



ИЗВЕШТАЈ ОД СЛЕДЕЊЕТО НА МЕДИУМСКИТЕ СОДРЖИНИ

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Third Monthly Report
based on the monitoring of media content through the Rapid Response Media Mechanism
of the Institute of Communication Studies
(time-frame: 6th February – 4th March 2016)

ON THE POLITICAL PLURALISM IN THE MEDIA

Political pluralism is one of the most important dimensions of media pluralism as it enables free and equal circulation of different political ideas and opinions. This means that each media outlet individually should endeavor to ensure a so-called internal pluralism in the news, or to present all opposing positions on a given topic. This is fairly important for the overall democratic public sphere as citizens will be able to obtain a full picture and to form opinion on issues of public interest. On the other hand, avoiding reporting on certain topics or distorting the angle by highlighting only one view, in the long run, creates ideological manipulation of the public opinion.

The broadcasting media outlets, especially the television broadcasters, have a great significance in informing the citizens for the pluralism of views and opinions in the society. They have both legal (Article 61 of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services) and ethical obligation (Article 14 of the Code of the Journalists of Macedonia) to provide unbiased and balanced reporting on various political entities and must not reflect political leanings by favouring or attacking certain positions.

Given the importance of political pluralism in the election period, particularly in the context of the political crisis, Przino Agreement and the current political negotiations, the Institute of Communication Studies (ICS) conducts monitoring and analysis of the way the national televisions report on various political views and ideas and the extent to which they provide political actors access to their programmes.

The third monthly report on the political pluralism in the media covers the period between February 6th and March 4th, 2016. The analysis examined 11 news programmes and 38 editions of 11 different current-affairs programmes of the Public Service Broadcaster (MTV 1 and MTV2) and of 7 private television broadcasters (Sitel, Kanal 5, Alfa, Telma, Alsat M, 24 Vesti and TV21).

The conclusions and observations presented in this report were obtained based on a qualitative analysis of various aspects of informing in the news and the informative programmes.



Kingdom of the Netherlands

CONCLUSIONS

The reporting trend of the pro-government media in February was identical to the one during the previous two months of monitoring¹ and reflects the manner in which the governing structure uses the most influential broadcasters to maintain the status quo in terms of the relations of political power. Several key strategies can be identified: (1) use of television news programmes as political marketing of the government and the leader of VMRO-DPMNE; (2) selective censorship of political expression; and (3) a media-orchestrated crackdown on dissidents.

Television News Programmes as Political Marketing of the Government and Nikola Gruevski

A positive image of the operation of government is uncritically presented in the news. Journalism fails the function of a guardian of the public interest and of a neutral and detached critic: instead of protecting the interest of the citizens, it turned into an informative propaganda of the ruling party.

The reports that uncritically present the successful projects and achievements of the Government are regularly first on the primetime news programme, announced by favourable sentences and strong audiovisual presentation in the news headlines. They are broadcasted only on the pro-government televisions (MTV, Sitel, Alfa, Kanal 5), and if they appear on another television, they are mostly treated in a neutrally critical context. Furthermore, they extensively cover the field activities of Nikola Gruevski, although he is no longer a prime minister, yet hardly report on the incumbent Prime Minister. The appearances of Gruevski are usually related to the work done so far by the government, or to what VMRO-DPMNE is doing now or will do if they win the elections.

This was especially typical in late February and early March, when the Public Service Broadcaster and the three private television broadcasters (Sitel, Alfa, Kanal 5) covered the field activities of Gruevski with several reports per day. All his appearances were conveyed uncritically and in a glorifying tone, without questioning his capacity when he speaks on behalf of the state government projects. Such coverage gives the impression that the election campaign has already started and there is no differentiation between government and political projects.

Selective “Censorship” of Political Pluralism

The strategy of the ruling party to “allow” the opposition certain access to the pro-government media is intended to create a false picture of pluralism and balance in the news and the debate shows in order to ‘justify’ to the critical public the extensive coverage of the activities of Gruevski or the non-separation of the party and the state.

