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Monitoring Media Pluralism in Europe: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor 2017 in the European Union, FYROM, Serbia & Turkey

Country Report: Sweden

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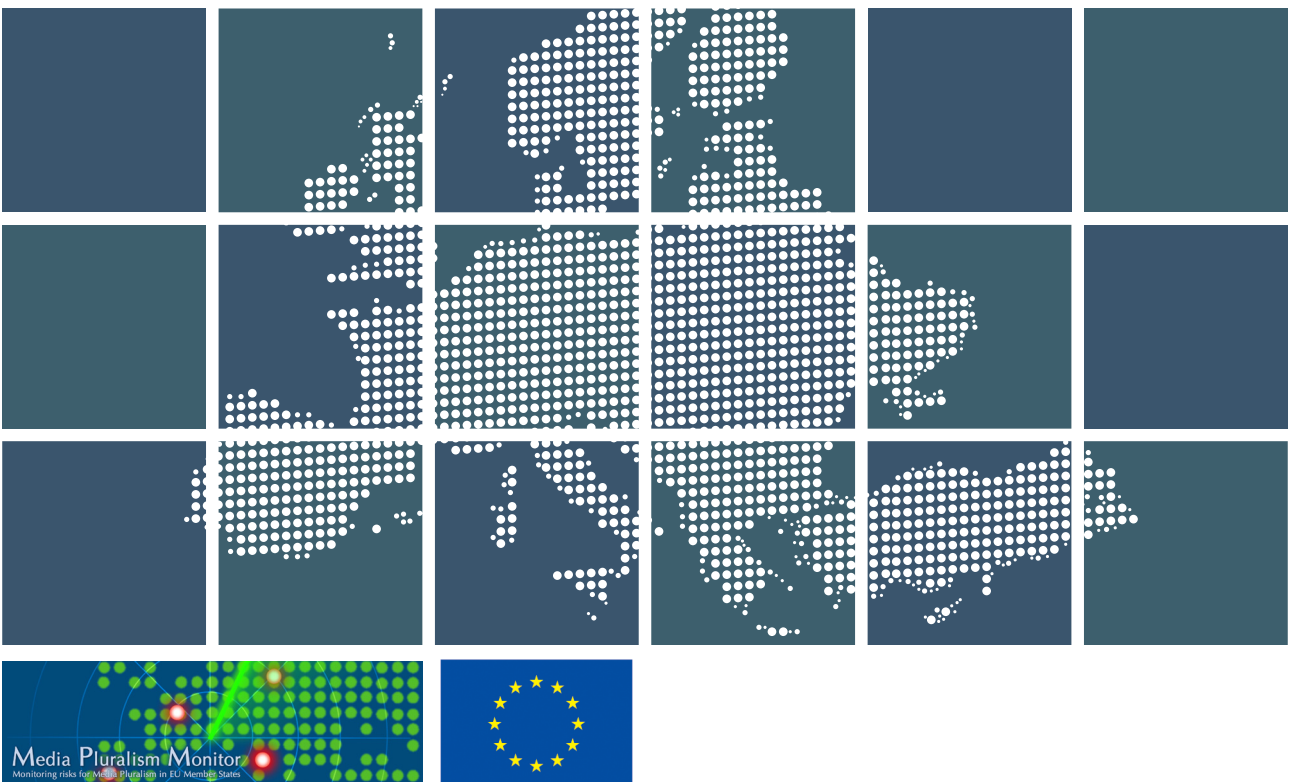




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1. ABOUT THE PROJECT

1.1 OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

The Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) is a research tool that was designed to identify potential risks to media pluralism in the Member States of the European Union. This narrative report has been produced within the framework of the second EU-wide implementation of the MPM, carried out in 2017. The implementation was conducted in 28 EU Member States, Serbia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRoM) and Turkey with the support of a grant awarded by the European Union to the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF) at the European University Institute.

1.2 METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The CMPF cooperated with experienced, independent national researchers to carry out the data collection and to author the narrative reports, except in the cases of Malta and Italy where data collection was carried out centrally by the CMPF team. The research is based on a standardised questionnaire and apposite guidelines that were developed by the CMPF. The data collection was carried out between June and December 2017.

In Sweden, the CMPF partnered with Dr. Mathias A. Färdigh (University of Gothenburg), who conducted the data collection and annotated the variables in the questionnaire and interviewed relevant experts. The scores assessing the risks for media pluralism were provided by the CMPF and calculated according to the algorithm developed by the Centre itself. The national report was reviewed by CMPF staff. Moreover, to ensure accurate and reliable findings, a group of national experts in each country reviewed the answers to particularly evaluative questions (see Annexe II for the list of experts).

Risks to media pluralism are examined in four main thematic areas, which are considered to capture the main areas of risk for media pluralism and media freedom: Basic Protection, Market Plurality, Political Independence and Social Inclusiveness. The results are based on the assessment of a number of indicators for each thematic area (see Figure 1 below).

