

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 2021

Country report: Slovenia

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Research Project Report

Issue -
June 2022

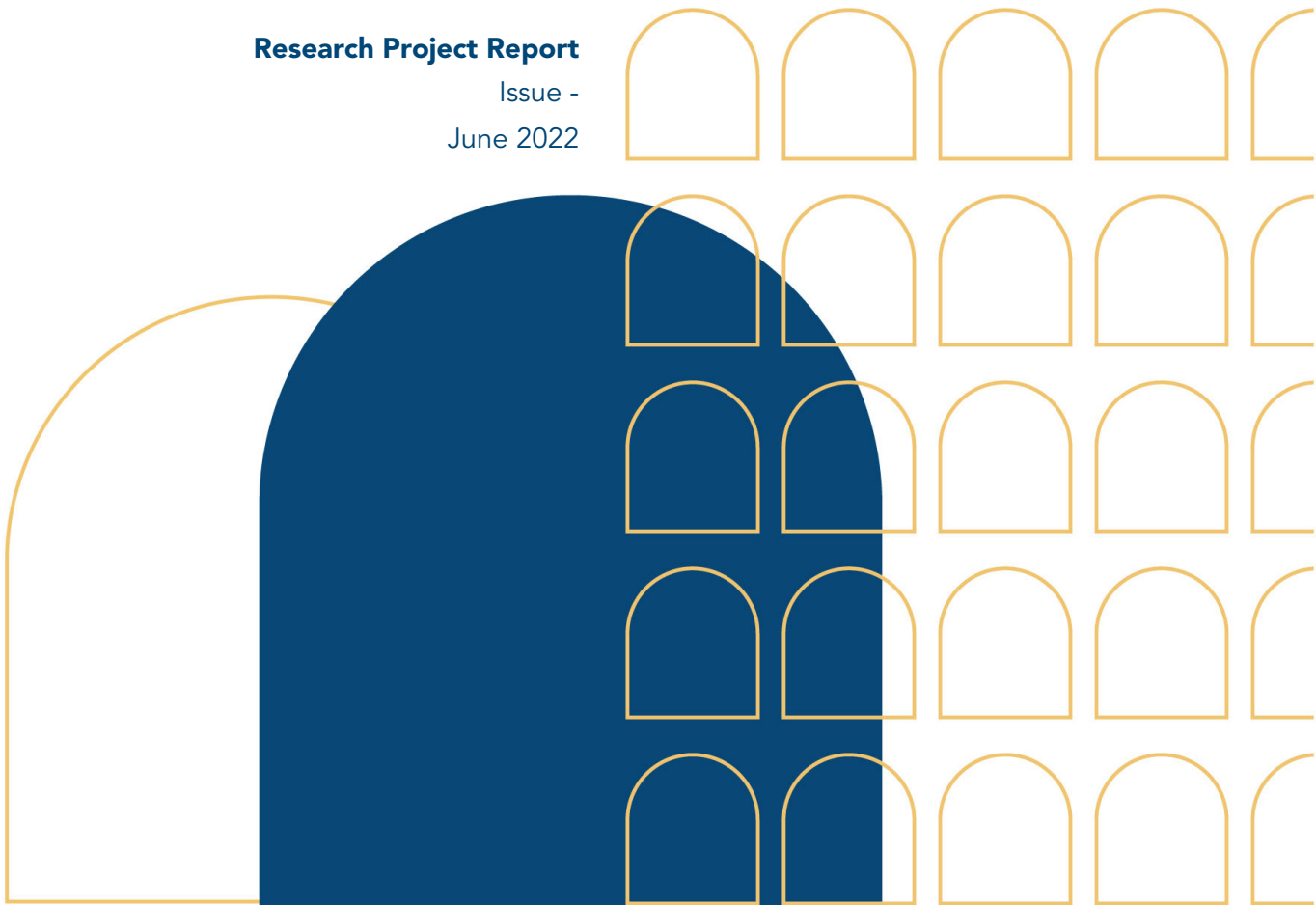


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Published by

European University Institute (EUI)

Via dei Roccettini 9, I-50014

San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)

Italy

ISBN:978-92-9466-305-4

doi:10.2870/73200



With the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. The European Commission supports the EUI through the EU budget. This publication reflects the views only of the author(s) and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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 2021. 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 notes

Authorship and review

The CMPF partners with experienced, independent national researchers to carry out the data collection and to 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 that was developed by the CMPF.

In Slovenia the CMPF partnered with Marko Milosavljevic and Romana Biljak Gerjevic (University of Ljubljana), 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 being intertwined with the traditional media and the 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 and 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, in order 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, MPM2022 scores may not be fully comparable with those in the previous editions of the MPM. For more details regarding the project, see the CMPF report on MPM2022, available on: <http://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/>.

2. Introduction

- **Population:** The Republic of Slovenia covers an area of 20.271 km² and has a population of 2.108.708 (SURS 2021).
- **Languages and minorities:** The official language is Slovenian, while in areas where the Italian and Hungarian national minorities are densely populated, Italian and Hungarian are also official languages. There are three officially recognised minority groups: Hungarian (0.3%), Italian (0.1%) and Roma group (0.1%). Ethnic communities from the former Yugoslavia are also present, but they do not enjoy minority rights, even though their share of the population is larger than the share of officially recognised minority groups; i.e. Serbs (2%), Bosnians (1,6%) and Croats (1.8%) (EACEA 2021).
- **Economic situation:** While the European Commission's (EC) projection indicated the Slovene GDP would increase by 6.9% in 2021, Slovene data indicates it increased by 8.1% (SURS 2021b). The EC mentioned high inflation, which averaged 2% in 2021, and was mainly driven by energy prices and prices of non-energy goods and services. "Growth in the first three quarters was strong across all components, especially investment. Imports increased more than exports, leading to a negative contribution from net exports," the EC states, adding the 2021 GDP exceeded its end 2019 level in the third quarter (European Commission 2021). Later, the National Institute of Macroanalysis and Development (IMAD) lowered its September 2021 forecast for this year's economic growth (4.7%) to 4.2% due to the consequences of the Ukrainian crisis. In 2023, the growth is expected to be 3%, and that is also lower than the 2021 autumn's estimate, while in 2024, it is expected to reach 2.8%. The European Commission's forecast in its latest assessment, published before the war in Ukraine, was lower and may be further reduced as the war has increased economic risks. The reduction in the forecast was explained by the European Commission in particular by rising prices and supply disruptions, but nevertheless, strong consumption growth and high investment growth are expected (Lončar 2022).
- **Political situation:** Slovenia is a democratic republic with National Assembly as the highest legislative body. Its polarised political space with a clear right-left divide was shaken in recent years by the success of centre liberal parties (Rak, Bulatović and Zupanič 2018), formed around the central figures of so-called "new faces" and popping up before every parliamentary election. The contemporary political landscape in Slovenia is characterized by a high number of small parties, the prevalence of coalition politics and instability. In parliamentary elections normally dozens of political parties are vying for seats in parliament, some of them newly formed.
- **Media market:** The Slovenian media market is small and shaped by high ownership concentration, often tangled in unclear ownership structures. There is a lack of publicly available and precise information on the advertising revenues and market shares of individual media outlets. The circulation of the country's daily newspapers is constantly decreasing, partly due to the changing consumer patterns and partly due to the shrinking trend of distribution infrastructure (Kučić 2020b). Another problem is the growth of the online and television news network, which is controlled by the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), which led the Slovenian government from 2020 until 2022. The leader of the party Janez Janša, who has been a Prime Minister for three times, is a right-wing populist leader with close ties to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and an avid supporter of Donald Trump (The Brussels Times 2020). He has been at the helm of SDS for almost 30 years (Cirman and Vuković,

2021). A significant number of his party members, including the most visible party figures, are co-owners of a party controlled TV network Nova24TV, together with print or online political magazines (Demokracija, Škandal24) and a multitude of micro local websites (Vežjak 2020). In 2018, 13 of them could be identified, and in a few years their number has grown to “more than 30” (Mekina 2022). Several party-friendly media outlets are owned or partly owned by Hungarian investors linked to the Hungarian pro-government media and the Hungarian government (Kučić 2019). Hungarian owners with links to Viktor Orbán also purchased one of the main commercial TV stations, Planet TV, which was established in the time of one of the previous Janša’s governments and owned by Telekom, the state-controlled national telecommunications operator. These foreign investments are not problematic as such, but they are frequently described as geopolitical investments aimed at enhancing the strength and popularity of Janša and SDS (Kingsley 2018, Bayer 2021, Ozsvath 2021).

