



## **CS2. Country case studies on critical junctures in the media transformation process in Four Domains of Potential ROs (2000–2020)**

The aim of the second case study is to provide analysis of risks and opportunities concerning the diachronic changes in four domains defined by the project in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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# Critical junctures in the media transformation process

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## Executive Summary

There are several critical junctures that arise from the context of the social, political, economic, and technological developments within the media in Czechia between 2000 and 2020. We identify these seven: (1) the consequences of the social transformation after 1989, which lasted until the beginning of the 21st century; (2) the emergence of new media, whose production and user development occurred mainly after the year 2000; (3) the economic crisis in 2008; (4) the emergence of new political movements after 2011; (5) the refugee crisis in 2015; (6) the polarisation of society; and (7) the pandemic of Covid-19 as a complex phenomenon after 2019. With focus on the agency of different actors in propelling certain risks and opportunities at the outlined critical junctures, these are the groups with either specific knowledge of the Czech media development or with a long professional history: (1) media industry representatives (e.g., media owners, media managers, journalists, journalists' professional unions); (2) communication researchers and lecturers; (3) media analysts and analytical companies; and (4) NGOs. As shown by our analysis of the Czech media system between 2000 and 2020, the critical junctures, risks, and opportunities, have not contributed to the development of deliberative communication and democracy in Czechia. On the contrary, we conclude that the changes just after 2000 led to an illiberal turn that stems from the social, political, economic, and technological development of both society and the media system.

## 1. Introduction

In our second Country Case Study, we follow up on the knowledge gained and presented in Case Study 1 and proceed with another evaluation of the source availability and notable limitations in data quality. This is explored in more detail in the section about the critical junctures of media development in Czechia.

As we already commented on the availability of the data in Case Study 1, we can briefly summarize that, in the Czech context, peer-reviewed and indexed articles are very easily accessible, but this is not true for books, book chapters, reports, and other sources. The main problem is that each university has a different cataloguing system (mainly access-wise). A similar situation exists for the accessibility of industry/business materials, the majority of which is restricted by pay.

Moving on to the obvious limitations in the data quality, we can assess that those various sources have diametrically different qualities. It would be hard to identify a systematic strategy for the field and industry because the field is thematically fragmented and it is defined by the individual interests of particular researchers and workplaces (i.e., departments, institutes). The side effect of the fragmentation and the small size of Czech academia is that the coverage of core disciplinary topics is not saturated. As will be discussed, the scholarly texts we discussed in Case

Study 1 showed that the Czech academic field had been predominantly theoretical in the early years and, only in later years, became more empirical with data being gathered and analysed. Even though industry data was collected more systematically, it became mostly inaccessible, and it is often of no use for academics.

Therefore, we decided to supplement the data with interviews with specialists in Czech academia and experts in the development of the Czech media industry. We focused on their views on the specific paths and critical junctures of media development between 2000 and 2020. In February 2022 we conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with representatives of the Czech media landscape who originated in academia, industry, and the non-profit sector. Our main interest was to gather their experiences and perceptions of the evolution of the Czech media landscape from 1990 to today. Our focus was on the main (perceived) critical junctures and risks, and the opportunities that have emerged during this time frame. The interviews were conducted by three trained researchers and lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. They were recorded and later transcribed into textual form for easier analysis. For the analysis (and due to the limited number of interviews) we used the classical paper-and-pen inductive approach. Most of the interviewees are cited in their own name, though several representatives asked to be anonymized, so a random codename was assigned to them.

The text is structured as follows: The first contextual section is focused on social, political, economic, and technological transformations and their important “turning points” so that we can later name the critical junctures of the media development in Czechia between 2000 and 2020. We focus mainly on the risks and opportunities for deliberative communication. The second section depicts the overall development in the four domains and specifically analyses the main changes (i.e., critical junctures) within each domain. The conclusion sums up the potential critical junctures and explains the agency of different actors in propelling certain risks and opportunities.

## **1.1. Critical junctures of major technological, economic political, social, legal and educational changes**

Social, political, economic, and technological transformations within Czech society created conditions for critical junctures in the development of the media. Until the economic crisis in 2008, Czech society was developing both economically and politically towards the stabilisation of conditions characterised by the building of capitalism, the Europeanisation of politics (which culminated in 2004 when Czechia joined the European Union), and the consolidation of the political scene, which, on the surface of the socio-economic cleavage, was stabilised within a right-wing scheme that was represented by strong, traditional political parties (mainly ODS and ČSSD; see Hloušek & Kopeček, 2008).

The economic crisis was a significant shock for the media market, which had been dominated by foreign capital. Between 2008 and 2019, Czech media that had been owned by foreign companies passed into the hands of domestic millionaires. This “oligarchization” was also reflected in the political scene, where the previously stable scheme of strong traditional political parties began to erode with the emergence of new entrepreneurial political subjects (e.g., Věci veřejné, ANO 2011, SPD)<sup>38</sup>, and where anti-European voices became apparent. The unstable political structure was especially apparent at the local and regional level (Lorenz, 2020).

The refugee crisis in 2015 strengthened this political process. New political actors took advantage of the fear of refugees to stir up nationalism and a fear of Islam despite the fact that there was only a minimal presence of Muslims. This led to significantly stronger negative atti-

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<sup>38</sup> YES 2011, Public Affairs, Freedom, and Direct Democracy.

tudes compared to other European countries (Marfouk, 2018). In this context, the success of the activist movement called *We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic* (Islám v České republice nechceme – IVČRN), which emerged and spread mainly on social media (initially as a Facebook group, later as a political force), is noteworthy.

These facts lead us to identify two critical junctures — *the concentration of ownership in the hands of domestic entrepreneurs* and *the emergence of new political movements* ("the populists") — in the context of the socio-economic changes that followed the economic crisis of 2008. As we will see below, this process has serious implications for the Czech media system. Oligarchization and the pressure that the new politicians exerted on the media are the fundamental factors in the development of the media in Czechia over the last decade.

The advent of new technologies, especially social media, buoyed these political movements that are linked to the socio-economic changes initiated by the economic crisis. However, available research hardly indicated a radical, new media-driven transformation of citizenship; rather it suggested "subtle shifts in practices and a pragmatic mixing of face-to-face communication and traditional media" (Macek, Macková, & Kotišová, 2015). Czech citizens tended to avoid discussions on the internet, and the online environment was not becoming an important new space of the public sphere (Macková, 2017).

More recently, however, the importance of new media has increased, particularly due to the impact of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Recent research (Macková et al., 2021) shows that the internet is used as a primary news source by the same, or even higher, numbers of people than the previously dominant television (although caution is needed when interpreting these facts, because the pandemic and the temporary reduction in social contact in 2020 may have played a role). While news sites are the dominant news source, social networking sites are also growing in importance (up 8% year-on-year, with Facebook the dominant social network) (Macková et al., 2021). Hand in hand with this growing importance of new media for political debate and people's everyday decision-making is the proliferation of phenomena such as the spread of disinformation.

In terms of users, the press, as the traditional vehicle for news and political debate, is lagging behind the internet and television and its sales are declining year on year. There has not yet been a rapid decline in advertising revenues. Print is still perceived as a credible medium for advertising, unlike online advertising,<sup>39</sup> and, from the economic point of view, there has not yet been a major shake-up in Czechia that would lead to a rapid reduction in profits that would threaten print periodicals — although it must be said that advertising profits temporarily fell by up to 13% for print in 2020 due to the pandemic.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, *the emergence of new media* is another critical juncture, but its consequences are uncertain and need to be seen in a complex context (especially in relation to changing user habits).