Basic Protection	Market Plurality	Political Independence	Social Inclusiveness
Protection of freedom of expression	Transparency of media ownership	Political control over media outlets	Access to media for minorities
Protection of right to information	Media ownership concentration (horizontal)	Editorial autonomy	Access to media for local/regional communities and for community media
Journalistic profession, standards and protection	Cross-media concentration of ownership and competition enforcement	Media and democratic electoral process	Access to media for people with disabilities
Independence and effectiveness of the media authority	Commercial & owner influence over editorial content	State regulation of resources and support to media sector	Access to media for women
Universal reach of traditional media and access to the Internet	Media viability	Independence of PSM governance and funding	Media literacy

The results for each domain and indicator are presented on a scale from 0 to 100%. Scores between 0 and 33% are considered low risk, 34 to 66% are medium risk, while those between 67 and 100% are high risk. On the level of indicators, scores of 0 were rated 3% and scores of 100 were rated 97% by default, to avoid an assessment of a total absence or certainty of risk. For more information on the MPM methodology, see the CMPF report “Monitoring Media Pluralism in Europe: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor 2016 in EU-28, Montenegro and Turkey”, <http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/46786>



Disclaimer: The content of the report does not necessarily reflect the views of the CMPF or the EC, but represents the views of the national country team that carried out the data collection and authored the report. Due to updates and refinements in the questionnaire, the MPM2017 scores may not be fully comparable with those of MPM2016. For more details, see the CMPF report on MPM2017, which will soon be available on <http://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/>



2. INTRODUCTION

Sweden is the third-largest country in Western Europe and located on the Scandinavian Peninsula in northern Europe. It is bordered by Norway on the west and Finland to the east. In relation to its area, Sweden is one of the least populated countries in Europe, with a population of 10 million people. Since the industrialization in the 1900s many people have moved from the countryside to the cities of Stockholm, Göteborg, and Malmö. About 2 million are under the age of 18 years old and 18,5 % of the population is born in a foreign country. The official language is Swedish and the vast majority of Swedes also speak English to a very high level. Sweden has five official national minority languages and countless other languages are spoken by the diverse population. After Swedish, the most common are Finnish, Serbo-Croatian, Arabic, Kurdish, Spanish, German and Farsi.

Sweden is a parliamentary democracy and the constitution, dating from 1809, is based on four fundamental laws: the Instrument of Government; the Act of Succession; the Freedom of the Press Act (TF); and the Riksdag Act. The Swedish parliament is unicameral and elected by the Swedish people through proportional representation multi-member party lists for four-year term. The next Swedish general election is scheduled for Sunday 9 September 2018. The political preferences of the Swedish electorate are a clear left–right dimension and the political parties are generally grouped into two blocs. A left-of-centre bloc consists of the Social Democrats (S), the Left Party (V) and the Green Party (MP), and the centre–right bloc consists of the Conservative Party (M), the Centre Party (C), the Liberal Party (L) and the Christian Democrats (KD). Isolated from these two blocs is the right-wing national conservative Sweden Democrats (SD), which is Sweden's third-largest party.

The Swedish media landscape has undergone major changes and shifts in terms of regulation and actors and is dominated by public service broadcasters (SVT, SR, UR). The Swedish public service television company (SVT) has the widest range of programming of all TV companies in Sweden while the Bonnier family, the Stenbeck family and Schibsted are the largest private actors. All forms of media are open to private competition.

Sweden has a strong tradition in print media and characterised by a high newspaper penetration. There is a current shift in revenue structure among the Swedish media companies, mainly from financing through advertising to financing through subscriptions and pay walls. This is evident in the Swedish TV market in particular, where the revenues from subscriptions are increasing, while the revenues from advertising have slowed.

The dissemination and use of the media on digital platforms suggests that there is an infrastructure and that the population has access, the know-how and the financial means to use it. Sweden has a well-developed ICT infrastructure, affordable ICT access and high Internet usage.

In October 2017, the Public Service Committee presented its proposal for a new funding model for public service. The committee proposed an income-based tax and the introduction of the tax is proposed to take place in 2019. The public service reform is one example of a currently and most interesting formative momentum of the Swedish media landscape.

