

MONITORING MEDIA PLURALISM IN THE DIGITAL ERA

APPLICATION OF THE MEDIA PLURALISM MONITOR IN THE EUROPEAN UNION, ALBANIA, MONTENEGRO, THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA, SERBIA & TURKEY IN THE YEAR 2020

Country report: The Netherlands

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Research Project Report

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. About the project	4
1.1. Overview of the project	4
1.2. Methodological note	4
2. Introduction	6
3. Results from the data collection: assessment of the risks to media pluralism	7
3.1. Fundamental protection (30% - low risk)	8
3.2. Market plurality (57% - medium risk)	9
3.3. Political independence (23% - low risk)	11
3.4. Social inclusiveness (32% - low risk)	12
4. Pluralism in the online environment: assessment of the risks	14
5. Conclusions	16
6. Notes	17
7. References	18
Annexe I. Country Team	
Annexe II. Group of Experts	

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1. About the project

1.1. Overview of the Project

The Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) is a research tool designed to identify potential risks to media pluralism in the Member States of the European Union and in candidate countries. This narrative report has been produced on the basis of the implementation of the MPM carried out in 2020. The implementation was conducted in 27 EU Member States, as well as in Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey. This project, under a preparatory action of the European Parliament, was supported by a grant awarded by the European Commission to the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF) at the European University Institute.

1.2. Methodological note

Authorship and review

The CMPF partners with experienced, independent national researchers to carry out the data collection and author the narrative reports, except in the case of Italy where data collection is carried out centrally by the CMPF team. The research is based on a standardised questionnaire developed by the CMPF.

In The Netherlands the CMPF partnered with Ofra Klein (EUI), who conducted the data collection, scored and commented on the variables in the questionnaire and interviewed experts. The report was reviewed by the 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). For a list of selected countries, the final country report was peer-reviewed by an independent country expert.

Risks to media pluralism are examined in four main thematic areas: Fundamental 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 Table 1).

Fundamental Protection	Market Plurality	Political Independence	Social Inclusiveness
Protection of freedom of expression	Transparency of media ownership	Political independence of media	Access to media for minorities
Protection of right to information	News media concentration	Editorial autonomy	Access to media for local/regional communities and for community media
Journalistic profession, standards and protection	Online platforms concentration and competition enforcement	Audiovisual media, online platforms and elections	Access to media for women
Independence and effectiveness of the media authority	Media viability	State regulation of resources and support to media sector	Media Literacy
Universal reach of traditional media and access to the Internet	Commercial & owner influence over editorial content	Independence of PSM governance and funding	Protection against illegal and harmful speech

Table 1: Areas and Indicators of the Media Pluralism Monitor

The digital dimension

The Monitor does not consider the digital dimension to be an isolated area but rather as intertwined with traditional media and existing principles of media pluralism and freedom of expression. Nevertheless, the Monitor also extracts digital-specific risk scores and the report contains a specific analysis of risks related to the digital news environment.

The calculation of risk

The results for each thematic area and indicator are presented on a scale from 0 to 100%.

Scores between 0 and 33%: low risk

Scores between 34 to 66%: medium risk

Scores between 67 and 100%: high risk

With regard to indicators, scores of 0 are rated 3% while scores of 100 are rated 97% by default, to avoid an assessment of total absence or certainty of risk.

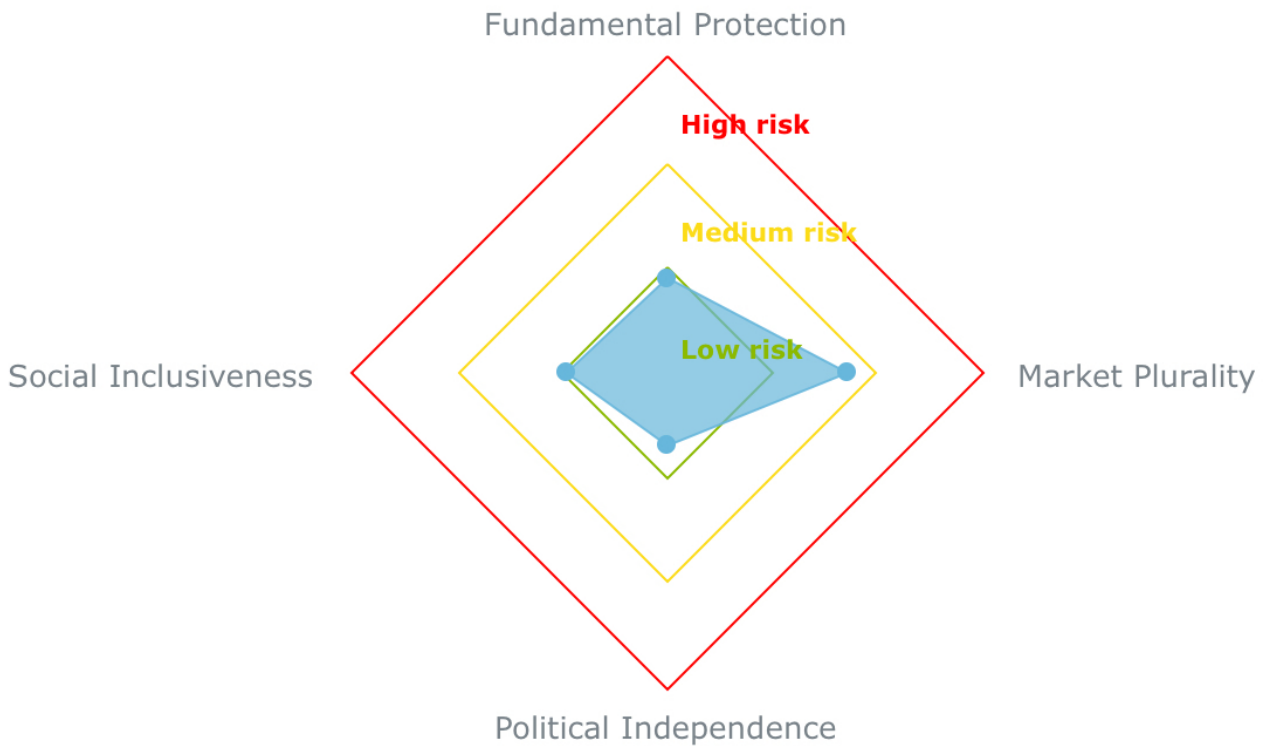
Disclaimer: The content of the report does not necessarily reflect the views of the CMPF, nor the position of the members composing the Group of Experts. It represents the views of the national country team that carried out the data collection and authored the report. Due to updates and refinements in the questionnaire, MPM2021 scores may not be fully comparable with previous editions of the MPM. For more details regarding the project, see the CMPF report on MPM2021, soon available on: <http://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/>.

