

PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA AS A POLITICAL ISSUE

How Does the European Parliament Approach PSM and Communication Rights?

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ABSTRACT

Platform dominance, threats to media freedom and disinformation are some of the key phenomena that are shaping the current media environment in Europe and threatening citizens' communication rights. Within this context, Public Service Media (PSM) could have an important role to play, although explicit political support is needed. This article studies the main communication and PSM topics that have been discussed in the European Parliament during the past term (2014–2019) as well as the proposals drafted by political parties for the 2019 European election. The results show that the main proposals linked to PSM involve their independence and the need for increased collaboration, including the establishment of a European public service platform that would enhance the development of a European public sphere.

Keywords: public service media, media policy, European Parliament, communication rights, European Public Sphere

The current media environment demands greater institutional involvement, both at a European and at a national (and even regional and local) level in order to safeguard some of the European citizen's fundamental information and communication rights: freedom of expression and the freedom and pluralism of the media.¹

1. European Union, "Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union," article 11.

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During the past few years, the rise of disinformation, that is, “false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit,”² mainly (although not only) spread via digital platforms, has proven to be an increasingly worrying threat to democracies, as captured by the Flash Eurobarometer 464 on Fake news and disinformation online, which found that 85% of the respondents consider *fake news* as problem for their country, and 83% think that they are a problem for democracy in general.³

At the same time, the dominance of digital platforms has also risen concerns all around the globe. The tendency shown by the GAFA⁴ (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon) toward monopoly⁵ and ecosystem competition,⁶ along with their algorithmic dynamics and their disruption on established, legacy media, have triggered debates on the need to govern them in order to safeguard media pluralism and the public interest.⁷

Within this context, Public Service Media (PSM), understood as a publicly funded “multi-platform media space that is relevant, credible and impartial” that is “essential for an informed and effective democracy and should be accessible and accountable to all citizens,”⁸ could now play an important role. Considering that, at least ideally, these media outlets are independent, thus free from political and economic pressures in their decision-making, PSM should emerge as the cornerstone for the defense of the citizens’ communication rights, acting as a reliable source of information and other trustworthy media services. However, the situation of PSM organizations, even the most renown ones, has traditionally been far from this ideal model of editorial and financial independence,⁹ and in some Member States, such as Hungary or Poland, PSM has been captured¹⁰ by political interests, leading to “allegations of direct censorship, abrupt changes of staff, including executives, for political reasons, and the

2. European Commission, *Multidimensional Approach to Disinformation*.

3. European Commission, “Flash Eurobarometer 464.”

4. Chibber.

5. Srnicek.

6. Miguel de Bustos and Castillo-Izquierdo.

7. Napoli.

8. Public Media Alliance.

9. Karpinen and Moe, “What We Talk about When Talk about “Media Independence.””

10. Dragomir.

co-optation of nominally independent media regulators by governments or other dominant political forces.”¹¹

A recent report of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism has stressed the relevance of PSM in the safeguard of European democracy.¹² For instance, the report suggests that they should be an active part of collaborative strategies that can be developed to fight disinformation. Nevertheless, for PSM organizations to be able to actually meet the citizens’ communication needs, some prerequisites are needed. Such requirements can be summarized in two: independence and funding.

Despite the theoretical agreement on the need to provide PSM with adequate and stable funding, European PSM has suffered the consequences of the economic crisis, which led to major budget cutbacks in some of the Member States’ public corporations and unfolded the existence of a two-speed Europe in terms of the impact of austerity measures in PSM.¹³

Moreover, the funding of some European Member States has not only been reduced, but it has also received increasing criticism by private media and political parties. One of the most recent examples of such attacks targeted the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which was criticized, among others, by the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and is currently undergoing a loss of political support that threatens the sustainability of its historical funding model, the license fee.¹⁴ The independence of PSM, both regarding its funding and its governance, is still a fragile illusion in some Member States, as reflected in the results of the latest Media Pluralism Monitor from 2017.¹⁵ According to this report, the independence enjoyed by the German, French, Belgian, Dutch, or Danish PSM contrast with the high threats to PSM’s independence in Hungary, Poland, Croatia, Bulgaria, Italy, or Finland. However, further research showed that those PSM with higher risk to their political independence do not necessarily have biased content.¹⁶

Considering the current situation affecting the media environment in general, and European PSM in particular, this article aims at exploring, from a media policy perspective, the way in which PSM was approached

11. Nielsen, Gorwa and de Cock Buning, 19.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Juanatey-Boga, Martínez-Fernández, and Rodríguez-Castro.

14. Thorpe.

15. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom.

16. Šimunjak, 14.

at the European Parliament (EP) in a two-fold way: on the one hand, through the identification of the main communication-related topics discussed at the EP during the past term (2014–2019), by analyzing the texts adopted by this institution; and on the other, through the study of the electoral proposals of the main political parties from eight Member States with representation in the EP, by reviewing their electoral manifestos for the 2019 European elections.

The article is structured as follows: first, the main developments of European media policy are summarized, considering the different competences between both the European Union (EU) and the Member States, and among European institutions. It is argued that this distribution of competences has constrained the devolvement of a European public sphere. After the main actions of EU policy affecting PSM are reviewed, the main communication issues discussed at the EP during the past term are categorized and developed. In the fourth section, the electoral proposals of the selected political parties concerning media issues are exposed and analyzed. Finally, we elaborate on the results to attempt to outline what the main EU policy initiatives on PSM during the present term (2019–2024) may be.

European Media Policy: Between Economic Goals and Public Interest

When we talk about European media policy, it is worth noting that we refer to policies developed at the EU level, despite the fact that there is yet no such thing as a single European media system¹⁷; and which mostly takes television, video on demand, the film industry, and media infrastructure as objects of regulation, while usually leaving the printed press, magazines, radio, and digital media content-related issues out of its scope.¹⁸

Moreover, European media policy has been described as a “complex maze of actors, regulatory instruments and interests,” as Donders, Loisen, and Pauwels refer to this object of study, because “there is in fact no clearly defined field of European media policy; no single competent authority responsible for it; no single law which European media sectors need to comply; no unified actor interests; and no shared objective underlying

17. Michalis, 128.

18. Nowak, 107.

European media policy.”¹⁹ The fact that media regulation is marked by “the technical and evolving nature of the sector,”²⁰ thus redefining the landscapes and concepts used in the policy-making process, adds another level of complexity to this maze. This fragmentation of EU policy has been deemed by some scholars as one of the reasons behind the failure of the creation of a European communicative space.²¹

