

KATARZYNA KONARSKA (2021). *MEDIA PUBLICZNE A DEMOKRACJA: TEORIA I PRAKTYKA. MEDIA PUBLICZNE EUROPY ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ* [PUBLIC MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY: THEORY AND PRACTICE. PUBLIC MEDIA IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE]. WROCŁAW: WYDAWNICTWO UNIwersYTETU WROCŁAWSKIEGO, 524 PP., ISBN: 978-83-229-3764-8

The reviewed monograph is devoted to the functioning of public media in Europe, with a particular focus on Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. In order to outline the changes taking place in the media systems of these countries, Katarzyna Konarska has analysed the basis of media operation in selected countries. The publication is the result of the author's long research into the issues raised, culminating in her achieving habilitation in the discipline of social communication and media sciences.

The monograph is divided evenly into four parts. In the opening sentences of the *Introduction* the author emphasizes the importance of a functioning, free and pluralistic media system for strengthening civil society and the democratic state organism. The author understands this multidimensionally „as institutional and normative diversity, reflecting the differentiations existing in the society” (p. 7). Among the main hypotheses posed at the outset, the first assumes that there is a link between media freedom and democratic order. The next two concern the special role of public media in a pluralistic media system and the lack of universal model solutions that would allow the implementation of specific regulatory and structural patterns. However, the author does assume there are some general and basic conditions for the proper functioning of public media institutions in democratic systems. The latter hypothesis refers specifically to CEE countries: the media in countries with shorter democratic traditions are subjected to greater pressures due to the instability of the systems, especially political ones.

The first chapter delivers mostly theoretical considerations. Based on the extended literature on the subject, the author introduces the concept of democracy, discusses its most important models and the role and place of the media in democratic systems and then analyses whatever are the essence of democracy the freedom of the press. Later in the chapter, Konarska focuses on the idea of the public sphere and civil society. She also devotes a little more space to the democratic role of the media in traditional and alternative terms. The

first chapter concludes with a discussion of selected typologies of media systems, including authors such as Siebert, Peterson and Schramm; Wiio, Hallin and Mancini; and Blum.

The second chapter is a gradual narrowing of the subject matter to the axis of the monograph, namely public media. The researcher, drawing on an extensive bibliography, analyses what public media is in relation to the public sphere of civil society in a democracy. She devotes due attention to the widely commented phrase – „public mission.” The author subsequently discusses the various models of public media and their tasks, starting with the normative approach and ending with empirical concepts. The chapter concludes with the observation, which is a direct reference to one of the research hypotheses, that there is no one pattern of a public media model that is ideal for all times and conditions. Therefore, following S. Cushion, the author cites the opinion that there are many unique hybrid models in the world, which—based on systemic, financial, political and technological conditions—offer program contents that meet the needs of many audiences (p. 168).

In the third chapter, the author moves away from strictly theoretical considerations to descriptive-analytical ones. The main purpose of this part of the monograph is to introduce the systems of organization and functioning of public media in Europe. At the outset, the Konarska presents a summary of the countries belonging to the European Union plus the United Kingdom along with basic data on their television markets (including the number of channels run by private and public broadcasters and the latter's audience share). Further information cited relates to the financing of public media and the systems for regulating their activities. Clearly presented data in tabular form are a starting point for further analysis and consideration, such as the dominant mechanisms in the sphere of public media regulation in Europe (parliamentary, corporate and professional supervision). Based on indicators of media freedom and independence of public media funding management, Konarska analyses the situation of individual European countries, noting the high risk of political interference in some countries, including Poland and Hungary (but surprisingly also Finland). In the remainder of the chapter, the author focuses on European media policy toward public broadcasters. She concludes her general considerations on the subject by saying that in the absence of a consensus around specific regulations, „the question of media independence, including public media, will depend solely on the political culture and level of democratic development of individual countries” (p. 216). In the remaining pages of the chapter, Konarska describes in extenso the media policies of nine Western European countries with regard to public media: Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The choice is not accidental and is based on the representativeness of each media system. The author analyses both

structural relations and systems of financing, management or control of public media, and in the final section of the chapter also issues of mission, values and task fulfilment. In the conclusion, Konarska states that: „neither the structural regulations nor the content presented determine unequivocally the autonomy and independence of the public media. For their situation is a resultant of many variables, such as the aforementioned tradition and political culture...” (p. 277).

The fourth chapter is entirely devoted to public media in eight CEE countries and is essentially a repetition of the analyses that the author conducted on the nine Western European countries in the previous chapter. However, early in the chapter, Konarska along with other authors, recognizes that these countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) are characterized by great cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious or historical-geopolitical differences. Nevertheless, in recent years, deteriorating indicators of democracy have been noticed in this group, a trend that according to the authors of the cited data, is the result of growing right-wing populism and affects the level of media freedom and pluralism in these countries. Among other disturbing phenomena, the author also mentions the instability of political systems, the oligarchization of socio-political life and its appropriation by political parties. Konarska briefly reports on the systemic transformation of the countries discussed in this chapter, concluding not very optimistically that: „Thirty years after the beginning of the systemic transformation in the former communist bloc countries, the situation of the mass media does not seem to be much better than at the beginning of this period” (p. 301). In ensuing subsections, the author analyses the media policies of individual countries, often referring to the systemic solutions used in Western European countries (discussed in the previous chapter). In doing so, Konarska considers not only the institutional basis and structural solutions but also control and management bodies. With the collected data, Konarska attempts to assign individual countries to the system models devised by Hallin and Mancini and Hanretty. Another aspect of the analysis is the sources of funding, and the goals and programmatic tasks carried out by public media in the discussed countries. On the sidelines of these treatments falls the formulation of unsuccessful attempts to recreate public broadcasting systems in the Western European style (J. Juzefovičs). Symptomatic seems to be the observation that the more broadly the mission and tasks are described by public broadcasters, the worse they are fulfilled. In the chapter’s conclusion, Konarska emphasizes that „the independence of the media is guaranteed not so much by the adopted procedures for the selection of members [of control and supervisory bodies – AS] and the scope of their competence, but rather by the political culture and the attitude of the political elite, which seeks consensus” (p. 430).

In the *Conclusions*, the Konarska acknowledges that her analysis has shown a link between the degree of independence of public media and the level of involvement of political elites in the processes of organization, management, supervision and control of these entities. She also confirmed the validity of her theses, including the existence of an inextricable link between media freedom and the democratic order. Furthermore, Konarska acknowledges the higher realization of the public mission in countries assessed as full democracies, and that in countries with shorter democratic traditions, public media are more often exposed to pressure from political elites who seek to subordinate their activities to party interests.

Katarzyna Konarska's monograph is a carefully edited compendium of knowledge on the functioning of public media in Europe, proving that: „Properly organized and defined public media can still be an important and necessary element of the public life of democratic societies” (p. 278).

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