



REPORT

BASED ON THE MONITORING OF TV NEWS PROGRAMMES

SUMMARY

- The results provided in this report were obtained from the analysis of TV news programmes¹ broadcast in the periods from the 3rd to the 7th and from the 10th to the 14th of October, i.e. for a total of 10 days. The goal of the analysis was to establish how national TV stations are reporting on the democratic processes in the county and whether they present a balanced overview of the differing political standpoints. The news programmes of 12 TV stations were analysed: MTV1, MTV2, Sitel, Telma, 24 Vesti, Kanal 5, Alfa, Alsat M (in Macedonian and in Albanian), TV 21 (in Macedonian and in Albanian) and TV Nova.
- As the start of the electoral campaign approaches, the number of news stories that refer to pre-election activities of political parties increases. This topic was prevalent in the 10 days of monitoring and it was mostly visible in the news in Kanal 5, Sitel, TV Nova and Alfa. In that process, these TV stations also showed a misbalance in the quantity and the quality of representing political entities, in favour of VMRO-DPMNE, and at the expense of the oppositional party SDSM. These four TV stations and MTV 1 published a total of 90 news stories about Government measures and activities, promoted by Ministers from VMRO-DPMNE, as well as 36



reports where VMRO-DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski promoted Government measures. Thus, once again they blurred the line between party and state institutions.

The Macedonian Radio Television informed about all current-political events, without going into analyses and without taking an affirmative, negative or criticizing journalistic stand. About the activities of major political entities, the Public service informed in a balanced manner, however if one adds the number of published reports on the activities of officials in the Government, a significantly higher number of reports was published about VMRO-DPMNE and their officials (128), as compared to SDSM and their officials (68).

The second programme service - MTV2 informed about all significant political events in the country, although a mild inclination could be observed towards the topics that are of interest for the Albanian ethnic community (the activities of DUI officials, pre-election shifts in the Albanian political block as well as local events related to the Albanian community).

- Several neutrally-critical TV stations (Telma, 24 Vesti, Alsat M, TV 21) continued monitoring the regular activities of state and of public institutions, their potential shortcomings in performing their obligations (in areas such as education, public finance, local self-government, etc.), without providing a political tone, which continued to be the prevalent topic in this stage of the pre-elections period.

In the news on Telma the topics that dominated continued to be of civil interest, and they were treated with an argument supported critical attitude from the journalists, by consulting all involved parties in the issue. Telma often raised topics that other media outlets did not cover. TV station 24 Vesti actively followed current events in the country and they made persistent efforts to present different political opinions and views about the issues. The TV station not

only communicated criticisms for political actors, including state institutions, but also took an argument supported approach to deriving their own critical conclusions.

Alsat M allotted time in their news programmes for different political entities to present their opinions and views. For the most part, the media outlet performed their informative function by revealing and protecting public interest and they provided a comprehensive overview of the events and processes that were the topic of reporting. TV 21's contribution to media space comes from the daily analyses and debates with experts who mostly have opposed opinions, and which cover daily current topics. The TV station has also raised topics that were not in the focus of the other TV stations and were partially connected to ethnic issues.

Unlike these TV stations, what was typical for pro-Government private TV stations (Kanal 5, Sitel, TV Nova and Alfa) was that they reported very little on the work of state institutions, critically addressing the topics that concern the people. On the contrary, commonly present on these TV stations were news packages with positive reports on the work of the institutions, i.e. the achievement of officials from the ruling party.

- The general conclusion may be that the media image on political pluralism in Macedonia remains the same as in the September analysis. What was remarkable in this period is that 7 of 12 TV stations showed reports where only one source of information was consulted (with the exception of MTV 2, Alsat M and TV 21), regardless of the fact that in most cases the report was followed by another report that was a reaction to it, for counter-balance. This may not have impacted the overall image of balance in the news, however it did reflect on the journalistic rule for consulting 'both parties' in the report and it also pointed to the fact that the news are being reduced down to only communicating the events, without any engagement on part of the journalists.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

In the ten day period, the media outlets that were subjected to analysis published a total of 1,309 reports related to political life and to democratic reforms, and the most common topics, according to the number of reports, were the following: pre-election activities of political parties (233 reports), the work of the Special Public Prosecutor's Office (218 reports), other activities of Government officials, including the issue of unemployed candidates for police officers, as well as their protocol activities and meetings (162), regular activities of state and public institutions (150), organizing early parliamentary elections (145), events in education (130), etc.

