

## **Media Capture in Denmark**

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## Abstract

The political and -in regard to that- journalistic climate of Denmark, can be identified as the “Democratic – Corporatist Model”; just like the other Scandinavian countries. This climate is acting as a natural barrier against the media capture for the country. However, all the potential dangers concerning media capture are also deeply connected to these roots. The self-governing structure of the Danish media; which built itself after the 1950’s; can very well be the brick of a surreptitiously rising media capture wall -if not regulated with well intentions-. High degree of state involvement in media market structure and the monopolistic approach comes with that, may also take a steep turn towards a political media capture with unforeseeable results in a country which doesn’t have any realistic precaution against media capture from different sources. Danish Press Council and its sanctioning power will be the only body examined in this paper which can be considered as a media capture precaution -to a degree-. Two doubts which beginning to surface in the journalistic circles are diagnosed as lack of market plurality and social inclusiveness and they will be considered as the main media capture concerns.

**Keywords:** Denmark, Democratic-Corporatist, Media Capture, Media Concentration.

### Denmark Country Profile

Denmark is a North European country with almost 5.9 million population by the last quarter of 2021 according to Statistics Denmark<sup>1</sup>. Her official language is Danish and she is the southernmost of the Scandinavian countries. Similar to her Scandinavian neighbors, has a fairly stable and high-income, and it follows a mixed economy model. By 2020, she has 356.085

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statbank.dk/FOLK1c>

Billion Dollars of Gross Domestic Product.<sup>2</sup> Official currency of the Denmark is the ‘‘Kron’’ and she has the privilege of staying outside Eurozone. The most important sectors of Denmark’s economy in 2018 were public administration, defense, education, human health and social work activities (21.6%), wholesale and retail trade, transport, accommodation and food services (20.0%) and industry (18.0%).<sup>3</sup>

Denmark has a ceremonial royalty which are only de jurely the head of the state. Their functions does not able them to be in a conflict with the principle of separation of power. The function of the monarch is to be a ‘‘symbol of the unity of the state’’.<sup>4</sup> The political tradition in Denmark -just as the media system- can be characterized as democratic-corporatist; with a strong tradition for including corporations and interest groups in policy making processes. Their most influential media governing body, Danish Press Council is working under the Ministry of Justice. Denmark’s Ministry of Culture does not have any governing or observing body for media purposes. They only have an agreement with Danmark Radio’s (DR) board of directors in the framework of a public service contract which also gives DR the privilege of getting funded by obligatory license fees.

### **Characteristics of the Danish Media**

Danish media is the part of ‘‘Democratic Corporatist model’’ with the countries like Sweden, Norway, Finland, Netherlands. It has political parallelism (links between media and political parties or positions), state involvement through extensive public service sectors and media subsidies, high levels of circulation and readership, strong degrees of journalistic

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<sup>2</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=DK>

<sup>3</sup> [https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/country-profiles/denmark\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/country-profiles/denmark_en)

professionalization<sup>5</sup>. Her much more tolerant stance on media regulations is the main difference with the aforementioned countries. And this liberal approach has created some external problems for Denmark; such as enabling Roj TV, the successor of Med TV, to broadcast from Denmark soil between 2004 and 2013. Their passive/neutral approach, lasting even after the legal sanctions to the media outlet from Belgium and Germany, got heavily criticized by Turkish Government. Erdoğan's visit to Denmark on 2005 which ended up with him storming out from a press conference involving a Roj TV reporter was a major external problem that rose from the "unregulated" character of Danish Media. Denmark did not comply and instead defended press freedom in Denmark.<sup>6</sup> This can be seen as a formal and unsympathetic approach by the government which does not care about the external consequences of the unregulated media freedom. Media is a natural pillar of democracy and has strong roots to democracy in Denmark, however, this passiveness regarding overly marginal groups and organizations can easily harm another democracy. After 9 problematic years with Turkey, Denmark finally shut down Roj TV for political favors regarding Anders Fogh Rasmussen's appointment as NATO Secretary General.<sup>7</sup> Lack of media related actions and concerns from Danish side still points to a deeper problem regarding the effects of almost unregulated media policy of Denmark. This inertia shows a lack of respect from the government side to their global partners and absence of a long-term risk management plan against the consequences of unregulated media.

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<sup>4</sup> Andersen, Poul (1954). *Dansk Statsforfatningsret*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.