An unusual trend in the reporting of the pro-government television broadcasters was observed in early February: a large number of reports were broadcasted on the activities of the opposition, such as meetings with citizens, election promises and other events, with a neutral tone in the reporting. At first glance, it seemed as an attempt of the pro-government media to improve the reporting quality and introduce balance in the coverage, but the huge volume of biased and demonising content in other parts of the news shows that the situation is far from balanced. Moreover, the campaign activities of the opposition were not included in the content of the media which are deemed neutral or critical, such as Telma, Alsat M, 24 Vesti and others.

Given the frequent public criticism of the appearances of Gruevski in the role of a promoter of government projects and of the non-separation of the party from the state, this strategy of selective “censorship” or allowing pluralism in the media in small doses proved to have the intention to “justify” and “legitimize” the coverage of the activities of Gruevski” to the critical public and the

¹First and Second Monthly Report from the monitoring of the media content through the Rapid Response Media Mechanism of the Institute of Communication Studies: http://respublica.edu.mk/modem/MODEM-eden%20_18%20noemvri%20_23%20dekemvri.pdf <http://respublica.edu.mk/2016-03-08-11-03-03/96-second-monthly-report-based-on-the-monitoring-of-media-content-19th-december-2015-29th-january-2016>

international community.

For a long period of time, the representatives of the opposition had no access to the pro-government media, neither in the form of coverage of their activities nor in the form of direct participation in interviews or debates. Indication that the ruling party decided to “allow” the opposition a certain access to the pro-government media was first the coverage of its officials in the government and their field activities, and then the invitation of its representatives (Zaev and later on Shekerinska) to as guests in the news. The decision to have Zaev as a guest on TV Sitel was the most paradigmatic event about this phenomenon, because the Sitel news runs the fiercest negative campaign against the opposition and its representatives. From the way the interview was conducted, we could clearly see that it is a different strategy, which aims to create a false picture of openness to the opposition representatives, yet actually intends to publically discredit and demonise the opposition.

The Public Service Broadcaster shows some improvement towards greater balance in the selection of guests invited to the debate shows as well as the neutral presentation of the anchorpersons. However, the general approach to the organization of the debate shows, the lack of a critical approach in the exploration of the topics and the absence of prominent members of the opposition suggest that the Public Service Broadcaster is still not a public forum for critical debate on current political issues.

The pro-government private television broadcasters (Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa) do not provide nearly any political pluralism in the current affairs shows i.e. the few debate shows which they broadcast primarily represent the views of the ruling structure. They either do not allow the opposition actors to express their view or attack and demonise them. This primarily refers to the shows “Jadi Burek” (Sitel 3) and “Milenko Late Night Show” on Kanal 5. These two shows are highly indicative in terms of the imbalance of political views that are presented in them and in terms of the way in which the political entities are treated both by the hosts and by the guests. The guests in the shows are primarily public figures close to the ruling VMRO-DPMNE.

Orchestrated Media Crackdown on Opponents

The strategy of directed orchestration of the editorial policy of the pro-government television broadcasters continues, with the purpose of publicly discrediting and delegitimising certain political actors, institutions and organizations.

Editorial convergence was observed among the pro-government media in the past two months, evident through the selection of the same topics, citing of the same sources and the same angle of exploration of the topics, which clearly indicated that the news appear to be edited in the same newsroom. In the coordinated or orchestrated editorial policy of pro-government television broadcasters, the most common technique is the “repacking” of new events in already known schemes or frames of interpretation, known in the communication theory as the applicability effect². These well-known frames of interpretation are constructed by the ruling party, whereupon are synchronously and consistently reproduced in the media. The goal is for the people to incorporate their interpretation of the new events in a previously adopted mental frame of “enemies of the state”, “Macedonians as victims of foreign conspiracy”, “the opposition as a collaborator with foreign services” and others.