In order to understand the socio-economic and political developments in the period 2000-20, it is necessary to understand the processes that occurred during this period (including the economic crisis of 2008 and the global pandemic) in the context of the transition period of the 1990s. Czechia underwent a radical social, economic, and political transition from a collective economic model and authoritarian one-party rule to a market economy and a parliamentary democracy. The consequences and ethos of this transition still strongly influence Czech society and contribute to its perceived polarisation.

Although pragmatic in nature, the post-communist economic policies have been charged with the sense of moral duty. The lack of a strong capitalist class led to the "spirit of capitalism" being

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.mediaguru.cz/clanky/2020/05/tisk-je-vnimany-jako-duveryhodne-medium-pro-reklamu/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.mediar.cz/investice-do-reklamy-loni-neklesly-dosahly-temer-120-miliard-kc/>

carried by intellectuals and technocrats (Eyal, 2000). That is why, especially at the beginning of the socio-economic transition in the 1990s, the main issue for media policy was the freedom of the media and the sovereignty of its owners (rather than social responsibility or alternative models of media).

Only after the economic crisis in 2008, when media capital changed from foreign ownership to the domestic portfolios of Czech billionaires with their own political interests, has there been stronger interest in supporting economically independent media. *The Foundation for Independent Journalism* has played a special role. Yet, it is symptomatic of the Czech socio-economic reality that the key players in supporting independent media are prominent Czech businessmen (the original idea emerged during discussions in the *Prague Business Club*<sup>41</sup>), who, in 2016, established the Foundation because they considered free and independent media to be essential for the balance of power in a democracy.

## 1.2. Specific features of the country

In the 2010s, with the rise of new “populist” political entities, there has been a very clear need in the public sphere to again articulate the necessity of the existence of the “civil society”. The emergence of entrepreneurial political projects by Andrej Babiš or Tomio Okamura (who have consistently been highly critical of independent and public service media, with which they refuse to communicate) has been perceived by the public as a “return of unfreedom” (i.e., communism, referring to Andrej Babiš’s alleged collaboration with the regime before 1989). This culminated in the widely covered demonstrations organized by the *Million Moments for Democracy* association in 2019 (cf. Surowiec & Štětka, 2020). The largest of these demonstrations were in Prague’s Letná district (June 23 and November 16). They each brought together a quarter of a million people, making them the most significant anti-government protests since the 1989 revolution.<sup>42</sup>

It is noteworthy that the period after 2013 (when Babiš became Minister of Finance) resembles the political cleavages of the early transformation period of the first half of the 1990s (Hloušek & Kopeček, 2008). In a sense, the current socio-political situation can thus be understood as a “polarized society” (as is often reflected in the public space by the rise of populist political forces) and as a return of post-revolutionary sentiments from the period of capitalist construction. We can also understand the post-2021 removal of the left-wing representatives from the Chamber of Deputies, which was unprecedented in a traditionally strong left-wing country, as a signal for both the inability of left-wing political entities to articulate the needs of their traditional electorate (the socio-economic aspect of elections) and the adaptation of the axiological aspect of “anti-communism” among voters of right-wing parties.<sup>43</sup> This is particularly important because this axiological perspective carries with it an aversion to regulation and emphasises procedural solutions. This is why the issue of public service media has been reduced to discussions of the mechanisms for electing members of media councils and the structural problems of the Czech media system are not reflected in the public space (i.e., the simplistic metaphor of oligarchization).

On the one hand, it is necessary to recognize that the orientation towards the procedural side of political problems neglects socio-economic deficiencies (i.e., poverty, inequality); on the other hand, the value of civil society as “the main strategic component of the neoliberal package”

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.nfnz.cz/o-fondu/proc-jsme-vznikli/>

<sup>42</sup> See [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/demonstrace-babis-letna-milion-chvilek-necas-odborari-vaclavak.A190623\\_173207\\_domaci\\_maka](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/demonstrace-babis-letna-milion-chvilek-necas-odborari-vaclavak.A190623_173207_domaci_maka)

<sup>43</sup> This anti-communist emphasis in relation to Andrej Babiš is paradoxical because he himself applied methods known from human resources management in the business sphere to his political project ANO 2011, which eventually made him the Prime Minister. See Hloušek & Kopeček, 2019.

(Eyal, 2000: 52) cannot attract the social strata that feels these socio-economic deficiencies. This was also shown by the research *Divided by Freedom* (Prokop et al., 2019), which distinguished six social classes in Czech society. Only the emerging cosmopolitan class felt the power to influence the solutions to problems in their communities. It was the only one to feel interpersonal trust; it trusted institutions the most; and it showed the lowest social distance from marginalised or socially excluded social groups (i.e., ethnic minorities, drug addicts, people of different religious beliefs). Together with the secure middle class, this emerging cosmopolitan class also feels social inequalities the least and it has the most profound positive perception of the development of Czech society after 1989 (i.e., the transition to capitalism). This is also important because members of these classes (34% of Czechs in total) represent professionals, managers, and people from creative fields, including the media. It is here that the “division” of society can be found – these are the social classes that control or work in the media and, in simple terms, see the world through very different eyes than the rest of society (cf. Volek & Urbánková, 2017). This is mainly in the sense that they overlook social and economic inequalities. The journalists’ appeal to civil society in the independent media, which reduces protest voices in the Czech society to populism, thus deepens rather than bridges social differences.

*Polarisation of society* can be considered another critical juncture. It is complex in nature, and it is associated with the stratification of society in terms of economic, social, and cultural capital. From this point of view, the social divide that has been opening up, especially in the last decade, is not between the left and the right, as has traditionally been the case in Czech politics; rather it runs transversally through the Czech political scene with a much more complex profile.

The above-mentioned facts are important because, according to the available research (Macková et al., 2021), Czech society perceives itself to be more polarised than it actually is. While 78% of people believe that certain topics divide society so much that individual groups of citizens are unable to talk to each other (61% of respondents perceive this polarisation at the level of the media, as compared to 55% of their audience), society is not as strongly polarised at the level of behaviour. Only 20% refuse to talk to people of a different opinion and only 30% do not want to use media with different opinions than theirs. However, social inequalities also influence this fact, especially on the level of education, which correlates positively with perceived polarisation and negatively with practiced polarisation. Older people (55+) perceive and practice polarisation more.

Thus, polarisation can be observed most strongly in the sense that there are demonstrable divides in the attitudes of the “successful” social classes (the secure middle class and the emerging cosmopolitan class) on some socio-economic and political issues. Additionally, two electoral “blocks” can be discerned in society – one contains voters of the left (ČSSD, KSČM) and the so-called “populist” voters (ANO 2011, SPD); and the other has voters of centre-right and right-wing parties (Pirates, ODS, KDU-ČSL, TOP 09, STAN) (Macková et al., 2021). In the 2021 elections, no left-wing parties made it into the Chamber of Deputies, so this pole of Czech society is represented only by the populist parties, against which a large coalition of centre-right and right-wing parties define themselves.

As this research demonstrates (Macková et al., 2021), the role of the COVID-19 pandemic will be crucial, particularly in a polarising society (e.g., in relation to vaccination). The spread of misinformation and the application of manipulative techniques that can be found in the media have reappeared in a new form after the refugee crisis – not least because the emphasis on users on new media is increasing. We therefore suggest that *the pandemic as a complex phenomenon* should be considered as a potential next critical juncture because it has intensified the above-mentioned processes that have so far been evident in Czech society.

### 1.3. Background

Czechia<sup>44</sup> is a country in the Central Europe created by the division of Czechoslovakia on 1 January 1993. It is a post-socialist country that started transition after the 1989 revolution. Czechia is a unitary parliamentary republic with a developed, high-income export-oriented social market economy. It is a member of European Union (since 2004) and NATO (since 1999). It has ca. 10,5 million inhabitants and the main language is Czech.

