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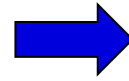
Public service media, journalistic autonomy, and resistance: A case study of a newsroom conflict in the Radio and television of Slovakia (RTVS)

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Introduction

New Director General is elected by the Slovak Parliament (2017)



Exodus of the TV reporters & editors



Jaroslav Reznik, Director General of RTVS



E.g., in May 2018, 12 journalists



Autonomy and interference

- **Autonomy:** “the latitude that a practitioner has in carrying out his or her occupational duties” (Weaver et al. 2007)
- Hanretty`s (2011): journalists can enjoy the autonomy when they:
 - do not receive or act on the basis of instructions, threats or other inducement from other actors motivated by other than journalistic logic,
 - do not consider whether the interests of these actors would be harmed by particular choices about output.
- **Interferences:** acts the objective of which is to shape editorial content and which cause or attempt to cause the journalists to act in a particular fashion (Hanretty 2011, Hiltu



Researching autonomy and interference

- Few detailed accounts of concrete cases when **independence of public service broadcasters was breached** and journalistic autonomy restrained (for exceptions, see, e.g., Koivunen 2017 for Finland; Chapmen 2017 and Dzieciotowski 2017 for Poland; Dragomir 2017 for Hungary)
- **External political interference** that occurs in flawed democracies and authoritarian or hybrid regimes (e.g., Ataman & Çoban, 2019; Barrios & Miller, 2020; Fedirko, 2020, Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2019)
- This study: (perceived) **internal interference** from within the media organization in a European Union country (Slovakia: 42nd out of 167 countries in Democracy Index 2019, 33rd out of 180 countries in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index)



Employee dissatisfaction: exit and voice

- Organizational studies: the practices that employees use to express their dissent for the organisation where they work
- Hirschman (1970): exit or voice
- Farrell (1983): exit, voice, loyalty or neglect
- Voice strategies (Kassing 2002):
 - active constructive (e.g., making suggestions, argument, union bargaining);
 - passive constructive (e.g., listening, quiet support, unobtrusive compliance);
 - active destructive (e.g., complaining, ingratiation, verbal aggression, antagonistic exit);
 - passive destructive (e.g., murmurings, apathy, withdrawal)



PSM in Slovakia in a fight for independence

□ Low *de jure* independence of RTVS:

1. the Parliament elects the Director General and all nine members of the RTVS Council
2. the Parliament and the Government control financial matters

□ RTVS funding:

- a. a licence fee set by the Parliament
- b. advertising and other commercial activities
- c. contribution from the state budget

□ Throughout its history, RTVS has repeatedly been used as a political tool



Research questions

1. What happened in RTVS: how do the stakeholders interpret the course of events, the causes, and the consequences of the newsroom conflict?
2. What acts and incidents did the journalists perceive as unacceptable interference in their professional autonomy?
3. What resistance practices the journalists used to cope with the perceived interference?

