



# REPORT

## BASED ON THE MONITORING OF TV NEWS PROGRAMMES

## SUMMARY

- The results contained in this report are obtained by way of analysing television news programmes<sup>1</sup> aired during the period from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> and from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, i.e. for a total of ten days. The objective of the analysis is to see how national coverage TV stations are reporting on the democratic processes in the country and whether they give balanced presentation of the varied political standpoints. The news programmes of 12 TV stations were analysed: MTV1, MTV2, Sitel, Telma, 24 Vesti, Kanal 5, Alfa, Alsat M (both in Macedonian and in Albanian), TV 21 (both in Macedonian and in Albanian) and TV Nova.
- Despite the fact that the election campaign is far from its starting date, some of the TV stations (Sitel, Kanal 5, Alfa and TV Nova) are already intensely reporting on the pre-election activities of the political parties, mostly concerning VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM. An improvement can be observed with these TV stations in terms of balanced reporting. However in a large number of packages the ruling party was still favoured. The packages concerning SDSM are almost always accompanied by a report package that is a reaction from the ruling party or from a state authority, as a counterbalance.

- The most obvious negative stance could be observed in the reports on Zaev's statement concerning the use of Albanian language on the whole territory of Macedonia. The accusatory stand was evident in the unilateral reporting, since only the negative reactions to this proposal were shown, although they were not the only kind of reaction. On the other hand, VMRO-DPMNE's promises, especially the ones provided as announcements from the state, were followed up by journalistic analyses, in order to provide arguments supporting how successful the implementation would be. Once again a synchronization in the editorial policies was noticed in several TV stations (Kanal 5 and Alfa), which even used identical sources in their analyses on government benefits for agriculture.
- The content that could be classified as pre-election campaign also included those (57 news reports) in which ministers from VMRO-DPMNE promote new government measures and projects that would be implemented after the elections. News reports (18) were also aired in which VMRO-DPMNE leader, Nikola Gruevski, promotes government projects. In this way, the media have given an additional advantage to the ruling party ahead of the opposition, because VMRO-DPMNE is using the resources of state-owned institutions in order to promote itself in the pre-election period. This indicates that there is still no clear line drawn between party and state and that pro-government media outlets are one of VMRO-DPMNE's main mechanisms to keep their place in power.
- The Macedonian Radio Television, in their prime time news broadcast, aired on the first programme service, reported current events on time and in full, informatively and without going into any analyses. This also refers to the news on the second programme service.
- With several critically inclined TV stations (Telma, 24 Vesti, Alsat M), monitoring the regular work of state and public institutions, their potential failure to perform their duties (in the fields of education, urban planning, public finance, etc.), without assigning a party-political mark on them, continued to be the prevalent topic in this stage of pre elections.
- TV Telma reported on current events fairly, in part providing an analytical approach. TV 24 reported on the activities of political parties, however most of the attention was directed to the institutions (authorities) and their operations. Alsat M Television, both in the news in Macedonian and in Albanian languages, mostly focused on the problems in the functioning of state institutions, and much less on campaign activities of the political parties. TV21, which also airs programme both in Albanian and in Macedonian languages, informed on the events neutrally and objectively, with an occasional critical tone towards DUI and their ministers.
- In general, it can be concluded that the image of the media about political pluralism in Macedonia has improved in comparison with the period six months ago, which is especially evident in the 'mitigation' of the negative undertones that were very much present in previous cycles of the monitoring: side-taking, propagandist reporting, demonizing political entities, inserting political marketing were then a part of the news more than in the present period.

# GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Despite the fact that the political parties have already started the pre-elections campaign, in most of the reports of some TV stations the focal point is the *work of state and public institutions*, their failure to function properly or their lack of functioning (197 news reports). These are reports that refer to electing judges and the condition of the judiciary system, issues in the health and education sector, issues in urban planning (landslide at construction site in Skopje, for which there were political reactions) etc. These topics were more often represented on TV stations: 24 Vesti, Telma and Alsat M. At the same time, the TV stations held the institutions accountable, not linking them to party affiliation according to their management's political background, thus honouring the line between state and politics.