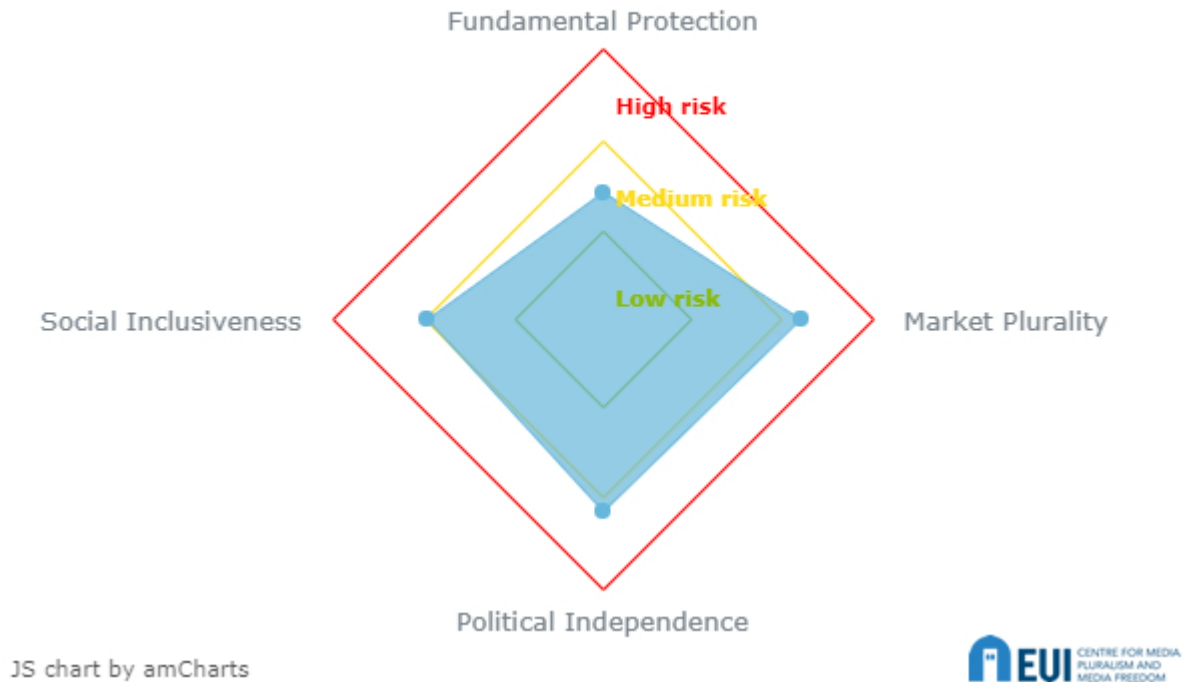
- **Media legislation:** The media legal framework remains outdated and not fit for the contemporary digital communication environment. Two of the three most important media laws were adopted in 2001 and 2005, namely the Mass Media Act and the Act on RTV Slovenia, respectively, and have not been subjected to major changes lately. The audiovisual law was, however, reviewed and aligned with the 2018 Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMS) in December 2021, which is more than a year after the deadline. The first AVMS bill was adopted in June 2021 but vetoed immediately after by the upper chamber of the Parliament – primarily because of controversies around the introduction of an industrial levy intended to support European audiovisual production. The levy advocated by the Ministry of Culture would also apply to non-domestic AVMS providers but put the highest financial burden on domestic AVMS providers. After the failed government proposal, a group of opposition deputies proposed a changed version of the bill without the contested levy and with some other modifications. That version was then adopted. There is no law that can prevent smear campaigns and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), which are exercised by visible Slovenian political figures against journalists. There were also high-profile cases of political abuse of the Law on the Slovenian Press Agency (ZSTAgen, adopted in 2011 and minimally amended in 2021). The Slovenian Press Agency (STA) reached the verge of financial collapse because the government refused to allocate the legally mandated state funding (Bayer 2021b). This was criticized by representatives of the EU bodies and several other international organizations and professional associations. Among those that called on the Slovenian government to safeguard STA the necessary funding and refrain from pressures on media were Dunja Mijatović, CoE Commissioner for Human Rights; Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission; and Věra Jourová, EU Commissioner for Values and Transparency. Also, in December 2021, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in Slovenia, which also included concerns and calls regarding pressure on the national public broadcaster RTV Slovenia and the atmosphere of hostility in the country (Žerjavič 2021).
- **Regulatory environment:** In October 2020, the Slovenian government proposed the draft law (Zakon o Javni agenciji Republike Slovenije za trg in potrošnike in Javni agenciji Republike Slovenije za finančne trge, predlog, 2020), which envisaged to merge the national regulatory authority responsible for audiovisual media services (AKOS) with five other regulators, namely the Energy Agency, Competition Authority, the Traffic Safety Agency, the Civil Aviation Agency, and the Railway Agency. According to the government’s proposal, the new authority would be called the Public Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for the Market and Consumers. AKOS (2020) claimed the bill was in conflict with several EU directives, including the AVMSD with strong legal safeguards of national regulatory authorities’ independence. Despite the fact that all the involved agencies opposed the merger, the government insisted on the continuation of the legislative procedure with probably an intention to subordinate these agencies and replace their governing bodies. The bill was debated in the National

Assembly on 24 April 2021, but was not adopted.

- **COVID-19:** Slovenia entered 2021 in circumstances of a proclaimed national epidemic, which lasted until mid-June and was not proclaimed again in the second part of the year. The country was added to the CIVICUS human rights watchlist based on the assessment that COVID-19 measures were “used as a pretext to restrict civic freedoms”, freedom of association was threatened as civil society organisations were “increasingly targeted”, and “journalists repeatedly attacked by then Prime Minister as media freedoms decline” (CIVICUS 2021). The Constitutional Court ruled in July 2021 that the government decrees restricting movement and association in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 were in the part in which they prohibited rallies or limited them to up to 10 participants, unconstitutional (STA 2021g).
- **War in Ukraine:** Unlike some countries, especially the Baltic ones and Poland, Slovenia did not take any immediate action towards the Russian media outlets at the beginning of the Russian invasion in Ukraine. The country followed the Regulation (2022/350) and a Decision (2022/351) by the Council of the European Union effectively banning RT (and its subsidiaries) and Sputnik based on Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which came into force on 2 March 2022. Based on these two acts, Slovenian regulator AKOS joined several NRA's from EU member states who had not taken any prior measures to suspend the retransmission of Russian TV channels. AKOS communicated the EU regulation and decision on its website, and reminded players that these instruments are of immediate and direct application (AKOS 2022).

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

Slovenia: Media Pluralism Risk Areas



In general, the findings of the MPM2022 implementation indicate an overall high risk to media pluralism in Slovenia, similar to the one identified in MPM2021. Even though some monitored areas show a slight improvement, these changes can also be attributed to modifications in the MPM questions.

Fundamental Protection is not the only area anymore to score medium risk to media pluralism. It scored 47% in 2021, compared to 48% in 2020. **Social Inclusiveness** scored 5% less than in 2020 and therefore presented a medium risk to media pluralism in 2021 as well (with 65% in 2021, compared to 70% in 2020). **Market Plurality** scored 73% in 2021 (76% in 2020), while **Political Independence** scored 71% in 2021 (73% in 2020). Both areas, therefore, represent high risks to media pluralism.

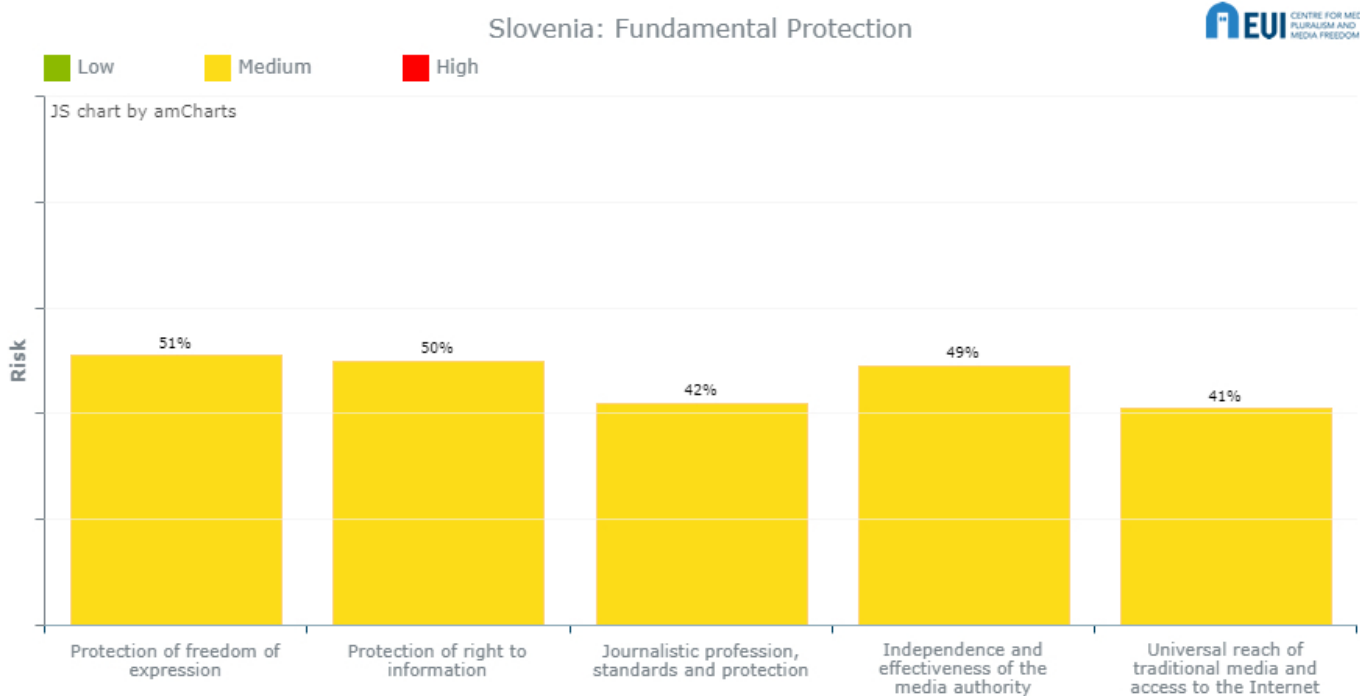
Within the monitored areas, the highest risks to media pluralism are indicated in Protection against illegal and harmful speech (92%), which was monitored specifically online, as well as Independence of public service media (PSM) governance and funding (92%), followed by Political independence of media and Commercial & owner influence over editorial content (both 90%). These are followed by Online platforms concentration and competition enforcement (88%), News media concentration (77%) and State regulation of resources and support to the media sector (71%).

None of the indicators monitored in 2021 scored a low risk to media pluralism, which has not changed since the 2020 MPM implementation.

