

**BUYING A GUN NOT TO USE IT?
A STUDY OF THE CHANGE IN CZECH MEDIA
OWNERSHIP AND ITS POLITICAL
INSTRUMENTALISATION**

**КУПИТЬ ОРУЖИЕ,
ЧТОБЫ ЕГО НЕ ИСПОЛЬЗОВАТЬ?
ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ИЗМЕНЕНИЙ В СТРУКТУРЕ
СОБСТВЕННИКОВ ЧЕШСКОГО МЕДИАРЫНКА
И ИХ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ ИНСТРУМЕНТАЛИЗАЦИИ**

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This article covers changes to media ownership in the former Eastern Bloc, which first started in the 1990s (de-nationalisation, privatization, the entry of foreign owners), and then by other changes brought by the economic crisis after 2008 (the fleeing of foreign owners, the rise of domestic capital). In the Czech Republic we can talk about another, the third stage of media ownership from 2013, when Andrej Babiš, entrepreneur, the chair of a political party, and later the Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, became the owner of the MAFRA Publishing House.

The theoretical debate of our contribution looks at the first two historical stages and discusses point-by-point the individual concepts that the literature mentions in this context (party-press parallelism, Italianisation) and some of which may be in conflict with the normative expectations placed on the media in democratic and pluralist societies (business parallelism, impure publishing, instrumentalisation).

The subsequent empirical part of the paper is dedicated to this “third stage” of media ownership in the Czech Republic. The method of quantitative content analysis focuses on Babiš’s two dailies, MF Dnes and Lidové noviny, and, by comparison with the contents of other dailies, examines whether there has been political instrumentalisation that has robbed them of their independence so that they side with their owner.

The research – in comparison with both expert and public opinion – produced surprising results. Although media siding was measured with the aid of openly expressed sympathy for various political actors or by measuring the attention devoted to each political actor and their arguments, almost no tendency towards partisanship was recorded. The input hypothesis about the pernicious impact of merging political and media power in democratic public debate was found to be false. Interpretation of these results, however, does not mean this danger should not be heeded, and offers three possible explanations as to why there has been no political instrumentalisation in this area so far.

Key words: *media ownership, media parallelism, Italianisation, media moguls, instrumentalisation.*

Данная статья рассматривает изменения, происходящие в структуре собственников медиарынка в странах бывшего Восточного блока, начавшиеся в 1990 году (денацио-

нализация, приватизация, допуск иностранных собственников), а также трансформации, произошедшие под влиянием кризиса 2008 года (отток иностранных собственников, увеличение объема внутреннего капитала). В случае Чешской республики мы можем говорить о новом, третьем этапе изменений, начиная с 2013 года, когда предприниматель, глава политической партии, а в дальнейшем вице-премьер и министр финансов Андрей Бабиш стал владельцем издательского дома MAFRA.

В теоретической части работы рассматриваются первые два исторических этапа, последовательно обсуждаются теоретические концепты, обычно упоминаемые в данном контексте (политико-медийный параллелизм, «итальянизация»), некоторые из которых могут вступать в противоречие с нормативными ожиданиями от медиа в демократическом и плюралистическом обществе (бизнес-параллелизм, инструментализация).

Эмпирическая часть статьи посвящена «третьему этапу» трансформации структуры собственников в Чешской республике. Количественный контент-анализ двух ежедневных газет Бабиша MF Dnes и Lidové noviny, а также их сравнение с другими ежедневными изданиями помогают понять, имел ли место политический инструментализм, лишивший их независимости и поставивший на одну сторону с владельцем.

Результаты исследования — особенно в сравнении с общественным мнением и суждениями экспертов — выглядят неожиданными. Несмотря на то, что позиция СМИ изучалась и с помощью фиксации выражений открытой симпатии к ряду политиков, и с помощью измерения объема внимания к тому или иному политическому актору и его аргументам, не удалось

обнаружить тенденций к партийности. Изначальная гипотеза о вреде интеграции медийной и политической власти в демократическом публичном дискурсе была опровергнута. Интерпретация этих данных не подразумевает, что опасность указанного явления следует замалчивать, и предлагает три возможных объяснения того, почему политическая инструментализация до сих пор не проявилась в данной области.