With 154 news reports, the second most common topic was the *pre-election activities of political parties*. This topic was more present on TV stations Kanal 5, Sitel, TV Nova and Alfa. Having in mind that the oppositional party increased their outreach activities, they were more present in the news programmes. However, this only refers to reports where subjects would speak directly on behalf of their political party. The contents that may be classified as pre-election campaign also included 57 reports to promote new government measures and projects, primarily to aid agriculture. They were promoted by ministers from VMRO-DPMNE, however keeping in mind that they should continue after the elections, they may have the characteristics of pre-election promises. Furthermore, 18 reports were also aired where VMRO-DPMNE leader, Nikola Gruevski, promoted government projects. Judging by the number of reports, the two largest parties are approximately equally represented on all TV stations, especially the ones that provided a more in-depth monitoring of this stage of the pre-election campaign.

*Organizing the elections* was also a common topic (138 reports), especially due to the issue that came up with the sixth electoral unit, where the number of registered voters exceeds the legal limit of five percent above the average and brings into question the lawfulness of the entire election process. This topic was particularly discussed in the media that also air their contents in Albanian (Alsat M, TV21, MTV2), in correspondence with the ethnic composition of that electoral unit. However, the topic was also covered by 24 Vesti, Telma, MTV1 and Sitel, and it got relatively little attention from Alfa, Kanal 5 and TV Nova. TV stations addressed criticisms to the Ministry of Justice, the party DUI, and to all four major parties in Parliament, accusing them of not making sufficient efforts in overcoming the issue and jeopardizing the election process.

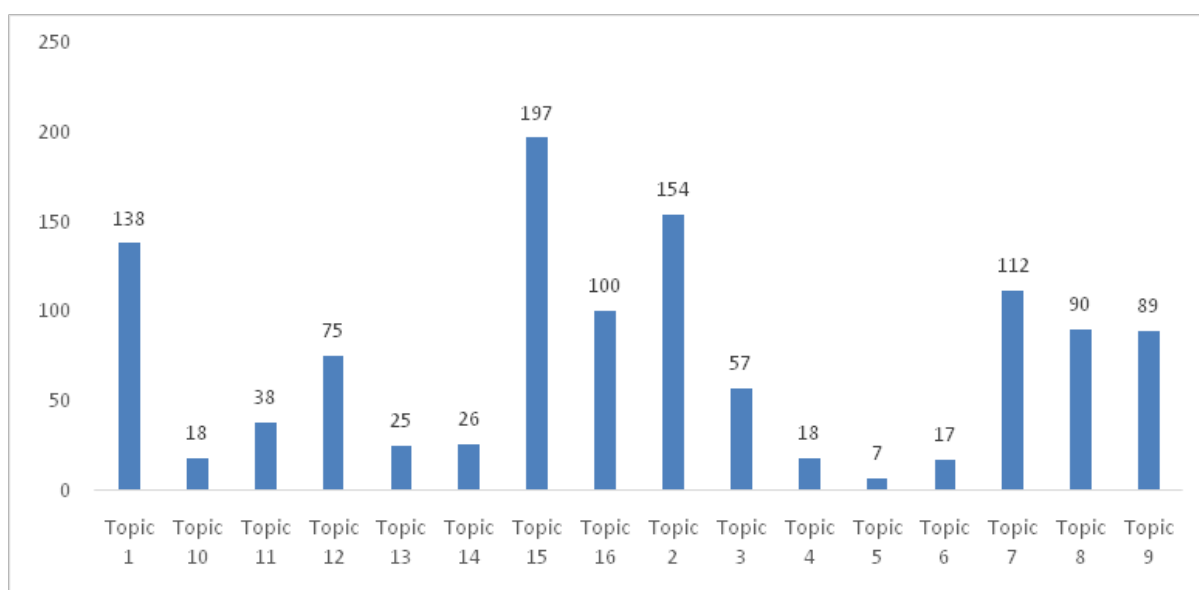
A total of 112 news reports were aired on the *Special Public Prosecutor's Office*, which on the anniversary of its establishment filed the first charges, among others to the leader of the ruling party, Nikola Gruevski. TV stations 24 Vesti, Telma, Alsat M and TV21 published twice, even three times as many reports about the SPPO than Sitel, Kanal 5, Alfa and TV Nova. Regarding the SPPO, some media outlets also addressed the topic of the Constitutional Court not declaring anything in connection to the constitutionality of this organ.