Similarly to 2020, the state did not introduce any specific measures for journalists or media outlets in regard to the COVID-19 crisis. Many newsstands, which were closed due to the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, never reopened in 2021, which means the distribution issues continued to increase, and the readership of print media continued to decrease (RSF 2021).

3.1. Fundamental Protection (47% - medium 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 the competence to regulate the media sector, and the reach of traditional media and access to the Internet.



The indicator on **Protection of freedom of expression** scored the highest medium risk within this area with 51%. Defamation is still criminalised within the Criminal Code with prison time or a fine. Criminal offenses against the honour and reputation of an individual that are punishable by a fine or imprisonment are defined in the eighteenth chapter of the Criminal Code (KZ-1). They include the following offenses: insult, slander, defamation, calumny and malicious false accusation of crime. Pursuant to Article 27 of KZ-1, these criminal offenses qualify as such if committed intentionally, and if they are committed via media or similar public platforms, they are punished with a higher fine or imprisonment. In 2021, KZ-1 was amended, among others, to provide for the ex officio prosecution of threats against the highest representatives of the state, a member of parliament, a member of the Council of State, a member of the government, a judge of the Constitutional or Supreme Court or their relatives. The amended Article 135 of KZ-1 stipulates that such threats will no longer be prosecuted at the request of the injured party, but ex officio. The political opposition saw this as a sign of repression and accused the government of trying to silence anyone who disagrees with government's actions. According to them, the changed Article 135 was an attempt to suppress freedom of thought and create special protection for the political elite. The State Prosecutorial Council and individuals from the Bar Association also opposed the changes (Matejčič 2021).

The right to correction in the Mass Media Act is still problematic and often abused. During the first and second COVID-19 epidemic the government closed newsstands. After opening cafes and hairdressing salons, access to the press on these premises was still banned, and magazine print was consequently left without a significant number of subscribers. This was recognised as a press freedom risk by Reporters without borders (RSF) in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index (RSF 2022). In Slovenia, there are no

specific legal remedies for those whose freedom of expression has been violated. Regular remedies include access of citizens or journalists/media to courts and a potential appeal to the Ombudsman or to the European Court of Human Rights.

Long court proceedings remain an issue. In the most recent report, covering the year 2020, the Supreme Court reported that a total of almost 51,500 court backlog cases were resolved in Slovenia, which was 6.9% of all resolved cases, and almost 52,500 remained unresolved (37% of all unresolved cases) (Vrhovno sodišče Republike Slovenije 2021). There is significant evidence that it became increasingly common to express negative and hate comments about journalists and media outlets, with specific forms of harassment and abuse being directed at female journalists and also examples of physical violence and systemic pressures (Slovene Association of journalists 2021b; RSF 2021). For instance, Janez Janša, who was Prime Minister during 2021, frequently describes journalists, namely female ones (Železnik 2021), and some media outlets as “presstitutes”. In September 2021, the government rejected an amendment to the Protection of Public Order Act (ZJRM-1), which first introduced fines for indecent behaviour towards an official (while at work) and the highest representatives of the authorities and their relatives and was later extended to punish indecent behaviour towards all citizens (D.P. 2021). In November 2021, the government adopted amendments to the Criminal Code (KZ-1). According to the new law, suspects of the crime of threatening the highest representatives of the state and their relatives are prosecuted ex officio and no longer at the suggestion of the victim (GK 2021). In February 2021, car journalist Martin Česenj was sentenced to a 6-month conditional prison sentence for writing against migrants on Twitter (Petrič 2021). A trade unionist issued a criminal complaint against journalist Bojan Požar, accusing Požar of damaging his honour and reputation, insulting accusations and insults and demanding 8,000 EUR in compensation in November 2021 (Kršinar 2021). Also, in November 2021, a former judge Urška Klakočar Zupančič, who faced disciplinary procedures and left her job because of the pressures following the publication of her message from a private Facebook group by State Secretary Vinko Gorenak, reached a court settlement with Gorenak, after which he removed the post from his blog in which he published her private message and described her as a left-wing activist (Lovšin 2021). As Slovenia took on the presidency of the Council of the European Union, several international press organisations urged EU leaders to address media freedom in Slovenia (International Press Institute 2021). The issues related to the Slovene Press Agency (STA) were persistent and prompted several reactions from EU leaders throughout the year (Bayer 2021b). After the Constitutional Court suspended the implementation of the decree, which also implemented a ban on rallies in April 2021 (Amnesty International 2021), it ruled in July 2021 that government decrees restricting movement and association in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 were in the part in which they prohibited rallies or limited them to up to 10 participants, unconstitutional, as such a restriction had not been shown to be necessary (STA 2021g).

The indicator on **Protection of right to information** has scored medium risk with 50%. The right to information is explicitly recognised in the Constitution, Article 39, para 2. The Slovenian Constitution provides a higher level of protection of rights in this area compared to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) concerning Article 10 of the ECHR. The sectoral law, i.e. the Access to Public Information Act (ZDIJZ, last amended in 2015), put in place appeal mechanisms and defined restrictions on the right to information. However, these provisions are often misused, especially the confidentiality. There were media reports about the processes of obtaining public information being prevented (e.g. SNS 2021) or prolonged, with public administrations waiting the maximum amount of time until denying access. The Information Commissioner is receiving a lot of journalists’ appeals and requests for re-decision. There is a broad agreement that the existing legislation allows for wide access to information, but at the 2021 roundtable organised by Information Commissioner it

was confirmed that the problems arise in practice. The participants highlighted that access to information increased the understanding of current topics in public debate and contributed to the accountability of the public sector, and therefore urged the liable parties to ensure the fastest possible access to information in practice (Information Commissioner 2021).

Except under the Integrity and Prevention of Corruption Act (ZIntPK, adopted in 2010), whistleblowers in Slovenia are not adequately protected, as Slovenia has not yet transposed the EU Directive 2019/1937 on the Protection of Persons Who Report Breaches of Union Law (Oštro.si 2021). The legal framework does not provide for an effective enforcement (sanctioning) mechanism for members of parliament, state councillors, municipal councillors and mayors in case of illegal or non-integrity conduct (KPK 2020). In December 2021, the Ministry of Justice drafted a Proposal of the Law on the Protection of Whistleblowers (EVA 2021-2030-0052), which would comprehensively regulate the protection of whistleblowers and implement the directive on protection of whistleblowers. The conclusion of the public discussion on the draft law was envisaged for the beginning of January 2022.

In May 2021, the Slovenian Government Office for Development and Cohesion Policy initiated criminal proceedings against the weekly political magazine Mladina after it published a leaked government plan for its post-COVID-19 recovery. The indictment was filed against Mladina for issuing classified information on the basis of Article 260 of the Criminal Code (KZ-1), which requires a sentence of up to three years in prison for such violators (Košir 2021).

With 42%, the indicator on **Journalistic profession, standards and protection** scored the same level of medium risk as a year ago. Journalists' associations continue to act as an important voice for journalists in individual media and at the national level, but their calls and requests often go unanswered either by their publishers or the competent state authorities. Job security has fallen significantly and has led to much worse working conditions for the majority of journalists in the past years, which was confirmed also by a survey the Slovene Association of Journalists and the Slovenian Union of Journalists performed among journalists in 2020 (Slovene Association of Journalists 2020, Slovenian Union of Journalists 2020). Besides, the state did not introduce any specific protection or measures to safeguard the journalistic profession and functioning of media with regard to COVID-19 (STA, M.R. 2020). Despite the occurrence of physical attacks, no journalists were killed in Slovenia (Committee to Protect Journalists 2021).

So far, there is no anti-SLAPP legal framework in place in Slovenia. After 39 lawsuits were brought against three journalists of portal Necenzurirano.si in 2020, the same three journalists were reported to the National Investigation Office (NPU) and the Financial Administration of the Republic of Slovenia (FURS) in November 2021, in what media freedom groups described as an unjustified extension of a campaign of pressure against the media outlet (European Center for Press and Media Freedom 2021). The Slovene Association of Journalists established an online platform where journalists can report attacks on them. Throughout the year 2021, at least 32 attacks on journalists and media outlets were reported, including also verbal and physical attacks (Slovene Association of Journalists 2021b). Mapping Media Freedom reported at least 17 threats and physical attacks against journalists, including incidents where a camera operator was punched during a COVID-19 protest, a renowned photojournalist was tear-gassed in the face, a photographer was attacked and pressured to delete pictures, female journalists received threatening notes with irritating powder and misogynistic insults and threats, anti-vaccine protesters stormed a studio at RTV Slovenia headquarters and National Security State Secretary directed threats at a journalist (European Center for Press and Media Freedom 2021). Reports show women journalists are significantly more exposed to online attacks than men journalists, and attacks on them are more personal, vulgar and sexist

(STAkrog 2021).