In February, this phenomenon was clearly recognised as a devised strategy to orchestrate a crackdown on all critical voices that expressed opposing views from those of the ruling party. Several examples were particularly paradigmatic about this strategy: the attacks on the Special Public Prosecutor’s Office, the negative tone of reporting on the international community, the negative campaign against the Belgian expert Peter Vanhoutte etc.

² Price, V., & Tewksbury, D. (1997). News values and public opinion: A theoretical account of media priming and framing. In G. A. Barrett & F. J. Boster (Eds.), *Progress in communication sciences: Advances in persuasion* (Vol. 13, pp. 173–212). Greenwich, CT: Ablex.

The main “victim” of the attacks was the Special Public Prosecutor’s Office and the prosecutor Katica Janeva, who was accused by the three broadcasters Sitel, Alfa and Kanal 5 of “abuse of the right to use an apartment in Skopje”, “political affiliation with SDSM” and “improper treatment of witnesses”, mostly by uncritically broadcasting contents published on web portals (Kurir, Press 24). This frequently occurred on the day the SPPO released the first information on the initiated criminal charges of fraud. In the coverage of the arrest of the Mayor of Pustec, these broadcasters portrayed the Mayor as “a victim of an anti-Macedonian struggle”, and the SPPPO as “an enemy of the national interests of Macedonians”. On the other hand, the other broadcasters covered the topic neutrally, by focusing on “the SPPO trying to tackle crime”, “law enforcement”, “the rule of law in the country” and so on.

The orchestrated attacks on the SPPO were particularly intensified in late February and early March when a piece of information, first published on the web portal Kurir, was broadcasted (February 29th), that “the opposition leader, Zoran Zaev, gave orders to the Special Public Prosecutor, Katica Janeva ... in the period until the June 5th elections, to come out with as many requests for investigations related to...” (Kanal 5), or that “...sources from Bihacka brief that Zaev gave orders to the Special Public Prosecutor in the period until June 5 to come out with as many requests for investigations in order to compromise the staff of the ruling party” (Sitel), and that “...the direction of Zaev pointed SDSM’s special tool, the Special Prosecutor, to have requests for investigations at all costs” (Alfa).

Further, on March 1st, Alfa TV broadcasted a report asking “Is Katica Janeva a registered farmer or a prosecutor. The Special Prosecutor requested to lease land from the state at bargain prices”, which was afterwards broadcasted by Sitel and Kanal 5 as top news in primetime news, whereas none of the other televisions covered it. Further, on March 1st, 2nd and 3rd, all three broadcasters published similar reports on how “random citizens” without exception criticize and devalue the work of Janeva by saying that “instead of acting as a political body... (should) perform the assigned function”.

Another typical example was the reports from February 23rd in which all pro-government television broadcasters attack the international community for interfering in the internal affairs of Macedonia and accuse the international community of violating the sovereignty due to the announced assessment of the fulfillment of the requirements for fair and democratic elections. As a source they used Gjorgji Naumov, the first Minister of Justice, who neither participated in any public event, nor appeared in the media as a commentator on the current affairs, yet that day all three television broadcasters sought his opinion. Also, all three broadcasters in these reports broadcasted archive footage of the celebration of the independence referendum from September 8th, 1991, and the speech of the first President, Kiro Gligorov.

The campaign against the Belgian expert Vanhoutte started due to his critical views expressed to public, in particular because of his posts on the social network Twitter in which he satirically identifies major anomalies in the operation of the institutions and in the democracy in the country.

VIOLATIONS OF THE LAW AND OF THE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

MTV1 continually violates the standards and principles of the programmes established in Article 111 and in particular the responsibility established in Article 110 of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services “not to advocate or defend positions or interests of a specific political party... and to protect the programmes it develops and broadcasts from any kind of influence from the Government, political organisations or other centres of economic and political power”.

Many of the reports broadcasted during the entire monitoring period uncritically promote government projects and investment and adopt a propagandistic and apologetic approach. These reports mainly cover the field activities of Gruevski as the leader of VMRO-DPMN, who is actually promoting government projects. The journalists from MTV uncritically promote him in the role of

“factual PM”, instead of making a distinction between a state and a party position (February 27th, opinion of a journalist “Gruevski also inspected the construction of the sports hall”).