Among other topics, the ones that were more notable were *the consequences from the flooding* and Parliament debates on this topic (90 reports), *the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence* and analyses of how far the country has come (89 reports) and *the state of the economy, the debts* of the country to the business sector, investment opportunities, the decline of unemployment and the budget (75 reports). The proposal of SDSM leader, Zaev, for *expanded use of Albanian language*, with 38 reports, did not cause a big media uproar, and the topic was presented the most on Sitel (8 reports) and on Kanal 5 (7 reports).

# 1. COVERED TOPICS

In the ten day period in which the media were the subject of analysis, a total of 1,159 news reports were aired, which were related to politics and with democratic reforms. The following topics were represented:

Topic 1	Organizing early parliamentary elections (preparation of the voters' registry, the issue of the high number of voters in the sixth electoral unit, etc.)
Topic 2	Pre-election activities of the political parties (all activities that involved announcements, promises and the reactions to them).
Topic 3	Promoting Government projects and measures (the measures, mostly in agriculture, were promoted by government representatives from VMRO-DPMNE).
Topic 4	Government projects and measures where political parties and leaders are promoted
Topic 5	Pre-election promises of Government representatives
Topic 6	Other activities of Government representatives
Topic 7	The work of the Special Public Prosecutor's Office (including other topics related to the SPPO, such as awaiting a declaration of the Constitutional Court regarding its constitutionality)
Topic 8	Dealing with the consequences from the flooding in August (including sessions of Parliament when this topic was debated)
Topic 9	Marking 25 years of the independence of Macedonia (including the analytical segments of how far the country has come)
Topic 10	Honouring Mother Teresa
Topic 11	Zoran Zaev's arguments to expand the use of Albanian language
Topic 12	The state of the economy (the debt of the state to the business sector, unemployment statistics, budget preparations)
Topic 13	Public borrowing and public debt
Topic 14	The media and the functioning of the media
Topic 15	The functioning of state institutions (authorities)
Topic 16	Other topics



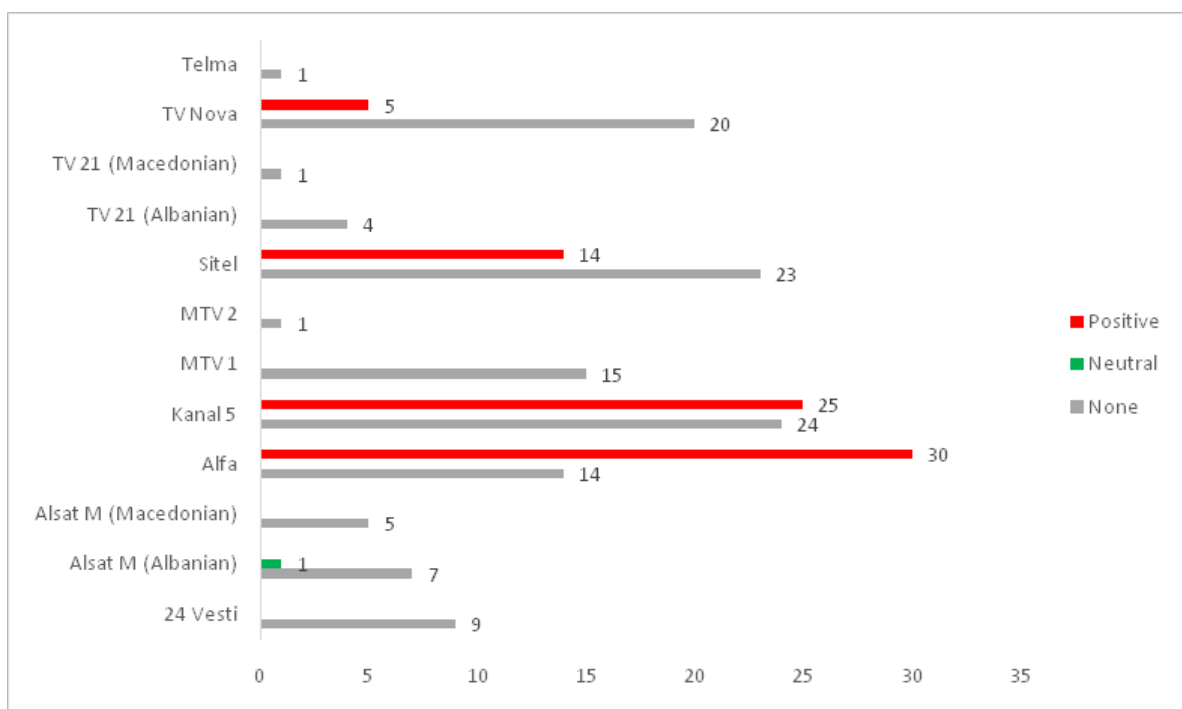
Number of reports aired on TV news programmes on various topics (September 5-9 and 11-16)