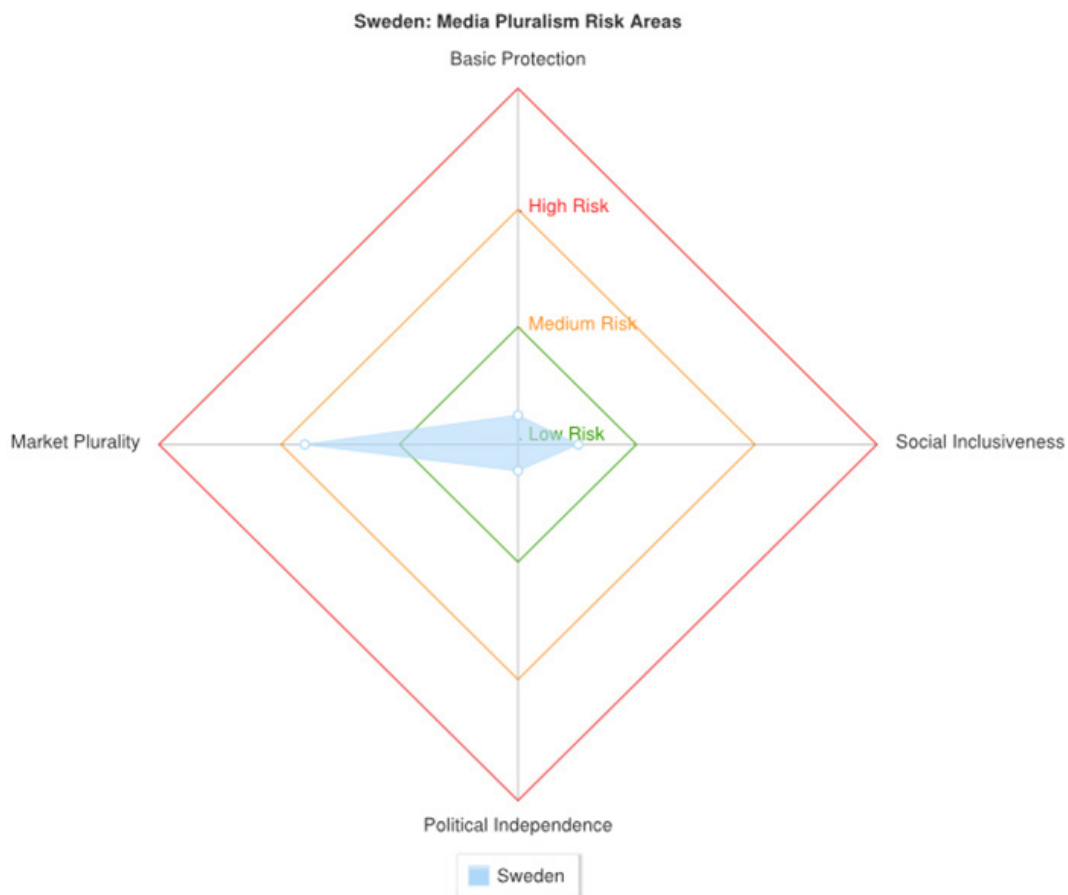


3. RESULTS FROM THE DATA COLLECTION: ASSESSMENT OF THE RISKS TO MEDIA PLURALISM

The implementation of the 2017 Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM2017) in Sweden shows a generally low risk for media pluralism in the country: 80% (16) of the indicators demonstrate low risk, 10% (2) of the indicators demonstrate medium risk, and 10% (2) of the indicators demonstrate high risk.

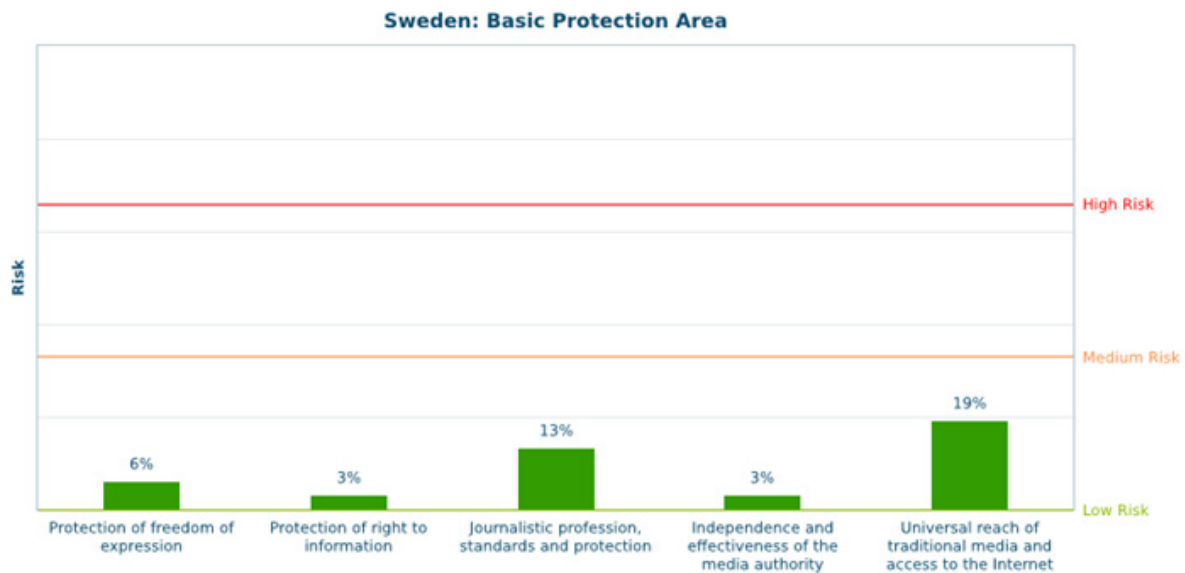
These high and medium risk are recorded in the Market Plurality area due to lack of specific thresholds in media legislation to prevent a high degree of concentration of ownership and the gradually “blurred line” between editorial and advertising content. The first high risk indicator is Concentration in media ownership (horizontal) and the second high risk indicator is Commercial & owner influence over editorial content. The two medium risk indicators are Transparency of media ownership and Cross-media concentration of ownership and competition enforcement.

On a general level, the MPM2017 instrument shows potential warnings predominantly due to risks in the market plurality area. But the overall state of media pluralism in Sweden should be considered good.



3.1 BASIC PROTECTION (9% - LOW RISK)

The Basic Protection indicators represent the regulatory backbone of the media sector in every contemporary democracy. They measure a number of potential areas of risk, including the existence and effectiveness of the implementation of regulatory safeguards for freedom of expression and the right to information; the status of journalists in each country, including their protection and ability to work; the independence and effectiveness of the national regulatory bodies that have the competence to regulate the media sector; and the reach of traditional media and access to the Internet.



Sweden scores low risk in the Basic Protection area, where all five indicators score between 3% and 19%.

The indicator Protection of freedom of expression scores a 6% risk.