One more reason behind such failure is the fact that media is mainly treated as a cultural issue and, therefore, under the subsidiarity principle, a competence of the Member States. This division of competences constrains the scope of EU media regulation. However, EU institutions have still shaped audiovisual policies since the liberalization of the broadcasting market. As stated by Llorens, “television—mostly under public ownership—was no longer merely a national and cultural matter, but an economic and European one too, since it affected free competition and the internal market.”²²

Media policy developed by the EU, therefore, has faced the conflict between “two distinct value-systems,”²³ between market and economic goals and democratic, social, and cultural aims. Through the promotion of an internal audiovisual market, competition law, the application of media-specific programs, and the defense of European cultural and economic interests in international organizations,²⁴ the EU has attempted to develop an extra layer of supranational, European identity, as a means to legitimate the existence of the EU itself,²⁵ and to guarantee a certain level of harmonization that enables the development of a common media space.²⁶

This tension between the economic interest of a European audiovisual market and free competition and the democratic, social, and cultural goals that should be part of all European media regulations is just one part of the abovementioned “maze” (of instruments) described by Donders, Loisen, and Pauwels. On one hand, “media freedom, free speech and the right to

19. Donders, Loisen, and Pauwels, 5.

20. Psychogiopoulou, 249.

21. Schlesinger, 271.

22. Llorens, 41.

23. Nieminen “The European Public Sphere,” 35.

24. Donders, Loisen, and Pauwels, 1.

25. Sarikakis, “Identity and Diversity in European Media Policy,” 59.

26. Michalis.

inform and to be informed are recognized as pillars of democracy²⁷ by the EU, therefore needing protection and support. On the other hand, the promotion of a European audiovisual market has been mainly related to competition issues, a “horizontally applying regulatory instrument (. . .) for the media sectors in Europe.”²⁸

Regarding the *maze* of regulatory instruments, two different levels can be identified. First, commendatory norms, or hard regulation, has been linked to the development of the internal market. Within this section, we can include Directives, such as the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) and even the European Commission’s (EC) decisions on competition issues. When direct policies cannot be approved at the EU level, either because of a lack of agreement among Member States or because of the appliance of the subsidiarity principle, the EU can use soft regulation to influence the cultural media policy framework.²⁹ An example of such soft regulation can be found in Creative Europe, a program designed to support the European audiovisual, cultural, and creative sector.

Some scholars have exemplified this same connection between economic interests and hard regulation, and public interest aims and soft regulation. Costache and Llorens considered that the EC showed clear support for the reinforcement of the internal market in the adoption of the AVMSD, in detriment of the cultural and human rights side of media, which was confined to soft regulatory strategies.³⁰

One last aspect of the European *maze* involves the complex institutional structure of the EU, which entails that a wide array of actors is involved in the development of different media policy initiatives. The different European institutions involved in media policy-making are also linked to the two main, conflicting goals mentioned earlier. While the EC, the executive power of the EU, has traditionally been concerned with economic and internal market affairs, the EP, along with the Council of the EU, has emphasized the democratic and cultural condition of media policy.

However, despite the fact that the inclusion of public interest goals in media policy is essential to secure the role of media in European democracies,³¹ and even if after the Lisbon Treaty the EP increased its powers in order to reinforce the democratic weight of the Union, the truth is that

27. Psychogiopoulo, 249.

28. Donders, Loisen, and Pauwels, 3.

29. Primorac, Uzelac, and Bilić, 7.

30. Costache and Llorens, 166.

31. Nowak, 108.

the EP has still limited powers to shape media policy and the economic perspective of the EC is still dominant.

The different approaches to media policy shown by different European institutions can be illustrated with how they have addressed the issue of media pluralism, as described by Klimkiewicz³²: while the EC has only attempted (without success) to approach media pluralism as internal and structural pluralism, that is, as a matter of concentration and media ownership, mainly considering it an added value to be dealt with at different European or national institutions, the EP (along with the Council of Europe) has approached media pluralism from a more democratic and cultural perspective, although with very limited success. This resulted in a lack of common regulation on media pluralism that displays the limited power of the EU in this field, mainly limited to competition policy.³³

The complexity of European media policy that has just been described, as well as the abovementioned tension between economic goals and the public interest, have been two major hurdles in the development of a European public sphere, one of the unresolved challenges of the EU. Habermas' seminal work on the public sphere³⁴ was further developed in order to fit the overlapping of several layers of spheres³⁵ in a postnational European democracy within a global communicative space.³⁶ The transposition of Habermas' theory to the context of the EU led to intensive discussions on the idea of the development of a European public sphere, that is, "a transnational arena of communication where social, political, institutional, cultural and economic actors voice their opinions and ideas which are then discussed, distributed and negotiated with reference to different (crucial) events."³⁷ A European public sphere should not be understood as an extra layer above national public spheres, but as the result of the "Europeanization of various, particularly national, public spheres."³⁸ However, the nature of EU media policy has hindered the development of such European public sphere.

32. Klimkiewicz.

33. Llorens, 53.

34. Habermas.

35. Fossum and Schlesinger; Iosifidis.

36. Eriksen, *Conceptualizing European Public Spheres*.

37. Krzyzanowski, Triandafyllidou, and Wodak, 4.

38. Risse, 125.

Both national and supranational institutions are aware of the importance of media systems in the construction of symbolic spaces of communication in the globalization context.³⁹ Hence the resistance showed by state institutions to the homogeneous uniformization of their media policies, over which EU supranational institutions have very limited power beyond the promotion of statements, forums, parliamentary debates, communications, directives, and recommendations, which are diluted in the sovereignty of the states.⁴⁰ Moreover, beyond the tensions between national and supranational institutions, the tendency of the EU to protect market interests and economic profitability through its media policy has led to a communication deficit that also constrains the development of a functioning European public sphere.⁴¹ This leads to a second type of deficit, a democratic deficit, as “only with a European-wide public sphere in place can the requirements of democracy beyond the nation state be met.”⁴² Therefore, the EU has repeatedly attempted to address these shortfalls by prompting transnational media projects that would enable the introduction of European issues into media debates and thus build transnational audiences, increase the discussion on European matters and institutions, and thus contribute to the development of a European public spheres. Such attempts, however, had very limited success.

