

## Recommendation for the reformation of the Czech media landscape

Impartial and independent media are one of the basic preconditions for a functioning democracy. They are key to social cohesion, the ability of citizens to form informed views on public affairs, they give our society a chance to face the influence of overly concentrated economic and political power and, last but not least, they stand opposed to social networks in terms of the integrity of the information provided. The Czech legal system needs more guarantees that will prevent influence over, or control of, the media and which will strengthen the legal and institutional framework of our media landscape.

To achieve these goals, it is necessary to amend the current legislation for the media market, thus creating favorable conditions for maintaining media pluralism, objective and independent work of journalists, and ensuring publicly available, professionally verified and high-quality information from independent sources.

**We view the following as the most significant current issues in the media field:**

- insufficient shielding of **public service** media from possible political pressures,
- absence of independent audits of financial management of public service media,
- lack of binding rules that would prevent media owners from influencing media content (including journalists' self-censorship),
- ineffective regulatory oversight of media market and outdated media **legislation** that does not reflect new media,
- the gradual disappearance of independent **regional** media,
- the threat to economies of traditional media by digital giants,
- a low level of professional cooperation; in other words the unwillingness of most journalists to participate in the creation of self-regulatory solutions and a functioning media council,
- large impact of **disinformation** purposefully disseminated through social networks and websites that do not respect journalistic and publishing ethics.

We therefore present a list of measures that we propose to address the current shortcomings (this is an **abridged version**):

## 1) Strengthen the position of public service media councils and the plurality of views represented

- a) Expand public service media council elections to include both chambers of the Parliament.
- b) Establish stricter qualification criteria for council election candidates and nominating organizations.
- c) Legislate judicial review of council decisions and parliamentary decisions on the appointment and removal of members of public service media councils.
- d) Amend legislation to no longer allow the possibility of dismissing a media council as a whole.

## 2) Establish audits of financial management of public service media

- a) Give the Supreme Audit Office the power to oversee the management of public media' budgets.

## 3) Modernize the regulation of audiovisual media in order to protect market pluralism

- a) Strengthen the expertise of members of the Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting (RRTV) by setting qualification criteria for election nominees.
- b) Strengthen the independence of councilors from politicians by abolishing the possibility of dismissing the RRTV as a whole and dividing the election between both chambers of the Parliament.
- c) Change the focus of RRTV from formalistic administrative supervision towards analyzing plurality, supporting independent media and cooperating with self-regulators.
- d) Reform competition law in the media market: lower turnover threshold for competition assessment of media mergers (compared to other industries)

and introduce legally binding inputs by RRTV in media anti-monopoly decisions. This is dependent on the previous point and on RRTV gaining access to the register of beneficial owners.

- e) Update regulation for the age of Internet by reducing the regulatory burden on broadcasters and extending the scope of RRTV to other digital media.

#### 4) Establish rules for private media and online media

- a) Prevent conflict of interest of private media owners who hold or run for public office.
- b) Strengthen self-regulatory mechanisms and define accountability standards in the media market so as to strengthen the credibility of media.
- c) Invest public budget PR funds transparently, and only in media that adhere to accepted standards for accountability and transparency.
- d) Ensure the establishment of fair conditions for cooperation between publishers and digital platforms (content license agreements).

#### 5) Preventing the emergence of "media deserts"

- a) Turn the attention of politicians, experts and citizens to the problem of disappearing independent regional journalism.
- b) Create long-term conditions for maintaining economies of both print and online publishing.
- c) Establish a public fund for the support of (regional) journalism.