Ключевые слова: *медиасобственность, параллелизм СМИ, италянизация, медиамагнаты, инструментализация*

Introduction

The question of media ownership is crucial in media studies and concerns such basic areas as journalistic independence, the watchdog role, political pluralism and the quality of the public sphere/marketplace (and, indeed, democracy itself).

This theme has specific significance in Central and Eastern European countries, which have seen a rapid and radical transformation of the political and media systems since the beginning of the nineties.

Leaving public service media aside (in the CR the community sector is almost non-existent), then the assumption of the project is that developments in the ownership of Czech media (and this can be freely extended to the entire region) can be divided into three phases.

Phase I (the nineties up to 2005)

The privatisation of existing (print) media took place relatively rapidly at the beginning of the decade; the subsequent process of

internationalisation was just as rapid. New owners, often the editorial staff, did not have the available capital necessary to modernise obsolete equipment. The decisive shares in a number of key print media thus passed into the hands of foreign owners and there was subsequently talk of a certain (temporary) market stabilisation, or concentration.

This phase has been well described as the beginning of the transformation of media ownership in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was addressed by Sparks, Reading (1998), Splichal (2001), Gross (2002), Huber (2006), Jakubowicz (2007), Jakubowicz, Sükösd (2008), Lauk (2008), Peruško, Popović (2008), Krone (2008). Regarding the CR, an exhaustive overview can be found in Benda (2007) or Waschková Císařová, Metyková (2009).

Although by consensus the movement of Czech media into foreign hands was accompanied by fears – especially in the case of German capital – in the literature cited here we see the first mention of the “**Italianisation**” of Czech/Eastern European media (Splichal, 1994). This term, however, at this point relates only to the low level of professionalism of a radically changing journalism, the politicisation of journalism and its shift to a commentary style rather than a neutral news style.

Phase II (2006–2013)

The start of the phase of ownership transferring in the other direction can be placed in the first years of the 21st century. However, this trend accelerated in 2008, when, due to the economic crisis, there was a marked decline in advertising revenue and a flight of foreign owners occurred from the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe (Štětka, 2010).

In the Czech Republic the trend of take-overs by local owners is personified by Zdeněk Bakala, who bought the publishing house “Respekt Publishing” (the weekly “Respekt”) in 2006, and two years later the publishing house “Economia” (“Hospodářské noviny”, “Ekonom”, “Marketing&Média”, aktualne.cz, atlas.cz). This entrepreneur operated primarily in the areas of mining, finance and real estate. Petr Kellner – with investments in insurance, energy, real estate, retail sales – bought the publishing house “Euronews” (“Euro weekly”). Karel Komárek, a mogul in oil and gas extraction, tourism, and the lottery industry, took over Stanford (“Profit”, “Czech Business Weekly”). Sebastian Pawlowski (property market) took over the then “Mediacop” (“Týden”, “Instinkt”). And then there were Jaroslav Soukup, investor in advertising and security services, who took over ownership of “Empresa Media” (“TV Barrandov”, “Sedmička” and later “Týden”, “Instinkt”) and František Savov, known in the fields of engineering and finance, who gained a controlling share in the the “Mladá fronta publishing house” (“E15”, “Euro”, “Strategie”) (Štětka, 2010).

Apart from being the richest Czech citizens, what unites these men is the fact that they conduct business predominantly in sectors of the economy other than the media. Tunstall and Palmer coined the phrase “media/industrialist mogul”, i.e. “entrepreneurs who are primarily captains in some other industrial field, but in addition own and operate major media interests” (Tunstall, Palmer, 1991: 105-106).