## 2. APPROACH TO REPORTING

During the ten day reporting period, providing comments and opinions that favour or attack some political standpoint did not occur as often. TV stations did not once quote websites, and in the first months of this year they were their main source of offensive, accusatory, slanderous and demonizing contents. Nonetheless, partiality to one type of views and disregarding, i.e. negating others was not left out, although the expression of a positive or negative attitude has lost a large portion of its intensity and harshness.

The main topics that showed the different attitude of the media towards one and other entities were the *pre-election activities of the parties*, of government representatives, as well as the involvement of state institutions in these activities. This was mainly evident with the TV stations that covered these topics the most, such as Sitel, Kanal 5, TV Nova and Alfa. Despite the relative balance of the number of reports, the way in which the reports were processed still showed essential differences. The prom-

ises and the activities of SDSM were shown as they were made, as the party representatives stated them, the media outlets did not provide any of their own insight. These reports were almost always followed by a segment that is a reaction of the ruling party or of a state institution, as a counterbalance. VMRO-DPMNE's promises, especially the ones provided in a format of state announcements, were followed up with author's analyses from the journalists, and the goal was to provide arguments that support how successful their implementation would be. It is interesting that some TV stations (Kanal 5 and Alfa) used the same sources for their analyses of government benefits in agriculture (the same cattle grower from the village Mralino, the same business owner, the owner of the company 'Veze Sharr', the 'drop by drop' systems). Gruevski's activities during which he speaks on behalf of the country about tourist weekends for pensioners and about other measures were broadcast without any distance taken due to his current position.



The approach to reporting in the TV news towards VMRO-DPMNE, VMRO-DPMNE's coalition, the Government ministers from VMRO-DPMNE, and Nikola Gruevski (September 5 – 9 and 11 – 16)