The Swedish media system has a long regulatory tradition for media freedom. There are two constitutional acts relevant to free speech for the Swedish media: the Freedom of the Press Act (SFS 1949:105) and the constitutional law on Freedom of Expression (SFS 1991:1469). Together with the constitutional law that regulates individual freedom of expression, these acts constitute the foundation of the Swedish media system. Freedom of expression is explicitly recognised in the Swedish Constitution since 1991 and there are relatively few cases of violations to freedom of expression in Sweden in recent years. Instead of systemic violations, it is more correct to speak in terms of very few exceptional cases.

Sweden also scores low on the indicator that measures Protection of right to information. The legal provisions to protect the right to information are clearly defined. So are the restrictions on grounds of protection of privacy and confidentiality. Sweden follows the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (SFS, 1994:1219). There are, however, at the same time some indications of poor implementation even though it is not possible to judge whether deliberately or due to ignorance of the officials. In total, Sweden scores a 3% risk for this indicator.

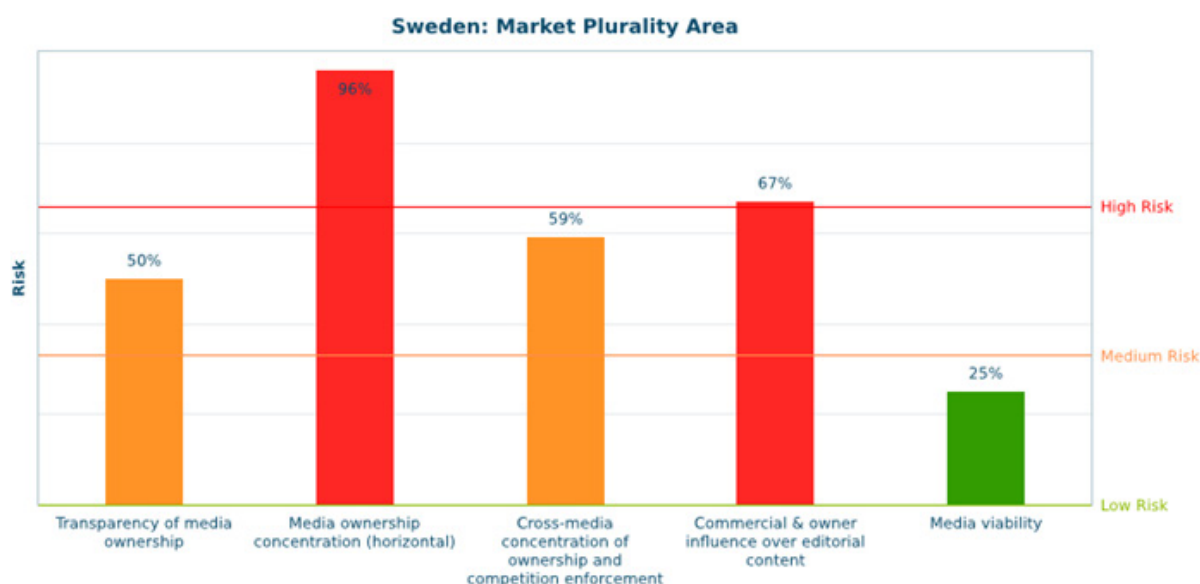
The indicator that addresses the protection and standards of the journalistic profession demonstrates a score of 13% risk. The general view is that the conditions the Swedish journalists operate in are among the most favourable in the world and there are no laws or self-regulatory instruments that prescribe who may practice journalism in Sweden. The composite risk level for this indicator is also generally low. However, there are some notable blemishes related to journalistic protection. Statistics from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention shows that more than 30% of the journalists in Sweden are harassed and threatened each year because of their work as journalists (BRÅ 2015). This is confirmed by the results from the Swedish Journalist Panel at the University of Gothenburg where 80% of the journalists also answered that email is the most common mediation of abusive comments and threats. Moreover, the results show that the more visible and profiled the journalist is, the more vulnerable to threats. Particularly vulnerable are the journalists working on crime and justice where 60% stated that they have been threatened in the last twelve months. (Löfgren-Nilsson & Örnebring 2015).

The indicator Independence and effectiveness of the media authority has a risk score of 3%. Sweden has effective regulatory safeguards for the independence of the Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority, limiting the risk of political and commercial interests (SFS, 2007:515; SFS, 2010:1062). The explicit objective of the media authority is to support freedom of expression, diversity, independence and accessibility.

Sweden scores low risk on the indicator Universal reach of traditional media and access to the Internet (19%). In addition to the Swedish Radio and Television Act (SFS 2010:696) and the constitutional law on Freedom of Expression, the universal coverage of both the PSM and private media is regulated in the broadcasting licences. Together with a well-developed infrastructure and affordable ICT access, this guarantees a universal coverage of traditional media and access to the Internet in Sweden.

3.2 MARKET PLURALITY (59% - MEDIUM RISK)

The Market Plurality indicators examine the existence and effectiveness of the implementation of transparency and disclosure provisions with regard to media ownership. In addition, they assess the existence and effectiveness of regulatory safeguards to prevent horizontal and cross-media concentration of ownership and the role of competition enforcement and State aid control in protecting media pluralism. Moreover, they seek to evaluate the viability of the media market under examination as well as whether and if so, to what extent commercial forces, including media owners and advertisers, influence editorial decision-making.



