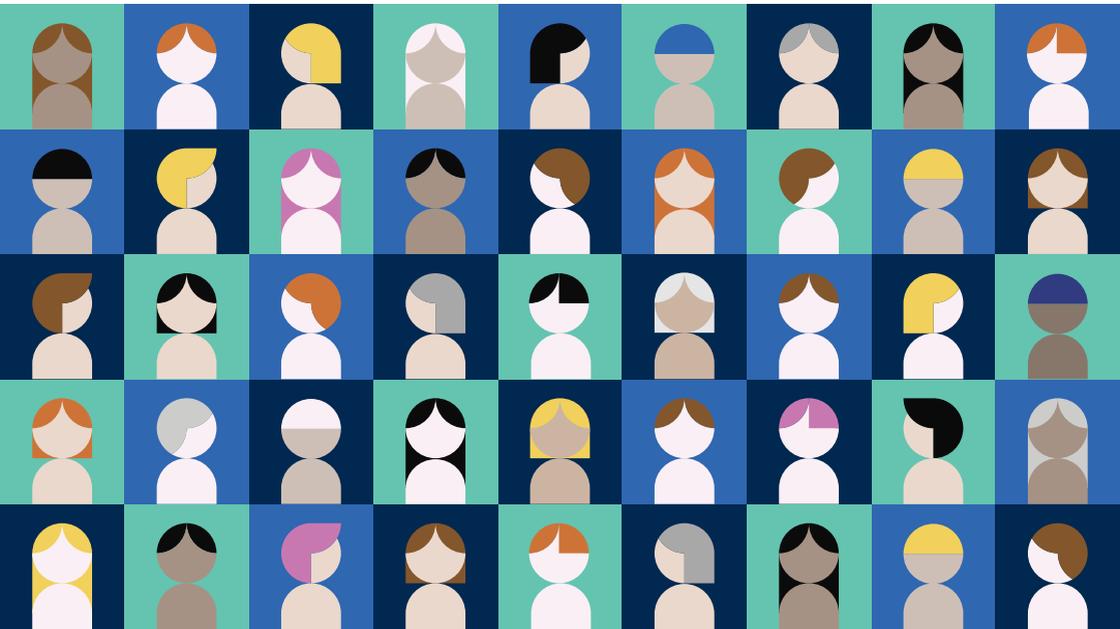




# **THE CITIZENS' PARLIAMENT DEMANDS ON MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY IN SLOVENIA**





# INTRODUCTION: ON THE CITIZENS' PARLIAMENT ON MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

**Between March and May 2025**, the Peace Institute organised, in Ljubljana, Slovenia, a series of four day-long Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy.

The Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy consisted of 22 citizens from all over Slovenia, selected through a public call for applications that took into account diversity in terms of gender, age, level of education, occupation, and other factors.

During the four meetings of the Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy citizens discussed democracy, the media system and media regulation, how the media represent different social groups and voices, and enable citizens' participation in democratic processes.

The discussions provided **insights into citizens' perceptions and expectations of the democratic functions of the media**. The discussions were guided by participants' own insights, complemented by introductory information on each meeting's topic provided by international experts (with video contributions) and experts from Slovenia (live).<sup>1</sup> The discussions were moderated by two moderators who followed the “art of hosting” method.

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<sup>1</sup> **The experts** from the international team who presented the topics to the citizens by video presentations were: Prof. Dr. Nico Carpentier (Charles University in Prague), Prof. Dr. Beata Klimkiewicz (Jagiellonian University in Krakow), Prof. Dr. Jeffrey Wimmer (University of Augsburg) and Prof. Dr. Andrea Miconi (IULM University of Milan). Experts from Slovenia who presented introductory information and reflections on the topics discussed to the citizens were: Prof. Dr. Gorazd Kovačič (Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana), Lenart J. Kučič (Media Advisor at the Ministry of Culture), Prof. Dr. Sandra B. Hrvatin (Faculty of Humanities in Koper), Matija Stepišnik (Editor-in-Chief of Večer) and Kaja Jakopič (Director of Digital Content at RTV Slovenia).

The citizens decided to call the conclusions they would formulate and adopt after the debate '**demands**', and to try to reach a consensus on them; if consensus could not be reached, the demands would be adopted by a two-thirds majority vote. Citizens who voted against or abstained were given the opportunity to explain their vote. They were also provided with an online platform with all the information and materials and a questionnaire with the possibility to explain their dissenting opinions in writing after each meeting.