This type of owner is inextricably linked with the term **impure publishing**, i.e. the type of media ownership that, for instance, Mancini found in Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century. Impure publishing refers to print media published at a loss and therefore concentrated in the hands of banks and, in particular, industrialists, who “cover the chronic deficits in the sector”

(Mancini, 2001: 41). These features accompany the Italian media system to this day. (On the topic of an “impure” publishing industry in Italy, see also Bergamini, 2006; Murialdi, 2006; Mancini, 2009; Scandaletti, 2003). Here the adjective “impure” indicates a certain non-compliance with the normative theories of democratic media – it warns against the risk of a media landscape, in which not even the “liberal minimum” is valid, i.e. the existence and success of the media is solely decided by the citizens/public by their choice/purchase of the best (faith in the “invisible hand of the market”, idealistically present in Czech public discourse in the nineties).

On the types of media/industrialist moguls, Mazzoleni (Mazzoleni, 1991: 169) observes that “they 1) acquired money elsewhere and invested it in media, considering daily press in particular to be ‘a strategic investment’ and a way of getting closer to the political parties; 2) have been more concerned with owning (rather than with actually running) the media (...); and 3) maintain close ties with the political establishment, directly or indirectly supporting politicians in return for their help in further media expansions”.

Here he discusses Italianisation in connection with the **instrumentalisation** of the media, i.e. the use of power stemming from ownership of the media to attain particular economic and/ or political objectives. The term usually occurs in regard to the concentration of communications/media power in the hands of a single owner. Rather than inferring direct influence, it refers to a number of more subtle, indirect ways in which owners can control the media in favour of their interests or those of their affiliates: by changing the organization of work, by replacing higher and middle management, and so forth. (McNair, 1998). Hanretty in a recent (Hanretty, 2014: 335–350) analysis of more than two hundred titles from 32 countries shows that titles with a sole proprietor, in which

foreign capital does not play a role, have much greater control of the editorial mechanisms and journalistic freedom.

Instrumentalisation has – among other things – a certain relation to parallelism. In media studies **political parallelism** is typically used to refer to traditional/historical phenomena whereby “the same social forces that found their expression in a political party (ies), had a tendency to find the same expression through the press” (Seymour-Ure, 1974: 159). Historical reasons, however, are also behind the fact that current political parties in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are not well-anchored and not stable, nor do they command a large membership. Instead of political parallelism they more aptly reflect a conventional model along the lines of “a close set of relations between politicians, businessmen and the media that leads to a routine interchange between different groups in post-communist countries” (Sparks, Reading, 1998); or **partisan-polyvalence**, found “in a situation where political parallelism is weak, the media may be instrumentalised by a multiplicity of stakeholders and be used for a range of different goals: supporting one political figure – or one political programme – and pursuing business goals at the same time” (McCargo, 2012; on partisan polyvalence in CEE, see Zielonka, Mancini, 2011). Therefore in the second phase of ownership attention more intensively shifts to **business parallelism**:

Zielonka and Mancini describe this process as follows: “However, our study also points to strong elements of ‘business parallelism,’ and this represents another common feature across the region. The mass media in Central and Eastern Europe are owned by and depend on economic and business interests rather than solely political and social organisations. This contrasts with most of Western Europe, but is similar to much of Southern Europe, where corporations and individual businessmen not only own but also

directly control mass media outlets in search of profits and political influence. Profits are also usually the prime objective of foreign investors in Central and Eastern Europe... Local owners often seek not only economic gains, but also – and often primarily – political influence.” (Mancini, Zielonka, 2011: 4).

The idea of “getting closer to the political parties” (or individual politicians) in order to obtain “political influence” is typical at this stage of development in the ownership of Czech media. The actual ambitions of the media/industrial moguls are not obvious. Rather we encounter support on the part of other actors¹, support that is often fleeting and not well publicised.

Phase III. (2013 -?)