Overall, Sweden scores medium risk in the Market plurality area, where the five indicators score between 25% and 96%. Sweden scores high risk on the indicators Media ownership concentration (horizontal) (96%) and Commercial & owner influence over editorial content (67%).

The indicator Transparency of media ownership has a medium risk score (50%). Sweden has no specific regulations on transparency for media companies as such. Instead, all companies are included and constrained to follow the general regulations in the Swedish Law of Financial Relations, the so-called Transparency Act (SFS 2005:590) which requiring companies to be transparent about ownership structures and the Competition Act (SFS, 2008:579), which regulates the ownership concentration. This means that all Swedish companies are required to inform the Swedish Competition Authority about their ownership structure and that all Swedes can access the annual reports of the Swedish media companies, which also include information on ownership and are available on their websites.

Sweden scores high risk on the indicator Media ownership concentration (horizontal) (96%). The level of horizontal concentration of ownership in the Swedish media sector is regulated in the Radio and Television Act (SFS, 2010:696, chapt. 4, 11§, 15§ and chapt. 13, 27§-28§) and in the broadcasting licenses. Furthermore, the Swedish media sector is regulated on the basis of the general Competition Act. However, the Radio and Television Act contains no clearer criteria than the wording: “ownership may not change more than to a limited extent”. Thus, it is up to each control authority to assess what is really meant by “more than to a limited extent” (also note that this formulation has no constitutional support).



The indicator on Cross-media concentration of ownership and competition enforcement produces a medium risk score (59%).

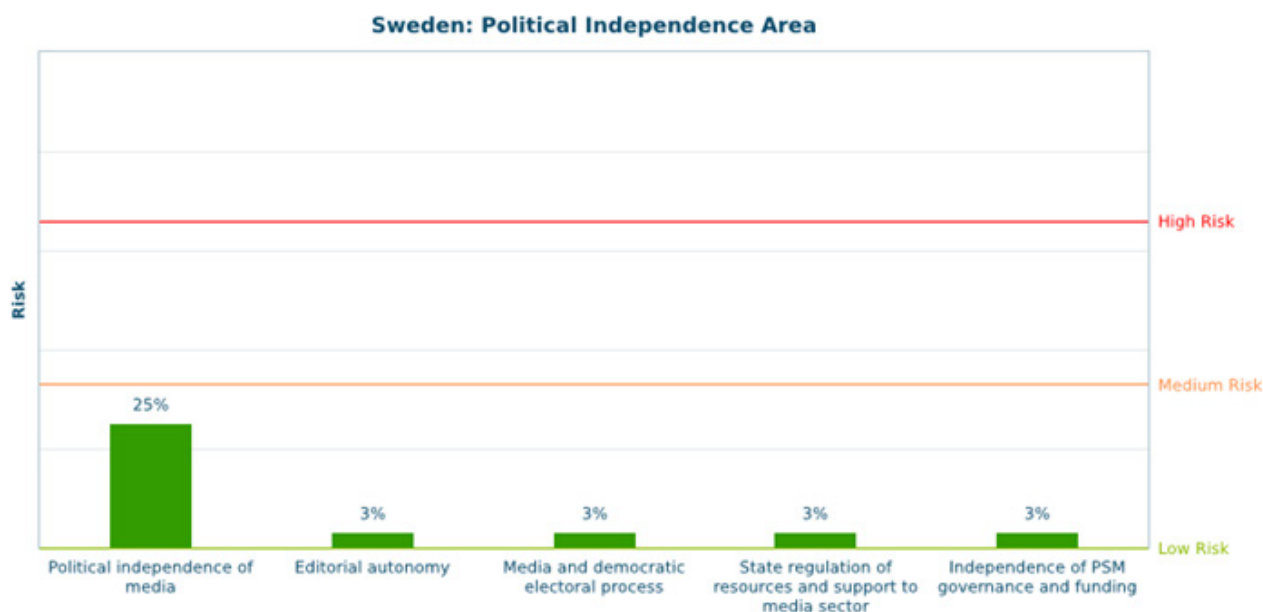
There are no specifications on cross-media ownership specifically aimed at media companies in Sweden. Instead, cross-media ownership is covered by the Swedish Competition Act (SFS 2008:579) through two main provisions: (1) Prohibition of anti-competitive cooperation; (2) Prohibition of the abuse of a dominant position. The Swedish Competition Act also contains restrictions on: (1) Anti-competitive sales activities by public entities; (2) Control of concentrations between undertakings.

Sweden scores high risk on the indicator Commercial & owner influence over editorial content (67%). On the one hand, all members of the Swedish Union of Journalists (SJF) follow professional rules. Violation of these rules can be notified within three months of the event at the journalists' ethics committee. On the other hand, one of the current most pressing issues concerns content marketing and where to draw the line between advertorials and editorial material. This is clearly a challenge for the Swedish media to manage as it creates difficulties for ordinary people to see the difference between advertorials and editorial material.

Sweden scores low risk on the indicator Media viability (25%). The Swedish TV industry is undergoing a major transformation. The audience is moving from traditional TV to online, and now also beginning to gain substantial revenue for online-based TV services. This means that a growing part of the revenues for Swedish television come from digital services. As a result of the fundamental and on-going restructuring of the advertising market, the business model of the Swedish newspaper industry has been put under severe pressure. Since 2012, the printed newspaper is no longer the largest advertising platform on the Swedish market – the Internet is. However, many Swedish newspapers have paywalls for online news, which helps explain why Sweden also has one of the highest rates of payment.