2. Introduction

- **Country overview.** The Netherlands is a Western-European country with 17,4 million inhabitants (StatLine, 2021). With 517 inhabitants per square kilometre, the Netherlands is the second most densely populated country in the European Union (Compendium voor de Leefomgeving, 2020).
- **Languages.** The official languages spoken are Dutch and Frisian.
- **Minorities.** The Frisians are the only legally recognized minorities in the Netherlands. On February 1, 2021, 24.7 percent of the population in the Netherlands had a migrant background. This includes people who were born abroad and those who were born in the Netherlands and of whom at least one of their parents was an immigrant, the second generation migrants (CBS, 2021). Of the total Dutch population, 10.6 percent has a Western migration background and 14.0 percent has a non-Western migration background. Almost half (46.2 percent) of people with a migration background are second generation. The biggest groups hail from Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia, Germany and Poland (CBS, 2021).
- **Economic situation.** The Netherlands is a prosperous country. Due to the lockdown, the gross domestic product contracted for the first time in six years. After a strong recovery in the third quarter of the year, the overall reduction of the GDP was limited to 2.5 percent in 2020 (CBS, 2020).
- **Political situation.** The Netherlands is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy. The elections take place on the basis of proportional representation, with a low electoral threshold. Cabinets are usually formed by several parties. Since 2010, Mark Rutte has led cabinets of varying composition (EuropaNu, no date).
- **Media Market.** The Dutch media landscape is increasingly concentrated. The National Public Broadcasting Service (NPO) leads the television market, followed by Talpa and RTL as largest commercial broadcasters. The Dutch national public service media system is unique by its composition of different broadcasting organizations, aimed at different target groups. Talpa is the largest supplier on the radio market, and owns the only news agency, APN. The newspaper market is for 90 percent owned by the Flemish Mediahuis and DPG Media (CvdM, 2020a, p. 4). The journalistic sphere is characterized by a strong journalistic culture based on freedom of speech, editorial independence and self-regulation through journalistic associations and codes of conducts. News consumption is generally high at 85 percent (CvdM, 2020b, p. 3). Trust in media is relatively high in the Netherlands.
- **COVID-19.** In 2020, even before the COVID outbreak, the share of Dutch people who paid for online news increased from 11 percent in 2019 to 14 percent in 2020. The lockdown led to a temporary increase of the reach of television, radio, and news media (CvdM, 2020a, p.4). At the same time, revenues decreased due to lower incomes from advertisements (CvdM, 2020a, p. 5).
- The author of the report would like to thank the experts who have provided valuable feedback on a small number of questions from the monitor. The author takes responsibility for any mistakes made in the report.

3. Results from the data collection: assessment of the risks to media pluralism

The Netherlands: Media Pluralism Risk Areas



JS chart by amCharts



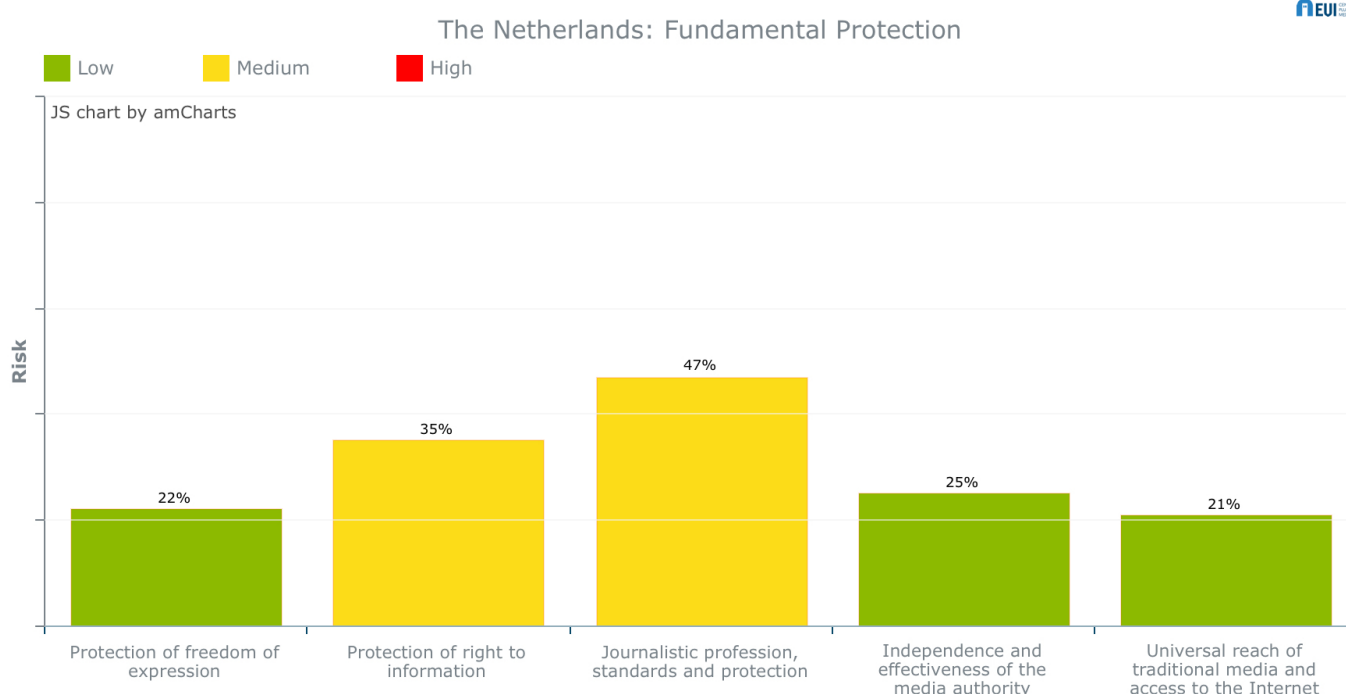
In the Netherlands, three of the four areas score a low risk.

