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Politicisation Persists and Is Increasing in European Public Service Media in the Digital Society

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Abstract

The open conclusions with which Hallin and Mancini (2004, 2011) approached their comparative study of Western media systems, initiated in 1998, retain their empirical, revisionist, and prospective value—even from critical perspectives—after a quarter of a century of profound historical, social, and technological changes. The names given to the three traditional media models in those authors' first publication are used in this article to compare the evolution of funding, audience shares, governance, structure, and political intervention in European countries' public service media on the one hand, and to contrast the operational hypothesis that politicisation persists and is increasing in European public service media in their adaptation to the digital society, on the other hand. Based on the variables from Hallin and Mancini's empirical model, five crucial questions about the evolution of public service media in the EU are addressed: intervention and development of regulation by states and by the European Commission in the area of shared powers; a comparative analysis of the funding systems and consumer audiences of each European country's public service media; the changes in the governance and management structures of said public service media; the variation in the professional culture and the rational-legal authority of their organisations; and the evolution and legitimation of public service media's public value in the internet society, as well as the persistence or mutability of the national media systems' fit within Hallin and Mancini's three original models.

Keywords

European Union; funding systems; media regulation; media systems; politicisation; public service media

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1. Introduction

Hallin and Mancini's (2004, 2011, 2016) comparative study of Western media systems is an empirical model that, 20 years after its first publication, may be the object of operational and critical revisionism, but it has methodological validity for the analysis of the structures, convergences, and divergences of relationships between political power and the media. This article specifically focuses on the relationships between the policies of European democratic states and their public service media (PSM).

The structure of Hallin and Mancini's model is operational—even though the inference of results may be divergent—for comparing the evolution of funding, audience shares, governance, structure, and political intervention in the PMSs of European states and the United States, according to their respective political systems. Hallin and Mancini (2004) predetermined three media models: the polarised pluralist model (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain), the democratic corporatist model (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland), and the liberal model (United Kingdom, United States, Canada, and Ireland). In the 2011 and 2017 revisions of their work, they expanded the focus to include some Eastern European countries and the digital sphere.

The characteristics of the polarised pluralist model are manifested by a lack of control over concentration in the television industry; a strong, polarised elite press; and a governmentalised public service television system under politicised and partisan control and based on government subsidies. This model is also characterised by a high level of governmentalised political parallelism, strong state intervention with insufficient public control, and a lower level of professionalisation. According to the authors, all of the above are due to late democratisation (Padovani, 2009) and polarised pluralism, with a significant role being played by political parties and clientelism from the viewpoint of rational-legal authority.

The democratic corporatist model is also defined by a mass, high-circulation press and limited concentration in the audiovisual media industry. The control of PSM is democratic, while funding is a combination of subsidies and licence-fee income under sociopolitical representation control. Political parallelism has experienced an evolution from a partisan press in the past to a network of neutral commercial media with a high level of professionalisation and self-regulation. As for public control, it is considered to be low due to strong respect for freedom of expression, although state intervention is high. The characteristics of this model are early democratisation and moderate pluralism rooted in consensus governments, organised pluralism, a strong welfare state, and the development of strong rational-legal authority.

Finally, the liberal model is characterised by the development of a commercial mass press and an audiovisual media industry based on regulated competition. As far as PSMs are concerned, they are democratically regulated, with independent regulatory mechanisms and funding dependent on a licence fee and public funding. However, it is not a homogeneous model as there are differences, for example, between the PSM of the United Kingdom and Ireland, and that of the United States. Political parallelism is reflected in the predominance of neutral commercial media focused on informative journalism and pluralism, and they also have a high level of professionalisation and non-institutionalised self-regulation. In this case, it is the market that regulates the media system—excluding PSM—within the context of liberalism exercised by the state. The seed of this model, as in the democratic corporatist one, also comes from early democratisation and moderate pluralism, as well as the development of strong rational-legal authority.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Twenty Years of Scientific Literature on Hallin and Mancini's Systems

Academics have frequently used the media system framework of Hallin and Mancini (2004, 2011) to conduct research on the media. Brüggemann et al. (2014) reviewed the model 10 years later, with their study being the first to comprehensively validate the original dimensions and models with aggregated data for the same sample of Western countries. In this sense, they found that while the dimensions relating to market pressure, political parallelism, and professionalisation showed relatively high levels of internal consistency, the one referring to the role of the state did not. Thus, they recommended that the latter be broken down into three sub-dimensions: public broadcasting, ownership regulation, and press subsidies.