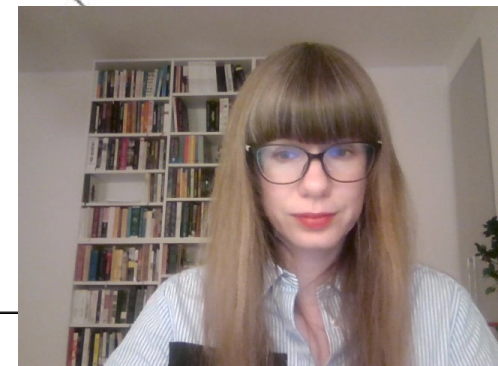
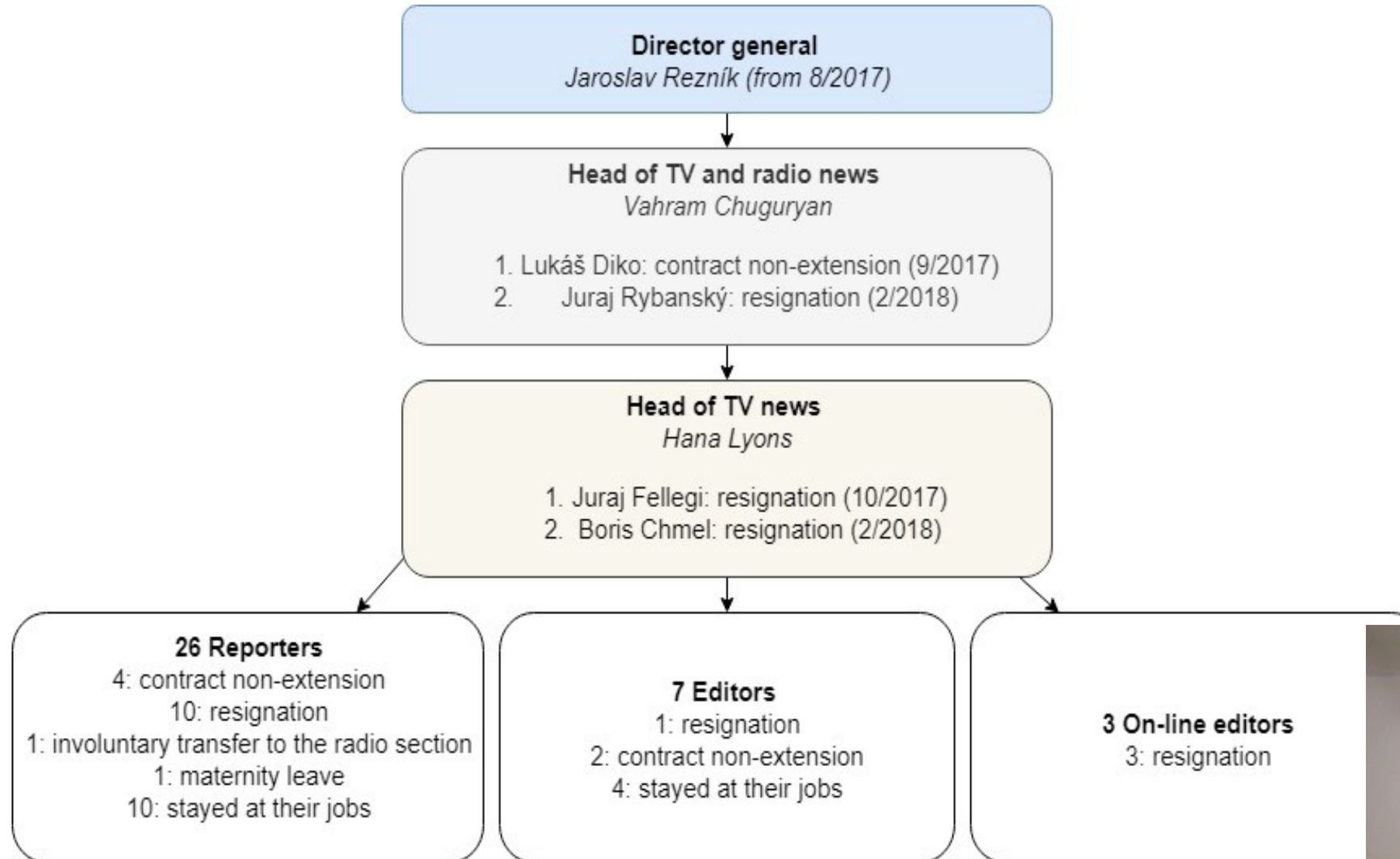


Data & method

- The election of the new Director General (June 2017) → 2019; TV newsroom only
- A case study approach (Yin, 2018); semi-structured interviews (N=16) with:
 - the members of the current (4) & the previous (2) management,
 - the journalists who resigned (5), whose contracts were not prolonged (1), who stayed at their jobs (4)
- Purposive sampling; the years of experience of the 5 female and 11 male participants ranged from 3 years to more than 20
- Data collection: July 2018 to September 2019
- Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)



Staff turnover from 8/2017 to 8/2019



What happened?

1. The selection of the new Director General (procedurally and personally)
2. A border between journalism and PR; a conflict of interests
3. Shutdown of an investigative programme after airing a story critical of a state-funded national cultural organisation linked to the Slovak National Party
4. Profound differences in the perceptions of public service, objectivity, and good journalism

“This was the biggest stumbling block, that two worlds with a completely different notion of objectivity and public service have clashed. This was the central core of all t

(Interview with an RTVS reporter, February 2019)