- **Fundamental Protection (30%):** The Netherlands have a strong legal framework that ensures freedom of expression. The risk indicates that requests for administrative documents (WOB requests) were frequently late and/or incomplete. Moreover, the safety of journalists, and their economic position, was further under threat due to Covid-19.
- **Market Plurality** scores a medium risk (**57%**): There are few legal provisions ensuring disclosure of ownership details, and a lack of legal provisions to limit media concentration. The high risk factor indicates a high market concentration, as mentioned in the earlier. The MPM2021 signals a growing risk for media viability, as the Covid-19 crisis led to a decrease in advertising expenditure for news media.
- **Political independence** scores a low risk (**24%**): There is an absence of regulatory safeguards against conflicts of interest or control of media by parties, partisan group or politicians, but there is no indication of this in practice. The government emphasized the importance of the media during the pandemic and took several measures, such as a code of conduct to improve transparency of online political advertisements, to support the media sector.
- **Social Inclusiveness** has changed from medium to low risk (**32%**) compared to last year's monitor. This change is due to the inclusion of variables related to access to media for people with disabilities in this category. While access for people with disabilities has improved, much can still be done to make media more inclusive for these groups as well as for minorities and women.
- The **online indicators** score a low risk. There is no indication of arbitrary removing content online. Two

court cases on the removal of Covid-19 content ruled in favor of the platforms. A risk for online market plurality is that advertisement revenues increasingly go to social media platforms. No specific regulations against online hate speech and disinformation exist in the Netherlands. Internet penetration and digital skills are high.

3.1. Fundamental Protection (30% - low risk)

The Fundamental 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 competence to regulate the media sector, and the reach of traditional media and access to the Internet.



Fundamental Protection scores a low risk of 30%

Protection of freedom of expression scores a low risk (22%). In the Netherlands, freedom of expression derives from the constitution. Penal restrictions on defamation do not hinder the public expression of ideas. In the online environment, expressions are moderated based on community standards of platforms.

The **protection of right to information** scores a medium risk (35%). The Openness of Government Act (Wet Openbaarheid van Bestuur - W.O.B) regulates the public's right to access administrative documents held by public authorities. In 2020, two-thirds of WOB-request was handled too late and/or incomplete (Het Parool, 2021). The 'House for Whistleblowers' Act^[1] states that employers with more than 50 employees need a procedure for reporting suspicions of malpractices. On December 18, 2020, the bill to amend the House for Whistleblowers Act was submitted to the Raad van State (Loyens & Loeff, 2020). The amendment is meant to improve the position of whistle-blowers. The bill is however criticized by, for example, Transparency International Netherlands, which argues that the proposal for several reporting channels for whistle-blowers might lead to confusion. Furthermore, the amendment does not address the

defects of the external reporting institute, the House of Whistleblowers, which has been criticized for its low rate in handling cases (Rooijendijk, 2020; Loyens & Loeff, 2020).

Journalistic profession, standards and protection scores a medium risk (47%). A reason for the increase in risk compared to last year is that the current MPM included questions about anti-SLAPP legislation. Currently, there is no anti-SLAPP legislation in place in the Netherlands. An additional risk is an increase in violence against journalists. The Dutch National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security for the first time identified journalists as a target of serious threats and aggression in 2020. The reporting point PersVeilig received two reports of threats against journalists each week in 2020 (NVJ, 2020). News broadcaster NOS removed its logo from its vans because of aggression (Henley, 2020). Consequently, the Netherlands dropped a spot, and is now on the fifth place in the World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2020). On the positive side, the Netherlands has a trade union for journalists. The Dutch Association of Journalists (NVJ) had close to 8000 journalists as members in 2019 out of around 18,000 journalists in the Netherlands (NVJ, no date). The NVJ has a sound reputation, is very active in negotiating the position of journalists and raises issues and increases awareness about possible threats. The association has been actively trying to improve the working conditions of the increasing number of freelance journalists in the Netherlands. In 2017, almost 40 percent of independent journalists indicated that they could not make a living from their work (Brandenburg, 2017). Recently, the NVJ developed a tool that freelancers can use to negotiate their salary (NVJ, 2021).