(1) The main conclusion from the analysis of the topics covered during the monitored period was that as the electoral campaign approaches, the number of reports on *pre-election activities of political parties* increases, since this is the topic that was most commonly covered during this ten day period - with 233 reports. Although almost all 12 TV stations showed several reports on this topic, the ones that covered the topic the most were Kanal 5, Sitel, TV Nova and Alfa. Precisely these TV stations showed a lack of balance in representing political entities, and the highest number of reports were dedicated to the activities of the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE, at the expense on the oppositional party SDSM. While doing so, these four TV stations presented VMRO-DPMNE's promotional activities as 'projects' whose implementation is 'agreed on and achievable', while the pre-election activities of the opposition were announced as 'the party's programme'. These four TV stations and MTV 1 (and one report on TV21 in Albanian), also published a total of 90 reports about Government measures and activities, promoted by ministers from VMRO-DPMNE. These

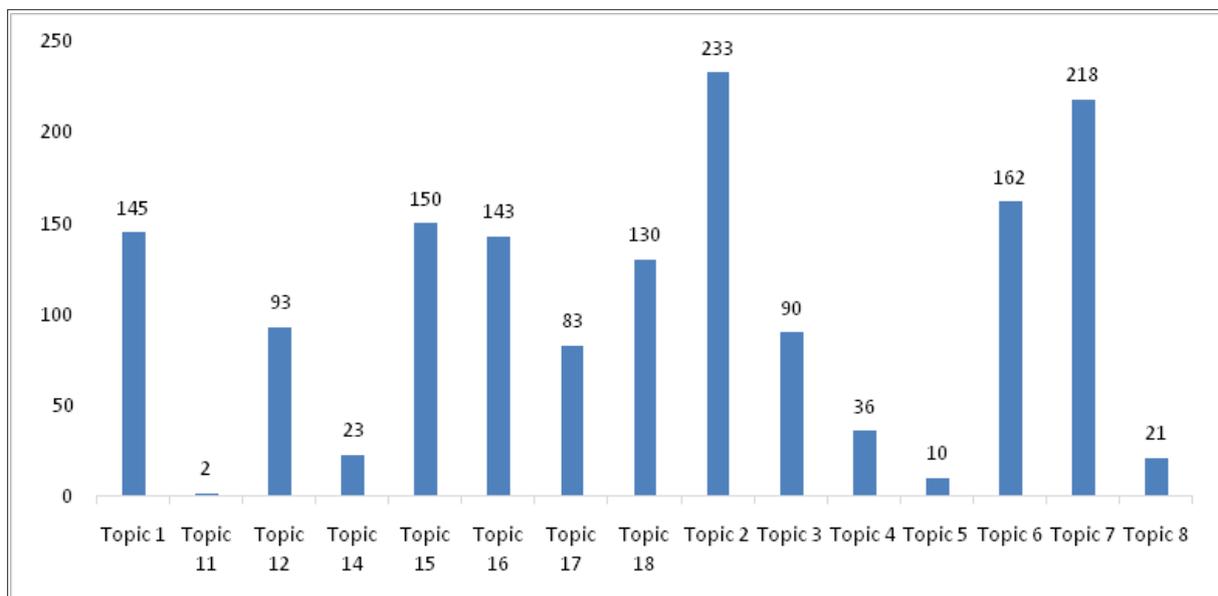
reports create an impression of concealed political pre-election marketing, behind the projects of state institutions. Despite this, the following five TV stations (MTV1, Sitel, Kanal5, Alfa and TV Nova), also published 36 other reports where the promoter of Government measures and projects was VMRO-DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski, which once again equates 'party and state'.

Monitoring pre-election political party activities on the other TV stations Telma, 24 Vesti, TV 21 in Macedonian and in Albanian, Alsat M in Macedonian and in Albanian and MTV 2 came down to broadcasting statements from these party promotions, however there was not a single report to promote a Government project.