■ **First meeting (15 March 2025)** was devoted to learning about the work of the Citizens' Parliament and deciding on the procedures to achieve the objectives set. After a brief introduction of the central theme "**Media and Democracy**", the Citizens' Parliament set priorities within the three topics, which were then addressed in the following meetings.

■ **Second meeting (29 March 2025)** was dedicated to the topic "**Media Systems and Regulation**". Citizens identified priority sub-topics: media accountability and ethics, media economics, and system renewal. They adopted 11 demands, 6 unanimously.

■ **Third meeting (12 April 2025)** was devoted to the topic "**Media and Representation**". Priority sub-topics were identified: media agenda and prioritisation of media content, pluralism of media reporting and socially responsible reporting. They adopted 12 requests, 6 unanimously. One proposed demand was rejected.

■ **Fourth meeting (10 May 2025)** was devoted to the topic "**Media and Participation**". Priority sub-topics were identified: media literacy as empowerment for greater participation, plural and safe participation, and regulation of the media's obligation to enable civil society participation and public influence in private and public media. The citizens adopted 7 demands, all by a two-thirds majority. Three proposed demands were rejected.

In total, the Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy adopted **30 demands aimed at reforming media policy and practices to strengthen the democratic functions of the media**. These demands are directed at decision-makers within state institutions as well as the media community. They call for changes not only to media legislation, but also for concrete actions within media organisations, the journalistic profession, the education system, and civil society.

**The Citizens' Parliament** is one of the democratic tools that strengthen the voice of citizens in debates and decision-making on matters of public interest. It is a form of consultation, debate and participation of citizens in democracy at different levels in order to influence common issues. It does not replace democratically elected bodies in the country, but its results are intended to enrich decision-making processes and can lead to better policies.

The Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy, which we organised in Slovenia, is part of the European scientific research project "Mapping Media for Future Democracies" (MeDeMAP). The project explores the role and influence of media in European democracies. It focuses on ten European countries and is coordinated by the Austrian Academy of Sciences. In Slovenia, the partner is the Peace Institute. The project is funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe programme.

**More information on the project** is available at

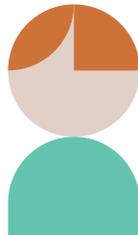
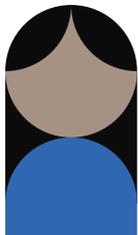
<https://www.medemap.eu/>.

**More information about the Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy** in Slovenia is available at

<https://www.mirovni-institut.si/mediji-demokracija/>.



# **DEMANDS OF THE CITIZENS' PARLIAMENT ON MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY**





# **TOPIC: MEDIA SYSTEMS AND REGULATION**

**(DEMANDS, ADOPTED AT THE CITIZENS' PARLIAMENT ON 29. 3. 2025)**

- 1. Every media outlet should inform its audience about their rights and obligations and provide a clear and accessible process for lodging complaints about the media outlet's work, including information on where and how citizens can file complaints.**
- 2. The responsible Ministry should tighten the regulation of media content and the sanctions for breaches of media regulation.**
- 3. The responsible Ministry should create a legal framework making media owners accountable for the ethical integrity of published content.**
- 4. The law should grant greater authority to the decisions of the Journalists' honorary tribunal by ensuring that courts take its decisions into account in their proceedings.**
- 5. Legislation should be amended to limit the dominance of political parties in the electoral system, for example, by making preferential voting mandatory. The decentralisation of the state should be introduced, for instance, through the establishment of regions. Effective parliamentary oversight of the government should also be implemented.**

- 6. Grassroots media (independent outlets funded solely by subscribers and free of advertisements) should be encouraged and supported in their development and organisation.**
- 7. The responsible Ministry should establish rules to increase the transparency of Slovenian media operations and financing, and media outlets should be required to follow these rules. In particular, transparency should be ensured regarding the sources of funding, how funds are allocated, and that the funds are used to produce socially relevant content.**
- 8. The responsible state authorities should carry out stricter oversight of media ownership consolidation.**
- 9. The responsible state authorities should define rules for reporting on the use of public funds in the media sector, and both media outlets and funders should comply with these rules.**
- 10. A single regulatory body should be established for all types of media.**
- 11. A special legal status should be introduced for media organisations that operate in the public interest, are socially responsible, and maintain transparency.**