The highly concentrated Czech media system was on the 20<sup>th</sup> rank on the World Press Freedom Index in 2022.

### Summary of the results of Case Study 1

Our literature review allowed us to map the national potential to monitor our project's four domains and to point out the main risks and opportunities for the monitoring capabilities and its quality.

The following aspects are **opportunities**:

1. We are able to gain the basic data about the media system, individual agents, and specific problems of media development in Czechia;
2. The number of sources is increasing;
3. The quality of sources is increasing; and
4. The number of reflexive content producers is growing.

The **risks** are that the analysed texts are problematic in terms of quantity and quality:

- 1. The saturation of time periods** – Until 2000 and the following several years, academic publications were sporadic, and the authors were initially foreign academics; later, industry data were gradually systematised and slowly became inaccessible and monetised;
- 2. Thematic density** – Focus on individual topics was more a reflection of the authors' and media organisations' individual interests than a systematic strategy of the field and industry;
- 3. Thematic breadth** – The small size of the academic field and the limited number of associated academics and students did not allow for coverage of even the core disciplinary topics over a longer period; the limited size of the media system has not created a sufficiently competitive environment for data to be accessible or for a relevant professional association to emerge; and
- 4. Quality** – Scholarly texts tended to be theoretical or descriptive, and only in later years did they build on empirical data, plus relevant industry data became inaccessible.

The data from the media academia and industry, in our view, makes it possible to highlight specific gaps in the research landscape in Czechia. We are, thus, able to give recommendations for future research initiatives. In the limited space of the Czech academia and industry, and with the limited number of people involved in the generation of reflections upon media development, the following are crucial to consider and implement:

1. The mutual cooperation of all actors (i.e., academia, industry, NGOs) with additional emphasis on interdisciplinary research;
2. The systematisation of topics and methods used, including for the long-term perspective;
3. The long-term perspective could lead to a gradual "densification" of the topics and a more systematic support (i.e., institutional and financial) for elaboration; and

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<sup>44</sup> For basic facts about Czechia (e.g., number of inhabitants, economic data) see *The World Factbook*, which is published by the CIA. For key media system characteristics see *Reporters Without Borders*, 2022.

4. There is a lack of deeper reflection on the ethical and legal aspects of media development, the working and organisational conditions of journalists, and journalistic competencies.

## 2. Risks and opportunities concerning legal and ethical regulation domain

### 2.1. Freedom of Expression

The freedom of expression and the freedom of information are firmly anchored in Czech law under constitutional order Act No. 2/1993, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms. Media-specific laws like Press Act No. 46/2000 and the Act on the Operation of Radio and Television Broadcasting No. 231/2001 regulate the obligations of the publishers of printed periodicals and broadcasters, respectively.

Czech law also contains opportunities for defence against non-compliance with the rules. This is in the form of the right of additional disclosure for the press. It allows individuals and legal entities to defend themselves against accusations made directly in the newspaper that wrote about them (46/2000) or, in the case of broadcasting, through regulators (councils regulate both broadcasting, in general, and public service media, specifically).

However, the laws do not contain a more precise definition for the journalistic profession, which can be considered a potential problem (Černý, 2022). Also, Czechia has no Press Council that would allow for a form of self-regulation to defend the freedom of expression and the freedom of information. The media in Czechia have mostly adapted codes of ethics since the late 1990s, and the overarching code can be considered the Code of Ethics of the Syndicate of Journalists of the Czech Republic, a professional organisation that, unfortunately, brings together a minority of journalists and has very little relevance for or influence upon the media in practice (Černý, 2022; Jirák, 2022).

### 2.2. Freedom of information

Freedom of information is further strengthened by the Law on Free Access to Information (106/1999), which obliges the state, local governments, and public institutions to provide citizens with information about their activities. The Copyright Act protects copyrights (121/2000). Czech law contains a basic protection for whistle-blowers in public institutions based on the Whistleblowing Directive issued by the Ministry of Justice; however, a comprehensive law that reflects the current legislative requirements of the European Union and private entities is still under development at the time of writing.

### 2.3. Conclusion: main risks and opportunities concerning the legal domain

In the legal domain we identify three critical junctures. The first is *the slow development of media ethics* between 2000 and 2020; the second is *the public service media (television) crisis* after 2000; and the third, and most significant critical juncture of the last two decades, is *the oligarchization of the media (i.e., the concentration of media ownership in the hands of Czech businessmen)* after 2008. This ownership-based development also led to the emergence of new, independent media and thus started a certain transformation of the Czech media system, the consequences of which cannot yet be fully assessed.

## 2.4. Accountability system

### 2.4.1. The development of media accountability system, critical junctures, and overall understanding of media accountability

The development of media ethics and law in Czechia was profoundly influenced by the socio-economic transition process of the 1990s. This process can be characterized by the abandonment of the previous normative and legislative framework (based on the Soviet model of the media role in society) and the adaptation of free market principles, which led to the transformation of relationships in the media sphere, the transformation of market demand, and the related changes to media content and its form (Bednářík, Jirák, & Köpplová, 2011: 368). The detatization process went hand in hand with the privatization of the media; private ownership was understood to be a guarantee for media independence (Bednářík, Jirák, & Köpplová, 2011: 369). That is why in the 1990s new ethical norms and processes for media regulation were adapted very slowly and with reluctance. As Jan Jirák (2022) explains, there was a "sense of triumphant freedom" that led journalists to overemphasize neoliberal doctrine with its emphasis on self-realization and individualism. In 1995, the first ethical code was adopted by *Czech Television*, a public service broadcaster. Later, in 1998, it was adopted by the first privately owned media outlet, *Týden*, and the general ethical code was adopted by the Syndicate of Journalists (Moravec, 2020: 339).

The professional and public debate on media ethics in this period was characterized by intuitiveness, the lack of systematicity, and internal necessity. Although there was a professional union of journalists — *the Syndicate of Journalists of the Czech Republic*, which was established in 1990 and replaced the liquidated pre-revolutionary *Czech Union of Journalists* — considerations of the self-regulation of journalism or professional ethics were not common at that time. The Syndicate of Journalists is a central actor in the professionalization of journalism in Czechia; however, its real influence on the journalism profession is questionable. One of the reasons is that journalists were few and earned relatively high salaries in the transition period of the 1990s. The profession also enjoyed a certain prestige in society at the time. Thus, journalists did not feel threatened and had no need to organize and fight for their rights (Jirák, 2022).

Any self-limitation was seen as incompatible with the newly acquired freedom. The problem of media ethics was thus driven by an external agenda, most notably the Council of Europe document on the ethics of journalism (Moravec, 2020: 343–344). On this basis, the government of President Václav Klaus had been preparing a new press law since 1994 (prepared by the Minister of Culture Pavel Tigrid), which, after being revised, did not come into force until the government of President Miloš Zeman (who was a harsh critic of the media at the time) in 2000 (No. 46/2000 Coll.).

This period ended with a strike at *Czech Television* (cf. Císařová, 2003), which was caused by the resistance to the new management of the television station (director Jiří Hodač) by media workers, some politicians, and the public. As a result of this crisis, which was closely followed by the public, the *Czech Television Act* was amended, particularly the part that regulates the functioning of the *Czech Television Council*, which elects the director of the medium. The new code of ethics was adopted by the Chamber of Deputies in 2003. Thus, the new legislation did not provide a solution to political interference in the operation of the media, but rather extended it to the sphere of self-regulation of the media (Moravec, 2020: 370). The *Czech Television Act* was supposed to prevent the influence of politicians on the activities of media councils, but it failed to remove the political influence that still persists today.

At the same time, under the influence of political discussions about the press law and the threat of significant regulation of the media by the state, an attempt was made to establish a *Press*

*Council*. This ended in failure. One can assume that this was also due to the reluctance of the media and their owners to limit their business.