(2) *The Special Public Prosecutor's Office*, with 218 reports in this ten day period of monitoring was the second topic that was most commonly covered. The debate in Parliament regarding the requests of the SPPO for amending the law on SPPO and for protected witnesses was the main topic that almost all media outlets covered. 'Block' reporting was clearly visible with this topic as well, the TV stations that are closer to the opinions of the Government (Sitel, Kanal 5, Alfa, TV Nova), published a significantly lower number of reports about this institution, some of them (Alfa) even displayed a negative tone, while the TV stations that are considered as criticizing (24 Vesti, Telma, Alsat M in Macedonian and in Albanian, TV 21 in Macedonian and in Albanian) published a higher number of reports that were informative and analytical (TV 21 in Macedonian and in Albanian), without presuming a certain attitude. With the public service MTV1 (19) and MTV2 (15), the representation of this topic was mainly informative.

1. COVERED TOPICS

Topic 1	Organizing early parliamentary elections (including the dissolution of Parliament).
Topic 2	Pre-election activities of political parties (all activities including announcements, promises and reactions to them).
Topic 3	Promoting Government projects and measures (in infrastructure, social protection, cultural facilities, etc.)
Topic 4	Government projects and measures promoted with participation of political parties and leaders (most often Gruevski)
Topic 5	Pre-election promises of Government representatives of SDSM
Topic 6	Other activities of Government officials (e.g. the issue of the unemployed police officer candidates, protocol activities and meetings, conferences, etc.).
Topic 7	The work of the Special Public Prosecutor's Office (including other topics related to SPPO, such as voting on the law related to this body in Parliament).
Topic 8	Handling the consequences from the floods in August (compensation for flooded households).
Topic 11	The announcement from Zoran Zaev for extended use of Albanian language
Topic 12	The state of the economy (preparations of the budget, foreign investments, issues with the economic sector, external trade)
Topic 14	The media and their work
Topic 15	Regular activities of state institutions, courts, local self-government (reports where the media did not report about political parties, rather about various problems and issues of public interest)
Topic 16	Other topics (75 years since the National Liberation War, the election of Judge Ilievski in the ECHP in Strasbourg, reports against representatives of the Colourful Revolution, report from the Helsinki Committee against the police, etc.).
Topic 17	The visit from European Commissioner Johannes Hahn.
Topic 18	Events in education (the search conducted at the MIT University, protests at the SEE University, students' referendum at Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, etc.).



Number of reports shown in TV news, shown in regards to the different topics (October 3 - 7 and 10 - 14)

- (3) The third topic according to the frequency of reporting (162 reports) were various *other activities of Government officials*, such as the issue of unemployed police officer candidates, the Constitutional Court about Ivanov's abolition, the protocol meetings and activities of Government representatives and the international conferences they attended. All TV stations, without exception, followed these events, airing statements from political actors mainly informatively, not going into more in-depth analyses.
- (4) *The regular activities of state public institutions*, more precisely their shortcomings or improper functioning and the issues that concern the citizens were the fourth topic in the focus of reporting (150 reports). These were reports that referred to problems in the court system, in the health system, in local self-government etc. These topics were more commonly presented on TV stations 24 Vesti, Telma and Alsat M. In them, the TV stations called on the accountability of the institutions, not linking their managing staff with any party affiliation, thus respecting the line between state and party. This topic was also partly covered by MTV1 (13) and MTV 2 (3), while TV stations of the 'group of four', with similar editorial policy published an insignificant number of reports on this topic (TV Nova - 1, Sitel - 3, Kanal 5 - 6, Alfa - 14).
- (5) *Organizing early parliamentary elections* with 145 reports was the fifth topic that was in the focus of reporting in this period with the analysed TV stations. The reporting mostly focused on the dissolution of Parliament, OSCE's stand on the voters' registry and pre-elections party regrouping. Some TV stations, such as Sitel, Kanal 5, Alfa and TV Nova presented the thesis that 'the conditions for elections have been met, there is progress in regulating the voters' registry and the media' (Sitel), while critically inclined media like Telma and 24 Vesti confronted the opinions of the Government and of the opposition, as to who is for and who is against the dissolution of Parliament ('Who is to blame for the delay of the dissolution of Parliament, this was an issue of collision between the Government and the opposition', 'SDSM is requesting dissolution of Parliament. VMRO is conditioning the dissolution with the budget'). The public service MTV 1 and MTV 2 broadcast the debate on the dissolution of Parliament, without going into deeper analysis ('Elections are a solution for the political crisis', 'Who is trying to avoid elections in December?'). Apart from covering daily events related to this topic, TV 21 and Alsat M published reports on pre-elections regrouping in the Albanian political block, and they raised debates on topics related to the elections, such as the situation with the sixth electoral unit ('The dissolution of Parliament is approaching, no solution for the electoral units', TV 21).
- (6) Other topics that were covered were *education*, from the aspect of the case of the private university MIT, the new university Mother Teresa and the protests of the SEE university (130 reports), *the state of the economy* through the options for investing and the budget (93 reports) etc. During this analysed period, according to the number of aired reports (143), TV stations initiated topics from the immediate surroundings, not related to the main political streams, and they were imposed by specific civil problems (Agoli's statue in Skopje, pressures on the local administration). This was evident with TV stations Telma, 24 Vesti, Alsat M and TV 21.