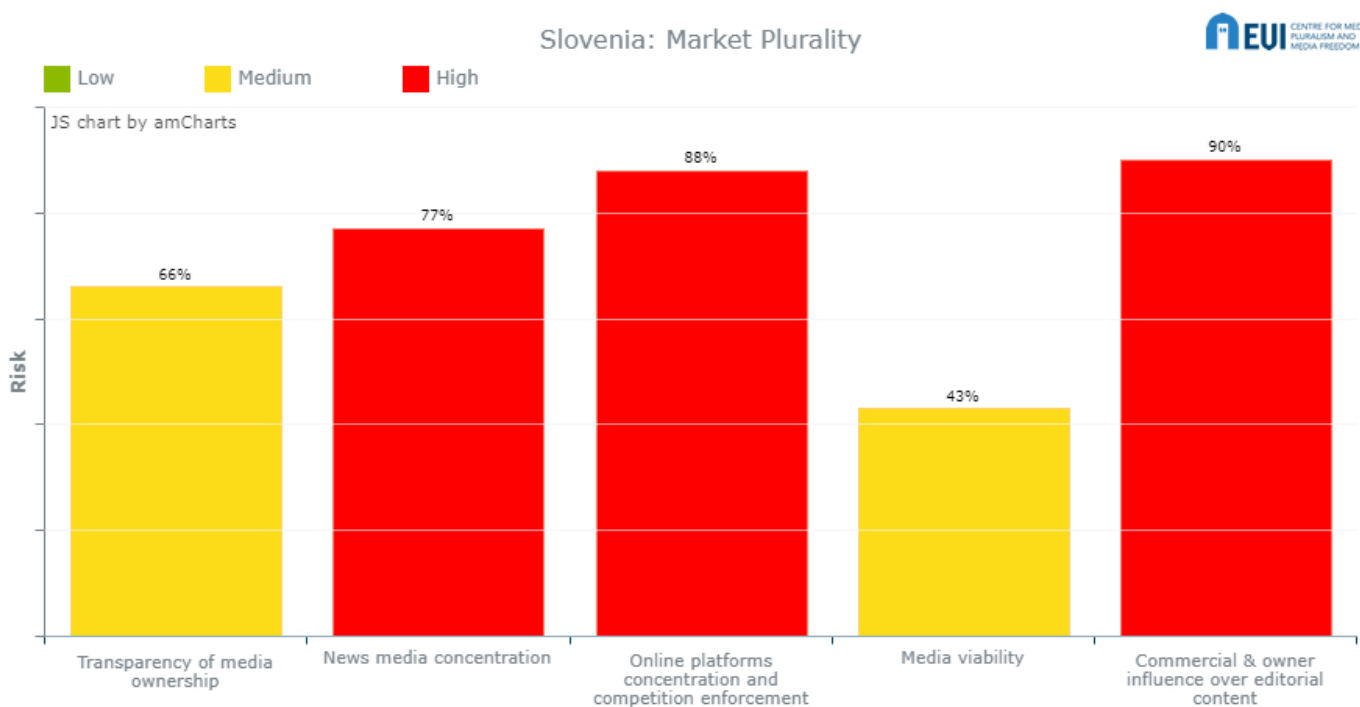
The indicator on **Independence and effectiveness of the media authority** scored medium risk with 49%. The appointment procedures are respected but very loose when it comes to criteria, and therefore they cannot safeguard political and economic independence effectively. The remit of the media authority is defined by the law, and the authority has a wide scope of enforcement mechanisms, e.g. warnings, suspension or revocation of licences and fines. However, media issues are often marginalised due to the extensive and varied scope of AKOS' responsibilities, including, among others, electronic communications, radio frequency spectrum, infrastructure investment, broadcasting and other electronic media, universal postal service and postal market, as well as the railway service market in Slovenia. This could have worsened, if the government's bill on super-regulator was confirmed (STA, M.R. 2020). Namely, in 2020 the Slovenian government informed eight national regulatory agencies of its plans to establish two 'super regulators' instead of those eight. This was revealed on 1 October 2020; the government offered all targeted agencies only 24 hours to respond, no public consultation was held, and only two weeks later the government approved the bill and sent it to the parliament (Kevin, 2020). According to AKOS (2020) the bill was in conflict with AVMSD and other EU directives that require the independence of regulatory agencies. AKOS (2020) also found government's intention to terminate the director's term of office unacceptable. The bill on two 'super regulators' was debated in the Parliament on April 24, 2021, but Janša's minority coalition did not succeed to get enough support for it.

The Parliamentary Committee of Culture discussed media concentration in October 2021 and ordered AKOS to re-check the previously issued licences of radio stations and the Financial Administration (FURS) to check purchases and sales of some companies from the circle of Martin Odlazek (Grgič 2021).

The indicator on **Universal reach of traditional media and access to the internet** scored medium risk with 41%. Universal coverage of the PSM is safeguarded by the law. However, there is a lack of data on the exact share of the population covered. Data from the first quarter of 2021 shows the top 4 internet content providers are Telemach Slovenije (31.1%), Telekom (28.5%), T2 (20.7%) and A1 Slovenija (14.4%) (AKOS 2021). Slovenia ranks overall 13th among the EU member states in the 2021 Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI); but 9th in the EU in connectivity (above the EU average); 8th in the integration of digital technology in businesses, and 10th as regards the open data indicator (DESI 2021). The country also performs well in the take-up of broadband, and the Slovenian internet users actively engage with e-government services (77%) compared to the EU average of 64% (DESI 2021).

3.2. Market Plurality (73% - high risk)

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



The indicator on **Transparency of media ownership** scored medium risk with 66%. As stipulated in the Mass Media Act, media are obliged to disclose information of 5% or higher individual ownership or management stakes in the publishing or broadcasting company to the Ministry of Culture. The information is published in the Media Register, which is public (Ministry of Culture 2021). The law does not contain any provision, which would require the disclosure of ownership details to the public by the media itself. Slovenia does have an online Register of ultimate owners, where the beneficial owners of media can be found (Open Ownership 2020), however this information is not always evident in the Media Register. The current legislation makes it possible for different publishers to connect in complex ownership networks and hide their concentration on the market (European Commission 2020) and there were no governmental efforts to improve this in 2021.

The indicator on **News media concentration** scored high risk with 77%. The media market is small and horizontal concentration is generally high. Same is true for vertical integration. The highest horizontal concentration is present in the radio sector (which is dominated by one actor operating through unclear ownership structures), followed by the magazine sector (dominated by the same publisher as in the radio

sector, increasing cross-media concentration even further) (Škamperle 2021; Kučić 2020). To prevent cross-media concentration, the Mass Media Act establishes a threshold of an ownership stake of more than 20%, when a publisher of a daily informative printed medium needs the approval of the Ministry of Culture to also publish or co-found a broadcaster of a radio or television programme service and vice-versa. Combining radio and television activities, advertising and radio and television activities or telecommunications and radio and television activities is not permitted. The limitations are however not always implemented, for instance, the Media24 Group, connected to Martin Odlazek, combines print, radio and television, publishes more than sixty different media, doing so with a group of different publishers connected in a complex ownership network (Kučić 2020). End of August 2021, the company Časnik Večer detached its publishing activity and, together with 94 employees, transferred it to the new company Večer Media. It was not officially known who the new partners of Večer Media were, however the employees of Časnik Večer were informally told that Salomon and Svet24 were among them, both connected with Odlazek (Al. Ma. 2021). There is a lack of data on the market share of specific media outlets, as there is no regular annual analysis of the media market with exact data. The data for December 2021 shows the audience share of the top 4 online news media in Slovenia is around 48% (MOSS 2021).

The indicator on **Online platforms concentration and competition enforcement** scored high risk to media pluralism with 88%. The information needed for identification of the beneficial and ultimate owners of digital native news media outlets is not always publicly accessible. The legislative articles regarding horizontal and cross-media concentration in the media sector do not specifically regulate the digital environment in the way they regulate the radio, printed and television environment, but even as regards broadcasting its provisions are hardly applicable, as they are not technologically neutral. There are also no signs that concentration in the digital environment is being monitored at all. The European Copyright Directive has not been transposed in 2021 (Bratož 2022). In December 2021 the parliament adopted amendments to the Audiovisual Media Services Act and therefore transposed the European Audiovisual Media Services Directive into the Slovene legislative system; the new law entered into force in January 2022 (STA, A.K. 2021).

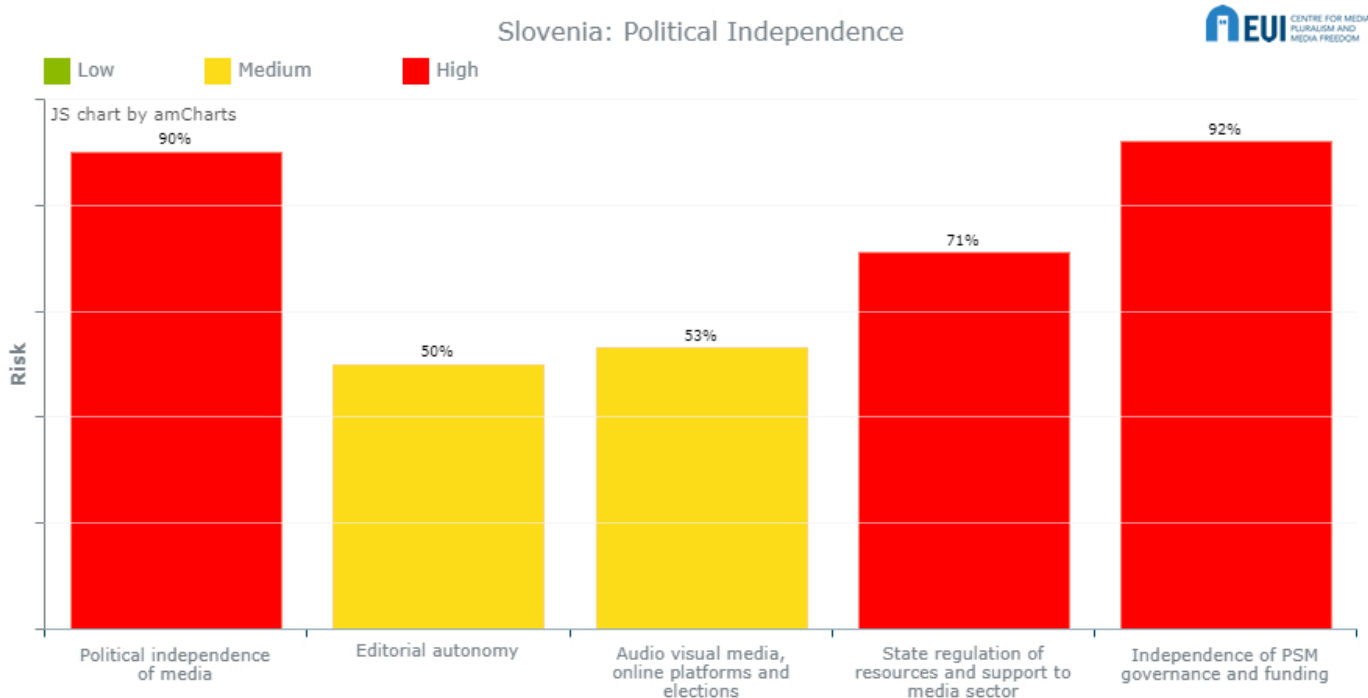
The indicator on **Media viability** scored medium risk with 43%. The number of employed journalists has been decreasing and young journalists often work as freelancers or contract workers, even though all the conditions for a regular employment are met. In pursuit of profit, the owners are interested in less binding contractual relationships and therefore do not offer them regular employment. In July 2021, some journalists have been let go from the regional newspaper Primorske novice (Tomažič 2021) after the outlet was sold to three companies from the circle of businessman Martin Odlazek (Tomažič, Čepar 2021). A new online news media outlet N1 Slovenija entered the market in June 2021, part of the media network of the United Group and exclusive partner of CNN. In October 2021, the Slovenian Competition Protection Agency (AVK) allowed the United Group acquisition of the Sport Klub TV channels (A. Č. 2021). Assessing the figures for advertising is very complex for Slovenian media. Some consulting companies consider the whole income of certain media companies (like TV companies) as advertising income, although not all the revenues of a media company come from advertising. It is also difficult to separate income of specific sectors within a specific company offering services in different media branches, e.g. broadcasting, newspapers and magazines.