Regarding governance, Downey and Stanyer (2010) conducted a study to address what they considered patent shortcomings in Hallin and Mancini's media model proposal. They proposed a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis to consider the complex causal combinations of political and media conditions. In the words of those authors:

> There are two causal paths to personalisation of political communication: one where the make-up of political institutions is predominant causally (particularly the presence of presidential systems) and the character of media institutions is relatively unimportant; another where a combination of political culture and media conditions explains personalisation irrespective of whether the political system is parliamentary or presidential. (Downey & Stanyer, 2010, p. 344)

They refrained from performing independent analyses of each variable. From the viewpoint of political information on television, a stand-out study is the one by Aalberg et al. (2010) on six Western countries over a period of 30 years. These authors found that the quantity and quality of political information varied according to the degree of commercialisation, with it being lower in liberal model countries. However, they noted differences between countries having the same model, with the United Kingdom being the clearest example due to its similarities with neighbouring countries. The data they added to the original ideas of Hallin and Mancini (2004) did not suggest any fast-moving overall convergence towards the liberal model, and they were struck by "how strongly resistant some European countries have been to subordinating the needs of democracy to profit making" (Aalberg et al., 2010, p. 255).

Hardy (2012) was critical of the use of the concept of "media systems" because he considered it unsuitable for many analyses. While acknowledging the strength of systems research for examining connections between the media and politics, he noted that the weakness was the tendency to generalise or extrapolate beyond what was restricted to these important relationships. For this author, there is a tension between the analysis of the set of characteristics that have shaped media systems organised along national lines on the one hand and transnational dynamics on the other.

Hallin and Mancini's media systems have also been useful for analysing paradigm shifts in the media industry. The study by Benson et al. (2012) looked at how media system differences in the form of news either change or remain the same as the press switches from print to digital format in all three systems. By doing so, the study concluded that there was a tendency towards more advertising and information in the liberal model,

and towards more opinion and deliberation in the polarised pluralist model. It noted greater protection in the French case (in the polarised pluralist model) from market pressures.

Hallin and Mancini (2016) resented a reflection on new digital media and their relationship to the media system model that they had devised in 2004, remaining open to finding independent logics based on transnational structures such as Facebook or WhatsApp platforms. Such independence might suggest that digital media are globally more alike than other media within national media systems.

For these authors, the internet has significantly increased the tendency for transnational media institutions—including technological platforms—to become strong players, although they note the coexistence of three different patterns, the first being based on the fact that the concept of "media systems" does not imply that they are closed and self-contained. Indeed, for them, the extent to which national media systems are affected by global flows may be an important variable with which to characterise each one. The second possibility is that new media develop differently in each media system following each of the three patterns and giving them significant continuity. A third option is to imagine that new media do not follow existing patterns, but occupy niches that were not filled by the existing media system institutions, from the perspective of media ecology.

Other research for comparative studies of digital media systems emerged after Hallin and Mancini (2016) presented their reflections on the digital context. Flensburg and Lai (2020) analysed the current context from the fields of infrastructure studies, internet governance, and political economy of the internet with the tradition of systemic media analysis, and concluded that existing frameworks were insufficient for capturing power structures in a complex environment. The authors developed the digital communication systems framework to map the components of digital communication systems within national and regional contexts in order to describe new typologies and detect structural differences and similarities.

The media system model expounded by Hallin and Mancini (2004) has led to other initiatives for developing comparative communication studies, always with the premise of theorising the role of the context. Mobile communication has also been the subject of analysis by academics such as Liu et al. (2020), who argue that what is mobile is not the information, the user, or the technology, but the context, through present and absent configurations of social relations. These authors defend the use of comparative studies for analysing communication contexts with different methodologies and forms of evidence.