It can thus be concluded that in the 1990s in Czechia, the discussion of media ethics was almost exclusively oriented towards the issue of self-regulation and media regulation, especially in relation to public service media, the press law, and the government's pressure on media regulation, and within the activities of the Syndicate of Journalists, which did not play the role of an active initiator of the discussion, but rather also reacted to external (international) pressures and influences. No academic or professional institution that was focused on media ethics, apart from the *Ethical Board of the Syndicate of Journalists*, was established. The professionals were oriented primarily towards the question of press freedom rather than to discussions of the professional roles of media and its respective normativity. This corresponds to the fact that the media law (i.e., the Press Act) does not define who a journalist is and there is no legal definition for the profession. Therefore, the position of journalists in the media system was and is fragile (Černý, 2022).

The central critical juncture, which to some extent predetermined the attention given to public service media after 2000, was *the television crisis*. This led to a change in legislation and became a reference point in subsequent debates on public service media. In the following years, the *Czech Television Council* and the *Czech Radio Council* have repeatedly come under criticism, not only from politicians, who would like to bring the public service media closer to themselves, but also from media professionals and journalists themselves, who point to the dysfunctionality of the councils and the political influence on their staffing. This culminated in 2020 with the dismissal of Hana Lipovská from the Czech Television Council,<sup>45</sup> which became a symbol of defiance against the influence of politically influential groups (in this case, conservative ones) on the work of the broadcasting councils. Thus, the key actors for this whole period are the public service media, politicians, and influence groups (both liberal and illiberal, who compete for influence over the public service media policy).

The period 2000–20 was marked by this malaise of professional and public debate on media ethics and the reduction of ethics for regulatory mechanisms and within media law. This is also evident in the only existing Czech monograph on journalistic ethics, which was written by Václav Moravec, a presenter on the public broadcaster Czech Television, who became a key actor in the academic environment during this period. As a lecturer at the *Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University in Prague* and the author of several partial texts on the subject, he became essentially the only theoretician of media ethics within a theoretically undernourished environment.

It is also symptomatic of the development of media ethics after 2000 that politicians (some who were active in the 1990s, like Miloš Zeman) continue to put pressure on the media, especially on public service media. Specifically, the role of the main PSM regulatory organs (i.e., Czech TV Council, Czech Radio Council) was widely discussed because these institutions remain under the heavy influence of the politicians. In 2013, Andrej Babiš became the key actor in both the media space, where his Agrofert holding had bought the media companies Mafra, a. s. and Londa (including the prominent newspapers MF DNES and Lidové noviny, and the dominant radio broadcaster Rádio Impuls), and in politics, where he was elected into the Chamber of Deputies and later became the Minister of Finance (2014) and the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic (2017–21) (see Kotisova & Waschková Císařová, 2021).

At the same time, the Czech media market underwent a radical transformation when media that had belonged to foreign owners (especially German) were sold on a large scale to Czech entrepreneurs. Thus, since 2008, after the economic crisis, the oligarchization of the media market

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.mediarcz.cz/vzestup-a-pad-hany-lipovske-v-rade-ct/>

led to the largest media groups moving into the hands of Czech billionaires with political ambitions or interests (e.g., Andrej Babiš, Zdeněk Bakala, Petr Kellner, Daniel Křetínský). In the first decade, most media outlets adopted their own codes of ethics, but there was neither the establishment of a self-regulatory body nor the strengthening of the role of the Syndicate, whose importance for the journalistic profession continued to decline.

The most significant critical juncture of the last two decades is the *oligarchization of the media*, which is the concentration of media ownership in the hands of Czech businessmen with their own political interests, especially Andrej Babiš. This event also led to the emergence of new, independent media and thus started the transformation of the Czech media system, the consequences of which cannot yet be fully assessed. The actors of this event are mainly domestic media magnates and the journalists who opposed them (and who often set up their own projects or embark on systematic critical work). This point combines probably the biggest risk but also the biggest opportunity for media ethics and law – the oligarchization of the media has led to a strong counteraction, whether it was the creation of new media, foundations, non-profit, and monitoring projects, or an increased interest within the academic world in the relationship between politics and media. In Czechia, the risks of oligarchization are still outweighed by the opportunities, which allows for the maintenance of a certain freedom for the media that is exceptional in the context of post-communist countries (cf. e.g., Hungary, Poland).

At this time, media law was also undergoing a significant transformation with the implementation of the so-called “muzzle law” (No. 52/2009 Coll.) in 2009. This law aimed to limit the publication of wiretaps, the leaks of sensitive information from criminal proceedings, and the secondary victimization of victims of crime. This law was amended in 2011 to a relaxed and constitutionally compliant form (No. 207/2011 Coll.) in response to widespread professional and political criticism that it excessively restricted press freedom.

In 2013, the *Press Act* was amended in relation to council (i.e., municipal) newspapers published by local authorities. This amendment placed a new obligation on local authorities to ensure that these publications provided balanced and objective coverage of the community, as well as a balanced space for the views of councillors. The problem with this amendment, among other things, is that it does not address the causes of the unsatisfactory state of council news media, but only the symptoms. For example, there is no adequate definition for the media because of local political publicity tools, there is no solution to their funding, there is no relationship with other similar tools, and there is no authority with sufficient decision-making powers (Waschková Císařová, 2015).

In reaction to the oligarchization of the media, the second decade saw a revival of the debate about media ethics, especially with the emergence of the liberal independent media and the rise of the populist political forces that began to put increased pressure on public service media. On this basis, new professional organizations, such as the *International Press Institute – Czech Republic* and the *Association of Regional Journalists*, were established.

#### *2.4.2. Existing media accountability instruments and an evaluation of their effectiveness*

It is symptomatic that, not only does the reduction of media ethics to journalistic principles continue (the issues of film, TV series, and entertainment productions are indeed critically conceived by Czech academics – e.g., Reifová, 2021 – but not within the framework of media ethics), but so does its interpenetration with media law. Moravec's book *Transformations of Journalistic Ethics* thus does not follow the foreign discussion of media ethics, its key development tendencies, and paradigms; rather, it comments on certain characteristic phenomena and widely employs the legal framework to interpret the phenomena. This interpenetration of media ethics and media law is also evident in the fact that other publications that deal with media regulation or self-regulation are exclusively legal in nature (Pouperová, 2010; Rozehnal, 2007).

In practice, it happens that, while in terms of the law, citizens have sufficient means for defence in terms of defamation and invasion of privacy, at the level of self-regulation these means are limited or minimal. Only in the public service media is there the opportunity to defend oneself against accusations, invasion of privacy, use of personal data, and other hardships, based on the regulatory authorities. However, in most cases the affected persons have no choice but to go to court. Self-regulation in the Czech environment does not have sufficient institutional support to enable an effective defence of citizens against violations of journalistic ethics.

Equally, this lack of self-regulation (Černý, 2022) represents an insufficient protection for journalists, who are usually – unless they agree to go to court – forced to accept assignments in the newsroom under pressure and in undignified conditions, even if it is a violation of the rules of journalistic work. This is a major critical juncture that affects all the variables of interest. Journalistic sources are protected by law (Press Act, 46/2000, §16). Czech media law does not systematically address the issue of media ownership, but it does contain some provisions to protect press freedom (e.g., under the Conflict of Interest Act (159/2006), public officials may not own or operate media).