<sup>5</sup> Christiansen, Peter Monk (2020), *The Oxford Handbook of Danish Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/roj-tv-und-pkk-der-kurdensender-der-schaeubles-zorn-erregte-a-565129.html>

<sup>7</sup> Keles, Janroj Yilmaz (2015-08-21). *Media, Diaspora and Conflict: Nationalism and Identity amongst Turkish and Kurdish Migrants in Europe*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 102

### **Market Structure of Danish Media**

The Danish media system is a hybrid one where strong public service broadcasters and private print and broadcast media co-exist, and where the commercial print media are subsidized by the state<sup>8</sup>. However, the presence of private print and broadcast media does not exactly show the true characteristics of a hybrid system. The widely accepted reason for the state interference in media is the public's right of receiving information. However, when we consider the much simpler and liberal actions that Denmark could take; such as having a state television channel that only airs news (from the national press agency) or creating a state organization with sanctioning powers that oversees all the media outlets; their current level of interference seems less like an effort to preserve the right of receiving information and more like being the main actor in the media by any means. One can argue that the argument of "only" protecting the rights of public by dominating the media market is a straw man argument and does not carry the true premise and promise of the social/liberal democracy. Their media model, in its core, is based on "understanding of access to current affairs as a public good"<sup>9</sup>. This value does not hold its democratic value to its fullest when state is the one of the sides of this affairs and can clearly be biased when informing public vis-a-vis aforementioned affairs.

### ***Newspaper Market***

In the newspaper market, contradicting the Denmark's "Nordic" values, we can observe higher than 75% market concentration according to Nielsen data. That's well above of a

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<sup>8</sup> Van Kranenburg, Hans, *Innovation Policies in the European News Media Industry*, Springer International Publishing AG, 2017, p.37

concentration rate that we should see in a highly concentrated market; let alone a competitive one. This dominance, accounted together with the high state interference by subsidies, shows the dependent structure of newspaper market. It is a well-known fact that many Danish media organizations depend strongly on subsidies for their economic survival<sup>10</sup>. Only two newspaper groups, JP/Politikens Hus and Børsen, could boast a profit without counting the state subsidy that still supports commercial news media<sup>11</sup>. Media cannot realize its watchdog duties when they are dependent on the body that they should watch. This leads the way for not only a journalistic capture which cripples the democratic responsibility of being held accountable for the government, but also an economic capture which can left the other actors who trying to make their voice heard like businesspeople, interest groups etc. out of field. Journalists of Denmark, which are highly unionized and has an elitist approach on media<sup>12</sup>, also limits the number of different voices which can be heard freely in media. Not accounting for wealthy groups' interests in a first world country may lead to serious lack of pluralism. Because unlike developing countries, developed countries' elite represents the public interest much more accurately. Corruption by the wealth is harder when the public is not poor, so limiting their reach to plain folks may create a democratic problem, more than a democratic favor for the public.

### *Television Market*

“Two structural conditions characterize the Danish television market: a consistently high degree of market concentration and a high degree of state intervention. The state

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.37

<sup>10</sup> Schrøder, Kim C., and Mark Blach-Ørsten (2018). ‘Denmark: Country report’, in Nic Newman, Richard Fletcher, Antonis Kalogeropoulos, David A. Levy, and Rasmus K. Nielsen, eds, Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

<sup>11</sup> Reuters Institute, Digital News Report 2018, p.74

<sup>12</sup> Eberwein, Tobias, The European Handbook of Media Accountability, 2018, p.55-56

intervention exists in the form of the Danish state's ownership of the two dominant television broadcasters—Danmarks Radio (DR) and TV2 Danmark—which, combined, accounted for almost 70% of total television viewing in Denmark between 2012–2014”<sup>13</sup>. Just like the newspaper concentration numbers, television market numbers are also pointing towards a dangerous trend. Having two major broadcasters under the state roof can sooner or later change itself from an economic monopoly to ideological monopoly. State controlled visual media, when considered with the easy to grasp status of visual messages, can create an unnoticed bias in favor of the state. This bias will degrade the effect of external messages by other actors of information chain, which is already controlled by state with their gargantuan presence on newspaper and television market. In the rare occasions they can find themselves as the sender of information, they face the risk of not getting a well-structured feedback from the public, because of this bias and receiver's tendency to getting their news/information from the state sources. Power of visual messages can give the state the chance of controlling the agenda of even children or/and elder people. This is a more dangerous kind of power than journalistic monopoly. Newspaper readers may still drift away from state influenced newspapers and can “vote with their wallets” in the case of readership. However, minimizing the effects of television in the daily life would be much harder for a person, especially controlling these effects on their children. Public spaces and regular neighborhoods are prone to visual media exposure and give the state or state affiliated organizations to chance of manufacturing consent or setting the public agenda. In the hindsight, this can be seen as the successful approach which mainly conserves the public's right of getting information in the current dynamics of Denmark. However, if couple of elections goes south, this

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<sup>13</sup> Van Kranenburg, 2017, p.38

can do an irreversible damage to present media liberality of the country. For a country with no precautions against political media capture, this poses the threat of being a catastrophic disaster.