2. APPROACH TO REPORTING

In the ten day reporting period, stating comments and opinions that favour or attack some political view was more rare than in the first half of 2016. The TV stations did not quote Internet portals at all, which was the main source of offensive, accusatory, slandering and demonizing contents in the first months of this year. Nonetheless, favouring one stand and disregarding, i.e. ignoring others, was not left out, although expressing a positive or negative attitude has lost a large portion of its intensity and sharpness.

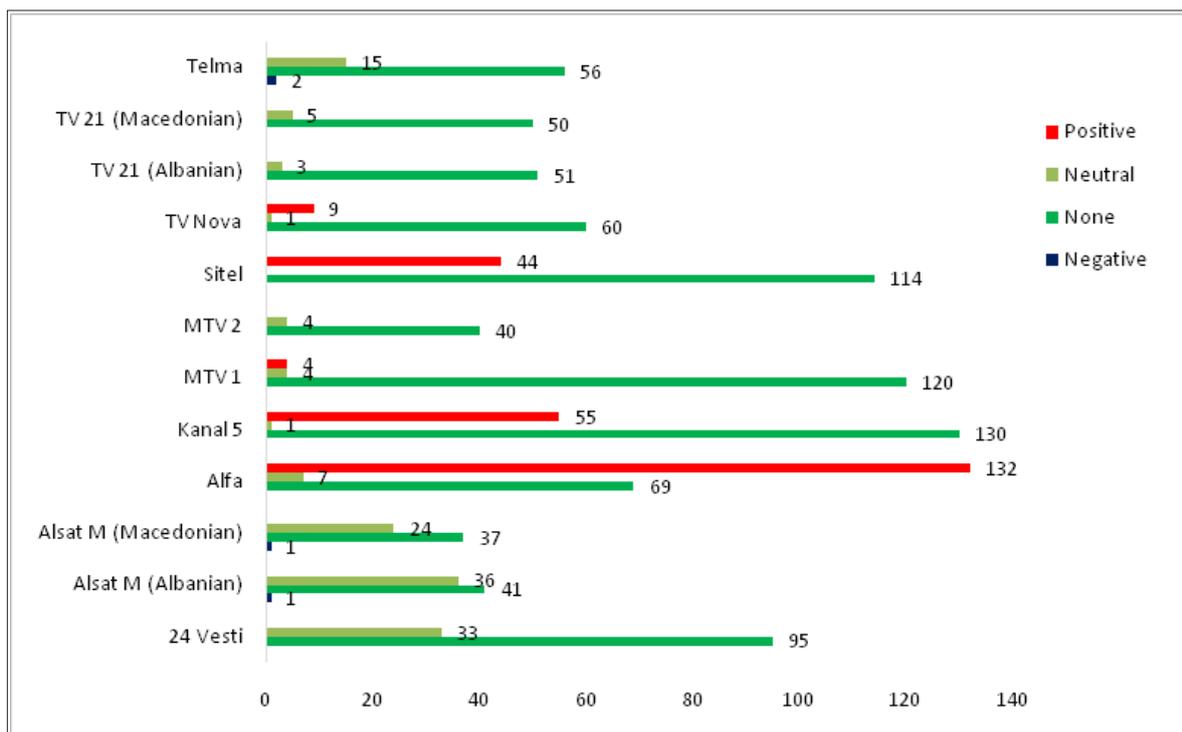
2.1. Approach to reporting on pre-election activities of VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM

The division in ‘block’ reporting to pro-Government and neutrally-criticizing TV stations was especially visible when reporting about *pre-election activities of the parties* (Topic 2), about *projects and measures promoted by Government representatives* (Topic 3) or *by the leader of VMRO-DPMNE* (Topic 4). With TV stations like Sitel, Kanal 5, TV Nova and Alfa, a severe lack of balance was present in the number of reports whose subject were the two major political parties. The news on these four TV stations still resemble a political tool of the ruling party, which is evident in the fact that in most of the reports the topic was VMRO-DPMNE (598 reports in total about VMRO-DPMNE and 262 reports about SDSM). In all of these reports, what was visible was a favourizing attitude towards VMRO-DPMNE politics, while a negative atti-

tude was taken in terms of the politics of the opposition, although, unlike the reporting at the end of 2015 and the first half of 2016, now it is much more toned down. A positive image about everything the ruling party does was not only presented by the reports on Government measures, but it also continued to be presented through propagandist reports about the leader of VMRO-DPMNE in which he promoted Government projects.

MTV 1 and MTV 2 showed balanced reporting about the two largest political parties, in separate reports, without taking any favourable, negative or criticizing journalistic attitudes. However, in the case of MTV 1, if you add the number of published reports about the activities of the officials of these parties, the number of reports about VMRO-DPMNE and their officials (128) by far exceeds the reports about SDSM and their officials (68). MTV 1 followed the regular activities of the officials (20), as well as the promotional reports about the projects and measures of Government institutions (12), in two of which Gruevski had the role of promoter of Government projects.

TV stations 24 Vesti, Telma and Alsat M (in both languages) also published a number of reports about VMRO-DPMNE’s activities. In terms of reporting about political actors and their views, it can be concluded that there was relative balance: 24 Vesti - in 63 reports the subject was VMRO-DPMNE and in 49 reports it was SDSM, Telma - 51 about VMRO-DPMNE and 30 about SDSM; Alsat M (Albanian) - 79 about



Approach to reporting on pre-election activities of VMRO-DPMNE, Coalition of VMRO-DPMNE, Ministers of VMRO-DPMNE and Nikola Gruevski (October 3-7 and 10-14)