The indicator on **Commercial & owner influence over editorial content** scored the highest risk within this area with 90%. There are no specific mechanisms safeguarding social security of journalists in case of changes of ownership or editorial line. The Union of Slovenian Journalists offers free legal help; membership is not obligatory. There are also no effective regulatory or self-regulatory safeguards to ensure

that decisions regarding appointments and dismissals of editors-in-chief are autonomous and not influenced by commercial interests. The Mass Media Act and The Code of Journalism Ethics include some measures to prevent commercial influence on journalists and content (for instance, paid publications must be clearly distinguished from journalistic texts and journalists must refuse rewards or favours), however they, as well, are not always effective (Mass Media Act 2016, Slovene Association of Journalists 2022). Advertorials often and mostly appear in print and online media.

3.3. Political Independence (71% - high 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 the public service media. Furthermore, the area is concerned with the existence and effectiveness of (self)regulation in ensuring editorial independence and the availability of plural political information and viewpoints, in particular during electoral periods.



The indicator on **Political independence of media** scored high risk (90%). Since there were no revisions of the relevant media and corruption legislation since the previous year, there are still no legal safeguards against political interference in editorial policies. The Mass Media Act (2006) or other laws do not regulate the conflicts of interests between owners of media and the ruling parties, partisan groups or politicians. The general Integrity and Prevention of Corruption Act (Integrity and Prevention of Corruption Act, 2010) applies, however it does not mention media in specific terms. The conflict of interest is very present, it scored high risk in the audiovisual media, newspapers and online, while it scored medium risk in the radio sector. As in previous years, the conflict is significantly present in the local areas, where a lot of small newspapers and publications are connected with major political parties and mayors (Čakš 2020). Members of the SDS party are co-owners of a TV network and a news website Nova24TV, as well as print or online political magazines (Demokracija, Škandal24) and the media have affiliated them with a number of micro local websites (Vežjak 2020). These outlets are also tied to investors connected with several Hungarian pro-government media and with ties to Hungarian government (Kučić 2019). Aleš Hojs (who was the Interior Minister during 2021)

is a former director of Nova24TV (Vezjak 2020). In January 2021 the private-owned National Press Agency (NTA) was established, in an seeming effort to replace the Slovenian Press Agency (STA) to which the government refused statutory funding. The editor-in-chief of NTA was a member of the SDS party (Košir 2021). When he declared himself “the editor of a new Slovene fascist media”, the politics turned its back on him and the ministry started inspection proceedings against the NTA (Esih 2021). In July 2021, the media reported about seven new digital outlets connected with the party SDS (Vezjak 2021, Simič 2021). After years of public controversy, in February 2021, Constitutional Court confirmed that free advertising of political parties in municipal media was against the law (Rus 2021).

In 2020, several persons connected with the ruling government parties took over seats in the highest decision-making body of the national Radio Television of Slovenija, i.e. Programming Council. End of January 2021 the Council approved a new Director General for the term of office between 2021 and 2025, and the former president of the RTVS Supervisory Board Andrej Grah Whatmough replaced Igor Kadunc in this position in April 2021. In July 2021 the new Director General Whatmough announced that he had proposed the dismissal of the Director of TV Slovenia Natalija Gorščak (Eržen 2021). Gorščak proposed to the court to issue a temporary injunction in a lawsuit against Radiotelevizija Slovenija (RTV Slovenia), however the court rejected her proposal (STA 2021e). The government also dismissed Matjaž Medved and Petra Majer from their positions on the Supervisory Board of RTV Slovenia in September 2021, and appointed Anton Tomažič and Milenko Zihrel. A day later the Supervisory Board appointed Janez Čadež for the new chairman of the Supervisory Board of RTV Slovenia. Three days later the Administrative Court annulled the dismissal of Medved and Majer. The decision was so flawed that it was not possible to judge its legality at all, the court stated (Ma.R., M.R. 2021). In October 2021 the Programme Council was acquainted with the draft Programming and Production Plan of RTV Slovenia for 2022, which envisaged shortening or cancelling of several news and current affairs programmes. In a disagreement with the proposed changes, first Manica Janežič Ambrožič resigned from the position of the Editor-in-Chief of the Informative Programming of Television Slovenia, and she was followed by three more editors: the Editor of domestic political and economic broadcasts Dejan Ladika, the Editor of the foreign policy editorial office Meta Dragolič and the Editor of the correspondence offices Mitja Prek (B.M.S. 2021). In November 2021, the staff of the news department of Television Slovenia called on the members of the Programming Council of RTV Slovenia to reject the proposal of the Programming-Production Plan for 2022, which was in their opinion lowering standards and undermining the mission of public television (G.C., T.K.B. 2021). The majority of members of the informative newsrooms of TV Slovenia also called for dialogue and clarifications from the RTV management, as the programming proposals were not in line with the proposals of the editorial board (V.U. 2021).

Due to re-suspension of financing of STA's public service in 2021 the operations of STA were at huge risk. Then Prime Minister Janez Janša publicly called on STA director Bojan Veselinovič to resign in March 2021 (G.C, Al. Ma. 2021). European Commissioner Vera Jourová responded a day after in the EP's Plenary discussion on media freedom in Slovenia stating that “constant attempts to undermine the STA are a cause for serious concern” (M.Z., L.Š. 2021). In September 2021 Jourová also sent a letter to the then Minister of Culture Vasko Simoniti urging him that the government must finance STA (STA 2021). The same month the Supreme Court annulled the suspension of the decree on the financing of the STA public service and noted that according to the law, the Republic of Slovenia is obliged to provide STA monthly financing for 2021 in accordance with the STA business plan (STA 2021b). Veselinovič did resign as the director of STA in September 2021 and former Director General at RTV Slovenia Igor Kadunc replaced him as the only candidate in the public competition for this position. He reached the funding agreement with the Government's Communications Office (Ukom) in November 2021 and 676,000 euros were transferred to

the agency for the already completed public service activities of the STA in the period of January – April 2021 (STA 2021c). In November 2021, the specialized state prosecutor's office dismissed the accusations directed to Veselinovič for the alleged abusing of his position as the director of STA (STA 2021d). In February 2021, the Finance Committee of the National Assembly confirmed an amendment to the government's bill on the Demographic Fund, according to which the National Demographic Fund would become the founder and sole shareholder of the Slovenian Press Agency (STA) (STA, M.R. 2021) allowing the government to take over the STA, but the law has not been passed by the end of 2021. The media confirmed also that among the 12 letters with more than 36 requests for access to the STA's business documents, which Ukom sent to STA between 14 October 14 and 30 November 2020, Ukom also asked for information on the STA's editorial decisions (Simič 2021b).

The indicator on **Editorial autonomy** scored medium risk with 50%. While the media laws refer to autonomy in provisions related to appointing and dismissing editors-in-chief, these provisions often have no real effect. The owners can circumvent the law by appointing a 'temporary' editor-in-chief, which became a common practice on daily newspapers in the past, for instance at Delo or Dnevnik. Thus, journalists have no power to prevent someone inappropriate from being appointed, and that is the case also for the public service broadcaster RTV Slovenia. The role of freelancers and permanent contributors is also not defined in terms of their participation in decision-making in the newsrooms. The general Code of Journalism Ethics (2002) applies to all journalists and media and the Journalist Court of Honour handles complaints from the public. Neither the Code or the Court of Honour are effective when it comes to enforcement, since there are no real sanctioning mechanisms available except the name and shame approach, and the compliance relies a lot on the willingness of the publishers and their owners to support, encourage and enable implementation of the professional standards in their media outlets. As in previous years, there were numerous cases where political influence and interference on editorial decisions and content were reported, especially in the media under direct political influence, either through state or private ownership and also because of owners' commercial interests related to for instance the big state investment projects. The European NGO for the Protection and Promotion of Fundamental Freedoms Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties) noted that political pressure on the media is worrying in Poland, Hungary and Slovenia. The latter was noted as a particularly striking case (IK, STA 2021).