Hallin and Mancini's analysis model has also inspired researchers to look into issues such as the fragmentation of news audiences across different media platforms—press, television, and the internet. A study by Fletcher and Nielsen (2017) in six countries revealed high levels of audience duplication, as well as cross-platform audiences, with greater fragmentation in Denmark and the United Kingdom than in Spain and the United States. They concluded that there was no evidence to support the idea that online audiences were more fragmented.

In the course of the second decade of the 21st century, there were new revisions and expansions of Hallin and Mancini's model, such as the analysis by Büchel et al. (2016) of the media systems of 11 Central and Eastern European countries, all of which were in transition and had a similar historical situation. These authors presented four media system models: While two of them coincided with the polarised pluralism and liberal

models, they divided the democratic corporatist model into two groups differentiated by their media markets, one being marked by a weak press and the other by a regulated media market.

This study was expanded by Castro-Herrero et al. (2017) to suggest that press freedom and foreign ownership should be considered additional variables of theoretical interest due to their ability to exert influence in Central and Eastern European countries. In their study, the political party/media parallelism category was dropped in order to avoid what they considered low levels of internal consistency, due to high degrees of electoral volatility and a lack of clear party alignment.

In the same vein, the work by Humprecht et al. (2022) broadened the perspective and presented an analysis of the media systems of 30 European countries and the United States, with the incorporation of issues relating to digitalisation. They obtained three groups: The first was similar to the democratic corporatist model; the second had characteristics similar to the polarised pluralist model, and included Eastern and Southern European countries; and the third "hybrid" one was situated between the two previous models and included countries assigned to the liberal, polarised pluralist (France, Italy, and Portugal), and democratic corporatist models. This group also included three Eastern European countries (Czechia, Estonia, and Lithuania).

Hallin and Mancini's proposal has also drawn criticism from Latin America. Some authors consider the media system proposal insufficient for the purposes of contextualising the predominant models of journalistic role performance in non-Western parts of the world. Mellado et al. (2017) highlighted the hybridisation of journalistic cultures through the analysis of the presence of six journalistic roles in print news from 19 countries. The study concluded that there was multilayered hybridisation in the performance of professional roles across and within advanced, transitional, and non-democratic countries.

Hallin and Mancini's (2011) expansion of the study, in which, among other cases, they covered Brazil, China, Israel, Lebanon, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Thailand, was deemed insufficient by the above-mentioned authors. In contrast, Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez (2014) used Hallin and Mancini's proposal to study the Latin American context and challenge the predominant categorisations of media systems. Among their conclusions, those authors referred to the development of a "captured liberal" model due to the intentional absence of regulation, the pragmatic exercise of power, and the configuration of alliances between media magnates and the political elites that lead to high levels of concentration.

For his part, Hallin (2020) criticised works produced using quantitative research and a large number of cases of analysis, and advocated more contextualised studies with space for reflection on how to theorise in the changing environment of the media.

2.2. Developments in EU Legislation and the Impact on PSM

In the last quarter of the 20th century, the European audiovisual media model was historically a dual one based on the coexistence of public and private media. That coexistence was far from peaceful and, from among the conflicts in which it was mired, it is possible to highlight the funding framework, the scramble for audience share and advertising, and the protection of film and audiovisual media as symbolic and strategic industries for European cultural diversity. From the first decade of the 21st century, a third actor came into play in the media ecosystem: digital networks and platforms.

European audiovisual media policies in the third decade of the 21st century are derived from the Audiovisual Media Services Directives of 2007, 2010, and 2018; the Communications of 2001 and 2010; and the Protocol to the Treaty of Amsterdam. The Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 (2018) expands the dual framework to that of the three spaces for large operators (public, traditional private, and digital platforms), thus representing a partial advance towards regulatory symmetry within the European audiovisual media ecosystem.

The new Audiovisual Media Services Directive was adopted in 2018. It updated the 2010 regulations of the same rank and obliged member states to adapt their audiovisual media legislation. In general, the regulation of platforms by member states is a mere regulatory transposition, while the regulation of PSM by member states—who share powers with the EU—is almost non-existent.

