



# CZECHIA

Lenka Waschková Císařová, Iveta Jansová and Jan Motal

## Czechia among other countries: fsQCA calibrated values of the outcome and conditions in the study

Czechia, together with e.g. Slovakia, Italy and Poland is out of the set of countries with high deliberative communication. Czechia indicates sufficient *contextual conditions* for the absence of deliberative communication, it is alone “on the path of higher technological development and lower polarization, and lower economic development and quality of democracy”.<sup>16</sup> Regarding *legal domain*, the Czechia is again in the group of countries, with the conditions for the absence of deliberative communication, where opportunities are successful defamation and data protection implementation, but risks are “unsatisfactory freedom of information and transparency of media ownership implementation”.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, for *accountability conditions*, there is a risk of “lack of organizational codes of ethics, meta discourse, public discourse and international accountability”.<sup>18</sup> As for the *market conditions*, “weaker media market contributes to the lack of deliberative communication”.<sup>19</sup>

To sum up, the fuzzy set analysis of the Czech context stressed various opportunities – higher technological development, lower polarization, successful defamation and data protection implementation; but it also brought out many more risks for deliberative communication – lower economic development, lower quality of democracy, unsatisfactory freedom of information, unsatisfactory transparency of media ownership implementation, lack of organizational codes of ethics, lack of meta discourse and public discourse about accountability, lack of international accountability, and weaker media market.

## Explanation

Based on our analysis of critical junctures in the Czech media transformation, which was focused on a secondary analysis of available data and research information on Czech media,<sup>20</sup> largely similar opportunities and risks were indicated, but seen more deeply and in the national context.

<sup>16</sup> Deliverable 3.1. Identifying Similar and Different Configurations of RO’s Factors and Grouping the Countries Accordingly, p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> Deliverable 3.1. Identifying Similar and Different Configurations of RO’s Factors and Grouping the Countries Accordingly, p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> Deliverable 3.1. Identifying Similar and Different Configurations of RO’s Factors and Grouping the Countries Accordingly, p. 51.

<sup>19</sup> Deliverable 3.1. Identifying Similar and Different Configurations of RO’s Factors and Grouping the Countries Accordingly, p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> Waschková Císařová, L., Jansová, I., Motal, M. (2022). Czechia. Critical junctures in the media transformation process. In: Country case studies on national media research capability as a contextual domain of the sources of ROs. *Approaching deliberative communication: Studies on monitoring capability and on critical junctures of media development in 14 EU countries*, CS2, D-2.1, pp. 202–244. Mediadecom. <https://www.mediadelcom.eu/publications/d21-case-study-2/cze/>

As the most significant risk – combining the risks from the legal framework, accountability, market conditions, and the conditions of journalistic work (e.g. journalists' autonomy) – we identified oligarchization of media ownership and concentration of media ownership in the hands of domestic businessmen. Nevertheless, this development also led to the emergence of new independent media and started a significant transformation of the Czech media system, which can be understood as an opportunity.

### **Recognising ROs: CMM (capability of monitoring mediascapes)**

The monitoring capability of Czechia is highly dependent on NGOs and academia, as the state institutions provide no consistent media policy and the related research, as well as the industry usually does hardly make their data public (public service media being the exception). The critical juncture which heavily influenced the evolution of CMM was the change of media studies research after 2010 in favour of more empirical data, combined with the “big sell” of Czech media to oligarchs and the consequent development of the independent journalism and related NGOs focusing on critical monitoring of media landscape (especially fact-checking, ownership, professional standards). This presents the great opportunity; however, it is connected to the following risks:

- a) The monitoring capacity and relevance of the professional organizations is very weak.
- b) Politics, industry, academia, and professional organizations are not sharing the data and they hardly cooperate in the evaluation of the available data.
- c) The academic research is still strictly project-oriented and there is a lack of the state support for continuous independent scientific research into the media landscape.

As there is no professional organization/institution (such as press councils are) or state institution being widely respected, the evaluation of the data provided by the monitoring capacities has only limited effect on the industry. On the contrary, as we can see in the policy and activities of the Publisher's Union, the industry has a great collective power to face the outcomes of monitoring and refuse it.

### **Wisdom-based media governance: risks and opportunities**

In the legal and accountability domain, we identify these biggest risks: the intuitive nature of the discussion on media ethics in the Czechia; its close intertwining with media law; the absence of a broader conceptual debate based on international comparisons; and the inactivity of the largest trade union organisation, the Syndicate of Journalists of the Czech Republic, which is unable to enter the professional or public debate in a significant way. A major risk is the long-term indifference of media professionals and the professional public to long-term and systematic solutions. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity now to start discussing and solving fundamental problems of media ethics and law, because of the public criticism of the oligarchized media.