### **Current Problems of Danish Media**

Media ownership across markets as an economic phenomenon is not regulated in the Danish media industry; and Denmark State is the biggest potential abuser of this unregulated environment. Other note-worthy actors in the market are Berlingske Media, Jysk Fynske Medier and JP/Politikens Hus. There is no particular legislation about media concentration and cross-media ownership, they are only being held accountable within general competition legislation<sup>14</sup>, which prohibits firms from abusing dominant positions only de jurely. However, the unique dynamics of media business makes some of the general business regulations invalid. This leeway given to media outlets and especially to the state, poses a great danger regarding monopolistic capture of media. This leads us to the first current problem of Danish media; low market plurality. According to Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom's Denmark Country Report (Media Pluralism Monitor 2016 Monitoring Risks for Media Pluralism in the EU and Beyond), Denmark carries a 39% of market plurality problems which puts her on a medium risk bracket. Horizontal media ownership concentration rate is a whopping 92% thanks to aggressive state presence in the market. Cross-media concentration of ownership and competition enforcement values are following the same trend with the risk rate of 63%. Their almost non-existent risk regarding transparency of media ownership (3%) enables us to see the main factor creating the high horizontal media ownership concentration rate: Highly influential role of state in the media market. State of Denmark owns not only two largest broadcasting companies of the

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<sup>14</sup> Van Kranenburg, 2017, p.43/Danish Competition Act



country, but also handful of local public service broadcasters. That is the primary and most important reason for potential and current monopoly in the media sector. However, being transparent about state's media power does not necessarily imply that it is acceptable in democratic norms. As mentioned earlier, this kind of power can be the enabler for an economic monopoly to reshape itself as a political capture apparatus. Inevitable presence of media in the daily life can be channeled as a consent manufacturing device or can be used for allocating state agenda to the defiant or indecisive people, against their free will. This structure of Danish media does not align with the common European or Nordic values. Denmark being a small market is not a valid reason for this kind of concentration, but a major concern. Gigantic media markets like USA can realize their obligations to the public within a strong oligarchy, or even with a potential Murdoch monopoly. Their multicultural society, Liberal/North Atlantic media model and better structured competition laws can protect the press and public from the full effects of media capture. But Denmark does not have the tools, demographic structure or media practices to keeping their information flow fluid. State interference to the media by the horizontal concentration can cripple entire societies democratic right of receiving information. Also, Denmark constitution does not have the sufficient laws and tools to reverse the effects of a media capture; immediately or in a long term. These are what makes the "small market" defense an invalid one. Lacking targeted or specific regulations about media capture is a Sword of Damocles and sooner or later will fall onto the country.

Risk rate of social inclusiveness in Danish media, according to the same report which assesses "regulatory and policy safeguards for community media, and for access to media by minorities, local and regional communities, women and people with disabilities", indicates a low risk for the aforementioned groups except women and minorities. DR has 6 channels: DR1 the

main channel, DR2 which focuses on current affairs, DR3 for young audiences, DR K which is specialized on culture, history and music, DR Ramasjang which targets 3 to 6 years old children and DR Ultra, targeting kids between 7 and 12. None of them are specifically targeting either minorities or women. Having no targeted television channels within the state-owned media may seem like an equalist decision. However, we should consider the distribution of women population in country within the age groups. There are 633.332 women above 65 years in Denmark<sup>15</sup>, according to 2020 data. That is more than 10% of the total population which characteristically getting their news and formal or informal information dominantly from the television. Having no tailored television channels or programs for them restricts their opportunity to easily grasp what is the current dynamics in the daily life and their ability to interact with the people from other age groups. Trying to maintain an equal or egalitarian approach in media, unfortunately creates an ageist dynamic which effects elder women much harder.

### **Potential Media Capture Threats in Denmark**

Because of their democratic values and habitual editorial independence, Denmark is free of media capture according to most metrics. However, their unregulated media atmosphere makes them vulnerable against potential media capture threats. These concerns can only be truly noticeable in hindsight, but, as the main purpose of this work, I will try to point out some of the dangers that may be waiting Denmark in a near future.