The main objective of this regulation is to regulate digital platforms, which are new operators within the media ecosystem that up to now have only come under the legal regulations of e-commerce, thus causing asymmetric commercial competition and a major impact on the business models of traditional media (Campos Freire et al., 2018).

The preamble to the Directive is based on the evolution of audiovisual media services in relation to the convergence between television and streaming and on-demand internet services. New forms of consumption were the main reasons behind the revised regulation, the aim of which is to ensure balanced regulation of digital platforms and networks vis-à-vis traditional operators.

The challenge is to transfer obligations to online service platforms that up to now have fallen solely on traditional broadcasters, such as the European content quota, within a context where audiences are increasingly consuming more content on the internet (Caballero Trenado, 2018). Thus, from now on platforms will work according to rules similar to those regulating the more than 5,000 television channels that exist in the EU. The objective is twofold: to balance competitiveness and consumer protection.

The text, in 11 chapters and 33 articles, has the country of origin principle at its core, according to which services in the audiovisual media field are subject only to the provisions in force in the country where they operate. The importance of this point lies in the determination of jurisdiction over providers and procedures for exception and cooperation, although it does not affect copyright or the scope of licences.

While the promotion of the audiovisual industry in the EU is one of the challenges to be addressed, the Directive imposes an obligation on audiovisual content providers to reserve 20% of the offering for European works in their programming schedules, whatever their ownership and nature. Likewise, it makes aspects of advertising regulation more flexible and member states will be able to decide whether to impose funding obligations for European works on the on-demand services available in their respective countries.

The protection of minors is also one of the pillars of the Directive due to the increased consumption of content on the internet by those under the age of 18. The Directive aims to promote the active responsibility of online content and audiovisual service providers, and also of traditional media, even if they do not have editorial responsibility for much of the content they distribute (Caballero Trenado, 2018). Among the measures, the definition of products as "harmful content" when they are indeed harmful is called for, as is the obligation to

adopt parental control systems based on age-related codes. The prohibition of hate speech is another of the Directive's values. It prohibits any manifestation of racism and xenophobia, and incitement to violence and hatred based on sex, race, colour, religion, descent, or nationality or ethnic origin.

From a governance viewpoint, the Directive pays attention to the obligation to establish independent national regulatory authorities, whose five powers must be the defence of media pluralism, cultural and language diversity, consumer protection, proper functioning of the internal market and promotion of fair competition.

Besides the Directive, there are other regulatory mechanisms that regulate funding, another of the fundamental pillars for the existence and legitimacy of PSM. The Protocol to the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997 is the legal text that supports state funding of public service broadcasting with the conditions of safeguarding pluralism, having democratic control and promoting sociocultural values. Its tenets are complemented by the European Communications of 2001 and 2009 on state aid rules applicable to public service broadcasting.

The Protocol to the Treaty of Amsterdam provides a legal basis for public funding on the grounds that the public broadcasting systems of member states are intrinsic to the democratic, social, and cultural needs of each society, as well as to the requirement to preserve media pluralism (Treaty of Amsterdam, 1997).

Thus, the European Commission (2001) published the *Communication From the Commission on the Application of State Aid Rules to Public Service Broadcasting*, which was expanded in 2009, to address commercial operators' concerns. In this sense, it established the relevance of a mechanism for evaluating public aid, with a prior review of the new services implemented by PSM, as well as clarifications on the incorporation of paid-for products within the public service mission. The new Directive also called for greater state-level oversight of corporate missions.

The 2009 Communication recognised PSM's right to operate on other platforms, provided the principles linked to their public service mission as specified in the Protocol to the Treaty of Amsterdam were upheld. That was when non-linear services were extended to PSM (European Commission, 2009). As a result, member states became responsible for establishing the appropriate mechanisms for ensuring regular and effective control of public funding to prevent overcompensation or cross-subsidisation.