The indicator on **Audio visual media, online platforms and elections** scored medium risk (53%). There were no elections in 2021 in Slovenia, so not much has changed in this aspect, however there was a referendum in July 2021. The RTV Slovenia organised a confrontation before the referendum and it was critiqued for not allowing a real dialogue and exchange of views (Vežjak 2021b). Based on the law and established practices, the representation of political actors and political viewpoints on RTV Slovenia has to follow a so-called "fair and balanced" approach, which is often noted as very mathematical and can lead to relativism (Faculty of Social Sciences 2020). The public service broadcaster must guarantee access to airtime for election candidates, parties and programme presentations as follows: equal time for candidates and political parties represented in the National Assembly and European Parliament and one-third of the total election programmes time for candidates and political parties that are not represented in the National Assembly or European Parliament. There is no specific regulation or self-regulation governing the access to airtime on commercial channels for political actors during election campaigns. The conditions and prices for political advertising on the RTV Slovenia are set in advance and the rates on commercial channels differ from one to another, but are normally equal for different political parties.

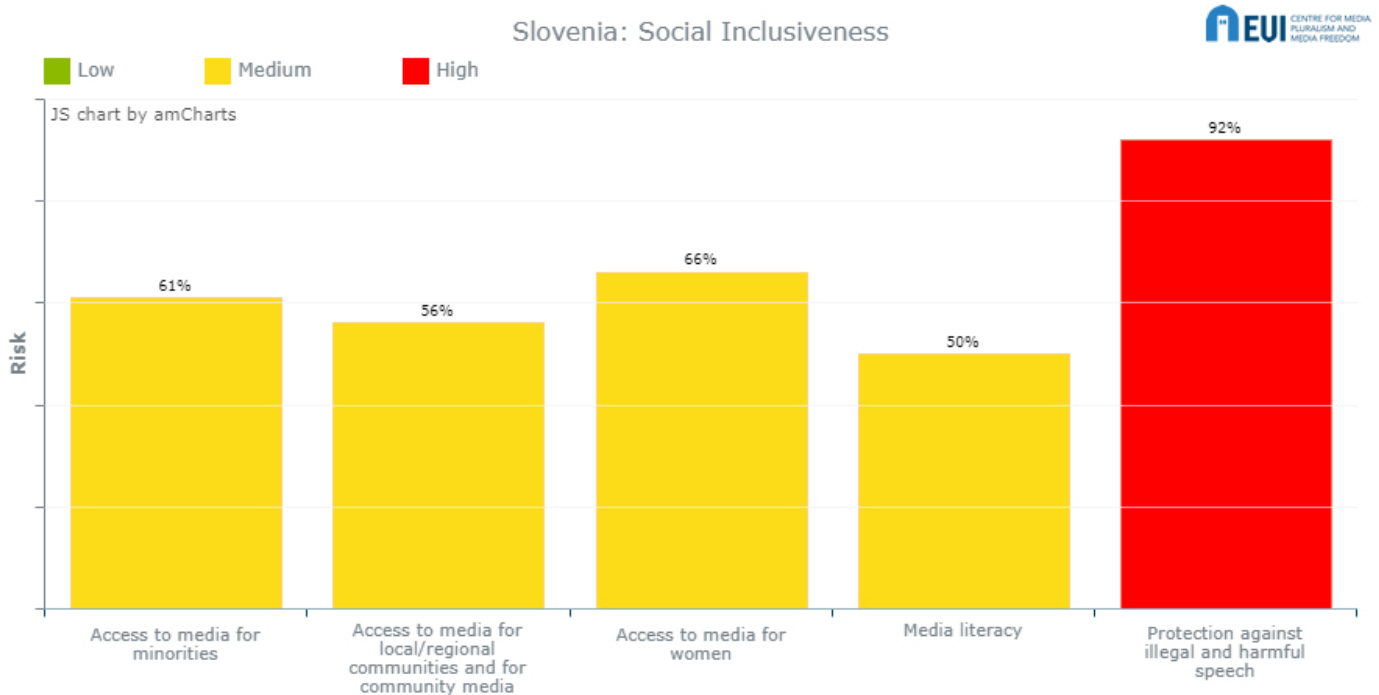
The indicator on **State regulation of resources and support to media sector** scored high risk (71%). As in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no specific subsidies for media or journalists

addressing the specific risks and working conditions in this time. The main issues are noted within the allocation of the regular public funds for media projects in the public interest, which appears highly prone to political interference, and the distribution of the so-called state advertising. This advertising paid by national, regional or local governments or state-owned companies continues to be distributed without a clear set of rules and in a non-transparent way. There is a general lack of data on media, which received advertising from state companies. As regards the public subsidies, in 2021 five radio stations with a status of special significance and a few influential dailies and magazines did not get funding from the annual call for co-financing media content, which for many of them represented an important source of funding (Kotnik 2021). In February 2021, the opposition filled an interpellation against the then Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family Janez Cigler Kralj, after the media reported that the tender commission at the ministry, which also included his closest colleagues, chose to finance Institute Iskreni, whose founding member and volunteer was then minister Cigler Kralj. The institute manages two online portals Iskreni.net and Domovina.je (Kršinar 2021b). The online portals also acquired funding for the promotion of vaccination from Ukom (Košir 2021), which gave no records on the reach or the financial management of the media outlets. In March 2021, the opposition unsuccessfully interpellated then Minister of Culture Vasko Simoniti for numerous reasons related to his policies on media, including among others the alleged attempts of "destruction of public service media, such as RTV Slovenia and STA" (Dernovšek, STA 2021).

The indicator on **Independence of PSM governance** scored the highest risk within this area with 92%. While the (existing) Radiotelevizija Slovenija Act (ZRTVS-1, 2005) provides relatively fair and transparent legal provisions considering appointment procedures for management and board functions of the PSM, they leave a gap for political influence, as a majority of the Programming Council or Supervisory Board members are appointed by the National Assembly, political parties, and the government. And in fact in 2021 the government quota members of the Supervisory Board of RTV Slovenia were replaced prematurely by the government and the coalition parties in the Parliament succeeded to appoint the majority of 29 members of the RTV Slovenia Programming Council. Also, the yearly financial plan was approved only in March 2021 (RTV Slovenia 2021) after initially not being approved in December 2020, which significantly affected the operations of RTV Slovenia (T.K.B. 2021).

3.4. Social Inclusiveness (65% - medium 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. Finally, it also includes new challenges arising from the uses of digital technologies, which are linked to the Protection against illegal and harmful speech.



The indicator on **Access to media for minorities** scored medium risk with 61%. The RTV Slovenija Act (ZRTVS-1) guarantees access to airtime on RTV Slovenia to legally recognized minorities (Italian, Hungarian and the Roma community). Even though the constitutional position of the Italian and the Hungarian national community is equal (Articles 5 and 64 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia), the amount intended for the Italian community is larger than the amount intended for the Hungarian national community. Both of these communities have access to their local government funds, which puts them in advantage compared to the Roma community also in the area of access to airtime on commercial channels. Even though the Slovenian legislation ratified or transposed important international documents on minority rights (e.g. Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ETS No. 157) and as an EU member state also the Treaty of Lisbon, according to which Minority rights have been a foundational value), these rights only apply to a small segment of ethnic minority communities in Slovenia. Still, the presence of legally unrecognized ethnic minorities (Serbs, Bosnians and Croats) in the programmes of RTV Slovenia is believed as better than their representation in other segments of the Slovenian society. RTV Slovenia finances these shows from the income based on RTV license fee and not from other funding sources which are partly covering the production costs of Italian, Hungarian and Roma content. The amount of content is however not proportionate to the size of these communities and the number of relevant topics directly related with them, while the recognised minorities have channels and programs dedicated to them. Ethnic minorities, which are not recognised by the law, have no regular access to the airtime on commercial TV and radio channels. The content for (and by) the unrecognised communities can be followed occasionally on one of Europe's oldest non-commercial, community radio stations Radio Študent, which is

however in constant financial restraints (Bezljaj 2020). The lack of community media for these numerous communities is perceived as a weak point of the Slovenia's media landscape and pluralism.

The indicator on **Access to media for local/regional communities and for community media** scored medium risk with 56%. Regional and local radio and television broadcasters, which meet the legally defined criteria (Articles 77-79 of Mass Media Act), have (together with public service broadcasting channels, student media and non-profit media) a status of broadcasters of special importance. RTV Slovenia is not obliged to have local correspondents. A number of local media receive funding from their municipality budgets and there are several controversial stories about those media promoting their mayor's or leading parties political ideas. For instance the Supervisory Board of the Municipality of Koper (IOC) identified a number of irregularities in the operation of the municipal bulletin at the time when the municipality was governed by Mayor Boris Popovič (Kučić 2021). Concentration is high in the local and regional media market. A study within the project "Local Media for Better Society" states the previously mentioned owner Odlazek owns almost 90% of Slovenian local media (Trade union of journalists of Croatia, Slovene Association of Journalists, BH Journalists, Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia 2022). The study also found the position of many local media outlets weakened during the COVID-19 pandemic due to a decline in sales or advertising. The content of community media is mostly affected by funding issues, including budgetary cuts on the local or state level, which influence the quality and quantity of production and editorial policies. As mentioned above, five radio stations of special importance did not receive any funding on the annual call for co-financing media content, including Radio Krka, Koroški radio, Radio Triglav Jesenice and Radio Kranj (Kotnik 2021).