No direct interference

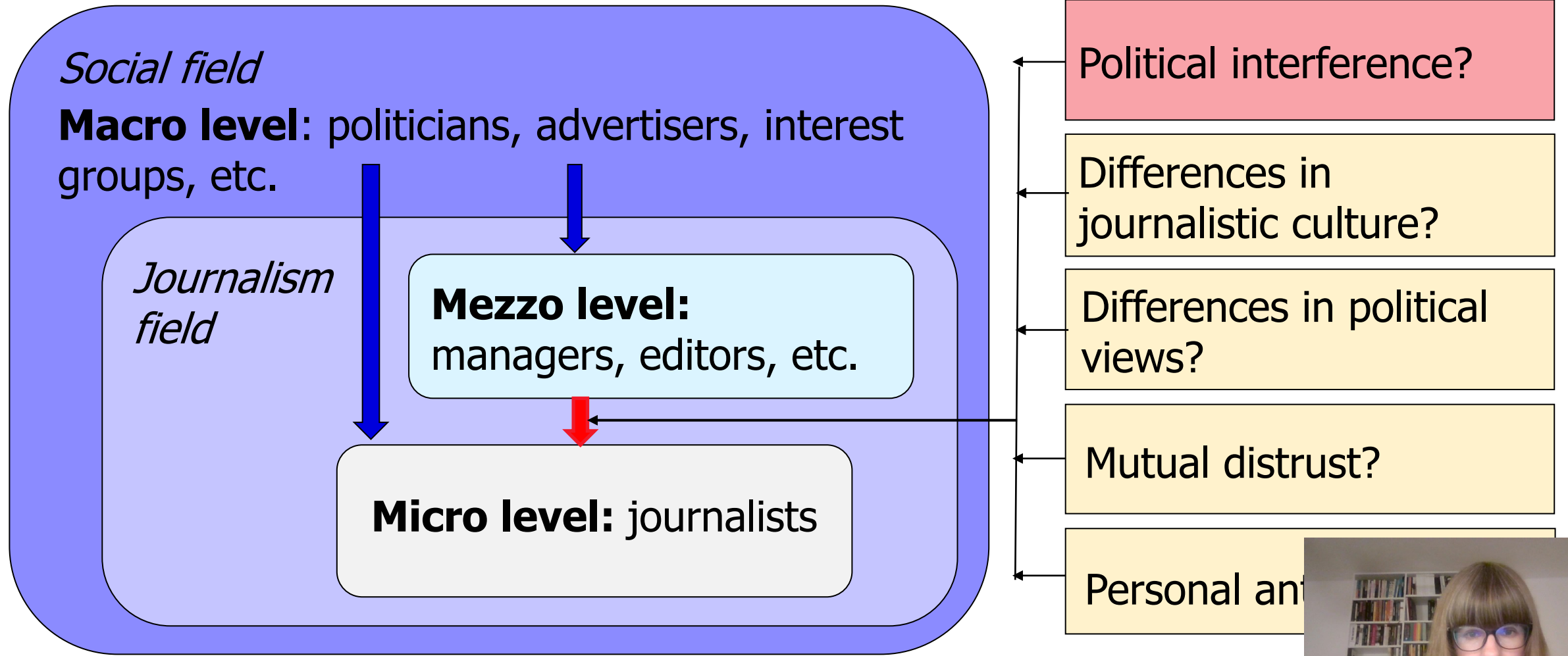


PERCEIVED INTERFERENCES IN JOURNALISTIC AUTONOMY

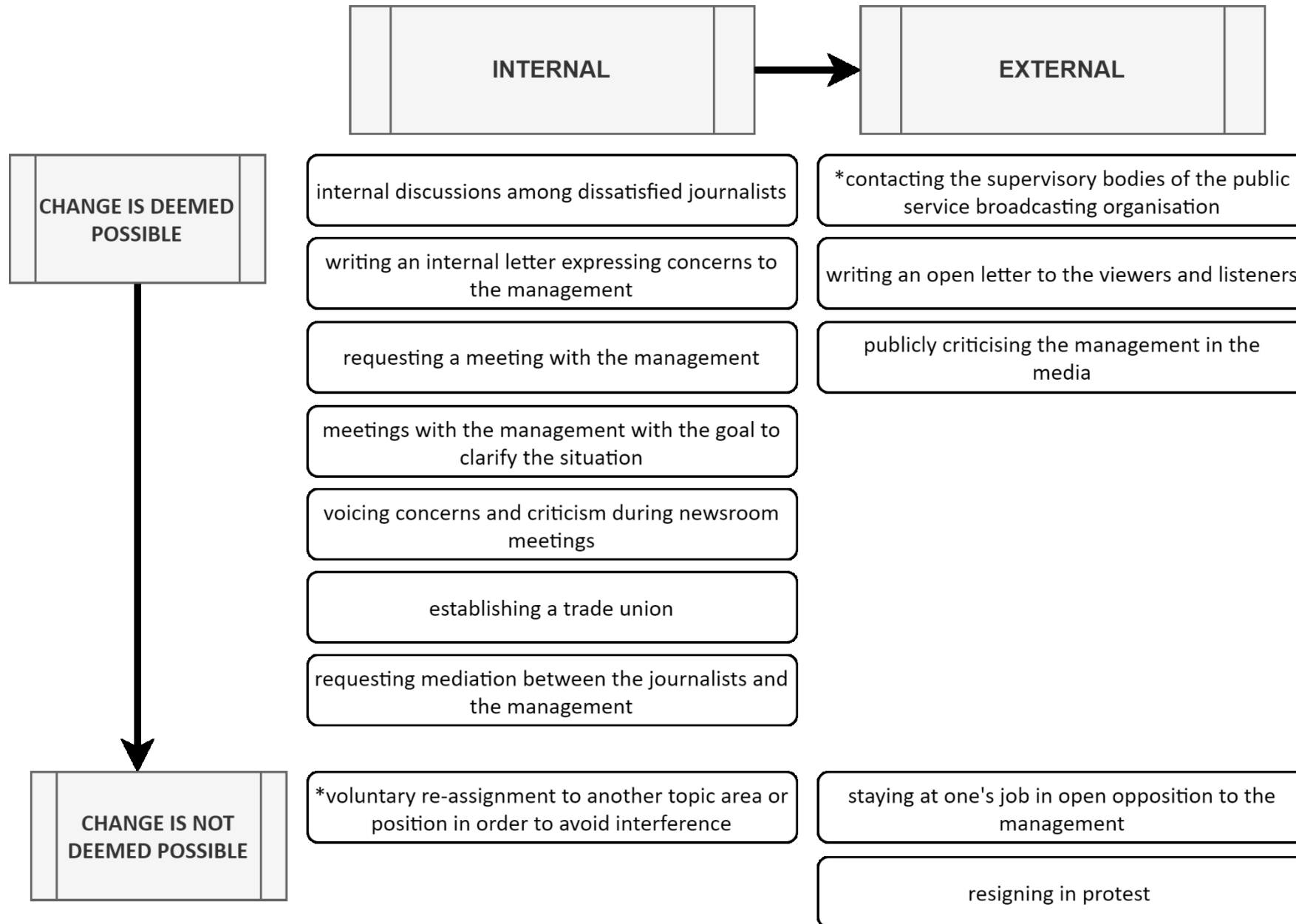
Intervention in editorial content		Disciplinary measures	
Areas	Tools	Rewards	Sanctions
<p><i>News story level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topics* • Information* • Sources* • Angles, frames* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions* • Advice, suggestions* • Criticism* • Commands, instructions • Prohibitions, bans • Threats • Creation/amendment of editorial guidelines • Editorial changes without the author's consent • Refusal to broadcast a story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition, praise* • Promotion* • Pay rise, bonuses* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criticism, excessive feedback, belittling* • Reprimand* • Ban or restriction of business trips, public appearances, etc. * • Involuntary reassignment to another topic area or position* • Demotion* • Pay cut, cut on bonus • Non-employment • Dismissal
<p><i>News programme level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prominence of the news stories (their order and length) 			
<p><i>Broadcast programming level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspension/discontinuation of certain programmes* 			



Sources of perceived interferences in journalistic autonomy



Resistance practices



Concluding remarks

Possible mechanism:

- Politicians →
- Compliant director-general →
- Like-minded managers: discipline the journalists →
- A few (new) reporters do what must be done (*compulsory figures*), the rest can carry out their jobs as they see fit →
- The rest of journalists leave on their own or adapt to the new status quo →
- As there is no proof of direct external political interference, it is difficult for journalists to explain the public what happened



Concluding remarks

- Using voice comes at high costs in journalism (Borden, 2000; Davidson & Meyers, 2016)
- Source and type of interference matter: the resistance practices differ significantly from those identified in cases of external political or commercial interference (Ataman & Çoban, 2019; Barrios & Miller, 2020; Goyanes & Rodríguez-Castro, 2018; Hanusch et al., 2017; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2019)
- Voice strategies should not be distinguished as constructive-destructive solely from the employer's perspective
- Two key moderating variables influence the response to dissatisfaction:
 1. Loyalty (as in Hirschman 1970)
 2. Peer support and the journalists' ability to organise and resist collectively
- A change in journalism culture in Slovakia?



Thank you for your attention!

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