2.3. Legitimation and Public Value

Competition from traditional private media, the emergence of new digital media, and PSM's loss of audience share and reputation have forced them to focus more on the quality and characteristics of their legal mandate. The BBC has adopted the conceptual narrative of public value to legitimise and justify innovation for its "digital-first" transition and transformation. The United Kingdom in 2006 and then, under the 2009 Communication on the funding of European state media, a further dozen European countries established the public value test to underpin the public value of innovation and the digital transformation of PSM. In addition, the European Broadcasting Union, which brings together and represents PSM, states that they share six core values: universality, independence, diversity, innovation, excellence, and accountability.

The concept of "public value," articulated for the first time by Moore (1995), has led to new strategies for, and studies of, PSM management (Gransow, 2018; Liddle, 2017; Mazzucatto et al., 2020; O'Flynn, 2007), the aim being to rethink their role in the current media system and develop new links with their stakeholders (Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2022), and all of this within a volatile context where transnational media groups and platforms are gaining power (Chalaby, 2010).

The most recognised application of this strategy was the above-mentioned public value test, with the BBC in the United Kingdom leading the implementation thereof as a way of legitimising itself (Michalis, 2012). This test is now guiding the daily actions of an increasing number of European PSMs (Cañedo et al., 2022). Meanwhile, efforts regarding theoretical conceptualisation continue to be made (Donders & Van den Bulck, 2016), with outstanding works such as the proposal of 12 mutable components in the definition of value developed by Cañedo et al. (2022).

2.4. PSM and the Digital Age

The digital adaptation of PSM has been one of the key debates in recent decades but, since 2020, the focus has shifted towards understanding the role of PSM within the context of platformisation (Cañedo & Segovia, 2022; Helmond, 2015; Poell et al., 2022). In that context, national PSM should provide competitive content to attract old and new audiences by connecting with their consumption habits.

In terms of formats and distribution, innovation is necessary when confronted with technological evolution and audience fragmentation and also for companies to distinguish themselves from their competitors in the media ecosystem (Zaragoza-Fuster & García-Avilés, 2018). *The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto* warns that access to innovative, critical, and high-quality content must be provided with attention to audience diversity (Fuchs & Unterberger, 2021).

Faced with the dynamics of audiovisual-content globalisation, where power is concentrated in large over-the-top platforms (Srnicek, 2018), PSM outlets promote cultural proximity (Straubhaar, 2008). Furthermore, connecting with young audiences—the largest consumers of audiovisual technology—is important to guarantee the maintenance of symbolic representation. Likewise, it is one of the main drivers for ensuring the existence of a future PSM audience.

3. Comparison of PSM in the EU

In this article, we will consider those countries that are current EU member states—except Malta and Luxembourg, for which not enough data is available—with references also to the United Kingdom, a full member state of the EU until 2020. To observe PSM variation, we will consider the evolution of audience shares, funding, and governance, as well as the diagnosis of media pluralism in the respective countries based on the recognised annual analyses performed by the Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) project of the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom at the European University Institute in Florence.