3.3 POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE (7% - LOW RISK)

The Political Independence indicators assess the existence and effectiveness of regulatory safeguards against political bias and political control over the media outlets, news agencies and distribution networks. They are also concerned with the existence and effectiveness of self-regulation in ensuring editorial independence. Moreover, they seek to evaluate the influence of the State (and, more generally, of political power) over the functioning of the media market and the independence of public service media.



Sweden scores low risk in the Political Independence area, where all five indicators score between 3% and 25%.

The indicator Political independence of media scores low risk in Sweden, but the 25% of risk makes it the biggest concern within this area. The relatively high score is related to the lack of regulation, rather than to actual malpractice.



Moreover, there are no current examples of conflicts of interest between media owners and ruling parties, partisan groups or politicians.

The indicator Editorial autonomy scores a low risk (3%). The Swedish Freedom of the Press Act (TF) regulates autonomy in appointing and dismissing editors-in-chief. Additionally, a large number of media and journalist organisations (Sveriges Radio AB (SR), Sveriges Television AB (SVT) och Utbildningsradion AB (UR), Publicistklubben (PK), Svenska Journalistförbundet (SJF), Svenska Tidningsutgivareföreningen (TU), Sveriges Tidskrifter) have jointly developed a number of self-regulatory/voluntary codes of conduct for stipulating editorial independence, which the majority of Swedish media are following. There are also no indications of informal political interference in appointments and dismissals of editors-in-chief or of parties or politicians trying to influence the editorial content.

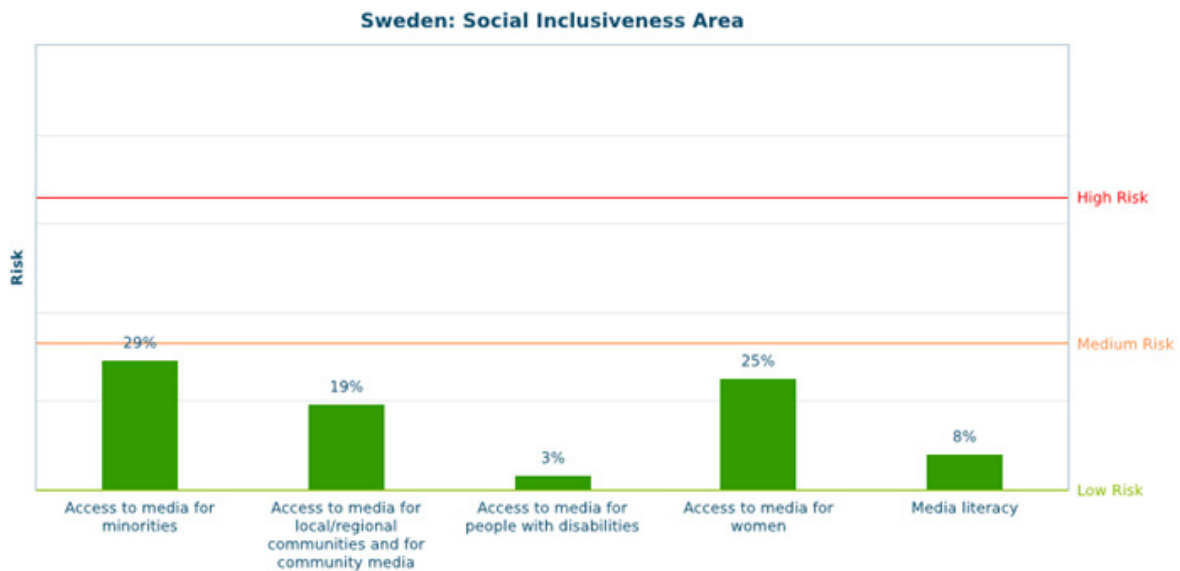
The indicator Media and democratic electoral process also has a low risk score (3%). The lack of concern in relation to this indicator is confirmed in a number of annual evaluations of Swedish media news content. The Media Election Survey conducted every parliamentary election in Sweden since 1979, shows that both PSM and commercial media generally offer proportional and non-biased representations (Asp 2011). The latest report shows that Swedish PSM channels are fair, balanced and impartial (Asp 2015). It also shows that plurality has decreased in the commercial channels and increased in the PSM channels between 2013 and 2014.

Sweden scores a low risk on the indicator State regulation of resources and support to the media sector (3%). The implementation of the so-called 'telecom package' in Swedish legislation is a high priority for the Swedish government. The legislation on spectrum allocation is also implemented effectively, but with one objection. According to the EU Commission's guidelines on the implementation of state support for the deployment of broadband state support can only be granted for the development of wired fiber-based or upgraded cable TV networks. The guidelines exclude, in time state support for the development of the mobile network infrastructure. A country with the kind of topography and demographics of Sweden, there is a need for greater flexibility in technology than what is the case today, to carry out the deployment of high speed broadband in the most efficient way possible. The direct state subsidies are distributed to media based on fair and transparent rules.