The risk from the point of view of journalism domain is a lack of cooperation and lack of mutual participation among individual actors in the field. The media market is rather a highly competitive environment. One of the risks is also the long-term dysfunctionality of the professional journalistic union, the Syndicate of Journalists of the Czech Republic.

Media usage research is one of the most systematically covered topics in the reflection of the Czech media, which can be understood as an opportunity, however, this data is collected by private companies or associations, which usually keep it out of the public domain and different actors do not cooperate with each other, both can be considered a risk.

An obvious risk that can be identified regarding media-related competencies is the void without activity, created by responsible actors such as the state, which must be filled by NGOs.

## Agent oriented analysis

### *Legal regulation: freedom of speech, freedom of press and freedom of information*

The Freedom of Information is guaranteed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms. Under the Information Act, citizens and journalists have access to information from public institutions and government. People have a legal right to information from public institutions and the government, but there is a lack of consistent digitisation of the public administration, much information has to be requested by law and is not publicly available, many authorities have been reluctant to provide it in the past, and people have had to seek it through the courts.

The courts can be considered as actors in cases of protection of journalistic sources (even with past cases of police trying to break this right unsuccessfully). Moreover, people have a legal right to information from public institutions and the government. The reality of that is hindered by the lack of digitalized content, making it available to requests by law not for public.

Politicians and businessmen (and coincidentally also owners) are also a growing risk as there is no regulation of ownership in the Czechia, just a regulation of politicians owning media, and oligarchization became an unavoidable problem in the Czech media system.

#### *How to turn risks into opportunities /or maintain opportunities?*

- Make it legally transparent and forbid all politicians to buy and own media (now the law is applicable only on national level of politicians).
- Restrict the amount of media ownership by one subject.

### *Accountability*

Czechia does not have any independent press council. The media have their own codes of ethics, and there is also a code of ethics for the Syndicate of Journalists; However, the effectiveness and enforceability of these codes is generally low, as there is a lack of independent bodies to enable such enforcement, and the journalists' union does not have sufficient authority. Organizational codes of ethics/conduct exist but are widely regarded as pro-forma declarations. There are also no ombudsmen for all media, only in public service media, and one private media have an ombudsman.

#### *How to turn risks into opportunities /or maintain opportunities?*

- Develop a discussion in the journalistic field on the functionality of self-regulation.
- Introduce the position of media ombudsman.

### *Journalism*

For the 10 million country, there are three University Departments specialized in Journalism training and some private universities too. Each bachelor study program is opened for a large number of students (e.g. 180 students per year). However, in the case of the Czechia the number of journalists with university degree in journalism is quite small in comparison to the possibilities for them to obtain the degree.

There is a lack of cooperation and solidarity among journalists, leading to lack of self-regulation (lack of strong professional organization).

#### *How to turn risks into opportunities /or maintain opportunities?*

- Promote the importance of lifelong learning for journalists.

- There is an opportunity to take advantage of the emergence of independent media, new generation of journalists and international environment and promote the cooperation and solidarity among journalists.

### *Media usage*

There is enough data on media usage in the Czech media system framework, however, only some actors have access to them, but they do not analyse or process them sufficiently. The picture of Czech media usage is therefore rather fragmented and does not provide important information for the relevant development of the field.

#### *How to turn risks into opportunities /or maintain opportunities?*

- Promote data sharing, collaboration on data analysis and interpretation, and the public availability and public discussion of the results of such analyses.

### *Media related competencies*

Our country has media literacy programs inserted in the overall plans in formal education, but the application is up to each school and is not controlled in any way. This results in incomparable quality of the media literacy education at each school in the country. Some schools (i.e. students) thus have great media literacy education thanks to their schools' initiatives, on the other hand there are completely opposite cases.

#### *How to turn risks into opportunities /or maintain opportunities?*

- Create a functional and sustainable media literacy program.
- Strengthen the role of the state in building this program.

## **Country-specific policy recommendations:**

**1. fight against media oligarchization, and more generally, against concentration of media ownership:** support for independent media, laws for transparent ownership, strengthening the separation of business and editorial processes (see the forthcoming EU Media Freedom Act), transparent media management (e.g. who are the big advertisers, how much money comes from advertising and how much from elsewhere, etc.)

**2. fight for better cooperation of agents:** support the creation of press council/strong self-regulatory organization; support lifelong learning of journalists (professional integrity) and development of media ethics; coordinated cooperation on legislation, on the discussion of what is a public service, on law reforms; creation of a platform, a kind of "tripartite" (journalists, media owners, NGOs, academia, state), which would meet regularly, discuss, share information and data



# Recommendations for media governance

## Policy Brief

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