3.1. Evolution of Audience Shares

Between 2011 and 2021, European PSM's audience shares generally fell. Of the total number, the PSM of 17 countries experienced significant falls whereas 11 maintained or increased their audience shares according to data from The European Audiovisual Observatory (2022). As shown in Figure 1, the most significant quantitative increases were in the PSM of countries joining the EU midway through the first decade of the 21st century (Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania), which later experienced processes of strengthening and reconfiguration of their respective PSM. In contrast, Romania, Portugal, Greece, Spain, Cyprus, Poland, and Slovenia had audience share losses exceeding 10% between 2011 and 2021.
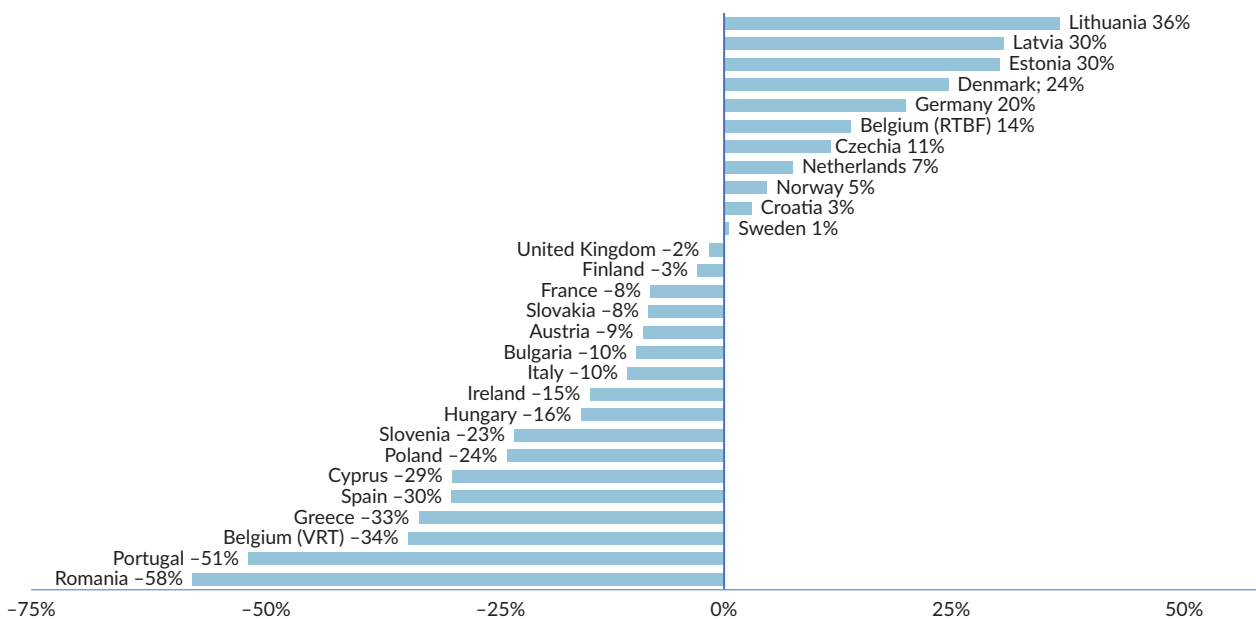


Figure 1. Audience trends for PSM, 2011–2021.

3.2. Evolution of Income

Based on data from The European Audiovisual Observatory (2022), it is possible to study the evolution of income from 2011 to 2021 (Figure 2). Using these data, we see an increase in income for the EU as a whole of more than 6%, albeit with variations between countries. The decrease in available funds is directly correlated with PSM's previously noted loss of audience share.

In the majority of countries that have more recently joined the EU, the increase in PSM's income has been greater. We can also see an increase in income in the Nordic states and Central Europe, whose countries come under the democratic corporatist model according to the typology of media systems defined by Hallin and Mancini, and in the United Kingdom, which falls under the liberal model according to that same typology.

In contrast, it is striking to note the decline in income in Southern European countries such as Greece, Spain, and Italy, which, according to Hallin and Mancini's classification, are included in the Mediterranean or polarised pluralist model. The almost 30% fall in income in Portugal is likewise surprising. These countries were also at the centre of European economic intervention during the financial crisis of 2009–2012.