The third phase of changes in ownership of the Czech media has a clear beginning. In June 2013 the MAFRA publishing house, issuing the most read reputable daily MF Dnes, and an influential daily Lidové noviny, a flagship of foreign ownership, instantly transformed into something different. Andrej Babiš, the owner of the agricultural, food and chemical holding Agrofert, and, according to Forbes magazine, the second richest citizen of the CR after Petr Kellner, purchased MAFRA in a surprising move. He was not just another in a series of second phase media/industrial moguls. His political ambitions took it to the next level. Even before the purchase, he founded and led the ANO Party. He unwittingly serves as an illustration of the recent observation that: “Business

¹ Bakala: ex. President Havel, the Green Party, pres. candidate Švejnár, TOP 09 and pres. candidate Karel Schwarzenberg; Kellner: former president Václav Klaus, Soukup: Democratic Green Party, the Social Democrats; Pawlowski: Prague mayors Kasl and Bém.

parallelism’ represents another common feature across the region, with some media owners actively engaged in politics and in business at the same time. Media ownership in regions is quite fuzzy and not sufficiently transparent” (Mancini, Zielonka, 2013: 2).

Although the mention of “fuzzy and not sufficiently transparent ownership” also has its interesting manifestations in the third phase of Czech media ownership, the key statement for us reads, “politics and business (incl. media business) at the same time” (NB: in contrast to, “getting closer to the political parties”). Instead of speculation about the support of political parties and individual candidates, characteristic of Phase II, Andrej Babiš arrives with his own party, albeit without obvious ties to the traditional political structures or existing social movements. Therefore it makes little sense to talk about general political parallelism (referring to a history of proven politico-philosophical alliance which forms a mass party), but we can return to the original term “party-press parallelism”. This is important since the latter type of political party has been identified in recent scholarly typologies of either political parties as a business-firm or entrepreneurial party (Hopkin, Paolucci, 1999: 307–339; Krouwel, 2006: 249–262, 2012) or directly named as a businessman party (Olteanu, de Néve, 2014; see also Harmel, Svåsand, 1993: 66–88; Arter, 2013: 1–12).

In contrast to the previous party types (mass party, catch-all party, cartel party), business-firm parties are mainly supported by private sector resources, they maintain financial and personal links with a commercial enterprise (either the party arises directly inside a company, or as a clone of its structures or otherwise) and the leadership of party and company are united in the person of one owner/party leader.

The ANO Party and its president Andrej Babiš serve as a perfect example of this model – especially given that, a few months after

acquiring MAFRA, the ANO Party made significant gains in parliamentary elections, earning second place, or 18,65% of the votes, and joined the government, with Andrej Babiš becoming Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the Czech Republic.

This completed the shift to the third and current phase, characterised by an extremely high degree of mutual reinforcement between economic, political and media interests. Even in public discourse the features of this are evident in descriptive words like such as the “Berlusconisation” or “oligarchisation” of the Czech media. This terminology accords with the “eastern direction” – the only direction remaining after applying the three Hallin-Mancini models, (Křeček, 2013).

Ever since 2013, this topic has been a very lively one in both the press and public discourse in the Czech Republic. A number of journalists from MAFRA moved to other periodicals or established new projects (“Echo 24”, “Reporter”). Non-profit organisations (Svobodu médiím – Freedom of the Media) and traditional parties attempted to legislatively restrict the linking of media and political power. This link is generally accepted as a threat to public discussion and democracy itself. However in this particular case there is not much evidence that the Deputy Prime Minister, Finance Minister and Chairman of the ANO Party has actively used “his” media against his political opponents). The lack of methodologically relevant analyses of the instrumentalisation of the media from the MAFRA Publishing House may be related to the fact that in the key years (i.e. from the second half of 2013 until the second half of 2016) there were no domestic (national) elections² in the Czech

² On 23 and 24 May 2014 elections were held for the European Parliament: ANO 16,13% of the votes (4 seats), TOP 09 + STAN 15,95% (4), ČSSD 14,17% (4), KSČM 10,98% (3), KDU-ČSL 9,95% (3), ODS (7,67%), Svobodní 5,24% (1). The voter turnout was the lowest ever – just 18,2%.