The three private television broadcasters Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa continuously violate the basic principles underlying the news programmes established in Article 61 of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services of: (1) “objective and unbiased presentation of events, with equal treatment of diverse views and opinions, enabling free creation of a public opinion on individual events and issues” (Article 61, paragraph 1, line 9), and (2) “autonomy, independence and accountability of editors, journalists and other authors involved in the creation of programmes and editorial policy” (Article 61, paragraph 1, line 13).

Each of these televisions sided with and favoured the positions of the ruling party in the reporting on the relevant political developments that took place this week, especially on: the tensions with the laying of the foundations of the cross in the municipality of Butel, the political crisis and the early parliamentary elections, and mostly the continuous attacks, insults and demonisation of the Special Public Prosecutor’s Office. The broadcasting of almost identical news reports (February 29th and March 1st, 2nd and 3rd), all referring to the Special Public Prosecutor’s Office and Katica Janeva, constitutes a clear violation of Article 61.

MTV 1 and the three private television broadcasters Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa continuously violate the basic principles established in the Code of Journalists of Macedonia and in particular Article 14 which stipulates that “reporting on political processes ... must be impartial and balanced.”

- Several violations of the legal and ethical norms were committed in the interview with Zoran Zaev broadcasted on Sitel TV on February 12th. The first serious violation, which was continually committed in the news of this television broadcaster, is the deviation from the basic principles underlying informative programming (Article 61 of the Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services), especially the principles of: (1) presumption of innocence, (2) objective and unbiased presentation of events, with equal treatment of diverse views and opinions, enabling free creation of public opinion on individual events and issues, and (3) autonomy, independence and accountability of editors, journalists and other authors involved in the creation of programming and editorial policy. The second serious violation was the reinforcement of stereotypes about an entire ethnic community—the Turks, which is in contravention of Article 48 of the same Law stipulating that the programme must not ‘... incite or spread discrimination, intolerance or hatred based on race, sex, religion or nationality’.
- Whether the media coverage of the field activities both of the ruling party and of the opposition (in the form of government projects, meetings with citizens and election promises) constitutes a violation of the electoral legislation is questionable. The Electoral Code clearly establishes the period for running an election campaign, however there is no explicit ban that prohibits the political parties from running an election campaign prior to that period or the media from reporting on it. The Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services also does not explicitly prohibit the media from reporting on the field campaign of the parties before the official start of the campaign. But, what is the purpose of the provisions of the Electoral Code under which an election campaign can be conducted (or covered) in a particular period before the election, if the political parties (without a status of participants in an election campaign) can bombard the voters with campaign promises several months earlier. If it is considered that it is in the interest of the public for the parties to be able to conduct the election campaign over a longer period of time, then the legal provision that prescribes a certain period for commencement and completion of the campaign is unnecessary. The same applies to the media – instead of constantly bombarding citizens with reports on the promises of the political parties, the media should critically inform on the real issues that trouble the citizens. Therefore, although such reporting is not expressly prohibited i.e. does not constitute a violation of the law – however, it is not in accordance with the public interest.
- The show broadcasted on Kanal 5 on February 12th was again observed to contain a homophobic rhetoric on the LGBT community used by the host Nedelkovski which constitutes an implicit hate

speech against this group of people, which is a violation of article 48 of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services and the Law on Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination. The continuing practice of Nedelkovski to disclose private photos of people who are not public figures and to comment on them in a negative or derogatory context should be stressed (published photograph of the son of a public figure, embrace with another guy in offensive comment), as it constitutes a violation of the principle for protection of privacy established in Article 61 of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services and the Law on Personal Data Protection.