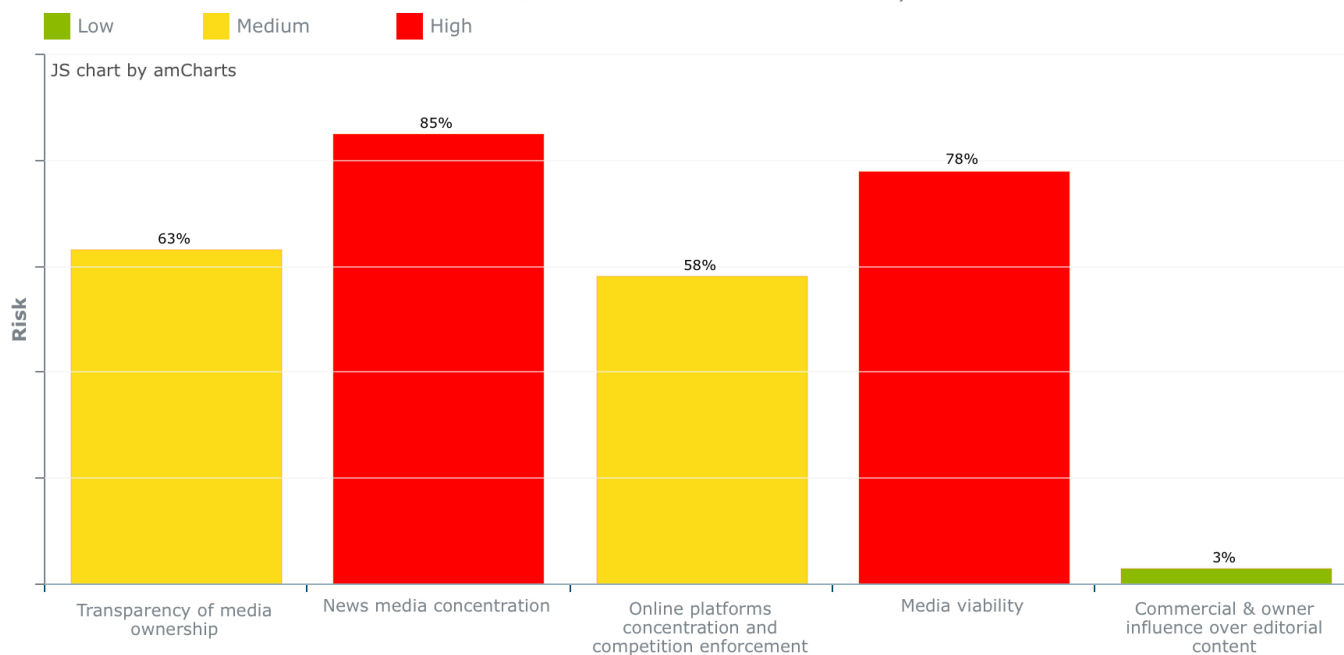
The indicator **independence and effectiveness of the media authority** (25%) scores a low risk. The independence of the authority is explicitly defined in an act covering independent administrative authorities^[2]. The Media Act^[3] limits the independence of the Commissariaat voor de Media (CvdM) in that certain powers are assigned by law to the minister responsible for media policies rather than to the CvdM. The CvdM is not completely politically independent, as the minister can overrule decisions by the authority in certain cases (Schultz et al., 2011, p. 143). The CvdM generally operates in a transparent way, partly due to statutory obligations to publish decisions and by statutory annual reporting obligations. At the end of 2019 and at the beginning of 2020, the newspaper NRC reported on several scandals within the CvdM (Nieber and Wester, 2019; 2020). This spurred a government investigation, after which the minister decided to restructure the media authority (NRC, 2020).

Universal reach of traditional media and access to the Internet scores a low risk (21%), with a high percentage of the population having access to radio, television and the internet.

3.2. Market Plurality (57% - medium risk)

The Market Plurality area focuses on the economic risks to media pluralism, deriving from lack of transparency and concentration of ownership, sustainability of the media industry, exposure of journalism to commercial interests. The first indicator examines the existence and effectiveness of provisions on transparency of media ownership. Lack of competition and external pluralism is assessed separately for the news media (production of the news) and for the online platforms (gateways to the news), considering separately horizontal and cross-media concentration; the concentration of online advertising market; and the role of competition enforcement. The indicator on media viability measures the trend of revenues and employment, in relation with GDP trends. The last indicator aims to assess risks to market plurality posed by business interests on production of editorial content, both from commercial and owners influence

The Netherlands: Market Plurality



Market Plurality scores a medium risk of 57%

Transparency of media ownership (63%) scores a medium risk. This is due to the absence of a law containing (news) media-specific provisions requiring disclosure of ownership details. The Media Act (2008) prescribes that commercial broadcasting organizations must provide the public with easy, direct and permanent access to a minimum of information. The Media Authority provides information on ownership structures of the main media groups operating in the Netherlands, but not always the beneficial owners.

News media concentration (85%) indicates a high risk. The market is concentrated both in terms of audience share as well as market share. There is no media legislation restricting ownership of media. The first three television providers have an audience concentration of 74% (CvdM, 2020a, p.29); and for the radio market, the first three players represent 73% (CvdM, 2020a, p.29). The Flemish Mediahuis and DPG Media own 90 percent of the Dutch newspaper market. Sanoma was taken over by DPG Media in 2020, thus increasing the market concentration (CvdM, 2020a, p. 4).

The indicator **online platforms concentration and competition enforcement** scores a medium risk (58%). There is a high penetration of social media usage in the Netherlands. Yet, news is still primarily accessed directly through news sites rather than via social media (CvdM, 2020b). Revenues from online advertisements increasingly go to social media platforms rather than news media (CvdM, 2020a, p. 6). There is no administrative authority or judicial body overseeing compliance with competition rules in advertising market.