Republic. Potential favouritism is always best evidenced in the pre-election news and journalism. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, it seemed appropriate to carry out just such a study during this period.

Methods

The theoretical background of our analysis is based on the normative theories of media and political communication, in particular, ideas about the desired behaviour of the media in relation to political actors and the public, about the media as a forum and mediator of discussions on politics and policy, i.e. the idea of media as an objective, balanced and non-partisan voice. The main research question logically, then, is whether MF Dnes and Lidové noviny favour their owner in reporting political news?

The research was conducted using a method of quantitative content analysis, in the framework of which the main hypothesis (Babiš's media support Babiš) was conceptualised so that, when referring to Andrej Babiš, there would be a significant difference between the media he owns and other media.

Focus fell on those media contents that covered/described specific disputes in which Andrej Babiš was engaged between 2014 and 2015. A pilot study, carried out in a full text media database by using a simple search algorithm³, identified ten disputes with various opponents (from governmental coalitions as well as

³ Tracking various words for disputes used in Czech: „Babiš AND (spor OR pře OR neshoda OR nedorozumění OR rozepře OR hádka OR kontroverze OR svár OR rozpor OR konflikt OR srážka OR svár OR boj OR konfrontace OR rozpor OR problém OR střet)“. Searched in Newton Media Databases.

parliamentary opposition) on a variety of topics⁴. Media siding/support/partisanship was operationalised to the 22 variables that registered the following information: space dedicated to quotations directly cited from speeches by Andrej Babiš (vs. those of his opponents); space dedicated to the arguments and interpretations of a given dispute by advocates of Andrej Babiš's opinions (vs. the arguments and interpretations of opponents); the reported number of supporters of Babiš or his opponent; a count of how many times a political leader (Babiš, an opponent, or both) appeared in a headline; whether the name of Babiš or an opponent came first in a given text; who (or whose opinion) had the last word in the article's text; who (Babiš, opponent) was cited as the originator of the dispute by the article's author; whether the article's author sympathized with one or other side of the dispute; and whether the author indicated who won (or lost) the dispute.

⁴ 1) January 2014: dispute with Prime Minister Sobotka about the Deputy Minister of Finance;

2) February 2014: dispute with the Chairman of the opposition TOP 09, Miroslav Kalousek, about financial assistance for the company Explosia;

3) February 2014: dispute with Prime Minister Sobotka about corrupt contacts in the Prague branch of ANO Party;

4) September 2014; dispute with the Minister of the Interior, Chovanec, about the Postal Act amendment;

5) October 2014: dispute with the Minister of Health about the funding of hospitals;

6) October 2014: dispute with Hudeček about his candidacy for ANO Party;

7) June 2016: dispute with MP Šinčl about the Insurance Act;

8) August 2015: dispute with Minister of Industry, Mládek, and Governor Novák about land for an industrial zone;

9) September 2015: another dispute with Kalousek, this time about the Lottery Act;

10) October 2015: dispute with MPs Šinčl and Bartošek about the corruption of MPs by the lottery lobby.

The four most widely read reputable dailies⁵ were analysed. Two belong to Andrej Babiš (“MF Dnes”, “Lidové noviny”). The other two (“Právo”, “Hospodářské noviny”) have a different owner. The internet versions of these journals (idnes.cz, lidovky.cz, novinky.cz, ihned.cz) were also included in the analysis. An analysis was made of all the news articles relating to the dispute in question (i.e., the dispute constituted the main topic of the article) for every month since the start of the dispute.

Analysis was carried out by eight students⁶ from the Analysis of Political Communication course after the pertinent training and successful ranking on a reliability test (0,91). A total of 136 articles⁷ were analysed (encoding units: articles with the main theme of “Babiš-Dispute with someone”) totalling 65,980 words.