Euronews, for instance, launched in 1993, is a multilingual television news channel whose initial aim was to provide news coverage from a European perspective. Among its main objectives are to explain international events to the European public, to promote a European identity, to discuss topics related to the European integration, and to safeguard greater levels of transparency among EU institutions.⁴³ However, Euronews’ coverage is still heavily dependent on the adaptation of national news⁴⁴ and its ability to stimulate public debate and civic participation in relation to European matters is weak. Further problems came from Euronews’ financial difficulties, as advertisement revenues were hard to achieve due to the

39. Flew and Waisbord.

40. Pavani.

41. Kaitatzi-Whitlock.

42. Eriksen, “Emerging European Public Sphere,” 341.

43. Kaliberda, 9.

44. García-Blanco and Cushion.

range and diversity of its audience, which evidenced the obstacles on the way toward European integration.⁴⁵

Similar constraints arose in other transnational media projects, such as Euronet Plus, a transnational radio network launched in 2007 with the aim of raising awareness on European issues and strengthen their understanding. This radio network is composed of 13 EU broadcasters, both public and private, and draws the attention to European local news broadcasting only 75 minutes per week of news from a European perspective⁴⁶ in 12 official EU languages. The main challenges that affected this radio project are linked to its audience dissipation and organizational weakness. Moreover, the absence of major European PSM is considered to have worked against the original aims of this project and to have allowed for the allocation of public funds to private companies.⁴⁷

The failure of these transnational media projects illustrates the obstacles that complicate the development of a functioning European public sphere, an absence that partially explains the EU democratic deficit and impacts European citizens' information and communication rights. Eriksen argues that "the public sphere is a precondition for the realization of popular sovereignty, because, in principle, it entitles everybody to speak without any limitation, whether on themes, participation, questions, time or resources."⁴⁸ Thus, without a solid European public sphere, European citizens are unable to exercise basic communication rights such as freedom of information and freedom of expression, as they lack the required infrastructure that would allow them to access information on European issues depicted from a European perspective and to voice their opinions and be part of the public debate.

European media policy has been unable to construct a European public sphere, but it has repeatedly attempted to protect and ensure the information and communication rights of European citizens in areas such as access, availability, competence, privacy, and dialogical rights.⁴⁹ One of the means that European policy makers could adopt in order to ensure these communication rights is the protection and reinforcement of PSM,

45. Giurco.

46. Kaliberda.

47. Gallego, Fernández Sande, and Demonget.

48. Eriksen, "Conceptualising European Public Spheres," 23.

49. Nieminen, "Communication and Information Rights."

as these institutions are “charged with implementation of communication rights for citizens in a democracy.”⁵⁰

PSM as a Target of European Media Policy

PSM has been one of the communication issues placed at the center of the EU’s concerns. Yet, the effective EU regulation on PSM is mainly linked to competition issues.⁵¹ As these public organizations constitute a state intervention on the market, they are seen by the EU (and by other market forces) as a constraint on free competition in the internal market.⁵² However, the legitimacy of each Member State to organize its public service broadcasting (PSB) system, as well as its remit and funding, was officially acknowledged in the Amsterdam Protocol, provided that such funding does not distort trading conditions and competition within the EU, to an extent that would be contrary to the common interest.⁵³

The Amsterdam Protocol was especially useful during the first decade of the 21st century, when the EC’s Directorate-General for Competition had to deal with many complaints issued by commercial media against the funding of PSM in several Member States, such as Spain, Belgium, and Germany. This series of complains were primarily related to the expansion of public service broadcasters from radio and television services to online media,⁵⁴ which was deemed by commercial media as incompatible state aid. Even though some European institutions, namely the EP, supported the need for Public Service Broadcasters to develop online media services,⁵⁵ the EC’s approach was more cautious, as it showed some concern for the respect of free competition in the internal market.

The EC handled this situation by publishing new guidelines for the funding of PSB and for the approval of new services—including the suggestion of the introduction of an *ex ante test* similar to the already operational Public Value Test of the BBC—in the 2009 Broadcasting

50. Aslama Horowitz and Nieminen, 96.

51. Donders.

52. Llorens.

53. European Union, “Treaty of Amsterdam,” 109.

54. This extension of public broadcasters to digital and online media is referred to by many scholars as the transition from PSB to PSM. For further information, see Lowe and Bardeol.

55. Brevini.

Communication.⁵⁶ The guidelines of the Commission were only partially adopted by the Member States, as the subsidiarity principle allows them to decide on how to regulate their PSM organizations, but they definitely helped curb the complaints against PSM's funding and provided a useful framework for deciding on new competition conflicts.⁵⁷

Despite this tendency of the EU to treat PSM predominantly from a market perspective, following the EC's approach, there seems to be a slight change toward a more public interest focus in European regulation. The increasing threats against media freedom in some Member States led the EU to take some action through soft power in order to protect media pluralism and freedom of expression.⁵⁸ Thus, Llorens states that "Brussels' concerns about protecting the internal market and free competition have faded into the background,"⁵⁹ as the safeguard of PSM as independent institutions working toward the respect of fundamental human rights—including communication rights.

Within this context, this article aims at contributing to a better understanding of the political discussions around PSM, which took place during the past term of the EP, as well as to dig into how different political parties approached this political project during the 2019 European Election.

Method

The main objective of this quantitative research was to study whether PSM is considered a political issue by the EP and represented political parties across Europe. To elaborate on that broad aim, two fields were explored: first, the adopted texts of the EP during the past legislature (2014–2019); and second, the electoral programs for the 2019 European election drafted by selected political parties. The study of the EP's approach to media policy is significant because, despite the limited power of the EP in comparison to the EC, this democratic institution has been able to influence and shape EU media policies before, aiming at a socially responsible media model, instead of a more economic one.⁶⁰ In the field of PSB, for instance,

56. European Commission, "Communication from the Commission."

57. Rodríguez-Castro and Campos-Freire.

58. Costache and Llorens.

59. Llorens, 46.

60. Sarikakis, "Defending Communicative Spaces."

the work of the EP was key in its explicit reference within the Treaty of Amsterdam.⁶¹ Even if the executive powers of the EC usually dictate the directions of EU media policy, the EP still plays a major role in shaping its discourse and agenda. Therefore, this article will shed some light on the main communication issues discussed from the point of social responsibility, while economic and market considerations are secondary.

Document analysis was the applied method to explore both areas due to the advantages of this technique when aiming to draft an overview of policy issues and debates and to get to know the different perspectives of involved stakeholders.⁶² Overall, 44 documents were analyzed: 28 electoral manifestos and 16 adopted texts of the EP.

Thus, this systematic procedure of finding, selecting, appraising, and synthesizing data contained in documents⁶³ was applied first to the texts adopted by the EP during the last parliamentary term in order to identify which topics were being discussed at the European level in terms of communication and PSM. Once these topics were identified, the authors looked at the selected electoral manifestos to check whether PSM was included in the political agenda, which was being shaped before the 2019 European election and to advance which proposals concerning PSM will be debated during the EP's next term (2019–2024).