The show “Vo Centar” of the journalist Vasko Eftov broadcasted on Kanal 5 on February 15th dedicated to the initiative for establishing an Albanian Orthodox Church in Macedonia abounds in ethnic stereotypes and demonises the “Albanians”. Both by the host and the guests, whose statements are released in the show, the Albanians are portrayed as attackers of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. According to the way in which the sentences are formulated in this show, this can be categorized as hate speech which is a violation of Article 48 of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services.

TOPICS COVERED IN THE NEWS

(1) The Political Crisis and the Possibility of Early Elections

The development of the political crisis and the possibility of early elections was the most covered topic in the primetime news in February as well (a total of 616 reports). In the first week, it was covered on a smaller scale (58), mainly regarding the need for revision of the electoral roll and the preparedness for elections, and in the following week, the interest in these same issues became stronger (141), whereas in the third week, the reporting on the topic culminated (297 reports) due to the anticipation of the assessment of the international community of the fulfillment of the requirements for holding the elections on April 24th. In the fourth week, the interest in the topic dropped significantly (120 reports) and the focus shifted on the visit of the High Representative of the State Department Hoyt Brian Yee and the revision of the electoral roll. As in January, this month as well, Sitel, Kanal 5, Alfa and MTV1 continued to synchronously propagate the views of VMRO-DPMNE, claiming that the elections must also be held on April 24th, while SDSM and the other actors that pointed to the unfulfilled requirements (the problems with the electoral roll and the media sphere) were continuously subject to attack. The other media neutrally-critically and/or analytically approached the topic.

In the first monitoring week (February 6th – 12th), 58 reports altogether were broadcasted on the political crisis. Generally, there were reports on the activities concerning the consolidation of the voter registry, the calls of multiple subjects for fair elections (Prime Minister Emil Dimitriev, the Ombudsman Ixhet Memeti), as well as the comments of foreign diplomats or politicians regarding the readiness for elections. In these terms, the Sitel, Alfa and Kanal 5 televisions particularly stressed the statement by the Vice-Chairman of the European People’s Party, Antonio Tajani, who after meeting with the leader of VMRO-DPMNE declared that the elections should be held on 24 April. Thereby they demonstrated a favourable view of this position, which is shared by the government, as opposed to the opposition, which asked for postponement.

In the following week (February 13th – 19th) almost three times more reports were broadcasted on the crisis and the early elections (141), thereby continuing the dichotomy in the reporting on the possible election date. The pro-government media Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa reported favourably towards the position of the Government and the ruling VMRO-DPMNE on April 24th as a date for the elections (“Why is the leader of SDSM, Zoran Zaev, avoiding the April 24th elections, yet at the same time hopes that the US and EU ambassadors will give him unconditional support?” – Kanal 5, February 19th, “Gruevski and Dimitirev announce elections on April 24th – Zaev claims that there will be no elections” – Sitel, February 18th, “The Social Democratic Union should not boycott the April 24th elections because of close party interests”, Alfa, February 18th). Milder favouring of this position has

been observed in the reports of MTV1 and MTV2 which convey statements of representatives of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, whereas 24 Vesti, Telma, Alsat M and TV21 presented different views on the election date and analysed various scenarios if they are held or delayed.

In the week from February 20th to February 26th, the topic became central in the news on all televisions (with a total of 297 reports), because the focus was on the postponement of the elections from April 24th to June 5th. It was predominant on all televisions with an average of four broadcasts per day on the events related to the election date, the expectation and the announcement of the recommendation of the EU and the US, the Assembly session on the scheduled dissolution (February 23rd), the reactions of the political actors, the opinions of the analysts and so on. Some broadcasters (Sitel, Alfa, and Kanal5) were observed to favour the position of the ruling party for not postponing the elections, while other broadcasters conveyed the “for” and “against” arguments concerning the postponement without explicitly supporting any position. The three television broadcasters demonstrated a deeply hostile attitude not only towards the opposition, but also towards the entities that expressed a position that the elections should be postponed, such as the NGO MOST (February 20th, Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa, text taken from the web portal Zhurnal: “There is no longer a doubt that Darko Aleksov, through the NGO MOST, will write a report on the elections that will satisfy the expectations of Zaev and SDSM”), the State Election Commission (February 21th, Sitel “Chichakovski vanished from the face of the earth although he is paid by the citizens to conduct the elections that the parties agreed to hold an April 24th”; February 22nd, Alfa: “Experts comment that the SEC, which is controlled by SDSM, will do everything to avoid confrontation with the citizens”; February 23rd, Kanal5 “The content of the announcements looks as if it was written by the headquarters of SDSM”), as well as towards the international community (February 22nd, Kanal 5: “Some of the Macedonian citizens disapprove the role of international community in the negotiations”; February 23rd, Sitel “The intellectual community is awakening: The citizens, not the ambassadors, have the final say”; February 23rd, Alfa “The interference of the international community in the internal affairs of Macedonia is a violation of the democracy”).