Funding through state budgets controlled by governments, as opposed to the BBC's licence fee model or that of countries in Northern and Central Europe, weakens sustainability and independence while increasing the risk of politicised instrumentalisation.
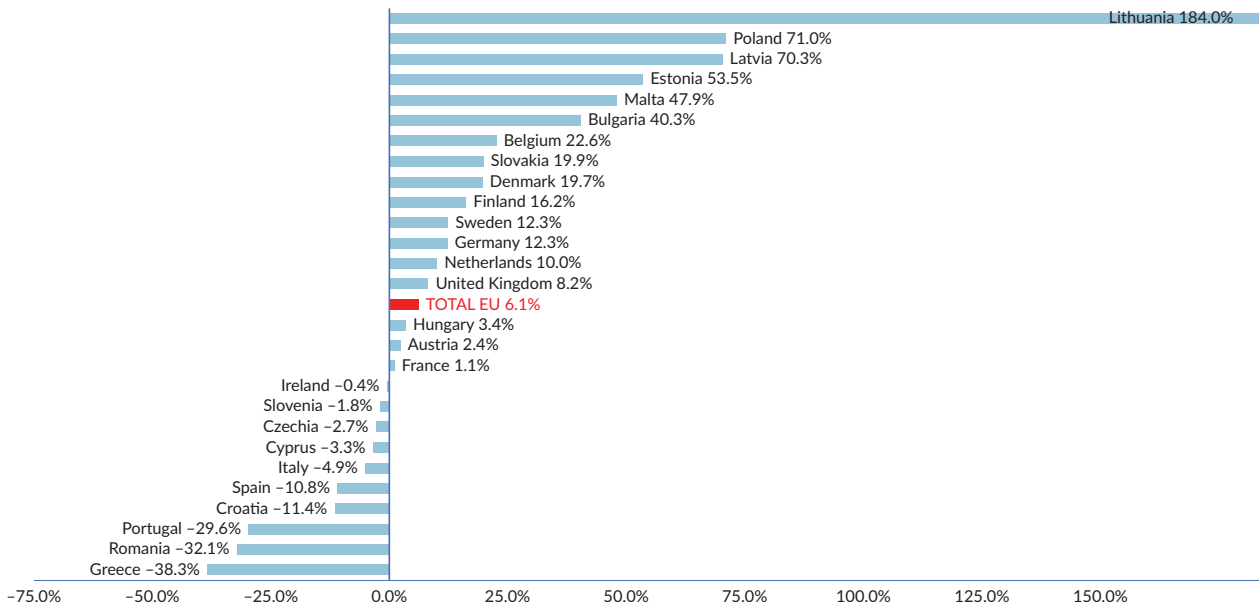
Figure 2. Evolution of the European PSM budgets, 2011–2021.

3.3. Governance and Management Structures

The governance and management structures of PSM are diverse and varied and more in line with the sociopolitical reality of each country than with Hallin and Mancini's three model framework. Nevertheless, that framework does indeed record some of its features. Firstly, there are some PSMs at the state level and others at regional and federal state levels, or indeed those covering distinct cultural and language communities.

Such cases can be found in Germany, where a state PSM (ZDF) coexists with nine other PSM of the *Länder* or federal states, which are integrated into the ARD; in Spain, where the state PSM (RTVE) and 13 other PSM of the autonomous communities (12 of which are grouped under FORTA); and in Belgium, with three entities from the respective French, Flemish and German communities. The PSMs of other European countries are organised centrally or by the respective regional cultural and language realities of their states. Despite the potential interest in studying the peculiarities of each region, in this study, we have only analysed PSM at the state level due to a lack of data.

Another characteristic of diversity is the corporate structure of PSM. In the majority of European countries, the respective and distinct radio, television, and digital services companies have undergone processes of integration into a single corporation. However, there are still some countries (France, Sweden, Poland, Czechia, Romania, and Bulgaria) in which these processes of transforming broadcasting (radio and television) into converged and integrated PSM have not taken place. France has been debating the process of integrating its four organisations into France Médias for many years.

The three governance structures of PSM are a board of directors, a president or director-general, and a supervisory and advisory council of programming and public or audience participation. The names and titles that each country gives to these bodies and positions vary. The number of members on the board of directors ranges from three to 15 (except in the case of foundations such as the one in Austria, which has 35). Members are elected by parliaments and in part by some governments. They may also have members representing workers, as well as qualified independent members selected by open competition.

In the polarised pluralist system, the election of members and appointees to governance bodies by parliamentary political representation traditionally prevails, whereas in the liberal model, it is combined with formulas for co-opting independent members. In the democratic corporatist model, an influential factor is the pillarisation (*verzuiling* in Dutch) of the institutionalised strata into which society is segregated (political parties, trade unions, religions, cultural entities, schools, business organisations, associations, etc.), a legacy of Calvinism in Central and Northern Europe (the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Sweden, and Germany), which can be seen in the composition of broadcasting councils.

One of the latest changes has been in the United Kingdom. In 2017, the BBC adopted a governance model inspired by the ethical codes of publicly traded private companies. This is manifested by a balance of four types of representation on the BBC board: members elected by the parliaments of the United Kingdom nations, executives from the corporation itself, independently co-opted advisors, and a chair proposed by the government.