Sample

In order to narrow down the sample of our research, we selected eight countries drawing from the media systems established by Hallin and Mancini⁶⁴: the United Kingdom and Ireland (Liberal Model); the Netherlands, Germany, and Sweden (Democratic Corporatist Model); and Spain, Italy, and France (Polarized Pluralist Model). Once the country sample was completed, we proceeded to the selection of the political parties whose manifestos would be analyzed. For this purpose, we selected the four political parties with greater representation in the salient EP (2014–2019). The political parties of our sample are gathered in Table 1.

61. *Ibid.*, 164.

62. Karppinen and Moe, "Texts as Data I: Document Analysis," 250.

63. Bowen, 28.

64. Hallin and Mancini.

TABLE I Sample of Political Parties by Country

France	Germany	Ireland	Italy	Netherlands	Spain	Sweden	United Kingdom
FN	CDU/ CSU	Fine Gael	PD	CDA	PP	S	Conservative Party
UMP (now Les Républicains)	SPD	Sinn Féin	M5S	D66	PSOE	MP	Labour Party
PS-PRG	Grüne	-	FI	PVV	IU/LV	Mo	The Brexit Party
MoDem/ UDI	Die Linke	-	LN	VVD	Podemos	FP (now Liberals)	Green Party

Source: Processed by the authors.

Note: These national political parties were grouped in European Political Parties during the past term (2014–2019) as follows: European People's Party: Union pour un mouvement Populaire (UMP), Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands/Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (CDU/CSU), Fine Gael, Forza Italia, Christen-Democratisch Appèl (CDA), Partido Popular (PP), and Moderata samlingspartiet (M); Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats: Parti socialiste/Parti radical de Gauche (PS-PRG), Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), Partito Democratico (PD), Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti (S), and the Labour Party; The Greens/European Free Alliance: Grüne and Green Party; Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe: Mouvement Démocrate/ Union des démocrates et indépendants (MoDem/UDI), Democraten 66 (D66), Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD), and Folkpartiet liberalerna (FP); Europe of Nations and Freedom: Lega Nord (LN) and Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV); European Union United Left/Nordic Green Left: Die Linke, Sinn Féin, Izquierda Unida/Los Verdes (IU/LV), and Podemos; Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy: The Brexit Party; European Conservatives and Reformists: Conservatives.

The EP and Communication Rights (2014–2019)

The analysis of the approved texts discussed at the EP during the 2014–2019 term showed that three main broad communication-related issues were at the center of the European debate: threats to media pluralism, the dominance of digital platforms, and disinformation. Other topics related to Europeans' communication rights, such as the universal access to the Internet, European media authorities, or the protection of minorities were also discussed at the EP (Table 2). PSM has not been the main issue of any of the texts adopted by the Parliament, but it is often transversally mentioned as a key agent in many of them.

TABLE 2 Main Communication-Related Topics Discussed in the European Parliament

Main Topic	Subtopics	Public Service Media
Media freedom	Threats and attacks to journalists Precarious work conditions Attacks to media from far-right parties	
Digital platforms	Media concentration Media pluralism Transparency of algorithms and artificial intelligence Data protection Geoblocking	
Disinformation	Digital and media literacy Russian interferences	
Others	Universal access to the Internet Net-neutrality Increased supervision—European regulatory authorities Protection of minorities	

Source: Processed by the authors.

Media Freedom

The EP expressed great concern for what were defined as key democratic European values, such as freedom of expression, media pluralism, and media freedom. Those concerns were targeted both at foreign countries and EU Member States.

Regarding non-EU countries, Egypt, Belarus, and Turkey were the main subjects of concern. In 2014, the EP approved a text on Egypt's freedom of expression, considering the attacks of the Egyptian government to digital and media freedom, as well as the attacks against journalists and media organizations.⁶⁵ With this approved text, the EP condemned the Internet and media censorship and defended media freedom as a cornerstone for any democratic state. In Belarus, the action that triggered the EP's adopted text in 2015⁶⁶ was the amendment of the Belarusian media legislation, which allowed the government to shut down media outlets and websites on the grounds of "unsuitable" content.

65. European Parliament, "Freedom of Expression and Assembly in Egypt."

66. European Parliament, "Situation in Belarus."

Similarly, in 2015, another adopted text⁶⁷ approached the concerns on the protection of freedom of speech in Turkey after several journalists and media executives had been arrested. The hostile environment that had developed in Turkey, with a great number of imprisoned journalists and increasing pressure from the government against the media, allowed for concern. The EP highlighted the need for media freedom and freedom of expression as fundamental values, especially in the case of an EU candidate country. One of the solutions posed by the EP was the allocation of funds from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for the support of independent media in Turkey. However, the situation in this candidate country did not improve, and in 2016 the EP adopted another text⁶⁸ regarding Turkey's media environment, as the arrestment of journalists continued (99 journalists and writers were arrested after the attempted coup d'état in 2016) and over 150 had been shut down.

Within European Member States, the EP debated its concerns about the situations in Poland, Hungary, Malta, and Slovakia. The last two countries were the object of adopted texts due to two specific violent attacks against journalists, both of them working in the Panama Papers. In Malta,⁶⁹ the murder of the investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in 2017 while she was reporting on corruption cases involving Maltese politicians triggered all the alarms and caused great concern about the protection of media freedom and independence in the island. The murder of the Slovak investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his partner Martina Kušnírová in 2018 caused great concern about the need to protect journalists against political pressures and to safeguard the protection of journalistic sources.⁷⁰ Both adopted texts were supported by data retrieved from the Media Pluralism Monitor, which contributed to the argument of how media pluralism is under great risk in Malta and Slovakia.