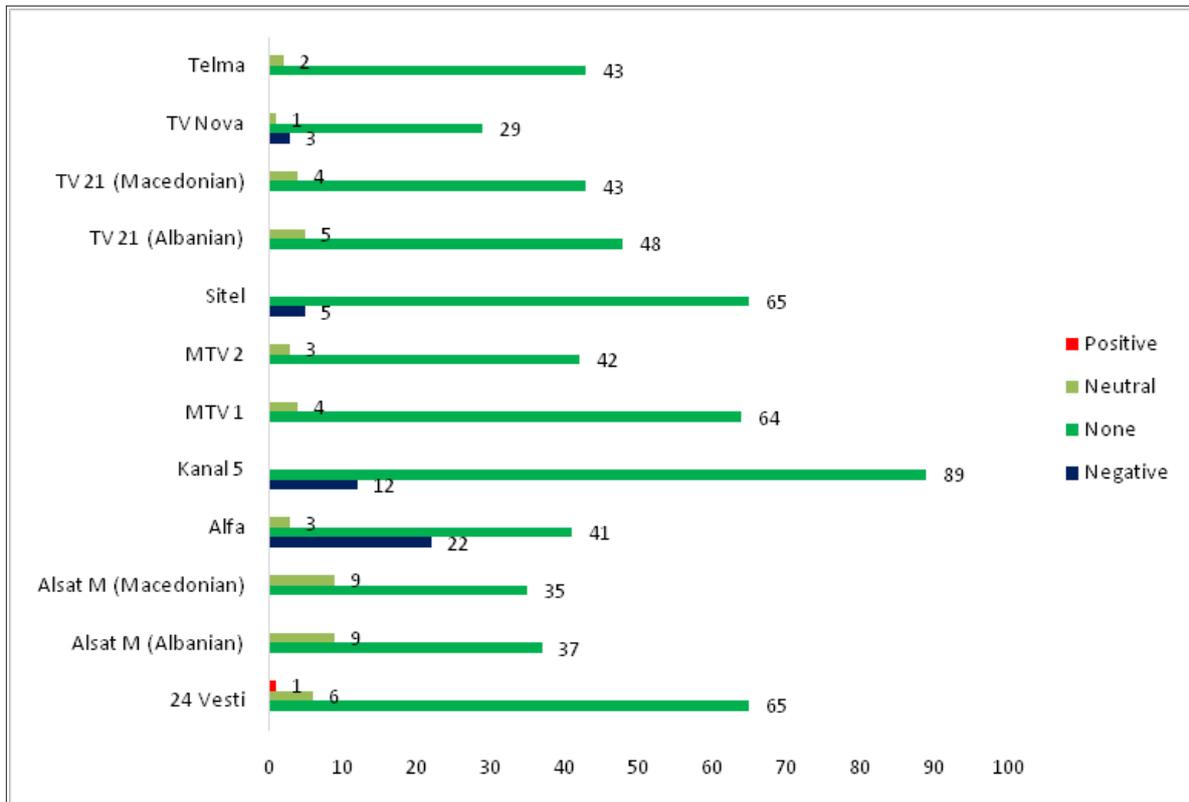
VMRO-DPMNE and 48 about SDSM, Alsat M (Macedonian) – 78 about VMRO-DPMNE and 38 about SDSM. The difference, however, increases in favour of the ruling party if you add to this the reports where party officials or the institutions they manage were mentioned, which is explained by the fact that the officials of the ruling party are more numerous and thus are a more common topic of media interest.

TV 21 in Macedonian (VMRO-DPMNE 35, SDSM 30) and in Albanian (VMRO-DPMNE 32, SDSM 33) did not exceedingly follow the electoral activities of both major political entities, and they were more focused on the Albanian political block and regrouping before the elections.

Although, despite the lack of balance in terms of quantity, with TV stations like Sitel, Kanal 5, TV Nova and Alfa, differences were also visible in the manner of reporting. The activities of oppositional SDSM were presented as ‘party promises’, while the ones promoted by VMRO-DPMNE and their officials and representatives were presented as ‘finalized projects that are simply waiting to be implemented’. (‘SONK (Edu-

cation, Science and Culture Trade Union) greet the building of 140 kindergartens’, ‘Instead of projects and a programme, they wish to escape the elections, are the reactions of disappointed members of SDSM’, ‘VMRO-DPMNE president Nikola Gruevski, whose party is at the head of the Government, announced a project and declared another project as finished’, ‘Strengthening and developing small businesses will be the priority of SDSM if they win the trust of the people, was the message of social democrats at today’s visit to Veles’).

TV stations 24 Vesti, Telma, Alsat M and TV 21 met their informative function in terms of the approach, by showing the standpoints of both subjects, however journalistic engagement by taking a critical stand to some topics discussed by the political parties was lacking. These TV stations dedicated significant space in the news for other smaller entities (Demokratski Sojuz, Levica), while Alsat M and TV 21 in both languages allotted plenty of time for the parties from the Albanian political block and their promotion (Besa, Uniteti, DR DPA, etc.).