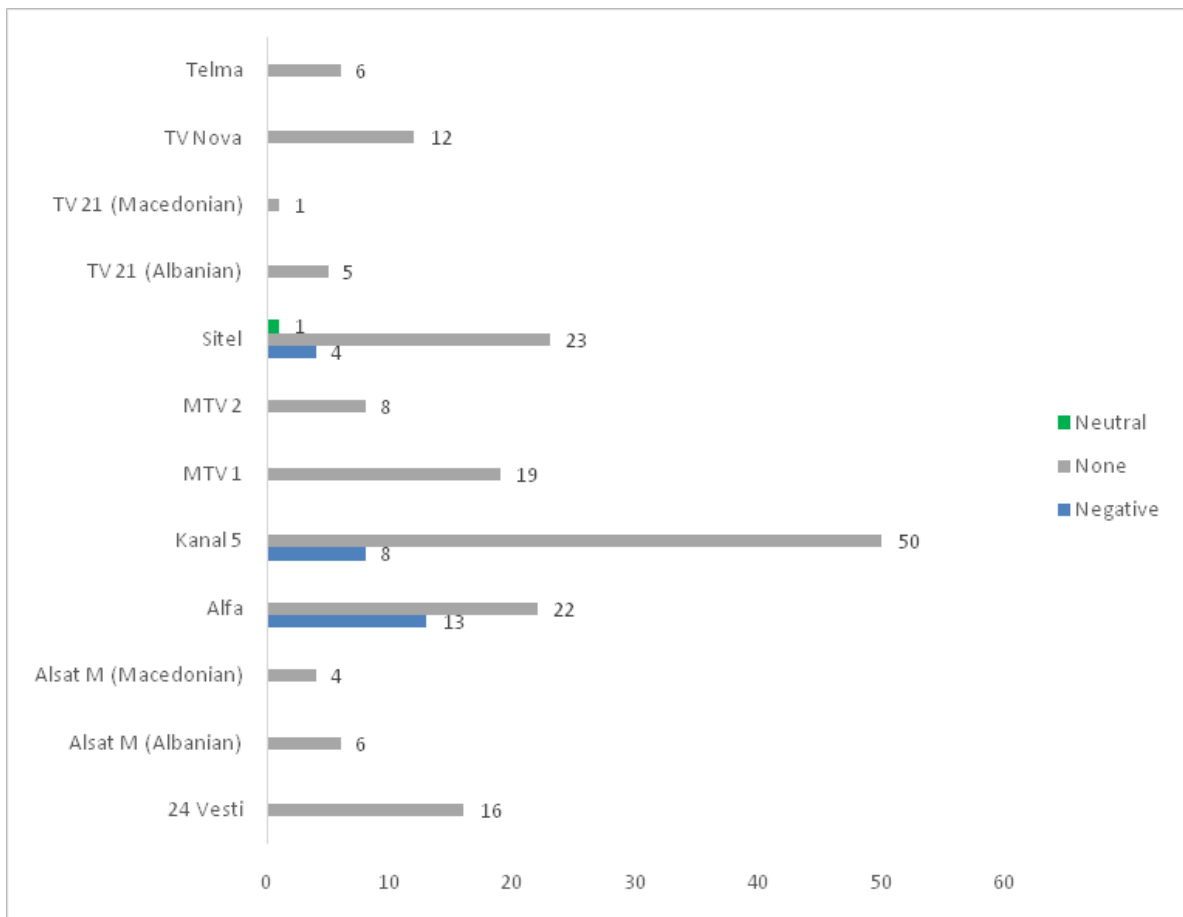
Regarding these topics, 24 Vesti television provided more coverage of the activities of smaller political entities, rather than the bigger blocks, and paid less attention to the promises and the campaign and more attention to the preparations of the parties, the potential formation of coalitions, drafting candidate lists and similar activities. Telma aired only a small part of SDSM's statements and the reactions of VMRO-DPMNE (concerning the costs for studying at University, September 16<sup>th</sup>), and this topic was hardly covered by Alsat M and TV21. All of these TV channels steered clear of the early campaign.

Macedonian Television reported on its first programme service on some of the activities of the opposition and the reaction to those activities (cancelling the broadcasting fee, the reaction to the canals that have not been cleaned out, etc.), as well as similar activities of smaller political entities (Democratic Alliance for Protection against Natural Disasters) and fewer reports about VMRO-DPMNE (projects in economy).

Another topic that noted significant differences in reporting, 'block-wise', was the work of the *Special Public Prosecutor's Office*. The reports about this institution referred to several sub-topics: a retrospective regarding the anniversary of the establishment of the SPPO, the option for the Constitutional Court to discontinue the prosecutor's office, and the first filed charges for the cases under their jurisdiction.

One of the ways in which a different attitude was expressed was in the news line-up. On most TV stations, including MTV, the topics that a charge has been filed against the leader of VMRO-DPMNE, Nikola Gruevski, was the leading news story and that is what opened the news, which is in alignment with public interest, especially that it is a person that held de facto the most powerful political position in the country for ten years. In contrast to that, Sitel, Alfa and Kanal 5 lined up that story as the seventh or eighth segment of the news, after reporting about the business forum between Ukraine and Macedonia, the visit of Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic, the attendance of President Gorge Ivanov at the first class of the Military academy, a statistics report about the increased turn-over in industry, and other topics.

Another way was through the choice of topics that were covered and were related to the SPPO. TV Nova aired statements of analysts who blamed the SPPO for organizing smear campaigns, and Alfa reported that it is to do with 'plenty of pompousness and little results', other TV stations pointed out the issues this prosecution office complained about, like the lack of cooperation from the institutions, and they also warned about the possibility for the Constitutional Court to discontinue it, criticizing the court of imploring tactics with delaying any statements on this issue (24 Vesti).