Media law focuses mainly on norms that were adopted in the 1990s and it does not reflect the advent of new technologies, which is, alongside changes in ownership, crucial for the transformation of the Czech media system (Jirák, 2022; Černý, 2022). In recent years, there has been an increased interest in some of the issues related to copyrights in the digital environment and laws in relation to new technologies, especially at the Institute of Law and Technology, Faculty of Law, Masaryk University (<https://cyber.law.muni.cz/en>). It should be noted, however, that these discussions are separate from the discussions about the journalistic profession, and they do not lead, for example, to a deeper legal reflection on the issue of precarization of work (i.e., false self-employment) or the lack of compliance with copyright law in newsrooms (Černý, 2022).

#### *2.4.3. The role of corporate and primary agents on media accountability*

The critical problem with Czech media ethics and media law is the absence of an academic workplace that would systematically address these topics over the long term and that could provide expertise for public policy. The fragmentation of the professional discussion is also characterised by mutual non-communication between actors (i.e., academics, journalists, politicians, media managers). Only in the last year has there been an attempt to establish such a workplace in Brno (see below).

Both professional and public discussions on media ethics and law, however, were primarily based on mere intuitive notions for objectivity and independence, as well as on the criticism of the oligarchized media. The academic institutions did not systematically develop a theory for media ethics or a specific ethical or legal stance on the media beyond partial commentaries or reviews and historical texts. Crisis phenomena, such as the ethics of portraying refugees or foreigners or sexism, have been commented upon mainly by NGOs and activists (e.g., Nesehnutí, Člověk v tísni). Thus, even though the Syndicate of Journalists still had an active ethics panel and the Prague Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, cooperated with the international organization *European Journalism Observatory* (<https://cz.ejo-online.eu>), no department has systematically developed media ethics as a specific discipline distinct from law. In 2021, the *Centre for Media Ethics and Dialogue* (<https://www.cemetik.cz/en/>) was established at the Department of Media Studies and Journalism at the Faculty of Social Studies of Masaryk University in Brno. It is headed by Jan Motal, who has spent the past decade focusing on education and the issue of dehumanization in the media in relation to media ethics (Motal, 2015). Apart from Václav Moravec's activities at Charles University, this is the only long-term academic activity in the field.

However, interest in media ethics is growing, as evidenced by the establishment of a new field of study called *Ethics and Culture in the Media* at the Sts. Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology at Palacký University in Olomouc in 2020. However, this focuses primarily on the education of future workers in social services, non-profit organisations, and authorities, not on professional ethics.

Overall, the discussions around the media councils (the Czech Television and Czech Radio Councils), in which journalists, politicians, and the public acted as key actors, were crucial for the development of media ethics and media law in the last two decades. Often, in the public sphere, this issue was put in the context of restrictions on media freedom in Poland and Hungary. Similarly, the oligarchization of the media, especially the acquisition of major media outlets by Andrej Babiš, was a key development. This has led to a broader discussion of journalistic ethics and to a renewed interest in the establishment of professional organizations. The *Foundation for Independent Journalism* (<https://www.nfnz.cz>) has played a significant role in the cultivation of the media environment, especially with its media rating system, which provides an assessment of media quality. It can thus be said that NGOs and foundations have been another key actor in the development of media ethics and law in the last two decades.

#### *2.4.4. Conclusion: the main risks and opportunities concerning the accountability instruments*

Despite the new impulses in the academic sphere, however, the biggest risks remain the following: the intuitive nature of the discussion on media ethics in Czechia; its close intertwining with media law; the absence of a broader conceptual debate based on international comparisons; and the inactivity of the largest trade union organisation, the Syndicate of Journalists of the Czech Republic, which is unable to enter the professional or public debate in a significant way. This is also linked to the low willingness of journalists to organise and join professional and self-regulatory organisations (Volek & Urbánková, 2017). The renewed debates about the possibility of establishing a press council, which have emerged in recent years, are thus more the result of the initiative of a limited group of activists and professionals and they do not have broad support among journalists. A major risk is the long-term indifference of media professionals and the professional public to long-term and systematic solutions. On the other hand, at the moment, due to the above-mentioned processes, it is an opportune moment to open up the fundamental problems of media ethics and law, because the political representation and the professional public are willing to listen to the criticism of the oligarchized media.

### **3. Risks and opportunities concerning journalism domain**

There were several critical junctures for media development between 2000 and 2020 in terms of topics related to the journalism domain. Firstly, there were key changes in the Czech media landscape: *post-socialist transition*, which was still covered in the analyses in the first decade after 2000 (e.g., Jirák & Köpplová, 2012; Volek, 2009); and *searching for a type for the Czech media system/market* and its similarities and differences with other post-socialist or western media systems (e.g., Castro Herrero et al., 2017). Later, the risks associated with the current trends in the media landscape: *public service media crisis* in 2000-01 (e.g., Císařová, 2003); *changing media ownership* after 2008 (e.g., Kotisova & Waschková Císařová, 2021); and the *development of illiberal democracy and its implications for the functioning of the media* in recent years (e.g., Surowiec & Stetka, 2020).

### 3.1. Market conditions

Our interviewees mention the foreign, specifically Western, influences on setting the basic features and development of the media system and market. Foreign owners, mainly from Germany, dominated the Czech media market until 2008. Experts recall that, at first, foreign ownership aroused distrust, but today, through the lens of the re-nationalisation of media ownership, they see it as a better option. It evaluates, from a distance, that foreign owners did not interfere in the functioning of the media and the autonomy of journalists (Jirák, 2022; Osvaldová, 2022). In addition, it enabled the financial and technological development of the media (Šmíd, 2022). Support for the development of journalism in the post-revolutionary period was also offered by the *Center for Independent Journalism*, which was established in the early 1990s and funded by the American foundation of the same name. As the expert recalls, CIJ was very cooperative (e.g., it published the first books about journalism in Czech and organized workshops for journalists; Osvaldová, 2022). Nevertheless, the beginning of the 21st century marked the end of the CIJ in Czechia – the American Headquarters "felt that we had moved on to the point where we no longer needed help with journalism independence" (Osvaldová, 2022). The same centres still operate in Hungary and Romania.

### 3.2. Public service media

The critical juncture, which to some extent predetermined the attention given to public service media after 2000, was *the television crisis*. This led to a change in legislation and became a reference point in subsequent debates on public service media. In the following years, the *Czech Television Council* and the *Czech Radio Council* have repeatedly come under criticism, not only from politicians, who would like to bring the public service media closer to themselves, but also from media professionals and journalists themselves, who point to the dysfunctionality of the councils and the political influence on their staffing. This culminated in 2020 with the dismissal of Hana Lipovská from the Czech Television Council,<sup>46</sup> which became a symbol of defiance against the influence of politically influential groups (in this case, conservative ones) on the work of the broadcasting councils. Thus, the key actors for this whole period are the public service media, politicians, and influence groups (both liberal and illiberal, who compete for influence over the public service media policy).

### 3.3. Production conditions

In terms of journalists, there are key topics for *professionalization* (e.g., Volek & Jirák, 2006; Volek & Urbánková, 2017) and the *transformation of journalistic work* (e.g., Jirků, 2020), specifically as a consequence of the changes of media ownership (e.g., Kotisova & Waschková Císařová, 2021).

The professionalisation of journalists and the conditions of journalistic work were often mentioned by the experts in the interviews. For example, the president of the Syndicate of Journalists reflected upon the unclear position of the journalist in the Czech legal system: "there is no mention of a journalist in media laws, the position of journalists is very fragile in the Czech Republic" (Černý, 2022). Moreover, he connected this unclear position to the situation after the Covid-19 pandemic and the related state compensation – "it is also symptomatic, if we look at the two Covid years, when all sorts of fields received support from the state ... but no support went to the media, although the consequences for them were dramatic" (Černý, 2022).