SPSS statistical software was used for data collection and statistical evaluation, using traditional approaches of quantitative content analysis – t-tests, ANOVA and Cross Tabs. (Riffe, Lacy, Fico, 2014)

Results

For some of the findings there was no need to perform a fresh analysis since attention allocated to individual disputes and all of its

⁵ Readership in the second half of 2015: MF Dnes 686,000 readers, Právo 328,000, Lidové noviny 206,000, Hospodářské noviny 172,000. The most widely read daily, the tabloid Blesk, had 1,086,000 readers (Media project, 3 + 4Q/2015, Unie vydavatelů (Publishers Association), Median, Stem/Mark)

⁶ Martin Balucha, Tomáš Černohous, Martin Dobrovodský, Iva Kestránková, Tereza Maršíková, Jiří Nevečeřal and Kateřina Syslová.

⁷ MF Dnes 12, Lidové noviny: 8, Právo: 21, Hospodářské noviny 7, idnes.cz 19, lidovky.cz 19, novinky.cz 34, ihned.cz 16

actors was higher for online media than print (this simply because Internet-based editors are not under much pressure to monitor word count and the length of articles).

Some indicators of siding needed to be verified, but here too the results were to be expected – for example, the authors of the articles themselves (journalists) only very rarely stood explicitly on one side of the dispute. The results for another variable – whether authors declared a winner or a loser in a particular dispute – were thus shown to be statistically insignificant.

Andrej Babiš was indicated as the originator of the dispute far more often than his opponent. This variable alone, however, cannot serve as an example of siding (nor does cross-tabulation with the other variables confirm anything of the sort). However, the finding may testify to Babiš's confrontational political style that he is consistently labeled as the originator of a dispute either in a positive light (“Babiš opens up important causes”), or negatively (“Babiš is a troublemaker”). This was not confirmed for Babiš's media nor the other media.

Of the media monitored, the most attention (space) was given by Právo and its internet version Novinky.cz. This is explained by the fact that these media have a party-press parallelism optic that is closer to the Czech Social Democratic Party and the leaders of this party were the most frequent opponents of Andrej Babiš (in seven out of ten disputes). For both of these media, however, a balanced and impartial representation of these disputes can be observed. Likewise, the analysis shows that, on the whole, the media owned by Babiš took a balanced and impartial position when reporting on Andrej Babiš's disputes. This goes for both the daily “MF Dnes” (and its Internet version idnes.cz) and the daily “Lidové noviny” (including lidovky.cz.).

So, in fact, the main finding of the analysis is that **the main hypothesis can't be confirmed**. Even using levels of statistical

significance at 10%, Chi-square test of contingency table did not confirm any significant relationship (Variable 1: Media, Variable 2: Space dedicated to Babiš x Space dedicated to the other side of the dispute; Space for Babiš's quotes x Space for opponent's quotes; First actor cited; First actor mentioned; Last actor mentioned; The number of supporters mentioned) any significant relationship (Pearson Chi-Square Test – Sig: 0,122 – 0,708; Symmetric Measures – Phi, Cramer's V 0,158 – 0,622), nor did the analysis of variance ANOVA.

Table 1

Paired samples statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Babiš's quotations	45,20	136	50,064	4,293
	Opponent's quotations	50,80	136	52,189	4,475

These surprising conclusions (on the example of variable „Space for quotations“) are demonstrated in *Table 1*, *Table 2* and *Figure 1*.

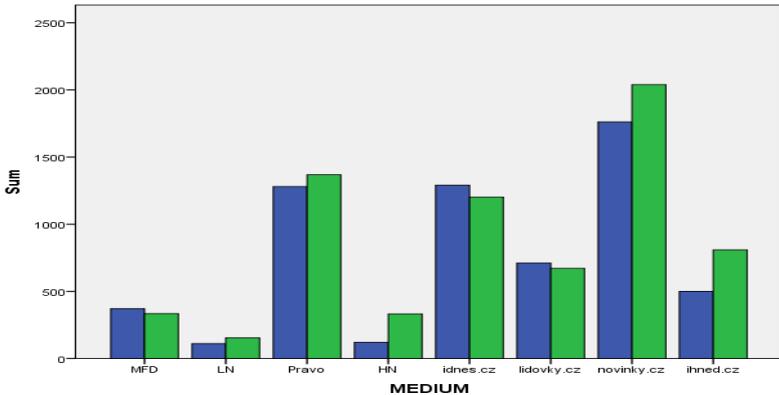
Table 2

Paired samples test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	t-test	-5,603	59,804	5,128	-15,745	4,539	-1,093	135	,277