A concentration exists in all news media markets and, in some instances, same media companies operate across markets and dominate different types of media. Market share of the four largest firms on newspapers (CR4 index) is higher than 75%<sup>16</sup>. Also Danish State owns two

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<sup>15</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.65UP.FE.IN?locations=DK>

<sup>16</sup> Van Kranenburg, 2017, p.38

dominant tv broadcasters at Danmarks Radio and Tv 2 Danmark which combined, almost accounts for the 70% of the television viewing in the country. This kind of dominancy may create a state-based media capture which alienates defiant viewers who are funding this media outlets with their tax money, without an option. There is a whopping 30% of the population which doesn't consume the media they are funding, or don't want to fund it. This puts a dent on the pluralist approach of the Scandinavian model and Democratic Corporatist System. The pluralistic problems of Danish media become observable in the daily life thanks to this unlevel playing field built by the country.

The main journalists' union in Denmark (Journalistforbundet) has 16.000 members which accounts for almost all the journalists of the country<sup>17</sup>. However, there is a growing concern and disagreements about the fact that communication workers, public relations officers, spin-doctors etc. can be the members of this union too. Many journalists think this is an ethical problem and some of them have formed a new body within the union that only accepts the traditional press workers<sup>18</sup>. This creates a journalistic gatekeep for some of the interest groups and denies them the chance of circulating their ideas to press circle. These ideas which cannot easily be published on media finds themselves as "stillbirth" ideas. This may look like a "elitist" problem at the first glance, however when we consider the receiver of this interest groups' messages, we can see that they are also blocking the public from their right of getting information and being aware of what the upper class of their society wants and dictates.

"The rates of the license fee are decided upon by the Parliament for a perennial period that overlaps with the term of the public service contract. This way, it is the state that outlines the

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<sup>17</sup> <http://journalistforbundet.dk>

<sup>18</sup> Eberwein, 2018, p.57

financial framework for DR, but it is not the state directly that finances DR”<sup>19</sup>. This financial structure gives DR an uncontrolled bargain power. DR management can simply protest their decided financial aid for the year by shaping their broadcasting policies and tendencies for targeting current government, which holds the majority of the seats in the parliament. Or in a similar light, they can give mediatic favors to the political actors who advocating for an increased DR budget. Possibility of an internal and state affiliated media capture is a great danger with no easy way to overcome; especially within the Danish constitution context.

### **Brief Comparison of Media Capture in Denmark and Türkiye**

The notion of capture describes the hijacking of public resources and administration by narrow, special or even criminal interests and the consequent subversion of the public good<sup>20</sup>. When we examine the potential capturing of Danish media, we cannot see it tallying with this definition, unlike Türkiye. Media capture dangers of Denmark are arising from either the intense state influence in media or from the media itself, which makes their media prone to be a “self-harming” or “ouroboros” body. However in Türkiye, media have to express a reactive stance regarding media capturing. Proactive actors of the media capture in Türkiye are not emerging from the media itself, but from the narrow and/or special interests we pointed out in the description of capture.

According to World Press Freedom Index of 2021, Denmark ranks 4<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries while Türkiye is 153<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>21</sup> This contrast between the two medias shows us the wide gap between the democratic values of countries in question, but this is not the only conclusion that

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<sup>19</sup> Van Kranenburg, 2017, p.40

<sup>20</sup> Finkel, A., 2015, *Captured News Media – The Case of Turkey*, Center for International Media Assistance, [https://www.cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CIMA-Captured-News-Media\\_The-Case-of-Turkey.pdf](https://www.cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CIMA-Captured-News-Media_The-Case-of-Turkey.pdf)

we can get from this scale. When we inspect the results of this index, we can clearly see that Turkish media does not hold to power for capturing even itself. That is a major difference between the two medias and a valid reason for not being able to compare these two countries objectively.

### **Conclusions**

Unregulated structure of Danish Media creates a breeding ground for the most radical voices, as we saw with the Roj Tv between 2004 – 2013. These external dangers arising from the uncontrolled nature of Danish media should be examined within THE EU. But the main concern for them should not be the potential EU sanctions; it must be the risk of the media's tendency to self-capturing itself. With the almost unlimited power on their hands, media elites of the Denmark may create an oligarchy on information. Media, which widely accepted as the 4<sup>th</sup> pillar of the democracy, can cripple democratic values itself by blocking the pluralism with this informational oligarchy. They have the potential to be an ‘ouroboros media that captures itself’, and state should protect the media from both the media itself and from the state itself. In their unregulated structure, implementing liberal media values of North Atlantic model to their state dependent roots can be the only precaution which will show urgent effects.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2021>