The indicator Independence of PSM governance and funding acquires a low risk score (3%). The broadcast licence regulates the operations of the Swedish PSM broadcast media in terms of independence from the state and from different economic interests. Media independence is also regulated by the Swedish Radio and Television Act and the Freedom of Expression Act. The appointment procedures are well defined in law and provide for the independence of the Swedish PSM boards and management. However, the procedure allows political oversight. The PSM boards are appointed by the PSM Management Foundation (Förvaltningsstiftelsen), which in turn is appointed by the government on the proposal from the political parties in the Swedish parliament. To avoid the general election to have an immediate impact in the PSM Management Foundation's composition, there has been agreed that the Chairman and six other members appointed by the government in the year that follows a the general election. The chairman appointed for four years, and the members in eight years. Thus, a newly appointed government may replace the chairman, but there is otherwise a delay in the board's composition. There are at the same time no indications or any examples of conflicts concerning appointments or dismissals of managers and board members of the Swedish PSM.

3.4 SOCIAL INCLUSIVENESS (17% - LOW RISK)

The Social Inclusiveness indicators are concerned with access to the media by various groups in society. The indicators assess regulatory and policy safeguards for community media, and for access to media by minorities, local and regional communities, women, and people with disabilities. In addition to access to the media by specific groups, the media literacy context is important for the state of media pluralism. The Social Inclusiveness area therefore also examines the country's media literacy environment, as well as the digital skills of the overall population.



On average, Sweden scores low risk in the Social Inclusiveness area, where the five indicators score between 3% and 29%.

Sweden scores low risk on the indicator Access to media for minorities (29%). The Swedish broadcasters have a major responsibility to take into account the needs of both physically challenged peoples as well as the national linguistic and ethnic minorities. According to the Swedish PSM Broadcasting Licence, the Swedish broadcasters are expected to give minority media access to media platforms and not least to improve accessibility.

In Sweden access to airtime on PSM channels for social and cultural groups are guaranteed in practice, but whether the access to airtime is adequate or not varies between social and cultural groups. The Swedish PSM broadcasting licenses contain conditions relating to airtime of the five minority languages: Sami, Finnish, Meänkieli, Romani Chib and Yiddish. The total airtime for Sami, Finnish, Romani and Meänkieli were 10 318 hours in 2016. With an agreement with SR and UR, SVT broadcast news in Finnish and Sámi. SR broadcasts news programs in Romani Chib and Meänkieli (Sveriges Televisions public service-redovisning 2016). One of the conclusions of the Swedish Media Inquiry was also that the obligation for PSM broadcasters to give airtime to the national minority language should also include the largest immigrant languages in Sweden as Arabic, Serbo-Croatian, Kurdish and Persian (SOU, 2016:30).

Sweden scores low risk on the indicator Access to media for local/regional communities and for community media (19%). In Sweden, the independence of community media encompasses both diversity in media content and media providers. PSM also has a specific agreement to offer a diverse range of programmes. These should reflect the diversity of the entire country and characterised by a high level of quality, versatility and relevance and be accessible to all.

Sweden has a strong tradition in policy-making on access to media content by people with disabilities. A short excerpt of the Swedish PSM Broadcasting Licence translated to English says: 11§ “SVT shall take into account the needs of persons with disabilities. However, the level of ambition in terms of opportunities for persons with disabilities to benefit from SVT’s range should be increased and the availability improved. The long term goal is that the entire range is made available to all citizens. The accessibility of programs for children and young people should be given priority. SVT will continue to prioritize their coverage including by the design of the broadcasts mind that background noise may impair the ability of people with hearing loss to take part of the supply. Programs will also be produced for specific audiences. SVT will have a dialogue with the groups concerned.” However, the policy is not explicit about



quality: you can for example turn on or turn off the subtitles but you cannot customise further. The indicator Access to media for people with disabilities scored low risk in Sweden (3%).

Sweden also scores low risk on the indicator Access to media for women (25%). The Swedish law on equal rights (SFS 2008:567) is reactive and can especially be used when individuals believe they have been disadvantaged. In addition to protection against discrimination there are also various promotions, such as access to a good education for everyone.

In the media sector, there are instead more explicit requirements for example that program content should promote diversity and equality (which is usually interpreted as a balanced representation of women and men). SVT has a comprehensive gender equality policy covering both personnel issues and programming content. At the same time, the data from the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) shows that the share of women as subjects and sources in news, as well as among news reporters, is still rather low in Sweden (around 30%).

The indicator Media literacy produces a low risk score in Sweden (8%). In Sweden the field of media and information literacy is currently in a state of transition. There is no overall national MIL policy. But there are at the same time a comprehensive policy work in the MIL area, albeit fragmented. The Swedish Media Council invests a lot in including informal education on media literacy in schools and libraries. For example, they produce information and pedagogical material to be used by parents, educators and people who meet children and young people in their profession. The majority of Swedish people use the Internet on a daily basis and have at least basic digital skills. At the same time, Sweden is struggling with the same challenges as many other countries in the EU, to really reach out with information and knowledge to peripheral groups (e.g. language, culture etc.).



4. CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the 2017 media pluralism data collection in Sweden shows an overall low risk for media pluralism in the country. However, there are particular issues that blemish the Swedish low risk score. Two such issues relate to the Market Plurality area.

The Swedish media system is concentrated and much of this can be explained by the small size of the Swedish media market. Albeit the high risk scores not imply a need for immediate policy changes, the lack of specific media concentration and ownership regulations is blatant.

Another issue relates to the Basic Protection area and the standard and protection of the journalistic profession. The composite score for this area is low risk. But if we look beyond the overall score it is apparent that the safety of a journalist is still not even fully guaranteed in a highly developed democratic country as Sweden. Instead, harassment and intimidation form very efficient ways to silence Swedish journalists.

