

H. Campbell, J. Casanova, N. Couldry, A. Hepp, S. Hjarvard, A. Jansson, H. Knoblauch, M. Lövheim, N. Luhmann, K. Lundby, J. Mariański, and J. Strömbäck.

The monograph is especially recommended for students of the following fields: journalism and social communication, political science, sociology of religion, as well as for media scholars and political scientists.

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Alicja Jaskiernia (2018). *Monitoring wolności mediów w Europie* [Monitoring Media Freedom in Europe]. Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, pp. 487, ISBN: 978-83-7545-840-4.

The issue of media freedom has recently aroused extraordinary emotions not only in professional, legal, or academic circles, but also among the general public. The media have become the subject of frequent discussions, analyzes, and disputes, and their actions (and also the actions of the authorities regarding the media) are widely discussed in both professional and private situations. It appears that everyone is directly affected by the problem of the media: how they function, who finances them and how they show the world around us. This does not mean, however, that the increased interest in the condition of the media results in a relatively consistent stance of those who take part in the dispute: on the contrary, the increasing polarization of the media disunites the audience to a great extent. The polyphony of judgements, opinions, and descriptions, immersed in the overwhelming media-tization of everything, in the information chaos, in this information oversupply, leads at the same time to degeneration; for example, news is often fake, and the media offer is based on algorithms and cybernetics.

On the other hand, we are facing situations that were unthinkable only a few years ago: in democratic countries, the media are becoming the object of ruthless political pressure, not to mention the violation of bodily integrity and even threats to the lives of journalists. One can even conclude, observing the changes taking place in the countries so far considered to be the forerunners of democracy, that values such as freedom, liberalism, and democracy are on the decline. Instead, they are being replaced by authoritarianism, which always tries to subdue freedom of speech, substituting it with censorship and restrictions on civil liberties and rights.

It seems that we are currently witnessing such processes, both globally and regionally. So, unfortunately (?) we have come to live in interesting times, without any guides, without these bright lighthouses which show the way to knowledge, the understanding of things, awareness of the changes taking place, and the threats

stemming from them. Therefore, any substantial and reliable support in this area turns out to be important and simply necessary: just like the book *Monitoring wolności mediów w Europie* by Alicja Jaskiernia.

At this point we should emphasize not only the significance of the time the book was published, but also of the author herself. The issues tackled by Jaskiernia have not been chosen randomly. For many years now, the researcher has been focusing on systemic issues, combining media and state issues. She is the author of *Rada Europy a problemy mediów masowych* [The Council of Europe and the Problems of Mass Media] (2002), *Publiczne media elektroniczne w Europie* [Public Electronic Media in Europe] (2006) or *Systemy medialne w XXI wieku. Wspólne czy różne drogi rozwoju?* [Media Systems in the 21st Century. Common or Different Ways of Development?] (2012, co-edited by J. W. Adamowski). In view of the above, it is neither surprising nor puzzling that this time the author addresses the issue of monitoring media freedom in Europe. The decision on the choice of topic seems to be fully justified; the reader who is familiar with the previous accomplishments of Jaskiernia feels that the book has been published 'by the right person, in the right place and at the right time'. This is an important observation, as sometimes one can have the impression that some authors write *ad hoc*, following fashion or other profits. However, no one can have such a suspicion here: it is clear that the publication is an expression of the author's interests, complementing and developing her considerable output in a coherent way.

The monograph should be considered an important compendium of knowledge on monitoring media freedom (mainly in the context of our continent, but there are also references to global issues). It fills the gap in the Polish publishing market and, by presenting the issues undertaken in a comprehensive way, lays the foundation for further, more detailed research.

The book consists of six extensive chapters, prepared with great consistency. The author leads her narration in a clear and orderly manner. Her statements are concise and written in comprehensible (though not simple!) language, which is an important advantage due to the potentially diverse audience of the text.

Thanks to the extensive bibliography (consisting of Polish and foreign academic publications, trade reports, and legal acts) we get a position which is multi-threaded, interdisciplinary, and yet coherent and precise. Although the author includes a number of topics related to media studies, political and legal issues, the main theme outlined in the title continues to be an inherent common denominator.

The structure of the monograph is its great asset, which makes it clear that the book is the embodiment of a well-considered and previously planned concept.

Thanks to the first chapter (*Wolność mediów oraz jej monitorowanie — kwestie prawne, definicyjne i metodologiczne* [Freedom of the Media and its Monitoring — Legal Framework, Definitions and Methodology]), the readers, on the one hand, are introduced to a terminology which is complicated at times, and on the other hand, they become familiar with the broader context of freedom of speech and monitoring of media freedom. The historical background enriches the definitional

and methodological content, proving that the issues raised in the publication have long been of interest to scientists and philosophers.