The cases of Poland and Hungary were slightly different, although equally worrisome for the EU, especially as the spotlight was put on national PSM outlets. The reform of the Polish media legislation was considered a threat for the “governance, editorial independence and institutional autonomy”⁷¹ of PSM. In Hungary, the concentration of private media on the hands of

67. European Parliament, “Freedom of Expression in Turkey.”

68. European Parliament, “Situation of Journalists in Turkey.”

69. European Parliament, “Rule of Law in Malta.”

70. European Parliament, “Protection of Investigative Journalists in Europe.”

71. European Parliament, “Recent Developments in Poland.”

businessman close to the government and the capture of the Hungarian PSM outlet by political powers were the target of the EP's criticism.⁷²

Besides these specific national situations, some other transversal issues were deemed major concerns for the development of independent journalism within the EU. The impact of the economic crisis on the media landscape has been mentioned as a major risk for media pluralism, as it led both to the closure of an important number of media outlets and journalistic initiatives, as well as to a deterioration of the working conditions of journalists and media professionals, with increasing precariousness and instability.⁷³ Similarly, the attacks from far-right parties and their supporters against European values led the EP to prompt Member States to train PSM and all media workers in general on how to cover such discrimination acts.⁷⁴

Digital platforms

The increasing dominance of digital platforms, mainly based in the United States, in the European communication space has been another of the widely discussed topics not only at the EP, but across all EU institutions. The update of the AVMSD⁷⁵ was triggered by the need to adapt these rules to the new media environment, and thus guarantee European values such as the protection of media pluralism and cultural diversity,⁷⁶ but also to establish new rules to grant a level playing field for traditional broadcasters, Video on Demand providers, and video-sharing platforms.

At the EP, the focus of the discussion around digital platforms was primarily driven by the need to protect media pluralism and media freedom. The resolution of the EP on this topic,⁷⁷ adopted in May 2018, warned about the two-edged sword nature of the current media system, as it offers both opportunities and challenges for communication rights such as freedom of expression, the democratization of news production, and citizens' public participation. The tendency of this evolving media market toward media concentration in the hands of "media conglomerates, platform

72. European Parliament, "The Situation in Hungary."

73. European Parliament, "Media Pluralism and Media Freedom in the European Union."

74. European Parliament, "Rise of Neo-Fascist Violence in Europe."

75. European Parliament and Council of Europe.

76. Broughton Micova, Hempel, and Jacques.

77. European Parliament, "Media Pluralism and Media Freedom in the European Union."

operators and internet intermediaries,”⁷⁸ exemplified by the Google/Facebook duopoly in the digital advertisement market, could harm media pluralism, one of the core values of European democracies, as well as the EU digital single market. The EP’s acknowledged the important role of new intermediaries as digital gatekeepers and highlighted the need for Member States to design national policies for the protection of a communication environment where different online media can contribute to pluralism.

Besides this media pluralism focus, the EP has also stressed in its resolution the need to be aware of some of the characteristics of digital platforms intrinsic to their nature. For instance, the opacity that surrounds the use of algorithms, automatization, and artificial intelligence was a cause for concern. The EP demanded full transparency in these matters in order to guarantee that no kind of censorship or removal of content is done without a human rights–based approach. Moreover, data protection was mentioned as an individual right for every citizen, in relation to the disclosure of personal information, unlawful surveillance, and the right to be forgotten. In direct connection to the development of a common media space, the EP has also stood up against geo-blocking practices on media content across Member States. One last topic was included in this EP resolution in direct relation to digital platforms: their role in the diffusion of hate speech and radicalization, as well as their role in the advance of illegal practices such as cyberbullying or revenge porn.

Disinformation

The spread of disinformation was another key topic during the past term of the EP. Even though the EP acknowledges that this is not a new phenomenon and that it is not limited to the online scene, the fast spread of disinformation throughout the European media space was another cause for concern, as the proliferation of *fake news* can result in the erosion of the citizens’ trust in the media and damage the quality of the political debate and democratic participation. In order to curb the effects of disinformation, the EP stresses two main measures.⁷⁹ On the one hand, media outlets and digital platforms are encouraged to develop self-regulatory mechanisms based on accuracy and transparency, to enable users to report fake

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid.

or misleading news, and to collaborate with independent and impartial fact-checking organizations.

On the other hand, the EP focuses on media literacy as a crucial democratic skill that empowers citizens. The interest of this institution in media literacy practices is not new, as the EP had already prompted a communication on this topic in 2007 and the introduction of an obligation in the 2010 AVMSD for Member States to report on their levels of media literacy.⁸⁰ In the 2014–2019 term, the EP focused on the encouragement of formal, nonformal, and informal media literacy education and asks the Commission and Member States to invest on this kind of communication strategies for the empowerment of citizens and help them navigate a disinformation environment.

Media literacy is not linked to the identification of fake news, but also deemed important in the field of gender equality, as the EP encouraged media literacy projects developed considering gender perspective⁸¹ in order to guarantee that the online sphere is safe for everyone.

The EP has also identified some agents behind disinformation practices attacking the EU media system. The Russian interference has been particularly worrisome, leading the EP to adapt a text on the strategic communication of the Union to counteract its propaganda, where the situation is referred to as an “information warfare.”⁸² The lack of an international legal framework for cybersecurity and media accountability has been seized by Russian powers. The independence of the media, along with media freedom, objectivity and impartiality are key values that the EP wants to encourage not only within Member States, but also in neighboring countries, in order to limit the influence of propaganda against the Union. Media literacy comes into play in relation to this issue as well, along with collaboration with digital platforms and further information on media ethics.

Other Topics Related to Communication Rights

Apart from media freedom, digital platforms, and disinformation, some other relevant topics were discussed at the EP in relation to communication rights. Universal access to the Internet was one of them. In its

80. Nowak.

81. European Parliament, “Gender Equality in the Media Sector in the EU.”

82. European Parliament, “EU Strategic Communication to Counteract Propaganda,” 2.

resolution on media pluralism and media freedom, the EP states that both the EU and Member States should work to recognize Internet access as a fundamental right.⁸³ In order to protect this right, net neutrality must also be secured. The EP regretted the decision of the United States to repeal the rules on net neutrality, positioned itself in favor of strengthening this principle and prompted the development of further guidelines on the implementation of net neutrality rules by national regulators.

Media and communications authorities have also been part of the discussion. The EP underscored the relevance of such institutions, as independent and impartial authorities, both in the supervision of the compliance with the regulation on horizontal concentration of media ownership and cross-media ownership and with the safeguard of transparency of information regarding media ownership, funding, and governance. Moreover, the Parliament has also encouraged national audiovisual regulatory authorities to share their best practices. Collaboration strategies have been frequently highlighted by the EP in other fields such as the development of common innovative and sustainable strategies for the European media sector, coproduction among European media, and cooperation between journalists and European institutions.

One last topic has been the need to protect minorities, understood as a wide concept involving women, the lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, and intersex (LGTBI) community, local and regional communities, minority languages, or people with disabilities. The results of the Media Pluralism Monitor showed that the communication rights of minorities were at risk, as their media access was not always granted. The Parliament has stressed the need for inclusive media and the right of every citizen to access independent information on their mother tongue,⁸⁴ as a prerequisite for a thriving, plural, and open media environment.