In the fourth monitoring week (February 27th – March 4th), the interest in the topic faded (120 reports), although this topic was second according to the intensity of reporting that week (following the laying of the foundation of the cross in Butel). Although the election date was moved forward, the pro-government media (Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa) adheres to the view that the opposition is fighting tooth and nail to postpone the June 5th elections (Sitel, March 1st: “While VMRO DPMNE is preparing the most comprehensive election programme ever, SDSM is still not drawing back from the idea of coming to power through plots and with the help of Katica Janeva”; Kanal 5, March 1st: “In these early parliamentary elections, the citizens will choose between two concepts: the concept of destruction and crisis offered by SDSM along with violation of the national sovereignty, and the concept of a quality programme aimed at solving the problems of the citizens offered by VMRO DPMNE”). The other television broadcasters covered the topic through the activities of SEC, the visit of the High Representative of the State Department Hoyt Brian Yee and the statements of the main political parties on the commencement of the revision of the electoral register, without adopting an attitude towards any political entity.

(2) The work of the Special Public Prosecutor’s Office

The work of the Special Public Prosecutor’s Office was perhaps the most important topic that captured media attention throughout February, and it was connected to the announcement of the first criminal charges made by this prosecution office. The topic had a convincing lead in getting attention from the media in the first two weeks of monitoring, and then in the third week it was all but gone, and at the end, in the fourth week it resurfaced, however now it was reported as a pseudo-event related to the ‘harness between the SPPO and the opposition’, mainly imposed by pro-government media.

In the first week (6th – 12th February) the work of the *Special Prosecutor’s Office* was the leading news topic (110 packages), particularly on the last day, 12th February, when the SPO announced its first criminal charges at a press conference. Significant differences in the coverage of this topic were noted. Before the press conference, the Sitel, Alfa and Kanal 5 television broadcasters broadcast

hostile stories about the apartment used by the special prosecutor Katica Janeva and her alleged links to the opposition leader Zoran Zaev. MTV 1 did not join this smear campaign, with the exception of one package on the Brima Gallum poll, according to which the population in Macedonia does not trust Janeva. The other television neutrally broadcast the information on the work of the prosecution and the criminal charges filed against it. On the day of the press conference, Sitel and Alfa continued with their hostile attitude, whereas Kanal 5 became somewhat milder, but broadcast the reports in the second part of the news. The other television broadcasters (Alsat-M, 24 Vesti, Telma) made the topic breaking news, with five to six features in a row, covering all aspects and revisiting contents they had broadcast before on the contents of the criminal charges, electoral manipulations, etc.