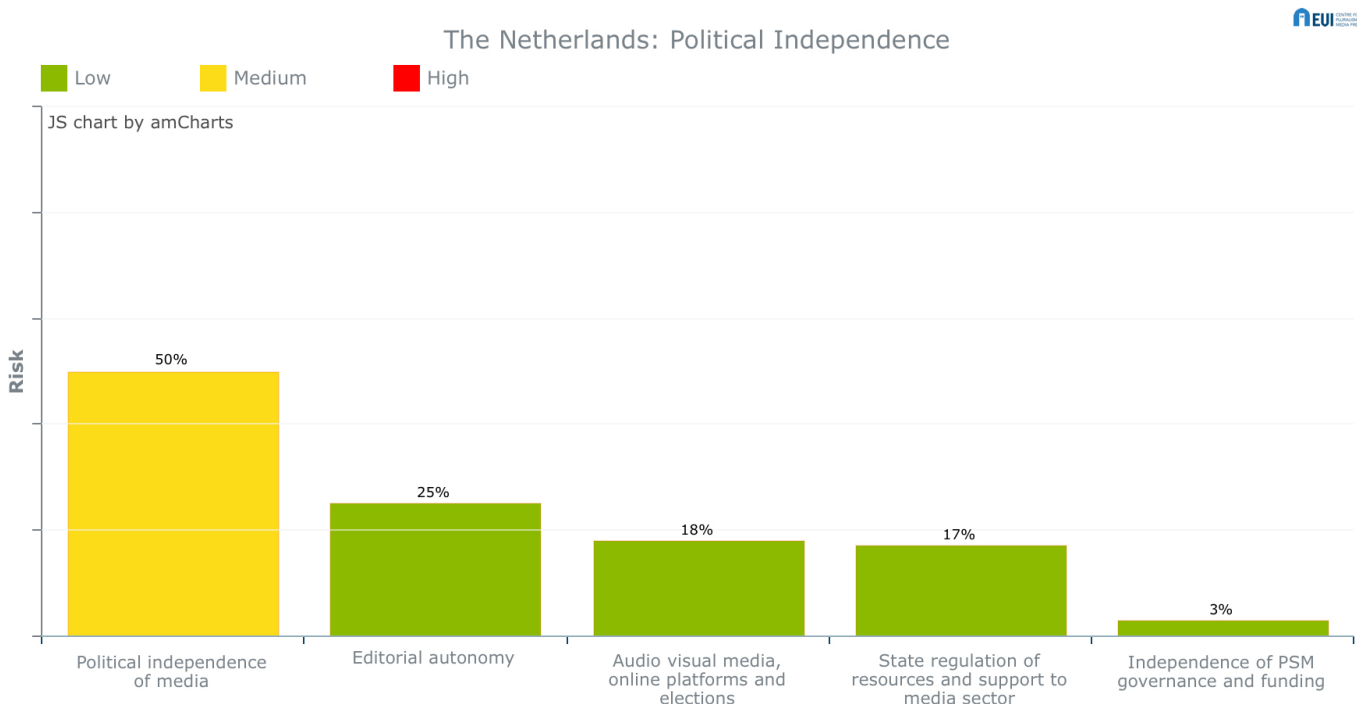
There is a high risk for the indicator **media viability** (78%). The risk level indicated is slightly higher than last year. Newspapers report on the negative effect of the lockdown on the revenues for all sectors (audiovisual, radio and newspapers). This is due to drops in advertising revenue, especially in the first half of 2020 (de Jong, 2020; NPO 2021; Hafkamp, 2020; Radio.nl, 2020). However, at the time of writing this report, no final numbers on revenues in 2020 could be found. The trade association for local public broadcasters (NLPO) expected that for September 2020, one in five local broadcasters would have to cease activities due to money problems (Hinke, 2020). Unemployment numbers for journalists went up in the beginning of 2020, but seemed to restore after July 2020 (Kivits, 2021). Freelancers reported getting less work too (Kivits, 2020). Several funds for freelancers and news organizations in the Netherlands were established (SvdJ, 2020).

Commercial & owner influence over editorial content scores a low risk (3%). The editorial

status adopted by the print media seeks to ensure journalistic independence (NVJ, 2008). The Media Act mandates public broadcasters offer their services independently of commercial and government influence. These status do not apply to online influencers whose business is driven by commercial communication for whom political topics is of growing relevance. The Media Act 2008 has rules for advertising, sponsoring and product placement for broadcasters. In 2020, the Media Act was revised for it to apply to the online environment (CvdM, 2020b).

3.3. Political Independence (23% - low risk)

The Political Independence indicators assess the existence and effectiveness of regulatory and self-regulatory safeguards against political bias and political influences over news production, distribution and access. More specifically, the area seeks 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. Furthermore, the area is concerned with the existence and effectiveness of (self)regulation in ensuring editorial independence and availability of plural political information and viewpoints, in particular during electoral periods.



Political independence scores a low risk of 24%.

The indicator **Political independence of media** scores 50%. This high risk assessment is primarily due to the absence of regulatory safeguards against conflicts of interest or to limit the direct and indirect control of media by parties, partisan group or politicians.

The indicator **Editorial autonomy** scores a low risk (25%). Editorial autonomy is protected by editorial statute, which is fully respected by all Dutch news publishers. Furthermore, the Press Council (Raad voor de Journalistiek) has a Code for Journalists which emphasizes journalistic independence (Code van e Raad voor de Journalistiek, 2019, 9). Some news media have drawn up their own in-house code.

The indicator on **Audio visual media, online platforms and elections** scores a low risk (18%). Measures against online disinformation were taken in advance of the March 2021 elections. More information about these measures can be found in the final section of the report. There are no legal provisions about fair representation of political viewpoints on PSM services. The Media Act (Mediawet, 2008; CvdM, 2020c)