The uniqueness in the representation of administration and management systems (see Appendix 1 of the Supplementary File) diverges from the perspectives of Hallin and Mancini regarding how structures and traditions of political cultures in each country shape the varied governance models of PSM. That diverse uniqueness is intricately linked to the demonstration of their independence and reputation.

3.4. Indicators of PSM Pluralism

The MPM is a set of indicators developed by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom at the European University Institute in Florence. It allows potential risks to media pluralism in the EU and neighbouring countries to be identified. The first MPM indicator data were obtained in 2014 for nine EU countries (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, and the United Kingdom). In 2015, the indicator covered an additional 19 countries and, since 2016, it has been expanded to all EU member states. The latter is taken as the point of reference for Appendix 2 of the Supplementary File. The report published in 2020 covered the years 2018 and 2019.

The MPM measures the risk to media pluralism and covers political, cultural, geographical, structural, and content-related dimensions. It also analyses public service, commercial, community, and new and online media. The indicator takes values between 0 and 100 and expresses them as a percentage. Thus, the higher the percentage, the greater the risk to the analysed variable. Thus, if the risk is low, the value will be between 0% and 33%; if the risk is medium, the value will be between 34% and 66%; and, if the risk is high, the value will be between 67% and 100%. The information obtained from the risk assessment allows stakeholders to understand threats to media pluralism and take measures to defend it (Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, 2017).

Although the compound indicator has four dimensions—fundamental protection, market plurality, political independence, and social inclusiveness—we have focused on the risk to the independence of PSM governance and funding. Based on MPM data, Appendix 2 of the Supplementary File reflects the indicators of the risks to media pluralism in general, and to the independence of PSM governance and funding, as part of the independence of PSM, in the respective European countries. When calculating the average of the four components of the indicator, we can see that most countries have a medium risk, even though the scores for each component are quite different.

If we look at the independence of PSM, it is striking to find that, for the period of years studied, there is a risk to it for Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Portugal (with a considerable increase in the score in correlation with some changes to that country's PSM internal governance structure). All of these countries come under the democratic corporatist model, with the exception of Portugal (politicised pluralist model) and Lithuania (not included in Hallin and Mancini's classifications).

Among the countries showing high risk in all the years studied were Cyprus, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Poland, and Romania. In this instance, such unequal assessments of the countries within the Mediterranean model are surprising, and barring Italy, which as we have seen before has shown high risk every year, Greece managed to fall to medium risk in 2022. Spain showed medium risk between 2017 and 2021 and high risk in the first and last years. France had a low risk from 2016 until the last year, in which the indicator rose to medium risk. Ireland, under the liberal model, was situated as medium risk. It would be advisable for policymakers in all these countries to plan policies that aim for greater independence of the media.

4. Conclusion

Hallin and Mancini's theses confirm the persistence of governmentalisation and political intervention in the PSM of European countries, though some of them—especially those forming part of the fifth enlargement of the EU in 2004 (Czechia, Cyprus, Estonia, Slovakia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, and Poland)—are not covered by the three classifications of the authors' model.

That hypothesis is contrasted with the high dependence of PSM governance bodies on governments and parliamentary political systems, whose appointment and renewal terms also replicate ordinary legislature periods. This is complemented by institutionalised formulas for the political linkage of social participation bodies that have hardly taken advantage (except in Ireland and the United Kingdom) of the advances in digital transformation that these organisations have embarked upon—as a strategic innovation challenge—to integrate direct audience participation.

The stand-out conclusion, in light of Hallin and Mancini's historical analytical framework, is that the polarised pluralism model—with some mutations and variants—is the predominant and growing one in both the traditional Mediterranean countries and the newly incorporated Eastern European ones. Changes in funding systems—with a licence fee or charge payable by households or citizens in decline, as demonstrated by the fact that 16 countries had such a tax in 2016 and only 12 did so in 2023—confirm the predominance of subsidies linked to state budgets, which are dependent on the respective governments' discretion.

The indicators of pluralism, independence of PSM governance and funding, and the vulnerability of media systems likewise reaffirm those trends as they represent a medium or high risk in countries other than those falling into the democratic corporatist model, thereby jeopardising fundamental protection, market plurality, political independence, and social inclusiveness.

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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