### Summary of separate (dissenting and concurring) opinions:

As a general rule, there should be restraint when it comes to tightening media regulation and imposing sanctions, except in certain cases. Such measures can have both positive and negative consequences. They may be misused to serve particular interests rather than the common good, which is what we support. *Concurring separate opinion*: The emphasis of the demand lies in sanctioning content that causes harm to others, such as the spread of false information, incitement to violence, and similar. It is not about enforcing strict legal prescriptions on what or how the media should report, but about recognising a boundary that journalists must respect, also with the aim of preserving and nurturing a healthy social fabric. Regarding the demand to limit the dominance of political parties in the electoral system, it should be acknowledged that political parties are the foundation of our parliamentary democracy. How could we have a parliamentary democracy without parties? As for the demand concerning the electoral system and the role of political parties, I lack sufficient background knowledge in this area and therefore prefer to remain neutral.



# **TOPIC: MEDIA AND REPRESENTATION**

**(DEMANDS, ADOPTED AT THE CITIZENS' PARLIAMENT ON 12. 4. 2025)**

- 1. Media should: a) publish more international news that is diverse, placed in a broader context, and more in-depth; b) report and select topics with less sensationalism and with greater ethical responsibility; c) publish news without misleading information, including in headlines.**
- 2. Journalists should publish original news reports rather than merely summarizing content from other sources, and the news should contain substantive information. They should report on the developments and consequences of events, not just provide short-term, intense, and sensationalist coverage of the event itself. Editors should filter out propaganda by exposing the underlying interests behind certain information, placing it in proper context, and thereby limiting the influence of hidden agendas and interest groups.**
- 3. Civil society should have the opportunity to influence the process of setting thematic priorities regarding what the media report on. Media outlets are encouraged to organise public meetings—e.g., once a year—where the public or civil society can directly engage with them, suggest topics, or ask why certain issues are covered in a specific way. Such meetings between the media and civil society should be systemically supported (e.g., through**

**the provision of public venues and other infrastructure). When implementing this measure, editorial independence must be respected.**

- 4. The European Union should fund media literacy education for all generations, especially younger and older people, with the aim of strengthening skills for identifying false or misleading news.**
- 5. The state should ensure comprehensive media literacy education for the population. This education should begin at the preschool level and continue through all stages of formal education. It should be integrated into existing school subjects or introduced as a separate subject. For those not participating in formal education, media literacy training should be delivered through workshops, with the state supporting implementation via public calls for expert organisations, NGOs, and other relevant actors. Fostering critical thinking should be a strategic objective of the state.**
- 6. The state should legally guarantee full protection for whistleblowers.**
- 7. The Ministry responsible for media should launch a nationwide awareness campaign about the role and basic functioning of the media. The goal is to raise citizens' awareness of what they consume in the media, for example, understanding the difference between a news report, a factual account, and an opinion piece. The campaign could, for instance, include a fictional scenario showing a society without media to illustrate the importance of media for democracy and public life.**

- 8. When reporting on or discussing a particular social group or minority, the media should be required to include representatives of that group, their voices, and perspectives. The principle should be: Nothing about any social group without that group. If a media outlet organises a panel discussion on a certain group, at least one participant should be a member of that group, rather than only politicians or experts.**
- 9. The state should legally ensure dedicated funding for media organisations to enable the employment of a sufficient number of qualified journalists on a regular and sustainable basis.**
- 10. The European Union should establish and fund Erasmus exchange programs for professional journalists, allowing for both short- and long-term exchanges. This would contribute to ongoing professional development and training. Previous obstacles that prevented the creation of such a program should be reassessed and addressed.**
- 11. The state should provide dedicated funding for production of media content and sections that address socially relevant topics in a high-quality and responsible manner.**
- 12. The state should promote internal (employee) ownership of media organisations, for example through tax incentives and other mechanisms. This should include encouraging the social responsibility of worker ownership and strengthening its resilience against corrupt influences. Legal provisions should ensure that no individual in employee-owned media holds a majority stake or transfers ownership to someone outside the media organisation.**

**Summary of separate (dissenting) opinions:** The demand that editors filter out propaganda is seen as intrusive to editorial independence, and defining what constitutes propaganda is difficult. The requirement that journalists refrain from summarising others' news is challenging, especially for smaller media outlets. Civil society already has channels to influence the media, such as readers' letters and the Ombudsman for viewers, listeners, and users of RTV Slovenia services. Moreover, civil society participates in public broadcasting governance (e.g., in the RTV Council), so additional civil society oversight is unnecessary. There are doubts about the proposal for the European Union to fund media literacy education, with concerns about potential hidden motives and the EU's role. The call for a special awareness campaign is viewed as redundant, since media literacy education is already addressed by the existing demands of the Citizens' Parliament and is partially already implemented. Using a fictional country without media as a campaign example is considered problematic. Regarding state funding for content on socially relevant topics, the definition of such topics is insufficiently clear. For example, political content is overrepresented, while arts coverage is lacking. Support specifically for arts content production would be justified, but broad general funding is not.