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<sup>46</sup> <https://www.mediarcz.cz/vzestup-a-pad-hany-lipovske-v-rade-ct/>

### **3.4. Relations and interaction between the corporate and primary agents concerning the economic and social sustainability of journalism**

The re-nationalization of traditional media ownership (see above) has also brought with it an increasing diversity of business models and media types – there are more independent, niche media and the emphasis on an audience-driven business model is growing. There is a lack of mutual cooperation of the different agents (e.g., researchers, media professionals, state, professional unions).

### **3.5. Journalists' working conditions**

According to the experts, the precarious position of the Czech journalists has more roots in the 1990s because, at that time, there was a greater supply of job opportunities than the number of journalists, therefore journalists had high salaries, chose where to work, and, if there was the slightest problem in the newsroom, could go elsewhere (Černý, 2022; Jirák, 2022). "Journalists had this sense of 'triumphant freedom' – that state of affairs has led journalists to underestimate the need to organize and collectively bargain and defend themselves for quite some time. They failed to realize that there might come a time when they would not be in the limelight" (Jirák, 2022). On the other hand, as a consequence of the weakening of traditional media after 2000, the situation for journalists in Czechia today is abysmal: there are limited job opportunities, some work as freelancers even when they previously would have been entitled to full-time jobs, and working conditions are precarious (Černý, 2022). Moreover, the new media is blurring the line between who is a journalist and who is not (Osvaldová; Jirák; Černý, 2022): "Not everyone who writes something is a journalist" (Osvaldová, 2022).

### **3.6. Intra-organizational diversity of human resources**

The topic of intra-organizational diversity is not yet very visible in the Czech media discourse; it is mostly manifested in discussions about equal opportunities for women journalists (e.g., Jirák et al., 2011). There is no policy on intra-organizational diversity in the Czech context, only some internal editorial standards of independent liberal media contain it, public service media or professional associations do not address such a topic.

### **3.7. Journalistic competencies, education, and training**

In terms of the *state of journalistic education and related journalistic skills*, there is the ongoing debate over the structure of journalistic education; there are the majority of journalists without professional education; and there is an absence of lifelong learning for journalists. However, journalism education, like the profession itself, underwent significant developments in the 1990s. The first step towards establishing journalism education in universities was the ability to explain to critics that journalism was a discipline that belonged in academia. The department at Charles University in Prague, which was the first to be established, had cooperation with foreign universities for the preparation of the curriculum. The second step was the development of the field, but that progressed slowly – the field was small, based on a limited number of academics who were without strong links to foreign trends in the field, and this continues to this day. The experts mention: a lack of understanding of the social relevance of the field in academia (Orság, 2022); the fact that the field is still not represented in the Academy of Sciences (Jirák, 2022); and infighting in the field (Academic 1, 2022). The third step was the search for a balance in the teaching of theory and creative practice. There are big differences between the three journalism departments (i.e., Charles University, Masaryk University, Palacký University) in the emphasis they place on the acquisition of practical experience by future journalists, which is tied to the

level of skills acquisition. For example, at the Department of Media Studies and Journalism, Masaryk University, a media internship has been compulsory for a full semester for undergraduate journalism students since 2006. One of the interviewees critically reflects on the periods in the development of journalism education and research:

*First, there was the period of textbooks in 1990s – it was a period of acquiring information abroad, publishing textbooks and dictionaries. At the end of that period there was a generational clash, younger colleagues setting themselves apart from the 'first ones'. Then there was a phase of hunches and despair – we knew there was research and a scholarly article, but we didn't know how to do it. There was a lack of connection with the international academic community. And suddenly there was a period of demands – a rigorous system of science assessment on which university funding was based. (Academic 1, 2022)*

### 3.8. Professional culture and role perception

*Professional culture and role perception* of journalists was one of the topics that has received more attention from the academic community (e.g., trust towards journalists, Moravec, Urbániková & Volek, 2016; professional identity, Volek & Urbániková, 2017), than being part of the professional debate, which may also be related to an inactive professional journalistic union.

### 3.9. Conclusions: the main risks and opportunities concerning journalism

The biggest potential problem for media development in Czechia was the almost complete *lack of cooperation* or, at least, *the lack of mutual participation among individual actors in the field*, which concerned the following: academia; media; media associations; journalists union organizations; and NGOs. The media market is a highly competitive environment. It is understandable that some information is not made available. Nevertheless, the media do not collaborate with analysts or academics (with the occasional exception of the public service media), so information about them is mostly descriptive and simply unavailable. The situation is no better among the professional journalistic associations. One of the problems of the Czech media landscape and a potential risk for media development is the long-term *dysfunctionality of the professional journalistic union*, the Syndicate of Journalists of the Czech Republic. The other associations that have emerged in recent years are not yet able to cover the absence of a professional organisation. There is only one NGO, the Foundation for Independent Journalism, which repeatedly assesses the quality of Czech media (Nadační fond nezávislé žurnalistiky. Rating médií). *Critical reflection on the Czech media market*, 30 years after the emergence of a free media landscape, thus *remains primarily the responsibility of foreign organisations* (e.g., Reporters Without Borders, European Federation of Journalists, The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism).

And yet the respondents agree that the functional cooperation of various agents in the Czech media landscape would contribute to solving a large part of the above-mentioned risks and critical junctures. At the beginning of the development of the Czech media, both in the academic and professional spheres, there were foreign actors, but they served more as know-how consultants and financial resources than as real partners for cooperation. In further development, mutual cooperation could not be established, even though interviewees saw it as crucial: "Prejudice is probably to blame. There is a misunderstanding between practical journalism and its theoretical reflection at the university. If we don't understand that we have to work together, we will all pay the price" (Orság, 2022).

## 4. Publications, data sources and main monitoring actors of media usage patterns

Before we move to the main changes in the domain of media usage, it is important to address an issue we can see in different country case studies' reflection on existing research and knowledge – the tendency to exclude interest groups of audiences (e.g., gamers, fans, pop culture audience) and more general media usage that is not connected to news consumption. However, all of the groups of audiences that interact with media nowadays reflect on how media communication works and how much of a re-establishment of new relations between the producer and consumer identities is happening (they even often collide). It would be a wasted opportunity to ignore this part of the existing research. Studying audiences is an interdisciplinary task and it must be handled as such, which is why it will be reflected in this manner in the following text.

### 4.1. The primary and corporate agents of media usage domain, the role of stand-for actors

Audience-hood is inseparably influenced by the local (in addition to accessible global) media content offer. Its distribution channels co-determine the practices of the audience itself. That is why we consider the evolution of ownership/management and the distribution model of Czech media at this crucial critical juncture in our media landscape. The establishment of commercial broadcasters (both TV and radio), alongside public service broadcasters, inevitably changed the landscape (e.g., emergence of talent shows, soap-opera genre). The changes were initially observable in the 1990's with commercial television stations Prima and Nova taking important places in the landscape, then again around 2005 with the increased competition between individual players and the changes in content (e.g., talent shows) and content creation. In 2010, Czech media saw the beginning of oligarchization and, after 2015, international subscription and on demand services found their way in the region (Kubíčková, 2022; Academic 1, 2022). Of course, the gradual development of the internet and its features (i.e., social networks) significantly added to the changes of media usage patterns.

The technological evolution is related to this critical juncture, and it is influential. Turning off the analogue signal and the increase of digitalization allowed for even greater fragmentation of the content offer, which became even more true with the arrival of the international players HBO, Netflix, and, later on, others. Jana Kubíčková (2022) labelled this arrival, plus the consequential changes in the media landscape and audience-hood, as "Netflixization". Both Kubíčková and Academic 1 explain that contemporary audiences<sup>47</sup> often lose their "togetherness" with other members of audiences. The socialization function of media is at risk of eventually disappearing in the context of "algorithmic domination" that individualizes the media experience of each user to the point that it will be difficult to find two users with same skillset, consumption/usage rituals, and practices.