Gender equality has been the key subtopic in this regard. The EP has acknowledged the great gender disparity that characterizes the media industry, both from the point of view of production and representation. Regarding media production, the Parliament calls on media outlets to address the underrepresentation of women on decision-making charges and executive boards, to develop a corporate culture that allows for the reconciliation of work and private life and to correct the salary gap between

83. European Parliament, "Media Pluralism and Media Freedom in the European Union."

84. *Ibid.*, 58.

men and women.⁸⁵ In terms of representation, the need to remove sexism and gender stereotypes and to include more women as sources in news production (proposing the elaboration of a database of women experts in different areas) were some of the key issues stressed by the EP.

PSM as a Transversal Topic

As indicated earlier, PSM was not the specific target of any of the EP's adopted texts, but it was present in many of them as a key element to safeguard certain values, achieve proposed objectives, or participate in cooperation strategies with other agents.

In the resolution on media pluralism and media freedom, the most relevant adopted text of the EP during the past term regarding media, the Parliament stressed the role of PSM within the European media sphere and reassured the values that should be at the core of European PSM organizations: independence and impartiality.⁸⁶ The independence of PSM's funding and governance from political and economic powers was particularly highlighted as essential means for the development of a free media environment and the protection of the citizens' rights to be informed. Therefore, the Parliament called Member States to strengthen their financial support to PSM and to avoid influencing their editorial decisions.

Moreover, the same resolution launched the idea of the "establishment of a European PSB platform that fosters EU-wide political debates based on facts, dissent and respect, contributes to a plurality of views in the newly converged media environment and fosters the visibility of the EU in its external relations."⁸⁷ This project, would be conceived as a means to contribute to a European public sphere, enabling the access to the same content to all EU citizens and counteracting the attacks of external agents against the Union.

In this regard, PSM has another important role to play in the battle against propaganda. According to the EP, PSM should act as role models in terms of their good practices on providing impartial and objective information as well as regarding their respect for journalistic ethics.⁸⁸ This way,

85. European Parliament, "Gender Equality in the Media Sector in the EU."

86. European Parliament, "Media Pluralism and Media Freedom in the European Union,"

87. *Ibid.*, 62.

88. European Parliament, "EU Strategic Communication to Counteract Propaganda," 51.

other media outlets from within or outside of the EU could improve their practices and contribute to a more democratic media environment.

A third area where PSM should serve as an example is the promotion of gender equality in the media sector.⁸⁹ The EP regretted the fact that women are underrepresented in strategical and high-level posts and on boards of European PSM organizations. However, it acknowledges that the situation in private media outlets is even worse. In order to repair this unequal situation, the EP requests PSM organizations to prompt internal policies in favor of equal opportunities, bearing in mind work–life balance, maternity and paternity leaves, and specific mentorship and training programs focusing on management. Moreover, the role of PSM in the fair representation of women is also considered a major step toward removing stereotypical and offensive portrayals, and Member States are encouraged to promote content on gender equality in PSM channels and services.

How Do Political Parties Approach Communication Rights and PSM?

The 2019 European elections took place in the midst of a turbulent time for the EU itself, marked by the negotiations on the Brexit and the growth of Eurosceptic parties all across Europe. Despite this juncture, the political parties running for the EP included references to the media environment in general, and some of them even drafted some specific proposals regarding PSM. In this section, the main results of the study of the four political parties with greater representation in the past term of the EP are presented, following the communication topics that were established after the analysis of the EP's adopted texts and including other issues that were identified during the analysis of the electoral proposals.

If we look at the proposals presented about communication topics by country, summarized in Table 3, the results show that the countries where more attention was paid to media-related issues were Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands, while in Ireland, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom they were barely mentioned.

89. European Parliament, "Gender Equality in the Media Sector in the EU."

TABLE 3 Communication Topics Mentioned in Electoral Manifestos, by Country

	Polarized Pluralist			Democratic Corporatist			Liberal	
	ES	FR	IT	DE	NL	SE	IE	UK
PSM	✓			✓		✓		
Independence				✓				
Collaboration	✓			✓				
Funding								
European Platforms				✓				
Platform Regulation		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
European Public Sphere				✓		✓		
Geo-blocking					✓	✓		
Algorithms, Big Data, and AI	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Data protection	✓		✓	✓		✓		
Disinformation		✓			✓		✓	
Media Literacy					✓			
Independent journalism	✓			✓	✓	✓		
Protection of journalists					✓	✓		✓

Source: Processed by the authors.

Note: ES: Spain; FR: France; IT: Italy; DE: Germany; NL: the Netherlands; SE: Sweden; IE: Ireland; UK: United Kingdom

Platforms

In some countries, the concern around the dominance of US digital platforms in the European media space was part of electoral manifestos. In Germany, for instance, the SPD proposed the development of a European platform, so that EU citizens could at least have an alternative to the GAFA. The German socialists state that such a European, transnational platform could contribute to the strengthening of democracy, of freedom of expression and pluralism. Another German political party, CDU/CSU suggested a similar idea, but this time this European platform would be developed through the connection of the platforms of the PSM organizations of the

Member States. This proposal, therefore, would consist of a European public service platform. CDU/CSU also bets on technology sectors that are deemed to be key for the development of a digital future, such as Artificial Intelligence and a responsible use of Big Data. Die Linke, on the other hand, approached platform capitalism by proposing a digital tax that would be applied to big platforms.

In the Netherlands, the VVD considers that the EU is falling behind in comparison to China and the United States in terms of digital advances. The D66, on the other hand, apart from worrying about the dominance of US and Chinese Internet giants, expressed their concern on the influence of algorithms in the media environment, and thus proposed that the EU research the impact of such algorithms in democracy, especially in relation to how they are used to determine which content reaches the users and which ones are removed, and regarding the origins of advertisement campaigns in digital platforms. The dominance of digital platforms was extensively covered by the D66 electoral manifesto, which also proposes that the concentration of advertisement and the powerful data that is in the hands of such platforms should be further regulated. D66 also positioned itself against geo-blocking, as this hinders the distribution of European content throughout all Member States. The reduction of geo-blocking, along with complementary resources such as subtitles in different EU languages, would facilitate the circulation of European productions.

The Swedish proposals on digital platforms were similar. The Swedish Social Democratic Party (S) proposed to develop a regulation forcing digital platforms to withdraw terrorist content. The Green Party (MP) deemed it necessary to strengthen the legislation in order to protect citizens' privacy online, and defended the removal of upload filters in order to advocate for a free Internet. The Liberals positioned themselves against geo-blocking of digital services and in favor of the development of a legal framework, based on net neutrality, for the flourishing of technologies such as blockchain, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms.