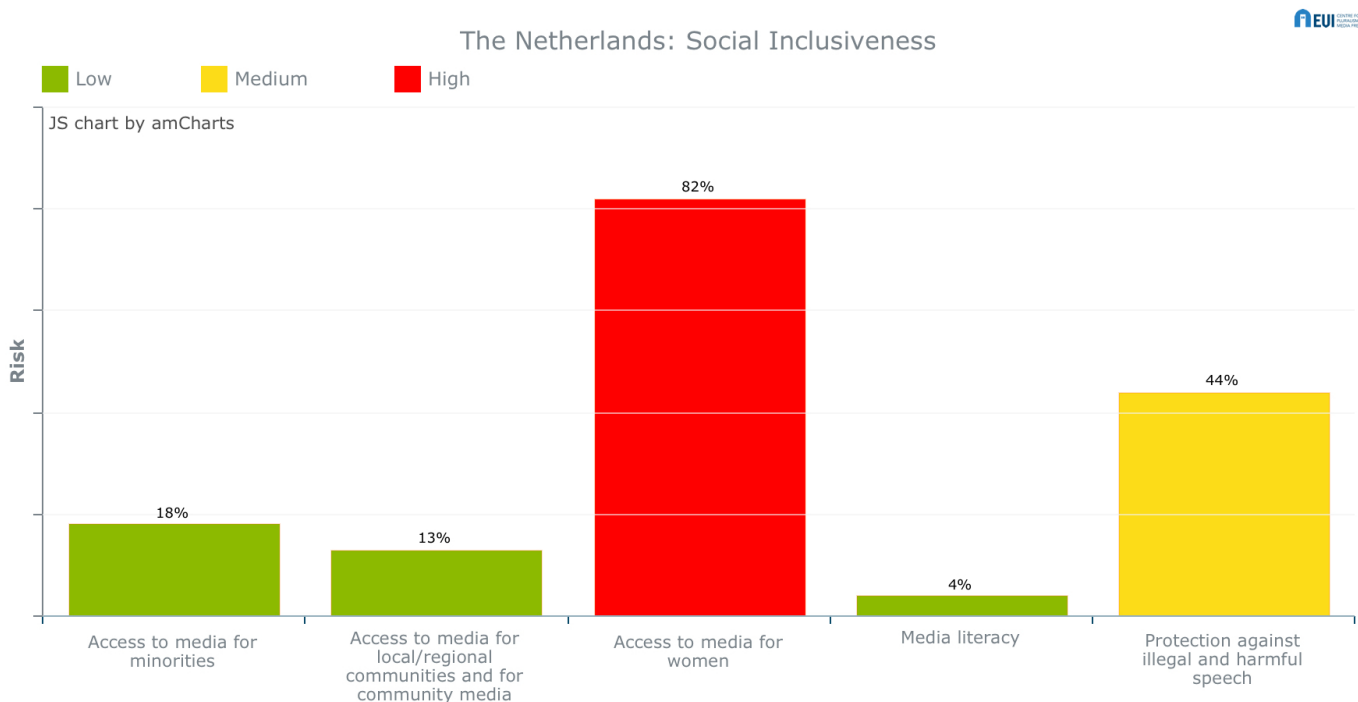
states that PSM must reflect public values and meet the democratic, social and cultural needs of Dutch society. The Dutch national public service media system is unique by its composition of different broadcasting associations, which are focused on diverse target groups. Currently, the CvdM is evaluating the applications of two new potential broadcasters, *Ongehoord Nederland* and *Omroep Zwart*. The Media Act (Mediawet, 2008; CvdM, 2020c) allocates airtime to political parties both between electoral campaigns and during electoral campaigns. There is no law restricting political advertising on PSM during electoral campaigns. However, media attention during the most recent election was not always proportional to the size of the party (Takken, 2021; Bormans et al., 2021; Aldering & Van der Pas, 2021).

State regulation of resources and support to media sector (17%) scores a low risk. Spectrum allocation, state subsidies and state advertisements are organized in a transparent manner. The government emphasized the importance of the media during the pandemic and took several measures to support the media sector. It offered leniency and financial measures to support media companies, self-employed journalists and freelancers in the media sector. Furthermore, the government used 2 million euros to support regional and local journalism and set up the temporary support fund for local journalism (Rijksoverheid, 2020a).

Similarly, the indicator **Independence of PSM governance and funding** (3%) scores a low risk. The Media act (Mediawet, 2008; CvdM, 2020c) provides fair and transparent appointment procedures for management and board functions in PSM, which guarantee independence from government or other political influence. The media law (Mediawet, 2008; CvdM, 2020c) prescribes transparent and fair procedures in order to ensure that the funding of PSM is adequate.

3.4. Social Inclusiveness (32% - low risk)

The Social Inclusiveness area focuses on the access to media by specific groups in society: minorities, local and regional communities, women and people with disabilities. It also examines the country's media literacy environment, including the digital skills of the overall population. In addition, for the 2021 edition of the MPM, a new indicator has been added to the Social Inclusiveness area in order to assess new challenges raising from the uses of digital technologies: Protection against illegal and harmful speech. Due to this modification of the indicators, comparison with previous editions of the MPM should be handled with extreme care.



Social inclusiveness scores a low to medium risk of 32%.

The indicator **Access to media for minorities** scores a low risk of 18%. This low risk percentage is primarily because of the access to media for legal minorities, the Frisians. The Frisians have their own regional broadcaster: Omrop Fryslân. The representation of other minorities scores a medium risk. While public broadcaster NPO has made a point of increasing representation, reports from Women Inc., the NPO Ombudsman and the NPO Expert Panel conclude that Dutch people of non-Western descent are still not well represented in the television programs of the public broadcaster (Kartosen-Wong, 2020; Gorter et al., 2020). The NPO acknowledges this shortcoming in their 2020 budgeting report (NPO 2019, p. 26). This indicator also includes the access to media for people with disabilities. The Media Act mandates that both public and commercial broadcasters must provide subtitles for Dutch audiovisual productions. The Mediawet 2020 includes changes to make television more accessible to people with visual or hearing impairments in the event of disasters or crises (Mediawet, 2008). Subtitles and spoken subtitles are available for almost all NPO programs, and audio description is available for some (NPO, no date). In 2020, Dutch sign language was officially acknowledged, and some additional programs will be made accessible through sign language (NOS, 2020; Markus 2021).

The indicator **Access to media for local/regional communities and for community media** scores a low risk (13%). In contrast with last year, one of the variables with respect to community media was coded as not applicable instead of no, as the Dutch Media Act does not consider community media as a distinct category. In contrast to many other countries, community media is not separate of public service broadcasting, it is part of it (Rutten et al., 2009, p.75). Due to this recoding, the risk has moved from medium to low risk. Yet, the risk for local media is rather high due to the underfunding. In 2016, about 30% of local public broadcasters were struggling financially. In the past years (2016-2018), 28 percent of local media had insufficient funds (CvdM, 2019a). As described before, COVID also affected local media.