Approach to reporting on pre-election activities of SDSM, Coalition of SDSM, ministers of SDSM in the Government (October 3 -7 and 10 - 14)

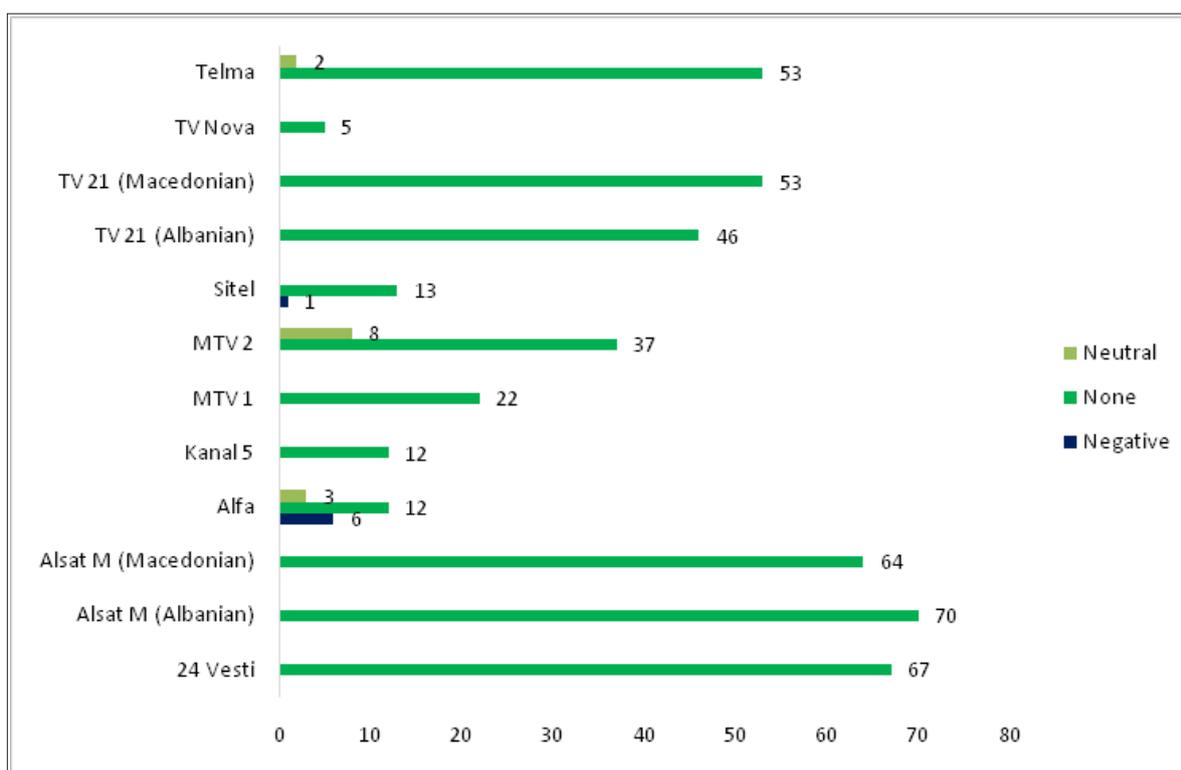
2.2. Approach in the reporting on the work of SPPO

The second topic where the different approach to reporting of TV stations was visible, was the work of the *Special Public Prosecutor's Office*. The reports where SPPO was the subject referred to the request from this institution for amendments of the laws on SPPO, which would allow for the duration of the operations of the institution to be prolonged, and the Law on Protected Witnesses, which were debated in Parliament right before it was dissolved.

Except for TV stations Alfa and Sitel, where there were a few reports with a negative attitude towards this institution (A new display of illiteracy from Katica Janeva) and 24 Vesti showed an affirmative attitude towards the requests, the rest of the reports were mainly lacking in any kind of attitude, or potentially presented a neutrally-critical attitude.

During the analysed period, a different strategy of reporting about the work of the SPPO was observed with TV stations Sitel (15 reports), Kanal 5 (12 reports), Alfa (21 reports) and TV Nova (6 reports). Unlike the previous situation, they used much less instances of direct attacks and insults towards this institution; however they now marginalize it, by displaying an ignorant attitude towards its work. Although the topic was very present during the analysed period, these TV stations published significantly fewer reports on it as compared to other media.

Other TV stations, including the public service MTV 1 (21 reports) and MTV 2 (44 reports), regularly reported on the events about SPPO, underlining the public interest and going deeper in analysing different scenarios related to this institution, depending on the outcome of the elections.



Approach to reporting on the activities of SPPO (October 3 - 7 and 14 - 16)