In the second monitored week (February 13th – 19th) this became by far the most exploited topic (183 stories). Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa continue with negative coverage of the work of the SPPO and the Special Prosecutor, Janeva, whose work in some reports is directly related to the Leader of SDSM, Zaev: “Janeva’s Titanic shipwrecked in the mud – no detention for the 4 suspects, unsubstantiated claims of SPPO” (Alfa, February 13th), “The Special Prosecutor requests case files that are not part of the “bombs” (Kanal 5, February 17th), “The Titanic, set sail by the Special Prosecutor, Katica Janeva, achieved a negative effect in the public, way off the expectations of Zoran Zaev” (Alfa, February 14th), “In addition to achieving a negative effect in the public, the execution of the case Titanic fell short of Zoran Zaev’s expectations” (Kanal 5, February 14th), “SDSM has a number of demands from Janeva, to pave the way for elections so that they can win: to abolish VMRO-DPMNE” (Sitel, February 13th). The television broadcasters 24 Vesti and Telma provided unbiased and in-depth coverage with analyses and broadcasting of all reactions. MTV1 and MTV2 reported based on the daily information without commentaries and opinions, whereas TV21 and Alsat M adopted a critical position (“The court’s reaction to Janeva’s requests for arrest warrants received public criticism about selective justice” – Alsat M, February 14th).

In the third monitored week (February 20 – 26) the interest in the topic nearly vanished, since only 10 stories were identified as devoted to the Special Public Prosecutor’s Office and the initiated criminal proceedings.

On the other hand, though, in the week that followed (February 27th – March 4th) the interest in the work of the Special Public Prosecutor’s Office once again resurfaced on the media agenda (85 stories total), although this time once more the thesis of the ‘harness between the SPPO and the opposition’ was being imposed. The trend of the three pro-government commercial television broadcasters Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa to demonise the institution and especially the prosecutor Katica Janeva continues. These television broadcasters again highlight the alleged connection between this prosecution and the opposition party SDSM (Kanal 5, February 29th: “The direction of Zaev pointed SDSM’s special tool, the SPPO, to have such requests at all costs, writes Kurir”; Alfa, March 3rd: “SDSM started presenting the political orders of the opposition leader Zaev to the special prosecutor Janeva publicly through the media”; Sitel, March 3rd: “SPPO is not an independent institution but a party body of SDSM and Soros because their actions and press conferences, operations and activities are ordered and then announced by SDSM, followed by the media of the Soros camp”). The news reports (mostly without sources or with pro-government web portals as sources) contain personal attacks and discreditations of Janeva (Alfa, March 1st: “Is Katica Janeva a registered farmer or a prosecutor. The Special Prosecutor requested to lease land from the state at bargain prices”, information broadcasted by Sitel and Kanal 5; Sitel, March 3rd: “Because of the private parties of Katica and Zaev, the court cannot decide on the cases Bribery and Putsch. Yesterday a wedding, today a private trip”). The coverage of the other television broadcasters focused on the request for amendments to the Law on Witness Protection (24 Vesti, March 3rd: “The Minister of Justice decided to remain silent on Janeva’s recent request for amendments. Even the Government had no comment on that, are they planning on helping the SPPO”). The television stations that broadcast in Albanian and Macedonian mainly reported on the testimony of the leader of DUI, Ahmeti, in the SPPO, in the case Cosmos, but without taking any position.

(3) Projects and accomplishments of the ruling party

Throughout February, pro-government media continued with intense promotion of the projects and the achievements of VMRO-DPMNE as the ruling party (288 stories), and Gruevski was consistently present in the role of 'factual' Prime Minister, although after his resignation he is just the leader of the main position party. The other televisions either reported very little on these pseudo events constructed by the government or approached them with a critical tone.

In the first week (February 6 - 12) 74 reports were published, mostly on the television broadcasters MTV 1 (23 packages), Sitel (18), Alfa (28) and Kanal 5 (12). Furthermore, these feature stories not only exhibit a strong favourable tone towards the Government and its officials, but also have more political/propagandist than informative elements (Alfa: 'Micro and Small Enterprises Wishing to Expand or Develop Their Business by New Job Openings May Receive MKD 92,000 of Government Assistance per Employee'). The other television broadcasters did not cover or had a critical view of this topic.