In the second part (*Monitoring wolności mediów w systemie Rady Europy* [Monitoring of Media Freedom at the Council of Europe]), Jaskiernia focuses on the analysis of this institution's approach to monitoring, reviewing the legal status and presenting the nature and role of mechanisms for monitoring media freedom by the Council of Europe. It is worth noting, by the way, that the author does not 'throw' the reader into the midst of her systemic deliberations, but first explains what the Council of Europe is all about. In my opinion, it is a very well considered and necessary gesture towards a less skilled reader, who is interested in the subject, but does not quite have the political knowledge.

Thus, a similar 'preparatory' introduction is also provided in Chapter 3 (*Monitoring wolności mediów w systemie Organizacji Bezpieczeństwa i Współpracy w Europie* [Monitoring of Media Freedom in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe]), in which the author first characterises the OSCE, and only then goes on to describe the functions and duties of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (of course in the context of monitoring media freedom).

The fourth part (*Monitoring wolności mediów w Unii Europejskiej* [Monitoring Media Freedom in the European Union]) relates to the EU and EU media policy. After the traditional introduction to the topic, Jaskiernia goes on to an almost 100-page analysis. Hence we receive not only an overview of the entities involved in media monitoring in the EU (the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council of the European Union, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the European Ombudsman, and the Court of Justice of the European Union), but also references to monitoring, for example, of public broadcasters, media pluralism, and media monitoring in the digital environment. Jaskiernia also refers to media education, which should be considered as another asset of the publication.

In fact, at this stage the content could be fully in line with the title of the book; after all, reference has been made to the European institutions and thus the research objectives have been achieved. However, the author decides to complete the picture of media freedom monitoring with the activities of non-governmental agencies, which she discusses in the fifth chapter (*Monitoring wolności mediów prowadzony w Europie przez organizacje pozarządowe oraz branżowe. Globalne indeksy wolności mediów* [Monitoring of media freedom conducted in Europe by NGOs and trade organizations. Global Indexes of Media Freedom]). This section presents the mechanisms implemented by UNESCO or the International Press Institute, as well as the most important media freedom indices, i.e. Freedom House, IREX and Reporters Without Borders.

The book — which should be highlighted — is complemented by the *Introduction* and *Conclusion*, which here takes the form of extensive conclusions and ques-

tions about the future of monitoring media freedom (it can easily be treated as a collection of inspiration for further work on this subject).

Having read the book, one might feel somewhat unsatisfied in terms of discussing the condition of media freedom in individual European countries (as a separate chapter on the subject rather than the references which do appear frequently in the monograph); this should not be treated as a fault, though. Given the complexity and capacity of the publication, adding another thread could be difficult to absorb. However, it would certainly be interesting if the author decided to research this issue in her subsequent studies.

Secondly, it would be brilliant if the future dissertation was enriched with in-depth interviews with those responsible for the broadly defined monitoring of media freedom in Europe. It should be stressed that the methodology implemented in the monograph presented here is absolutely sufficient: the author thoroughly analyzes the numerous secondary sources, the literature on the subject and the legal acts, keeping in mind the observations which appear on p. 43 (“It is necessary to take into account the fact that, in the light of the research carried out, there is a regularity that media freedom indices remain under the influence of ideological, theoretical, and financial patterns, and, as a consequence, may not achieve their intended purpose and present a biased picture of media freedom in the world”; “The monitoring of media freedom should also take into account the level of trust in the media and journalists. That is why the dimensions and criteria for monitoring are so important, which relate to the autonomy, independence, and professionalism of journalists”). While raising methodological difficulties, Jaskiernia maintains a distance to the subjects she is studying; relying on a solid substantive and theoretic foundation, she often addresses individual issues critically, e.g. in the case of media freedom indexes, whose relevance and general idea she seems to support, but not unconditionally, emotionally or overoptimistically.

An additional advantage of the book is that it is up-to-date; it is evident not only at the quite obvious level of source selection (the author sometimes points out that a given material, e.g. a new ranking, a report, appeared at the time of preparing the monograph), but also at the level of content (as evidenced by frequent references to the digital world, the Internet and technological changes).

The book is clearly a valuable source of knowledge on media monitoring. It also poses important questions on the condition of contemporary media and the political and social systems in which they are operating today. It triggers thinking and further research, encourages discussion, and because of its multidisciplinary it is a must-read for academics, practitioners, legislators, NGO activists, and students who represent a variety of interests ranging from the media, through politics, to ethics, and philosophy.

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