In France, the left-wing coalition PS-PRG included in its manifesto the development of measures against the spread of hate speech, particularly through social media platforms, while another coalition led by La République en marche (LREM) and MoDem proposed something similar, targeting the removal of terrorist, pedopornographic, racist, and antisemitic content from social media. This same coalition also proposed the creation of a charter for digital giants and demanded transparency for algorithms.

In Spain, the Popular Party (PP) defends the need to advance on the challenges of the digital revolution and the Digital Single Market, drawing from the principles of data protection, cybersecurity, and the defense of the consumers in the online environment. Moreover, the PP also bets on Big Data technology. The left-wing party Izquierda Unida advocates for the recognition of the Internet as a free, universal service (same as Podemos, which proposes Internet access as a fundamental right) and a legislation in favor of net neutrality. This last aspect is also defended by Podemos, which also demands greater transparency in the use of algorithms, to guarantee that they are not discriminatory, and the removal of upload filters.

Two Italian parties approached platform-related issues in their manifestos. The Five Star Movement (M5S), besides supporting the application of blockchain to the provision of public services, has also supported the acknowledgment of the citizens' digital identities, the need for data protection rules, the right to be forgotten, and access to the Internet. On the other hand, Forza Italia bets on the investment on digital infrastructure and on the creative industries.

In the United Kingdom, the only analyzed political party that referred to communication matters was the MP. Their proposals included the establishment of taxes for big Internet platforms, as well as further control over drones and artificial intelligence. The analyzed Irish parties did not include any references to this subject.

Disinformation

With regard to disinformation, one of the widely discussed topics at the EP during the past term, just four political parties from three Member States have included proposals in their electoral manifestos. In the Netherlands, D66 condemned the spread of disinformation, censorship, and propaganda. According to this party, the solution lies in the protection of independent media and in the improvement of media literacy. Another Dutch party, VVD, proposes an increase on transparency that would enable users to easily identify the source of a piece of news published in a social network, allowing them to assess whether they should trust this information or not.

In France, the coalition between LREM and MoDem included within its proposals the creation of a European agency for the protection of democracies, which would be in charge of oversight of disinformation, among other tasks. The Irish party Fine Gael also mentioned the need

to counteract disinformation online, especially in times of elections, and supported the EU Action Plan on disinformation.

Media Freedom

References to the defense of media freedom, media pluralism, and independent journalism were some of the most repeated proposals of the analyzed political parties. In Germany, Die Linke stressed the need for objective information, education, and participation as key requirements for a full citizenship, and condemned media concentration as well as the capture of PSM in countries such as Hungary and the attacks on PSM from far-right parties, such as Alternative für Deutschland. The main proposal of this party in this regard was the extension of the Creative Europe program to fund European-wide independent journalism projects. Similarly, the Grüne also proposed further financial support for independent media through European policies, including a European fund for investigative journalism.

In the Netherlands, D66 also acknowledged the pressures that independent media are undergoing in Europe. This Dutch political party, as the German ones, also proposes the creation of a fund to support independent journalism, although this time the focus is placed in supporting threatened journalists. The protection of journalists from threats and attacks is the main issue for D66 regarding media freedom. Among their proposals, the establishment of an independent reporting point for journalists to inform about attacks against them, a European policy for the protection of both journalists and their sources, and financial support for threatened media professionals are included. It should also be noted that D66 also demands the allocation of more resources to the Media Pluralism Monitor project, because of the value of this study for the identification of risks to European media diversity.

Three Swedish political parties have also approached media freedom in their manifestos. The MP denounce the threats to journalists and the political control of media, which they link to far-right parties. The Moderate Party (M) also stressed the need to protect media freedom and freedom of expression and calls for greater sanctions and cuts on EU funding for the Member States that do not comply with these essential values for European democracy. The Liberals stress how the strong Swedish media freedom protection should be extended to the EU in order to counterbalance the attacks against media and journalists.

In Spain, the left-wing party Podemos was concerned about the control of the media by banks and funds and proposes a regulation that bans this process of concentration in the field of communication. Podemos considers that this would contribute to safeguard the right of information, media pluralism, and accurate and independent journalism. The British Green Party, on the other hand, also emphasizes the need to protect journalists, activists, and whistleblowers who work toward the public interest.

Key Proposals Regarding European PSM

PSM was the object of electoral proposals only in three out of the eight analyzed political parties: Germany, Spain, and Sweden. The main aspects of PSM included in these manifestos approach the need to increase collaboration among Member States, their contribution to a European communication space, as well as the need to strengthen their independence from political pressures.

As mentioned before, the German party CDU/CSU proposed the establishment of a European Public Service Platform, built around the collaboration and interrelation of the platforms of Member States' PSMs. Similarly, the German socialists, SPD, also bets on the creation of a European Public Service Platform as a key step in the construction of a European public sphere and the reinforcement of a stronger European identity. Such proposed platform should be attractive and include content from PSM organizations from all Member States, as well as genuinely European content. Another challenge in the construction of this European public sphere would be, according to SPD, the development of public service content in Russian, Arabic, and Turkish, targeting both immigrants living in the EU and neighboring countries.

In relation to the development of a European communicative space, the Swedish liberals also underscored the role of PSM in the media coverage of European issues, which they deem scarce. Therefore, they propose the inclusion of the EU coverage within Swedish PSM organizations (SVT, SR, and UR), bearing in mind, however, that politicians should not be part of PSM's editorial decisions.

Collaboration at all levels among the Member States' PSM organizations has also been stressed by the Spanish socialist party, PSOE. The proposals of the PSOE include the development of common media content, collaborative artistic creation, and the exchange among cultural actors in order to promote European values across the cultural economy. PSOE's proposals

are not limited to PSM, as they also consider commercial media outlets as part of their idea to develop pan-European media. Similarly, Podemos proposed the creation of a European PSM organization, independently and transparently managed and under democratic control, which would contribute to the development of a shared identity among all the peoples of Europe, built around the core values of the EU.

Another Spanish left-wing party, Izquierda Unida, has also included references to PSM in its electoral manifesto. However, their proposals are linked to the safeguard of communicative spaces where social initiatives could have a voice and to the need to establish new rules that contribute to the democratization of the media system. Therefore, some of the proposals of Izquierda Unida include the allocation of one-third of the spectrum licenses to PSM, the strengthening of the public service perspective through the supervision of the Parliaments, society, and the PSM's employees and the right of access. Another related proposal from Izquierda Unida is the creation of a European authority to monitor the compliance with communication policies of public, private, and community media.