Finally, the high risk score of Commercial & owner influence over editorial content is, if albeit not immediate, yet a possible area of concern in the near future. The blurring lines between editorial and advertorial content is a tenacious issue for media credibility and the future of journalism. Investments and business connections of media owners will most likely lead to increased self-censorship in the media. Thus, it is essential for the Swedish state to recognize this as one of the challenges to media and journalism transparency and media credibility.

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ANNEXE 1. COUNTRY TEAM

The Country team is composed of one or more national researchers that carried out the data collection and authored the country report.

First name	Last name	Position	Institution	MPM2016 CT Leader (please indicate with X)
Mathias	Färdigh	Researcher/Senior Lecturer	JMG, University of Gothenburg	x

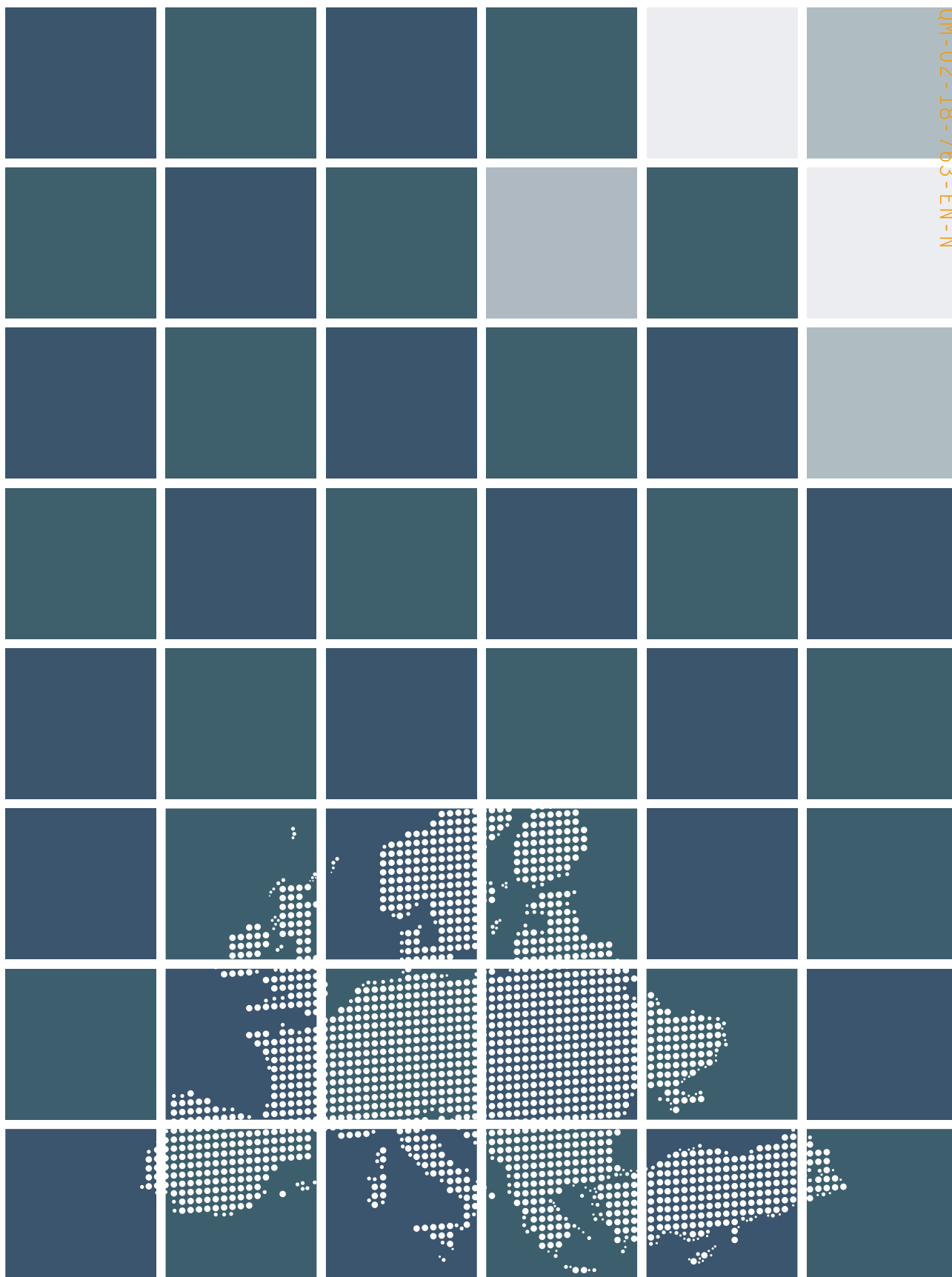
ANNEXE 2. GROUP OF EXPERTS

First name	Last name	Position	Institution
Tove	Carlén	Ombudsman	Swedish Union of Journalists
Oscar	Westlund	Professor	Oslo Metropolitan University
Jocke	Norberg	Strategist	Sveriges Television
Gunnar	Springfeldt	Former VP of Development	Stampen Media Group
Goran	Gavrilov	Representative of a broadcasters' association	Association of Private Broadcasters
Dragan	Sekulovski	Representative of a journalists' association	Association of Journalists of Macedonia
Igor	Micevski	Academic researcher	Research Institute on Social Development - RESIS





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