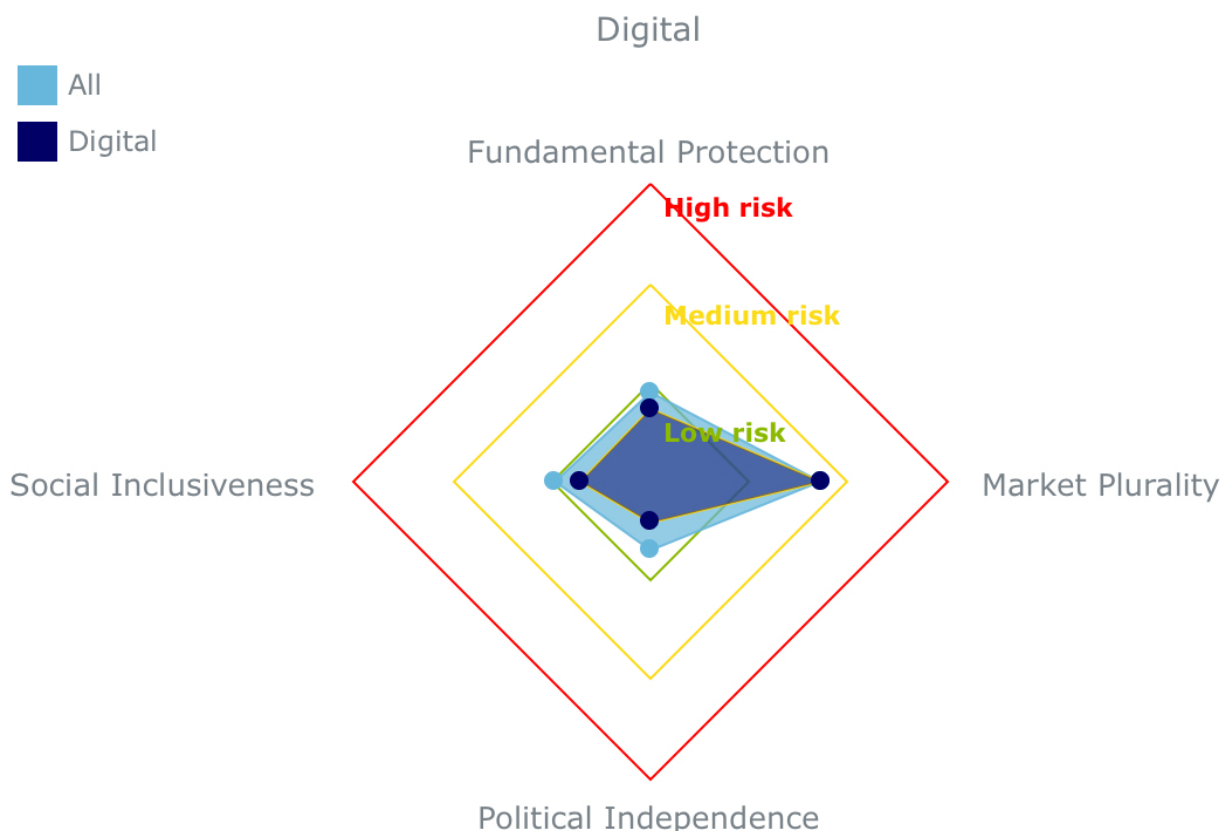
Access to media for women scores a high risk of 82 percent. The number of female editors in chief for newspapers, and the number of female executives or board members at broadcasting companies is low in the Netherlands. Men are still more often portrayed and quoted in television items and newspapers, on the radio and on news sites (69 percent is male, 26 percent is female). Women are less often invited as experts (only in 23 percent of cases) and are less often reporting the news (1 out of 4) (Gorter et al., 2020; CvdM 2019b). During the March 2021 election, almost all party leaders who received less media attention than would be expected based on the size of their party were women, while party leaders who received more media attention than would be expected were men (Aaldering & Van der Pas, 2021).

Media literacy scores a low risk of 4 percent. The Netherlands has an active policy of digital media literacy. The government has actively tried to improve media literacy by setting up the expertise center Mediawijzer.net. In addition, in its combat to disinformation during the 2021 election, the Dutch government emphasized the importance of digital literacy (Rijksoverheid, 2020b)

Protection against illegal and harmful speech has a medium risk (44%), due to the underdeveloped policies in the Netherlands against disinformation and harmful online speech. More information about this indicator can be found in the next section.

4. Pluralism in the online environment: assessment of the risks

The Netherlands: Media Pluralism Risk Areas



JS chart by amCharts



Several indicators in the monitor of this year addressed the digital environment.

For the indicator of **Fundamental Protection**, the online expression has the same constitutional protection as offline communication. Online expressions are subject to community standards of social media platforms. Many social media platforms stick to the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation. Dutch organisations were originally part of Facebook's fact-checking project but pulled out as they disagreed on the exemption of politicians from fact-checking (RTL Nieuws, 2019). The fact-checking of Dutch Covid-19 content was carried out by foreign fact-checkers (Hijink & Wassens, 2020). During the pandemic, online platforms tried to reduce the spread of misleading information by prioritising content from the government and adding links to post about Covid-19 to government web pages (Hijink & Wassens, 2020). Both Facebook and YouTube were sued by users who suspected that the removal of their Covid-19-related content had violated their right to freedom of expression. In both cases, the court ruled in favour of the platforms (Rechtbank Amsterdam, 2020a; 2020b). While the state generally refrains from blocking arbitrary content, the Europol Directive has provided a basis for Dutch police to refer content that can violate community standards to social media platforms. There is no concrete evidence of abuse or violations. The universal reach of traditional media and access to the Internet (21%) scores a low risk. The percentage of the population covered by broadband is close to 100. Internet connection speed is high, and safeguards against net neutrality are in place.

In the **Market Plurality** area, digital media show no discrepancies with offline media. The same lack of media-specific ownership disclosure legislation applies to online news media. Deloitte expects that online advertisements decreased with 25 percent in the second quarter of this year and an average decrease of 20 percent for the year 2020 (Kist, 2020). Revenues from online advertisements go to Google and Facebook rather than Dutch news (CvdM, 2020a, p. 6). There is no administrative authority or judicial body (e.g. media

and/or competition authority) overseeing compliance with competition rules in advertising market. Neither is there a form of taxation on online platforms (Koethenbuerger, 2019). The indicator on online platforms concentration and competition enforcement scores a medium risk (58%). There is a high penetration of social media usage in the Netherlands. In 2020, 48 percent of the Dutch population directly went to news sites, compared to 26 percent who accessed them via social media (CvdM, 2020b). Younger generations increasingly consume news through social media. Newspapers also increasingly use more digital means (Piersma, 2021). The renewed Media Act of November 2020 has included regulation prohibiting disguised advertisement online. Video platform services, unlike linear media services and on-demand media services, are not editorially responsible for the videos offered on the platform. The Renewed Media Act states that they must take appropriate measures to ensure that it is clear to users of the platform if advertising, sponsorship or product placement is present in a video (CvdM, 2020c).