PSM's independence was directly approached as a core EU value by the German SPD. The German socialists propose strengthening PSM organizations due to their role in safeguarding independent journalism and minorities' interest. For PSM to fulfill their remit, they ought to be protected from political interferences and pressures. Also in Germany, Die Linke condemned the attacks of far-right parties against PSM, as they are a core element of a democratic society, and committed to the defense of their independence.

The four political parties analyzed from the Netherlands, Italy, France, Ireland, and the United Kingdom include no references to PSM in their electoral manifestos.

Conclusions

The results of the analysis show a slightly different approach to PSM and communication rights from political parties and the EP. While the Parliament's adopted texts were more likely to mention PSM organizations as a transversal topic, in relation to the support of communication rights such as media pluralism and media freedom, gender equality or the EU's strategic communication, some political parties included PSM as an issue in its own right, focusing on reinforcing its independence and, most

notably, the need for collaboration strategies, mostly aiming at developing an European public sphere. This subtle difference might be related to PSM remaining under Member States' jurisdiction (except when mixed with EU competition rules), while the EP is traditionally linked to the overview and the defense of basic communication rights like media freedom or freedom of expression. This means that political parties that stand for election to the EP still design their manifestos and operate under national frameworks, even though some countries (Germany, Spain) or political ideologies (socialists and left-wing parties) are, in some way, Europeanizing their agendas as well.

When considering the results of this research from Hallin and Mancini's media systems perspective, it can be concluded that while the Democratic Corporatist countries have widely addressed communication issues in general, and PSM in particular, in their manifestos, especially in the case of Germany, the two Liberal countries analyzed did not shed a lot of light on their positions regarding communication rights and PSM. In Ireland, Sinn Féin focused in Irish matters while references to European media were not included, and in the United Kingdom the only political party that included a small mention of communication issues was the MP. Within the countries of the Polarized Pluralist model, Spain was the more active one in terms of proposals on communication and PSM, while the debate around these topics in France and Italy was far more limited.

Regarding the relation between PSM proposals and the ideological position of the political party, the results also show that there is a tendency for left-wing parties—gathered in the EP either in the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats or in the European United Left-Nordic Green Left—to show more interest in these topics, especially when approaching PSM. However, some proposals were posed by members of the European Popular Party as well.

The current media environment shows some causes for concern, as captured by the EP's adopted texts in the past term and the proposals on communication issues addressed in electoral manifestos during the past European elections. According to the results of the analysis, it seems that some of the widely discussed topics during the past term, such as media freedom and platform dominance, will have a continuance on the new parliamentary debate, as they were very present in the electoral manifestos, whereas others, like disinformation and media literacy, despite their relevance, were barely mentioned.

The troubling increase of attacks against journalists, as well as the threats to and capture of independent media and PSM organizations in some Member States, demonstrates the lack of effective power of the EP (and more broadly the EU) to fully safeguard the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and freedom and pluralism of the media within the Union. Some alternatives, such as the establishment of funding streams for independent media and journalists under threat, have been posed by political parties—the German Die Linke and the Grüne and the Dutch D66—in order to narrow down the influence of such attacks against media freedom and independence. Some scholars had already highlighted the importance of a European emergency fund available for journalists and media organizations in times of crisis, as necessary means for the protection of media pluralism and the development of engaged citizenship.⁹⁰

The dominance of US platforms, as well as the need for further transparency to guide the development of new technological services (algorithms, big data, blockchain, artificial intelligence) has been especially worrisome in the past term, and as clear solutions have not yet been found, the discussion and interchange of ideas is likely to continue. Still, no specific proposals were posed in the analyzed electoral manifestos, besides mentioning these technologies as opportunities not to be missed—the Popular Party in Spain, for instance—or highlighting their operational opacity and the need for greater data protection policies—CDU/CSU in Germany, for instance.

PSM's presence in the analyzed electoral manifestos, on the other hand, was only directly approached by political parties from Germany, Spain, and Sweden. In this regard, the idea of a Public Service Platform for the distribution of European content all across Member States was one of the more remarkable ideas presented in the context of the 2019 elections. This idea was posed by two of the major German political parties, CDU/CSU and SPD, and reinforces the idea that the European media space is in need of a new, European, attractive agent that serves the communication needs of the European audiences. This German interest on a European Public Service Platform might be connected to the scholarly and advocacy work of a European network started by 10 German academics, which triggered a public debate in the country. This group of experts developed a manifesto

90. Sarikakis, "Identity and Diversity in European Media Policy," 67.

on defense of the future of PSM, an open letter⁹¹ in which they support the online expansion of these public communication agents, as well as the increase of European coverage, so that EU citizens can be an informed part in the construction of a European public opinion. Also in relation to this aim, other political parties, such as Podemos in Spain, have suggested the establishment of a European public service broadcaster. Yet, if such a common broadcaster does not fit the audiences' new consumption habits, it is bound to be a failed project.

The attempts of the EU, as well as some EU political parties, to develop a European public sphere are not new nor will be accomplished in the near future. However, despite the many difficulties that are arising in this process—the growth of Euroscepticism, the respect for all the diversity of languages of the EU and engaging fragmented audiences, among others—it might be worth exploring the possibilities of a European digital platform with both European and national content available for all EU citizens, learning from the experience of previous transnational media projects such as Euronews and Euronet Plus, to see whether this initiative would be able to counterbalance the dominance of US-based platforms and to delve into how such a platform could contribute to raise the quality standards of digital media and digital journalism within the EU. The establishment of such a European platform with diverse content and a certain European agenda (in terms of topics and approaches), where different languages and communities coexist, could engage European citizens in diverse conversations and thus contribute to the Europeanization of existing national public spheres. For this massive project to succeed, a strong commitment is required by both European institutions and Member States, a commitment that has to start with the agreement on how to provide this European platform with the necessary funds. That, therefore, could be an object of study for further research, debates, and proposals.

Finally, we must point to the limitations of this research, which are mainly related to the sample. On the one hand, no political parties from Central or Eastern European countries were included in the analysis of the electoral manifestos. Further research on this topic should explore what the proposals from these countries are regarding communication policies and PSM, as well as whether they hold a different understanding of PSM or not. Moreover, the study of the EP's approach to key issues within media

91. Zur Zukunft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Medien, <http://zukunft-oeffentlich-rechtliche.de>.

policy only provides some insights from one EU institution point of view. For a more comprehensive understanding of EU media policy in general, and PSM in particular, the current position of the EC and the debates that are now being discussed within this executive institution should also be explored. These two main shortfalls can be addressed in further research.

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