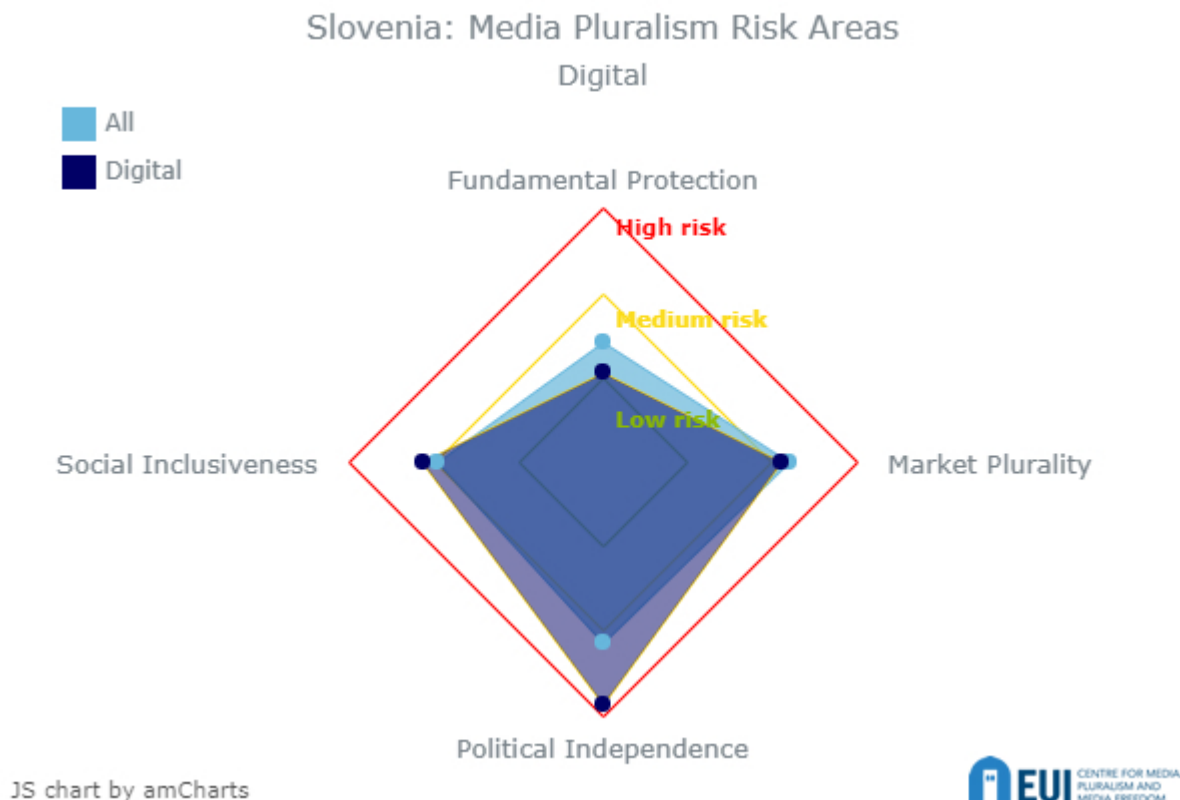
The indicator on **Access to media for women** scored medium risk with 66%. The PSM does not have a public gender equality policy. End of 2021 the share of women on PSM management boards was 40% and the share of women among executives on PSM was 29% (RTV Slovenija 2021b). The share of women among editors-in-chief in the leading news media in the country was 38%. The all-male panels both in the media and in other public events are rather the rule than the exception in Slovenia. A recent response to that was the establishment of "Ona ve" ("She knows") online platform, founded in June 2021 by four female public figures. The goal of the association is to increase the share of women in the media and public events in Slovenia to 50% (Ona ve 2022). Metina lista and Kliping d.o.o. analysed publications in selected print media from 1 April until 15 July 2021 and compared the proportion of women and men as interviewees in newspaper interviews. The share of female interviewees in interviews was 24% and most interviews with women were conducted by female journalists, namely 34%, while if the journalist was a man, only 16% interviewed women. The analysis also confirmed that the Slovenian media devote most of their space to politics and the economy, which are areas where women's voices are rarely heard (Mayer 2022). Slovenia was the only country to fall behind on the 2021 Gender Equality Index, it was also the country to fall behind the most since 2017 (Dernovšek 2021).

The indicator on **Media literacy** scored medium risk with 50%. While media literacy is often mentioned in government documents related to the media, there is a lack of consistent national policy here. The legislation does not specify, who is responsible for media literacy and how it should be taken care of. Despite being present in different school subjects, media literacy is not necessarily sufficiently included in formal education. The Slovenian school curriculum does not have mandatory content in the field of media literacy (Bulatović 2021). Moreover, the optional subject of media education is taught in only 17% of primary schools (excluding branches), and the curriculum dates back to 2006 (Bulatović 2021). There are several campaigns and actions promoting media literacy, for instance the MiPi platform managed by AKOS, activities by the Državljan D institute or online newspaper for children Časoris (MiPi 2022, Državljan D 2022,

Časoris 2022), however they are often limited to the capital of Slovenia and bigger cities or to certain groups of people, such as the elderly or school teachers.

The indicator on **Protection against illegal and harmful speech** scored high risk to media pluralism with 92%. For years, there have been repeated public calls for a legal framework countering disinformation online, but also a lot of disagreement with this. In 2021, disinformation was mostly related to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially vaccination against it, and it has had an influence on the way a segment of the population understood the health crisis and the need for the vaccination, and potentially also an impact on the percentage of the population that was vaccinated against the coronavirus (Vrečar 2021, Zgonik 2021). In March 2021, the team of Oštro's project for verifying the authenticity of media content Razkrinkavanje.si verified more than sixty statements of various individuals and media content related to COVID-19 since the beginning of the epidemic and "as many as 40% of them did not hold" (Bulatović 2021). 89% of the population aged 16 to 74 used the internet regularly in the first quarter of 2021 and 58% of them saw untrue or dubious information on news websites or social media. Among those who saw false or dubious content, 39% of users recognized that the information or their source was unreliable and 37% checked its veracity, National Statistical Office data shows (IK, STA 2021). There is no specific legal framework targeting hate speech online, however, it is against the Constitution to spread ethnic, racial and religious hatred or intolerance, as well as to promote violence or war (Article 63 of the Constitution). Public promotion of hatred, violence or impatience is also an offense within the Criminal Code (Art. 297) and the Mass Media Act (Art. 8). Despite that, online hate speech online and other forms of dangerous speech, namely harassment, bullying, vulgarity, sexism towards specific journalists and media outlets, especially women (Železnik 2021) are common, mainly on social media platforms (Kavcic 2020), where they are often exercised by visible political figures (Bratanic, Winfrey 2021). There have been no specific or systemic efforts to remove hate speech toward any population group from social media. Some legacy media and their associated social media channels continued to play a role in spreading disinformation. In June 2021, the prosecutor's office filed an indictment against two individuals for public incitement to hatred, violence or intolerance in a note published in Demokracija in December 2020 (STA 2021f).

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



Digital indicators within all four monitored areas continue to indicate a need for precise legislative definitions of the online media environment, as the current Slovenian media laws only consider the so-called electronic publications, and in a very general way.

Fundamental Protection (35% - medium risk)

Within the Fundamental Protection area, general restrictions for freedom of expression apply to the digital environment. However, as in previous years, they are still not always followed. The laws do not provide specific legal remedies for those whose freedom of expression has been violated online. The state, the internet service providers (ISPs) or online platforms have not introduced any new restrictions upon freedom of expression online in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic (for instance, to treat misinformation or fact-check information related to COVID-19) and the cases of public personas (actors, TV hosts) sharing false information online, specifically on social media platforms continued to occur. As in previous years, based on the Gambling Act (ZIS, adopted in 2011 and last amended in 2014), the ISPs filter pages of gambling companies that do not have a concession in Slovenia. Some news media are transparent about their online changes to articles, and some are not, even though Article 16a of the Code of Journalism Ethics stipulates that the interventions “must be marked so that it is clear what the error was” and when the contribution was supplemented with new information; also “the time of the last change must be evident” (Slovene Association of Journalists 2022).

Content restrictions based on local law in the Facebook and Instagram Transparency Report for Slovenia show there were three global restrictions generally imposed between January and June 2021. There were no restrictions in Slovenia only and no restrictions applied to others. One page/group was restricted on Facebook and two Instagram accounts, which were reported for violating local laws on hate speech (Meta 2021). The Twitter Transparency Report shows two legal demands other than court orders, two combined requests and four other legal demands accounts specified and four combined accounts specified (Twitter

2021).

There were no evident or publicly disclosed cases of governmental surveillance of searches, hacking or other similar digital attacks. There were, however, many examples of online abuse and harassment, mainly insults and threats on social media, including those conducted or promoted by politicians (e.g. Slovene Association of Journalists 2021a). For this reason, the Slovenian Journalists' Association has launched a platform for reporting attacks on journalists and the media in Slovenia with the aim to establish a systematic monitoring of the attacks and raise public awareness (Slovene Association of Journalists 2021b).

No journalists have been obliged to download any tracking apps managed by the state or non-state actors with regard to COVID-19.

While the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is binding on all entities, Slovenia still has not adopted the new Personal Data Protection Act (ZVOP-2), which is about to introduce a specific regime for some substantive and procedural issues that may be specifically regulated by EU member states. The process is slow and with many setbacks. Until the ZVOP-2 adoption, two regulations apply and regulate the field of personal data protection at the system level, namely the GDPR and the existing Personal Data Protection Act (ZVOP-1, adopted in 2004 and last amended in 2020).

Market Plurality (70% - high risk)

The indicator on Online platforms concentration and competition enforcement within the Market Plurality scored high risk to media pluralism with 88%. There is a number of websites and personal blogs, which are not owned by legal persons and do not have an editor-in-chief, and therefore the transparency on their background is low. They can however still present themselves as media.

There is a lack of comprehensive and regularly updated information allowing to identify the beneficial and ultimate owners of digital native news media outlets. The provisions of the Mass Media Act (ZMed) regarding horizontal and cross-media concentration in the media sector do not apply to the digital environment in the way they apply to radio, printed press and television broadcasting (Articles 58-61). The concentration in the digital environment, relevant from the perspective of media pluralism, is not being monitored.