### Access and diversity to different media content and news

The state of the media landscape is naturally reflected in the existing research, which brings us to an additional set of critical junctures. As described in Case Study 1, the research on media usage represents a wide range of fragmented and individualized approaches to the field that are produced by a similar range of different actors (i.e., academics, media professionals). This

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<sup>47</sup> This applies mainly to the convergent audiences that use a mix of classical broadcast and subscription video on-demand services, such as Netflix and other sources of content (e.g., online television). However, it is important to stress that the number of convergent audiences is gradually increasing in Czechia (Macek & Jansová, 2020).

brings us to the next critical juncture – the obvious *lack of academic empirical research on audiences* that was typical in the first decade of the period 2000–20. Such a tendency, of course, also reflects the state of the field before the year 2000.

On the other hand, the industry section of the field collected data continuously. However, only a limited amount was accessible to the academic field or the public (e.g., Český statistický úřad, 2014). It is important to stress that such research was conducted with the simple goal of knowing the numbers (e.g., how many people listened/watched) to further monetize the audience's attention. What exactly those audiences were doing with their media (e.g., how they use it, what their rituals are, how they choose content) was not (and often is still not) part of "the question". Jana Kubíčková (2022) points out that the "industry research" that is available (internal or external) is getting better and it is well contextualized. At the same time, she stresses that one of the biggest risks we are currently facing is the inability to interpret and use big data that reflects user experiences/behaviour. While Czech industry players collect such data, they are nowhere near effectively mining them, which is something Netflix, HBO, and others actually can do.

## 4.2. Relevance of news media

A significant change that concerned the previous lack of academic audience research (i.e., the contextual information of media usage) came in approximately the second decade of our time frame. Namely, *research teams* from (predominantly) Masaryk University (both the *Department of Media Studies and Journalism* and the *Interdisciplinary Research Team on Internet and Society*, with several lone researchers who combined media studies with psychology or sociology) *started to conduct both qualitative and quantitative primary research into media usage* (e.g., Macháčková & Blinka, 2009; Baslarová, 2014; Macek, 2015). The interest included specific audiences and their praxis (e.g., fans, gamers,<sup>48</sup> TV, and movie audience<sup>49</sup>); the generational uses of media (e.g., children's use of social networking); the psychological effects of media use (e.g., cyberbullying, eating disorders); and news consumption (e.g., connected polarisation, disinformation scene). As is apparent, the field became highly fragmented at the time (not only in the topics but also the methodological approaches).

This topic is addressed in detail in the newest research by a team led by Alena Macková (Masaryk University) that focused on information sources and the ability to process information from social networks sites (SNS). The research shows that 74% of the adult population used social networks at the end of 2020 and the main reason was to stay informed about their friends and acquaintances. During 2020 the number of people using SNS for information about world affairs increased by a third. The idea that Czechia was a polarized society (in types of perceived polarization and practiced polarization) was perceived by the respondents as the truth. The opinion divide was perceived by 61% of the respondents and polarization on the level of the media and their audiences by 55% respondents. Both types of polarization (i.e., perceived and practiced) increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. (Maková et al., 2021)

## 4.3. Trust in media

The state of contemporary Czech audience-hood and its actual research can be assessed with the help of several recent studies. Research that reflects Czech audiences and their practices regarding mostly (but not exclusively) its interest in content (e.g., TV series, movies) was conducted between 2019-20. The 98 interviews with contemporary audiences and the related

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<sup>48</sup> Quite a strong tradition of game studies has been established at the *Institute of Information Studies and Librarianship* (Charles University).

<sup>49</sup> Once again, Charles University also has a tradition in this type of research, even though we still predominantly encounter textual analysis. Some of Irena Reifová's work represents audience-based research.

survey ( $N = 4,294$ ) of the Czech population (Jansová et al., 2019; Macek & Jansová, 2020) indicates that approximately 30% of Czech audiences are now fully convergent. This number is steadily increasing (along with new possibilities in technology and accessible platforms). Convergent audiences are more in control (at least temporally and spatially) of their media usage because they can choose from the more traditional media (e.g., terrestrial broadcast) and also from new media offerings (e.g., social media, subscription based on demand services). Gradual individualization of the audience experience is also apparent in the polarization of (not only Czech) audiences/society.

#### **4.4. Conclusions: the main risks and opportunities concerning the media usage patterns**

Another critical juncture is the *cooperation between the academic field and industry representatives* and the combination of different approaches to the study of media audiences. This is difficult to date precisely in a particular year, but we approximate it to be in the 2010s. This cooperation stemmed from the changing of “audience-hood” as it is connected to the globalization of content, digitalization, and the growing media (and digital) literacy. Such cooperation represents a great opportunity in getting to know both Czech and international audiences in a more complex way. At the same time, it is important to consider that only a small number of such types of cooperation are functional and successful. Moreover, experts who were questioned in our interviews collectively highlighted the lack of a more efficient connection between the different bodies of research as a risk, while, paradoxically, each of the “representative body” perceived some sort of reluctance from others (Strachota, 2022; Academic 1, 2022; etc.).

### **5. Publications, data sources and main monitoring actors of media-related competencies domain**

#### **5.1. Normative approach concerning media-related competencies**

In Czechia, the terms media-related competencies and media literacy are mainly used in connection with (1) non-profit or commercial courses focused on journalism, digital, or communication education; and (2) the structure of school education.

Media literacy and media education are compulsory parts of formal education in elementary and high schools; however, there is no organ that systematically reviews the state of this education.

Seniors are also one of the target groups for media literacy. Care in this regard is mostly supplemented by NGOs or private subjects.

The law for radio and television broadcasts requires annual reports on the state of media literacy with regards to new communication technologies and the radio and TV broadcasts. This requirement applies to the *Committee for radio and TV broadcasts* (Děti a média, 2021).

In the first decade after 2000, academic works were primarily theoretical. This was true even regarding topics that warranted a more empirical approach (e.g., media literacy research – e.g., Jirák & Wolák, 2008).

The lack of media literacy research and the lack of media literacy education led to a paradoxical situation in which the non-profit sector had to step in and supplement both the research and the education (Strachota, 2022). This has another layer: the understanding of media literacy only scrapes the surface of this complex term with early academic works, the consideration of digital literacy, and the user perspective is mostly absent.

## 5.2. Overview on media-related competencies in policy documents: risks and opportunities

The definition of media literacy varies in different sources, a unifying definition provides a European guideline about audio-visual media services (Směrnice, 2010): "Media literacy includes skills, knowledge and understanding allowing users effective and safe usage of media. (Media) literate people should be able to conduct informed choices, understand the nature of the content and services and be able to use all the opportunities offered by new communication technologies...."

Media literacy is addressed in a policy called Framework educational program that mandates all schools in Czech Republic to provide "media education" (see later). Monitoring media literacy is also part of a Council of Radio and Television Broadcasting function (see RRTV). The council should be cooperating with Czech Telecommunication Office in offering and development of the media literacy development in Czech Republic. Its role is purely monitoring, not educational. Realistically, the Council can only offer solutions and strategies, not enforce policies that is why not much effort are visible in this regard.

## 5.3. Information about the media literacy programs in formal and/or in non-formal education

Media literacy is addressed in a policy called *Framework Educational Program* that mandates all schools (elementary and high schools) in Czechia to provide "media education". In this policy, media education is defined as a tool to be given to students on the basic level of media literacy. It is understood as ability to analyse media content and evaluate its trustworthiness, additionally also to recognize the communication aim of the information.<sup>50</sup> As we know from the previous sections, the level of media education varies among different schools and the government fails to function properly in its role as an upholder and provider of certain standards, tools and services. Once again, we must label this notion as a great risk to deliberative communication.

