Media freedom and independence: Trends and challenges in Europe

Introduction to the MEDIADEM project, aims and achievements

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ℳmediadem

- A collaborative research project on media policies for free and independent media.
  - ➡ MEDIADEM examined:
    - ⇨ the configuration of state media policies
    - ⇨ in 14 countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey and the UK
    - ⇨ Covering various types of media services; and
    - ⇨ taking into account external regulatory pressures (European Union, Council of Europe).
  - ➡ Project duration: April 2010-March 2013
  - ➡ Funded by the 7th Framework Programme of the EU

- An interdisciplinary effort of 14 institutional partners:
  - ➡ Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium)
  - ➡ Centre for Liberal Strategies (Bulgaria)
  - ➡ Institute for International Relations (Croatia)
  - ➡ University of Copenhagen (Denmark)
  - ➡ University of Tartu (Estonia)
  - ➡ University of Jyväskylä (Finland)
  - ➡ University of Bielefeld (Germany)
  - ➡ Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (Greece)
  - ➡ European University Institute (Italy)
  - ➡ Hertie School of Governance (Germany)
  - ➡ School of Communication and Media (Slovakia)
  - ➡ University of Castilla-La Mancha (Spain)
  - ➡ Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Turkey)
  - ➡ University of Edinburgh (the UK)

- Media policy: An increasingly elusive field to demarcate due to technological developments

- Media policy traditionally focused on 'mass media' as media of 'public communication'.
  - ➡ Is such a focus pertinent nowadays?

- For MEDIADEM, media policy is concerned with the conduct of media systems:
  - ➡ Organisation of the media market
  - ➡ Promotion of particular types of media behaviour

- MEDIADEM is interested in the media as agents of information and debate that facilitate public discourse in a functioning of democracy.

- **Media policy: the whole range of policy approaches, strategies and tools that are employed (or not employed) to shape the media in ways that promote their role as facilitators and carriers of public discourse.**

- Increasing complexity of media policy
  - A substantial increase in the number of *policy participants*, the *venues* in which decisions are made and the *processes* through which decisions are taken
    - **Actors:** state ministries, independent regulatory authorities, private corporations, media and journalists' associations, civil society organisations working in the field of human rights, academics, courts, etc.
    - **Venues:** state-based institutional arrangements (more or less centralised) supplemented by supranational settings
    - **Processes:**
      - Vertical: a focus on state-based policy-making and its interplay with supranational and sub-national policy-making processes
      - Horizontal: a focus on state regulation and its interplay with processes of self-regulation and co-regulation
  - Institutional complexity can also be observed with respect to the stage of policy implementation.

- MEDIADEM's focus: the contribution of distinct actors at different levels and through different processes on policy formulation and implementation

- Media freedom: related to freedom of expression and the right to seek, receive and impart information, as safeguarded *inter alia* by Art. 10 ECHR and Art. 11 CFR

  - ➡ Negative duty of non-interference

  - ➡ Positive duty to create an enabling environment for the exercise of freedom of expression

  - ➡ Art. 10(2) ECHR: freedom of expression is not an absolute freedom.

    - ⇨ It is subject to legitimate restrictions, limited to the pursuit of the public interest in a functioning democracy

      - ⇨ Neither the media, nor those individuals who own or work for the media enjoy an absolute right to freedom of expression.

📌 The media are subjected to a variety of constraints (public and private), which may undermine their ability to impart information and ideas on matters of public interest and facilitate public discourse in a functioning democracy. Pressures may stem, in particular, from:

➡ Ownership

➡ Finance

➡ The media's need for constant access to information

➡ Legal/Judicial constraints

📌 Online environment

➡ Same pressures (though their intensity may vary depending on the type of online media service concerned)

➡ Additional pressures

- Independence:

  - A concept catering for all different types of pressures on media activity (the media's *dependencies*)

  - Not an absolute attribute

    - Focus on containing/mitigating/resisting undue interference

    - A shared responsibility

  - Ability of the media to fulfil the normative requirements that they are expected to achieve in a democratic society

Work plan

- **Phase 1: State of the art (completed, October 2010)**
  - Collection of background information on the 14 media policies and landscapes under study; the media-related action of the European Union and the Council of Europe; reaching a common understanding of key research concepts

- **Phase 2: Country case-studies (completed, December 2011)**
  - Empirical research in the 14 countries under study based on desk research and semi-structured interviews with policy actors

- **Phase 3: Comparative analysis (completed, July 2012)**
  - Comparative analysis on key topics of MEDIADEM research

- **Phase 4: Policy development (ongoing, to be finalised in March 2013)**
  - Formulation and dissemination of policy recommendations for state and non-state actors involved in media policy-making, the European Union and the Council of Europe for the promotion of free and independent media

- **Project website:** www.mediadem.eliamep.gr

- **Project findings:** http://www.mediadem.eliamep.gr/findings/

- **Follow MEDIADEM on twitter:** http://twitter.com/#!/MEDIADEM

Thank you!