# **TOPIC: MEDIA AND PARTICIPATION**

**(DEMANDS, ADOPTED AT THE CITIZENS' PARLIAMENT ON 10. 5. 2025)**

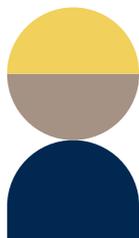
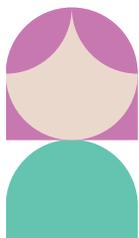
**Note:** Also within this topic, citizens have recognized and addressed the need to improve media literacy, reiterating or meaningfully supplementing previously adopted demands related to media literacy.

- 1. The responsible authorities and institutions should provide conditions and approaches that motivate schools and teachers to implement media literacy content and courses. The emphasis should be on a comprehensive approach, meaning that media literacy topics are integrated and participation is encouraged across various school subjects. At the same time, continuous teacher training for teaching media literacy should be enabled, and the openness of schools to guest programs on media literacy should be promoted. Critical thinking and creativity should be central, and knowledge assessment should be descriptive only.**
- 2. The responsible authorities and institutions should implement special awareness programs on media and participation for target groups outside the formal education system. These programs should use approaches suitable to the needs and interests of the target groups. For example, for older citizens, such media literacy and participation awareness**

**programs should be introduced through existing activities targeted at them, preceded by appropriate familiarisation (e.g., through intergenerational centers, public libraries, etc.).**

- 3. The public broadcaster, RTV Slovenia, should create content (shows, segments, teletext pages, fictional programming, etc.) to promote media literacy and critical thinking. Art cinemas should screen films that critically explore media topics.**
- 4. A law regulating media should establish a minimum quota for women and minorities to ensure their participation in programming content. Participation of minorities should be defined for content relevant to them, while women's participation (female experts) should be 50% across all programming content.**
- 5. Regulations and the actions of the responsible authorities should ensure that no one is harmed or penalised for participating in the media as a source of credible information. Whistleblowers and information sources should receive maximum protection.**
- 6. A national-level media ombudsman should be established.**
- 7. Both public and private media, whether operating nationally or locally, should take responsibility for media literacy and enabling the participation of citizens (users).**

**Summary of separate (dissenting) opinions:** Children already have too many subjects in school and do not need an additional media literacy course. Media literacy content should be integrated elsewhere, and media and other entities should inform about it. Quotas for women and minorities in media are unnecessary because it is challenging to define who qualifies as women or minorities. Interested individuals should participate voluntarily. Capable people should not be excluded based on gender. Quotas are not a solution. Media should not be forced but encouraged to seek out and include women and minorities. Absolute immunity from sanctions for media participation is not possible if someone spreads hate speech or other illegal content.





## **CONCLUSION: AN APPROPRIATE FORM OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN THE DEBATE ON MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY**

The process and results of the Citizens' Parliament confirmed the need to include citizens in the debate on media and democracy. The Citizens' Parliament proved to be an appropriate tool for gaining insight into citizens' views and expectations regarding the democratic functions of the media. In its design and implementation, the Citizens' Parliament followed the principle of participation. The diverse composition of citizens, who did not know each other beforehand – although not representative – showed that in a well-prepared, informed, and moderated discussion, citizens express and and harmonise their views and proposals in an engaged and respectful manner. The content of the demands they developed shows that citizens want greater social responsibility from the media. To achieve this, they call for action by the state, as well as by the media and journalists themselves. A strong focus of the demands is on media regulation and on encouraging certain organisational forms of media, types of ownership, employment practices, and content. They demand greater responsibility from media owners. They expect pluralism, inclusion and representation of all social groups, and openness to dialogue with civil society and citizens. They highlight the urgency of action by both the state and the media to improve media literacy across all generations. Citizens also expect support for journalists and media literacy efforts from the European Union.

## Peace Institute

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**Project:** *Mapping Media for Future Democracies* – MeDeMAP

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# MEDEMAP



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More about the process of the Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy in Slovenia is available on the link via the QR code.



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