatory media system and social inclusiveness) are distinguished. In Jürgen Habermas' words "the model directs our attention specifically to those variables that explain failures in the maintenance of a self-regulating media system and a proper feedback between the public sphere and civil society."[48]

These variables reflect two major lines of debate about the public sphere: structure and the nature and function of the discourses it carries.[49] A proper feedback between the public sphere and civil society lies in the structure of the public

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[47] CMPF. Monitoring Media…

[48] J. Habermas. Political Communication…, p. 423.

[49] N. Garnham (2007). Habermas and the Public Sphere. *Global Media and Communication*, 3(2), pp. 201–214.

sphere and the nature of access, openness and inclusiveness of the public sphere. As the MPM 2016 findings for the social inclusiveness area show, in a relatively significant number of the EU countries, there is a medium or high risk concerning access of various social and cultural groups to the media, and in particular minorities. Also, there seems to be a clear divide between the North-Western part of the researched EU countries and South-Eastern part in respect to policy and practice of media literacy. The MPM findings on social inclusiveness revealing a medium and high risk resonate with Habermas' observation of "an ambivalent, if not outright pessimistic conclusion" about the kind of impact the media has on the involvement of citizens in politics and public sphere formation.[50]

As regards the functions of the discourses the public sphere carries, discursive conditions and normative claims depend on the one hand on shared values and background knowledge as well as the self-regulatory and autonomous character of the media. The MPM 2016 findings for the protection of freedom of expression show the widely accepted value of protection of freedom of expression, enshrined either in constitutions or the national laws of the researched countries. At the same time, there are significant differences among the countries in the legal solutions concerning the limitations of freedom of expression and the media, and in the proportionality of these limitations. Also the institutional embeddedness of a concept of a common shared background knowledge in PSM status and performance proves quite problematic in cross-European comparison. Still, in a large number of European countries (13), the PSM lack governance and financial independence. According to Habermas, such conditions might suggest an incomplete differentiation of the media from its political environment rather than a temporary interference with the independence of the media that has already reached the level of self-regulation.[51]

With regard to the self-regulatory character of the media, the MPM 2016 measurement of the journalistic profession indicator reveals a considerable number of countries with a medium risk (including among others Italy, Hungary, Romania, Greece and Turkey), at the same time it also shows alarming scores concerning the protection and safety of the journalists, denoting both attacks on the physical integrity of the journalists as well as threats coming from online surveillance. The MPM 2016 measurement of political control over media outlets displays a robust majority of 24 countries either with a medium risk (10) or a high risk (14). Insufficient regulatory protection of the media and journalists from political influence enables media owners to convert media power into public influence and political pressure.[52] The radical loss of media autonomy and self-regulatory conditions leads to "media capture," defined by Joseph E. Stiglitz as a situation in which one or more of the parties that the media are supposed to be monitoring on behalf

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[50] J. Habermas. Political Communication…, p. 422.
[51] *Ibidem*, p. 420.
[52] *Ibidem*.

of society 'captures' or takes hostage of the media, so that they fail to perform their societal function.[53] Moreover, the self-regulatory and autonomous character of the media also suffers from the colonization of the public sphere by a market imperative, and the redefinition of politics in market categories. In such a process, issues of political discourse become assimilated into and absorbed by the modes and contents of entertainment.[54]

The risks described above as affecting the deliberative potential of media pluralism (and in particular the principles of shared common values and the background knowledge, self-regulatory character of the media, and social inclusiveness) do not suggest questioning a normative concept and the validity of the public sphere in deliberative politics and a changing communicative environment. On the contrary, this chapter argues that directing our attention to cross-national research on media pluralism may improve our capacity to reflect on the public sphere in a rapidly changing media and communication environment, transnational perspective and vis-à-vis new challenges in media use and deliberative politics.

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[53] J.E. Stiglitz (2017). Towards a Taxonomy of Media Capture. In: A. Schiffrin (ed.). In the Service of Power: Media Capture and Threat to Democracy. Center for International media Assistance (CIMA), Washington, p. 10.

[54] J. Habermas. Political Communication…, p. 422.

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