Both the commercial and public media face significant problems in their access to funding. There are efforts to find viable business models, however they are not always successful. There is no data however indicating whether the media experienced an increase or decrease of revenue coming from non-traditional revenue streams in 2021.

Political Independence (92% - high risk)

Within the area of Political Independence, presence of political control over the digital native media scored high risk, as there is a number of politically controlled digital outlets. There is an unofficial network of digital native media affiliated with the SDS party, which governed the country in 2021, with their publishers or editors being either members of local committees, party candidates in elections or party members (Kučić 2019). In 2021 the media reported about seven new digital outlets, connected with the mentioned party (Vežjak 2021). As mentioned above (in Political Independence in Media), in January 2021 the National

Press Agency (NTA) was established, the editor-in-chief was a member of the SDS party (Vezjak 2021, Simič 2021). After he declared himself “the editor of a new Slovene fascist media”, politicians, such as SDS MP Vinko Gorenak and Upper Chamber President Alojz Kovšca and several other NTA supporters or collaborators on the right side of the political spectrum distanced themselves from this project (Esih 2021). In early August 2021, the publisher of the NTA became Society for the Promotion of Traditional Values, led by Urban Purgar, a prominent member of the so-called Yellow Jacket movement in Slovenia with members who promoted neofascist symbols on different occasions (e.g. Katalenić 2021; T.K.B. 2021). Purgar also replaced Ernecl in the position of editor-in-chief of NTA.

Since there were no general social media guidelines for journalists in Slovenia existing or adopted in 2021, this was coded as a high risk to media pluralism.

The absence of legal provisions preventing that the funding of online services of the PSM does not distort competition with private actors was also coded as a high risk to media pluralism.

Transparency of political advertising on online platforms (including social media, search engines, video sharing platforms) also scored high risk. Overall, there are no rules on the national level which would guarantee that political parties, candidates and lists competing in elections disclose campaign spending on online platforms (e.g. Facebook and Google). The transparency of spending and techniques (as well as information on any targeting criteria) used in social media political campaigns scored high risk and so did the overall implementation of the European Commission Recommendation C(2018)5949 on election cooperation networks, online transparency, protection against cybersecurity incidents and fighting disinformation campaigns. The EC recommendation asks member states to encourage further transparency commitments by European and national political parties and foundations, in particular to make available on their websites information on their expenditure for online activities, including paid online political advertisements and communications, as well as information on any targeting criteria used in the dissemination of such advertisements and communications. Despite many calls coming especially from the civil society organisations, there was no legal framework or regulation established aimed at improving this area. The political campaigning online remains largely unregulated. Election and Referendum Campaign Act (ZVRK) was last amended in 2013 and has hardly any reference to the online aspects of election and referendum campaigns, even an indirect one (Kerševan Smokvina 2021).

Social Inclusiveness (71% - high risk)

The indicator on Protection against illegal and harmful speech within the Social Inclusiveness area scored high risk to media pluralism. There is no legal framework or effective public policies addressing disinformation online, as well as hate speech and other forms of harmful speech (harassment, bullying, vulgarity, sexism towards specific journalists and media outlets, especially women). There continues to be a lack of comprehensive research on harassment of journalists online and its widely present gender based aspects. Although there are several initiatives in the civil society, aiming at countering disinformation, their reach is limited. The most common are fact-checking platforms and awareness raising campaigns.

Despite the absence of specific framework targeting hate speech online, it is against the Constitution to spread ethnic, racial and religious hatred or intolerance, as well as to promote violence or war (Article 63). Public promotion of hatred, violence or impatience is also an offense within the Criminal Code (Article 297) and is forbidden by the Mass Media Act (Articles 8 and 47), where however only hate speech promoted by advertising is defined as misdemeanour, which can be fined up to € 83,500 (Article 129). As explained

above, hate speech online is nonetheless common, especially on social media platforms (Kavcic 2020) and there have been no important public policy efforts to remove hate speech towards any population group from social media.

There was however a case of an indictment against two individuals in June 2021 for public incitement to hatred, violence or intolerance in a note published in *Demokracija* in December 2020 (STA 2021f) and in February 2021, car journalist Martin Česenj was sentenced to a 6-month conditional prison sentence for writing against migrants on Twitter (Petrič 2021).

5. Conclusions

In general, the findings of the MPM2022 implementation indicate an overall high risk to media pluralism in Slovenia, similar to the one identified in MPM2021. Even though some monitored areas show a slight improvement, these changes can also be attributed to modifications in the MPM questions. The biggest risk to media pluralism was indicated in the area of Market Plurality (73%), followed by Political Independence (71%) and Social Inclusiveness (65%), while the area of Fundamental Protection scored medium risk with 47%.

Like in the previous year and elsewhere, the COVID-19 health crisis affected the Slovene media and journalism in many ways. Newspapers and magazines were particularly hurt because of disturbances and obstacles in distribution, as well as changed consumer habits and shortages of advertising revenues, which all affected their sale and revenues. There were no measures adopted by the government, Ministry of Culture or any other relevant institution to provide additional support for the media and for journalism in 2021, as was also the case in 2020. Unlike many other EU countries, Slovenia and its government did not enable or promote any financial, fiscal, or tax instrument, strategy, or other potential intervention aimed at strengthening media plurality or, for example, social inclusiveness. Quite the opposite, the government representatives and organs have even tried to hamper the functioning of CSOs operating in this field through various forms of pressure and funding cuts (STA 2021).

After the second year of increased political and financial pressures, the Slovenian media are on the verge of sustainability and many journalists are emotionally and existentially exhausted. The concentration of media ownership has increased, and non-transparent and discriminatory financing of pro-governmental media has continued to be an important feature of the Slovenian media environment. There is, however, a complete absence of public policies to address these issues. On the contrary, as shown in the previous chapters, there is evidence indicating that the parties, which were in the government during 2021, and especially SDS, perceive the media as their prey. In 2021, this was most evident in the arbitrary termination of funding of the Slovenian Press Agency; political appropriation of RTVS management and supervisory bodies; the appointments of RTVS editors close to the ruling party; the financing of party media projects from the public funds; and the sale of Planet TV to Hungarian owners close to Viktor Orbán. Another example of this are the methodologically unfounded analyses of RTV Slovenia's reporting with the purpose of demonstrating its biases to the detriment of the ruling parties. These analyses were launched by the Government Communication Office (UKOM) at the end of 2021 (Petkovič 2021) and became UKOM's regular activity, although there is no legal mandate for this, they did not follow established conventions of sampling and lacked procedures and methods designed to ensure reliability and validity of data. This and other reported cases of political interference in the media sector in Slovenia demonstrate dimensions not seen in the three decades since Slovenia's independence. Despite the continuous criticism coming from domestic and international institutions in the field of freedom of expression, as well as professional organisations, media and the highest EU officials, there were no signs of improvement in 2021.

Recommendations

Fundamental Protection

- **decriminalisation of defamation;**
- **strengthening the implementation and enforcement of the access to information legislation;**

- strengthening the personal data protection framework and its implementation;
- revising the legal provisions governing the right of reply and correction;
- addressing civil society's calls regarding the new whistleblowers' protection law;
- acting against attacks on journalists with special attention to forms of harassment and abuse being specifically directed at female journalists;
- developing anti-SLAPPs framework;
- supporting/promoting self-regulation in media;
- strengthening the independence of the national regulatory authorities;
- developing positive policies aimed at countering the spread of disinformation.

Market Plurality

- modernization of Mass Media Act (including in the field of media concentration);
- ensuring transparency of media ownership and financing;
- regulating state advertising;
- preventing the misuse of municipal media for the purposes of political advertising;
- improving measures aimed at preventing the commercial interference in editorial decisions;
- establishing non-arbitrary public subsidy schemes for the media;
- investing in scientific research and market/audience analyses to better understand the factors influencing the market plurality – with the aim to inform national policymaking.

Political Independence

- reform of ZRTVS-1 to ensure autonomous and professional functioning of RTVS;
- providing adequate funding to STA;
- strengthening safeguards preventing political interference in editorial decisions;
- modernization of regulation of political advertising and campaigning
- active participation in EU policymaking and implementation of (co)regulation related to digital platforms.

Social Inclusiveness

- **active promotion of media literacy in all demographic groups and geographical areas;**
- **supporting activities of civil society organizations related to the freedom of expression and freedom of media;**
- **developing measures better addressing hate speech online;**
- **providing funding for media outlets servicing the needs of social and ethnic minorities.**

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ANNEXE I. COUNTRY TEAM

First name	Last name	Position	Institution	MPM2022 CT Leader
<i>Marko</i>	<i>Milosavljevic</i>	<i>Professor</i>	<i>University of Ljubljana</i>	X
<i>Romana</i>	<i>Biljak Gerjevic</i>	<i>Research assistant</i>	<i>University of Ljubljana</i>	

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 that make up the MPM2022. Consulting the point of view of recognized experts was aimed at maximizing the objectivity of the replies given to variables whose evaluation could be considered as being 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>Tanja</i>	<i>Kerševan Smokvina</i>	<i>Ex-State Secretary / Regulatory Expert</i>	<i>Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana</i>
<i>Nika</i>	<i>Kunaver</i>	<i>Journalist / Management Board Member</i>	<i>POP TV / Slovene Association of Journalists</i>
<i>Cene</i>	<i>Grčar</i>	<i>Legal Expert</i>	<i>Pro Plus TV / Association of Broadcasters</i>
<i>Melita</i>	<i>Poler Kovačič</i>	<i>Professor of Journalism</i>	<i>Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana</i>

Research Project Report

Issue -

June 2022

doi:10.2870/73200

ISBN:978-92-9466-305-4

QM-07-22-564-EN-N



Publications Office
of the European Union