A visible role in this regard plays the non-profit sector, mainly the project *One World at Schools* in its media education initiative. Their activities cover preparation of educational materials, seminars, courses and conferences, they organize weeks of media education and conduct research into the state of media literacy in Czechia (JSNS, 2018). Most of their materials are free of charge.

## 5.4. Actors and agents of media related competencies: risks and opportunities

The main agents enforcing media competencies and media literacy should be the government, mainly the *Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports*. The Ministry should provide tools and strategies for schools for a quality media education. Unfortunately, even though elementary and high schools must provide some sort of media education, the state and shape of it is entirely voluntarily to them. The Ministry fails to provide strict leadership and the quality of media education in our country is rather being procured by NGOs (repeatedly mentioned *One World at Schools*) than the Ministry itself.

The primarily targets of media literacy programs are students of elementary schools and high schools. Attention is paid also to elderly generation, once again mainly in supplemental care provided by NGOs or volunteer activities (e.g., *Organization Elpida* focused on education sen-

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<sup>50</sup> More about the Framework educational program at <https://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/skolstvi-v-cr/skolskareforma/ramcovne-vzdelavaci-programy?lang=1>.

iors). While the non-profit sector offering a supplementary care in the regard of media education embodies an opportunity of progressive, in-time and quality education, the accompanying risk to the government failure in this regard is the inequity between different social groups or age groups in their access to such education.

## 5.5. Assessment of media related competencies among citizens

There is no standardized approach to assessment of media related competencies, a result of the named risk of non-cooperation of different agents (academia, NGOs etc.). Each agent approaches the task differently. As we addressed in the Case Study 1, the academic research highlights digital literacy a pressing topic, while the interdisciplinary research of media studies and psychology can offer us assessments of for example health impact of digital media usage and employment of digital literacy in that context. Longitudinal research in Czech youth and their digital and media literacy is provided only by NGO One World at Schools (e.g., JSNS, 2018).

The research in general is very fragmented and definitely not saturated, we are missing an interdisciplinary and internationally connected research team that would conduct longitudinal research into this topic and would cooperate with the government in employing valid changes into the media education (reflecting on the actual state of media literacy in the country).

## 5.6. Conclusions: the main ROs concerning media-related competencies among citizens

An obvious risk that can be identified while looking through the two decades worth of development regarding media-related competencies is *the weak cooperation between different actors* – academics, industry representatives, and NGO representatives. This is exacerbated when NGOs have to often fill “blank spaces” left by the other actors/sectors. The most visible examples are workshops in media literacy for schools and teachers (e.g., One World in the Schools). It is the same for publications about the state of media literacy in the Czech schools (JSNS, 2018).

# 6. Analytical conclusions

There are many potential critical junctures of media development in Czechia and the agency of different actors has propelled certain risks and opportunities.

There are several **critical junctures** that arise from the **context of the social, political, economic, and technological developments within the media** in Czechia between 2000 and 2020. We identify these seven in particular: (1) *the consequences of the social transformation after 1989*, which lasted until the beginning of the 21st century; (2) *the emergence of new media*, whose production and user development occurred mainly after the year 2000; (3) *the economic crisis in 2008*; (4) *the emergence of new political movements* after 2011; (5) *the refugee crisis* in 2015; (6) *the polarisation of society*; and (7) *the pandemic of Covid-19 as a complex phenomenon* after 2019.

In the **domain of legal and ethical regulation** we identify three critical junctures. The first is *the slow development of media ethics* between 2000 and 2020; the second is *the public service media (television) crisis* after 2000; and the third, and most significant critical juncture of the last two decades, is *the oligarchization of the media (i.e., the concentration of media ownership in the hands of Czech businessmen)* after 2008. This ownership-based development also led to the emergence of new, independent media and thus started a certain transformation of the Czech media system, the consequences of which cannot yet be fully assessed.

The biggest problem of media ethics and law in Czechia is the absence of a professional workplace that would deal with this issue and that would be able to saturate the public discussion with expertise. Although such a workplace is being established, the risk is that there is a lack of empirical research, not enough theoretical elaboration on key issues, and insufficient contact with the international environment. Ethics is mixed with law and this legalistic approach leads to the reduction of public discussion about the question of breaking the law. It is then difficult to find space for setting up effective self-regulatory mechanisms. The agenda of Czech media ethics is shaped by power actors, such as influential groups and politicians who criticize the media. This is particularly evident in the field of public service media. Another critical point, but one that also presents an opportunity for domestic journalism, is the oligarchization of the media, which has led to the emergence of new independent media and a supporting infrastructure. Also problematic is the low professionalisation of Czech journalists (i.e., their unwillingness to organise and participate in self-regulatory solutions).

In the **journalism domain** we identify four critical junctures. Firstly, *the post-socialist transition*, which influenced the development of media in the first decade of the 21st century and later was related to *searching for a type of the Czech media system*. Secondly, the following trends were crucial for the development of journalism: *the public service media crisis* after 2000; *changing media ownership* after 2008; and the *development of illiberal democracy and its implications for the functioning of the media* in recent years. Thirdly, in terms of journalists, critical junctures include their *professionalization development* after 1989, which is related to the *state of journalistic education and journalistic skills*; and *the transformation of journalistic work*, particularly because of the change of media ownership after 2008.

The biggest potential problem for media development in Czechia is the almost complete *lack of cooperation* or, at least, the *mutual participation of individual actors in the field*: academia; media; media associations; journalists union organizations; and NGOs. Specifically, one of the problems of the Czech media landscape and a potential risk for media development is the long-term *dysfunctionality of the professional journalistic union*, the Syndicate of Journalists of the Czech Republic. The other associations that have emerged in recent years are not yet able to cover the absence of a professional organisation. Moreover, the *critical reflection on the Czech media market*, 30 years after the emergence of a free media landscape, *remains primarily the responsibility of foreign organisations* (e.g., Reporters Without Borders, European Federation of Journalists, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism).

In the **domain of media usage** we identify several critical junctures. The first is the *stages* (i.e., the 1990s, 2005, 2010, 2015) of *the evolution of ownership/management* and the distribution models of Czech media after the 1990s, which significantly contributed to the change in Czech audience-hood. This is the same for *several degrees of technological evolution*, another critical juncture. Simultaneous critical junctures appeared in the research of the changing media landscape itself. The first critical juncture in this regard is undoubtedly the *lack of empirical academic research of audiences* and their practices, the second is when such *primarily research will start to be conducted*. A clear dividing line is at the end of the first decade of the 2000s. The field's opportunities and risks are connected to the *(non-)cooperation of different actors* who produce and collect data and research into audiences. An obvious risk that can be identified while looking through the two decades worth of development regarding media usage and the competencies of the media-related field is *the weak cooperation between different actors* – academics, industry representatives, and NGO representatives. This is exacerbated when NGOs have to often fill "blank spaces" left by the other actors/sectors. The most visible examples are workshops in media literacy for schools and teachers (e.g., One World in the Schools). It is the same for publications about the state of media literacy in the Czech schools (JSNS, 2018).

With focus on the agency of different **actors** in propelling certain risks and opportunities at the outlined critical junctures, these are the groups with either specific knowledge of the Czech media development or with a long professional history: (1) media industry representatives (e.g., media owners, media managers, journalists, journalists' professional unions); (2) communication researchers and lecturers; (3) media analysts and analytical companies; and (4) NGOs. In this sense, we also selected our communicative partners for expert interviews.

As shown by our analysis of the Czech media system between 2000 and 2020, the critical junctures, risks, and opportunities, have not contributed to the development of **deliberative communication and democracy** in Czechia. On the contrary, we conclude that the changes just after 2000 led to an illiberal turn that stems from the social, political, economic, and technological development of both Czech society and the Czech media system.

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