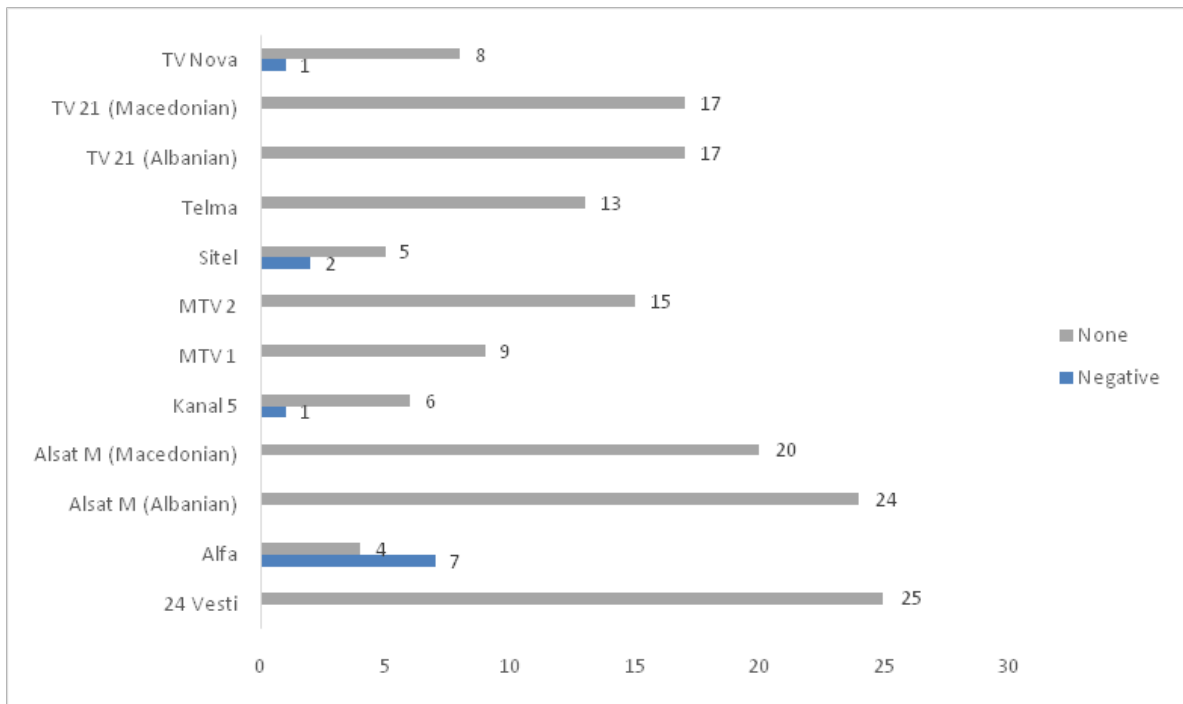


The approach to reporting in the TV news towards SDSM, SDSM's coalition, and the Government ministers from SDSM (September 5 – 9 and 11 – 16)

Retrospective analyses on the occasion of marking 25 years since the declaration of independence were particularly interesting as a topic that showed a partial and accusatory attitude of TV stations towards various political entities. It was especially evident in the case of Sitel, Alfa and Kanal 5, who in their stories pointed out that the country has undergone a transition and embargos, however now it has reformed and has become appealing for foreign investments (Sitel even directly pointed out that this happened in the last 10 years, after the current government came to power). On MTV, during the reports on this topic, there was balance in pointing out the ups and the downs of the coun-

try, and other TV stations had a much more critical approach, underlining that according to the state of the country today, the expectations from 1991 have not been met (24 Vesti).

The most expressive negative stand was noted in the reports of Sitel, TV Nova, Alfa and Kanal 5 regarding the statement of SDSM leader Zoran Zaev about the use of Albanian language on the entire territory of Macedonia. The accusatory stand was mostly visible in one-sided reporting, since they only reported the negative reactions to this proposal, although those were not the only reactions. Alsat M, on the other hand, reported that Rafiz Aliti from DUI commended the proposal, and Ilija Dimovski from VMRO-DPMNE criticized it.



Approach to reporting in TV news regarding SPPO's activities (September 5 - 9 and 11 - 16)