In the **Political Independence** area, digital native news media have a low risk at being politically controlled. The Code for Journalists by the Press Council states that “this code applies to all forms of journalism regardless the carrier or medium” (Code van de Raad voor de Journalistiek, 2019, 8). Some news outlets also have more specific guidelines for social media usage (NOS, no date; NRC, no date). A minor scandal has occurred related to excessive data collection by several political parties and Facebook has also removed advertisements from one political party due to disinformation (Snelderwaard and Van den Berg, 2020). In the run-up to the 2021 elections, a Dutch code of conduct (Dutch Code of Conduct on Transparency of Online Political Advertisements, 2021) was signed by 11 political parties and 4 internet services as to commit to transparency with respect to online advertisements. Regulation on online microtargeting is not (yet) in place. Microtargeting in elections does take place to a certain extent, but varies strongly per party, as the 2021 elections show (ICDS, 2021).

In the **Social Inclusiveness** area, digital competencies scores well. The Netherlands has an active policy to promote media literacy. The percentage of people with basic or above basic digital skills is high (79%). The Dutch government expresses support for the EU's Action Plan Against Disinformation and recently created a Dutch code of conduct^[4]. Further steps aimed at increasing the monitoring of online disinformation and creating a webpage for people to get more information about detecting disinformation (Rijksoverheid, 2020b). During the pandemic, several conspiracy theories were circulating online in the Netherlands. A study by IPSOS showed that the majority of the population did not believe in conspiracies surrounding the virus (IPSOS, 2020). Similarly, the 2020 Digital News Report by Reuters and the Dutch Media Authority (CvdM) stated that worries about fake information is the lowest in the Netherlands out of 40 countries included in the study (CvdM, 2020b). Similarly, research by the Rathenau Institute (2019) claims that disinformation in the Netherlands is a limited problem. There is not a specific law against online hate speech, as existing provisions of freedom of expression are transposable to online expression.

5. Conclusions

The Netherlands score well on the four criteria included in the media monitor.

Fundamental Protection: The risk for the criteria of fundamental protection has slightly increased in 2020. This is partly due to the handling of access to information requests (wob requests) and the increase in aggression against journalists. This trend continues: already in the first three months of 2021 *PersVeilig* received 73 reports of aggression/threats by journalists (Nieber, 2021).

- With respect to right to access to information, steps should be taken to improve how quickly people get access to documents and information in such documents should be more transparent.
- Anti-SLAPP legislation could improve the position of journalist.

Market Plurality: Of the four indicators, the highest risk is in the field of media viability.

- Regulation could improve the transparency of media ownership to the public, and an administrative authority or judicial body overseeing compliance with competition rules online and offline could reduce the risk.
- In line with other countries, a form of taxation of online platforms could be introduced.

Political Independence: In 2020, there were positive developments with the renewal of the media act and the Dutch code of conduct to improve transparency of online political advertisements.

- The code of conduct formed a guideline, which was not signed by all parties. Actual legislation could be considered.

Social Inclusiveness: In recent years, there has been an active policy of diversity of access to media. Yet, this is not always visible in practice. Sign language has received more attention during the COVID pandemic, due to the press conferences with sign interpreters.

- More and more television programs offer subtitles, but adding sign language could make these programs more accessible.

6. Notes

- [1] <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/03/26/bestuurders-weg-om-oude-zaken-a39547> 08
- [2] <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0020495/2020-01-01>
- [3] Media Act 2008, <https://www.cvdm.nl/>
- [4] <https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/richtlijnen/2021/02/09/nederlandse-gedragscode-transparantie-online-politieke-advertenties&data=04|01|marie.palmer@eui.eu|28674460e381492a2e2b08d93f9e3f0e|d3f434ee643c409f94aa6db2f23545ce|0|0|637610771175284856|Unknown|TWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0=|1000&sdata=TMgr4+tr+2dQWCeBaFFWw5ZQdGTp6DNU/uv6yiZDDP8=&reserved=0>

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Annexe I. Country Team

First name	Last name	Position	Institution	MPM2021 CT Leader
<i>Ofra</i>	<i>Klein</i>	<i>PhD Researcher</i>	<i>EUI</i>	X

Annexe II. Group of Experts

The Group of Experts is composed of specialists with a substantial knowledge and recognized experience in the field of media. The role of the Group of Experts was to review the answers of the country team to 16 variables out of the 200 composing the MPM2021. Consulting the point of view of recognized experts aimed at maximizing the objectivity of the replies given to variables whose evaluation could be considered as subjective, and therefore to ensure the accuracy of the final results of the MPM. However, it is important to highlight that the final country report does not necessarily reflect the individual views of the experts who participated. It only represents the views of the national country team that carried out the data collection and authored the report.

First name	Last name	Position	Institution
<i>Hans</i>	<i>Snijder</i>	<i>Supervisory board member</i>	<i>AVROTROS</i>
<i>Marcel</i>	<i>Betzel</i>	<i>Policy advisor</i>	<i>Commissariaat voor de Media</i>
<i>Tom</i>	<i>Nauta</i>	<i>Director</i>	<i>NPD Nieuwsmedia</i>
<i>Inge</i>	<i>Graef</i>	<i>Associate Professor of Competition Law</i>	<i>Tilburg University</i>
<i>Edmund</i>	<i>Lauf</i>	<i>Project manager</i>	<i>Commissariaat voor de Media</i>
<i>Paddy</i>	<i>Leerssen</i>	<i>PhD candidate in Information Law</i>	<i>University of Amsterdam</i>

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