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Panel presentations by:

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Halliki Harro Loit, Anda Rožukalne, Ilva Skulte, Lilya Raycheva, Bissera Zankova, Sergio Splendore; Norbert Vrabec, Slavomír Gálik, Sabína Gáliková Tolnaiová

Lenka Waschková Císařová, Iveta Jansová, Jan Motal, Ioana Avădani; Ján Višňovský, Jana Radošinská, Andrej Brník

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Media Freedom and Democracy: Europe in a Comparative Perspective (Panel Session by the Polish Communication Association)

ABSTRACT SHORT: This panel looks at authenticity in communication via the lenses of media freedom and democracy in contemporary Europe. Through references to findings from the EU-funded project MEDIADELCOM (www.mediadelcom.eu) it looks at the broader cultural contexts alongside diversity (and a mismatch) of democratic media visions – their interpretations and potential cultural barriers to media freedom implementation. The contributions use various methodologies, including comparative analysis, agent-oriented modelling, and case studies of critical cultural junctures.

ABSTRACT (RATIONALE): Media and democracy are challenged everywhere. We all learn from the annual global freedom and human rights that media freedom and related freedom of expression are in crisis, under siege or retreat. Regardless of the cultural and geographical orientations, the image of mission-led responsible media has blended with populism, misinformation, corruption, and the spread of fake news via legacy and data-driven media. While the Nordic countries top the global media freedom ranks, media industries across Europe have experienced political battles over media regulation alongside the weakness of media ethics and professional journalism accountability. In addition, the ongoing societal challenges, such as the War in Ukraine, the effects of COVID-19 and the clashes of values/societal and media polarisation (see, for instance, multiple narratives on migration, the rights of women and LGBT communities, state and church separation, relations with the EU, the Russian Federation, and so on) call for a constant media and democracy reexamination.

We argue that the challenges for European media and democracies are twofold. Firstly, an urgent turn from ‘the broadcast/print/online’ organisational settings towards more agile and community-driven forms has many implications for media democratisation, both regarding employees’ pride and motivation and going beyond the sender-receiver with civil society/publics relationships. Secondly, we aim to examine the broader cultural contexts of the European democratic media cultures, alongside diversity (and a mismatch) of democratic

media visions – their interpretations and potential cultural barriers to media freedom implementation.

Through in-depth findings from the European Union-funded research project “Critical Exploration of Media Related Risks and Opportunities for Deliberative Communication: Development Scenarios of the European Media Landscape” (MEDIADCOM, 2021–2024), this session will look at normative media and democracy foundations (theory and media regulation) to further examine their effectiveness and implementations. We have invited the consortium members from 11 European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Poland, and Sweden) to elaborate on single case study perspectives and comparative methodologies to illustrate findings from Media Freedom/Regulation and Self-regulation domain. There will be 15 female presenters and 13 male contributors, guaranteeing gender diversity and insights from both scholarly (academic) and non-governmental organisations.

The salient questions to be addressed are: What’s the effectiveness of regulatory and media policies in supporting media freedom and democracy? What mechanisms, processes and actors support media democratisation and the cultural change of today’s media? What are the most critical cultural barriers to change?

The presentations:

Gábor Polyák, Michał Głowacki, Petra Szávai, Jacek Mikucki, Łukasz Szurmiński, Katarzyna Gajlewicz Korab and Maria Łoszevska Ołowska; Ludmila Čábyová, Hana Pravdová, Zora Hudíková

Democratic and Cultural U-Turns? Hungary and Poland Explained

The quality of democracy in Hungary and Poland has raised attention under the ruling conservative right governments. While the European Union acknowledges non-democratic turns and free media erosion in both countries, Hungary's and Poland's governments build their success by opposing the Western voices, resulting in value clashes (formerly known as conservatives vs liberals). This paper uses critical cultural junctures and social, political and media lenses to investigate the origins of multiple narratives over today’s democracy.

Zrinjka Peruško, Epp Lauk, Filip Trbojević, Iva Nenadić, Dina Vozab, Peter Berglez and Mart Ots

How Quality of Journalism Influences Press Freedom in 14 European Countries: A fsQCA Comparative Approach

This paper investigates the relationship of the journalistic field with press freedom values in 14 Western and Eastern European countries. The study is based on case studies of media systems in the same 14 countries and the fsQCA (fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis) calibrations performed during the MEDIADCOM project. The fsQCA analysis is expected to show which combinations of contingent conditions in the countries related to higher or lower values on the press freedom index.

Halliki Harro Loit, Anda Rožukalne, Ilva Skulte, Lilya Raycheva, Bissera Zankova, Sergio Splendore; Norbert Vrabec, Slavomír Gálik, Sabína Gáliková Tolnaiová

Deliberative Communication and Democratic Society: The Media-related Risks and Opportunities as the Interaction of Agents

This study approaches the media-related risks and opportunities for deliberative communication using the actor approach. We ask how the action and interaction of different agents (e.g., journalists, media users, politicians, experts, etc.) – who act and interact in specific societal contexts and with specific competence – influence the paths of risks and opportunities in 14 European countries. The study uses agent-oriented modelling as the point of departure.

Lenka Waschková Čisářová, Iveta Jansová, Jan Motal, Halliki Harro-Loit, Ioana Avădani; Ján Višňovský, Jana Radošinská, Andrej Brník

Journalism Competencies and Self-regulation: The European Perspective

This paper focuses on self-regulation and its relation to journalism competencies in 14 European countries. The comparison considers historical evolution, political economy changes, and self-regulation development, with a special focus on journalistic (de) professionalisation. The study analyses media policy documents, self-regulation documents and organisations alongside the expert interview data. The framework covers a wide range of European media systems; the data stems from the research of the participating teams of the MEDIADELCOM project. Journalism and media accountability.

Tobias Eberwein, Marcus Kreutler and Susanne Fengler

Research With(out) Values: Institutionalization and Impact of Media Accountability as an Academic Field

Research on media accountability stresses the importance of free and responsible media for democratic societies. But in how far can researchers themselves contribute to holding media accountable? The paper discusses the relevance of media accountability as an academic field and its impact on journalism practice. The analysis is based on a comparative evaluation of research infrastructures for media accountability in 14 European countries and a discussion of cases of the interplay between journalism and academia.

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