Figure 1

Space dedicated to Babiš x opponents quotations



(in number of words; Babiš – blue, Opponents – green)

They show the results of the t-test carried out for the main key variable of siding/partisanship, i.e. the space dedicated to each side of the dispute across various media. Both graphical results clearly show that the content monitored in Babiš-owned media did not side with Babiš, or did so very rarely, just as the daily “Právo” sided slightly with Babiš’s opponents. This surprising result is accompanied by another surprise – the only journal, for which a significant shift to one side of the dispute was observed, was the financial newspaper “Hospodářské noviny” (and its internet version Ihted.cz), generally considered to be the best quality reputable daily in the CR. One explanation could be that, while the other titles have a large readership and a heterogeneous audience, “Hospodářské noviny” (“Economic Newspaper”) targets a numerically smaller economic elite. This, of course, would mean that at the present time high-quality Czech economic journalism is aimed against the

leading Czech businessman, presiding as the Minister of Finance! Maybe a better explanation is the fact that “Hospodářské noviny” is published by the “Economia Publishing House”, which is fully owned by Zdeněk Bakala, one of the top Czech oligarchs also active in the media – i.e. a Phase II oligarch, who never had any open political ambitions and preferred to simply support political actors, who currently stand in opposition to Andrej Babiš and his ANO Party (see *footnote 1*).

Conclusion

How should these results be interpreted, when there was an undeniable exchange of the journalistic staff and the management at Babiš’s media (and these changes had already had time to “settle”)? When former employees very often explained their departure as a response to Andrej Babiš’s interference with the editorial independence of ‘his’ media outlets?

The interpretation can, in principle, be made in three ways:

The first interpretative possibility can be called **idealistic**. The main promoter of this view, we can now reveal, is Andrej Babiš himself in his speeches on the topic of media ownership. According to this version, there have never been and are not now any restrictions on editorial independence imposed by Andrej Babiš, if there were, they were marginal and diminished over time.

According to the **pragmatic** interpretation, the editors at Babiš’s media recognized that critical eyes were scrutinizing them in all reporting about their owner, and they attempted (at least in the rough traits monitored by this analysis) to show maximum impartiality.

The **defeatist** variant is grounded in the simple reflection that there was no instrumentalisation because it is not worth it for media

owners. In this particular case, it may be due to the fact that there is no point in influencing the segment of content monitored by this analysis – i.e. the media representation of the current disputes between political professionals – outside of an election period; whilst there is sense in influencing other media content that was not monitored here (such as that which could have an agenda-setting effect). On a more general level, the defeatist variant of the interpretation may lead to the belief that the printed media's influence on public political communication has decreased markedly from the past.

Without leaning towards just one of the variants outlined here, the main explanation can be derived from the fact, already mentioned, that this analysis focused on media content from 2014 and 2015, when there were no elections in the Czech Republic.

The first election to take place following Andrej Babiš's acquisition of the MAFRA Publishing House was to occur in the autumn of 2016, i.e. at the time this paper went to press. The next content analysis – this time treating pre-election coverage – will be crucial for answering questions related to the concentration of political and economic power. If the anticipated event of instrumentalisation proves to be correct, then the Czech political system will need to ascertain whether this normative problem can be resolved legislatively. If it is not proven to be so, then nothing else remains but to investigate further, now no longer using content analysis, but with research by observation, questionnaires and interviews in the newsrooms themselves. This may explain how this unexpectedly positive state of balanced reporting was achieved – and whether the idealistic, pragmatic or defeatist explanation proves most valid.

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