

Poll reveals shifting attitudes towards media freedom in Central Europe amidst political changes and Russian influence concerns

[Budapest, 25th April 2024] A poll across the Visegrád Four (V4) countries – the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary – has revealed significant shifts in public attitudes towards media freedom, driven by political changes and growing concerns over Russian interference in the region.

The most striking finding is the sharp decline in concern over media freedom in Poland, dropping from 71% in 2023 to 53% in 2024, following the election of a more mainstream government. This contrasts with the situation in Slovakia and Hungary, where concern over the issue has grown compared to last year, as both governments continue to face criticism over its handling of media freedom and the rule of law.

The poll also highlights the growing fear of Russian penetration of domestic media and public opinion across the V4 countries. A majority of respondents expressed concerns about Russia's influence, with figures ranging from 61% in Hungary to 77% in Poland.

Despite these concerns, there is strong public support for governments to take action to safeguard media freedom. An overwhelming majority of respondents across all four countries believe that states should strengthen legislation to protect media independence, with figures reaching as high as 78% in Poland and 74% in Slovakia.

Other key findings include:

- A general consensus on the importance of media investment transparency and limitations on concentrations of ownership to avoid dominance by powerful and influential groups and individuals.
- Continuing strong support for the European Union imposing penalties on countries whose governments interfere with media freedom, particularly in Poland (63%) and Slovakia (61%).
- In Poland and Hungary, social networking sites and messaging apps are considered more free and more trustworthy than mainstream media.

The poll, conducted by MEDIAN on behalf of the Prague based Committee for Editorial Independence, with the support of the Bakala Foundation, surveyed over 4,000 respondents aged 18 and above across the V4 countries in March 2024, providing valuable insights into the complex and evolving attitudes towards media freedom in a region that has faced significant challenges in recent years. A press conference will be held in Budapest at 10am (CET) in partnership with Reporters Without Borders, featuring comments from European Commissioner Věra Jourová and editors and publishers from across the region.

Tessa Szyszkowitz, Chair of the Committee for Editorial Independence, said: "The Media Freedom Poll's three-year data reveals a complex landscape of public opinion on press freedom in Central Europe. The contrast between Poland's declining concern and growing unease in Hungary and Slovakia is striking."

"As the region grapples with political shifts and Russian influence, our findings underscore the critical importance of safeguarding media independence. The strong public support for action highlights the urgent need for a robust response from governments, civil society, and international institutions."

For more information, please contact:

Hana Schreibová
Secretary of the Committee for Editorial Independence
Economia, a.s. | Pernerova 47 | 186 00 Praha 8
hana.schreibova@economia.cz

Dr Václav Štětko
Loughborough University
v.stetka@lboro.ac.uk