The same reporting strategy continued in the period February 13 – 19 (87 reports), with no change in the positions of the pro-government media Sitel, Kanal 5, Alfa, and the Public Service Broadcaster MTV1 and MTV2 which propagandistically reported on the achievements of the government: "The first domestic company laid the foundations of the factory located in the industrial zone Bunardjik –300 job openings announced" (Sitel, February 16th), "Ademi accounted for 2 billion euro investments for 900 projects" (MTV2, February 19th), "The investment of 20 million euros should create 300 jobs" (MTV1, February 17th), "Today seven or a total of 27 projects for young people" (Alfa, February 13th), "More than 7,000 plots ready for the mega project Buy a house for young people" (Kanal 5, February 15th). Examples of favouring of government projects have been observed in the reports of TV21 in Macedonian and Albanian language, but they refer to officials of DUI. Telma, 24 Vesti and Alsat M rarely covered the activities of the Government, except when criticising the identification of the party with the state.

Slightly fewer reports (66) were published in the following week, February 20 – 26. MTV1, Sitel, Alfa and Kanal 5 put together broadcast 55 of these reports. The reporting of the four television broadcasters on this topic was positive and favorable. Cases of blurred lines between reporting and political advertising were detected (February 24th, Alfa, "The benefits of the project 'Buy a House for Young People', as well as of the free projects can be used for superstructures"; February 20th, Sitel: "Misajlovski: We invested over 430 million euros in road infrastructure in the eastern region"; February 21st, Kanal 5: "5,100 employees and 3 production facilities and the same number of foreign investors in the existing industrial zone is the motivation of the municipal decision-makers supported by the Government of Macedonia to commence the largest construction activity"; February 23rd, MTV 1: "Big discounts for buying a flat and state land for construction of houses. The focus is on the projects Buy a House for Young People and Buy a House, Buy an Apartment").

In the last week (February 27th – March 4th) it was a widely present topic (61 reports), owing to the informing intensity of the Public Service Broadcaster – MTV 1 and the three pro-government commercial television broadcasters Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa. The tone of reporting resembles a political marketing (MTV 1, February 29th: "The government projects increased the construction business by 65.8% in 2015", MTV2 March 1st: "The construction sector is a pillar of the economy", Sitel March 3rd, "The hospital in Shtip is the largest capital investment in the healthcare sector"). Certain government measures, such as the registration of agricultural machinery (February 27th) are covered by the other television broadcaster as well (24 Vesti), but they are incidental and informative. Telma broadcasted three reports on government measures, but all with a critical review (on the decrease in foreign investments and the criticism from the World Bank of the Macedonian education). The television broadcasters with Albanian ethnic background reported on the activities of the government through the coverage of the activities of the officials of DUI, however, the coverage of TV21 and Alsat M in Albanian was predominantly critical in tone.

(4) The activities of the opposition

The trend of enhanced reporting of the pro-government television stations on the opposition's outreach activities was also evident in February (180 packages) and it is owed to an attempt to show some sort of balance in the reporting and to 'justify' the intense reporting on government projects and on Gruevski's activities as leader of VMRO-DPMNE. On the other hand, in other news on daily events, the opposition was continuously demonized and attacked, and the government was favoured. This leads to the conclusion that despite the unusual presence of the opposition in the news, what is lacking is true balance and impartiality in the reporting.

In the first week (February 6 – 12) there was the most intensity in reporting on the opposition (65 reports). It was most featured on MTV 1 (16 packages), Sitel (18 packages) and Kanal 5 (12). The key difference in the reporting was that the MTV 1, Alfa, Sitel and Kanal 5 television, more frequently than other television broadcasters, featured the partisan activities of the opposition, primarily the visits of party representatives of various towns in Macedonia and the promises they made to the local residents. On the other television broadcasters (Alsat-M, Telma, 24 Vesti, TV 21), at the forefront were the activities of the opposition officials that are ministers and additional deputy ministers in the Government, who made almost daily statements regarding the irregularities in the work of the institutions they form part of (Ljupco Nikolovski, Additional Deputy Minister of Agriculture, accused of a lack of food safety controls, Aleksandar Kiracovski, Additional Deputy Minister of Information Society, reacted to the evaluation of the public administration, etc.). Additionally, there was regular coverage of their statements and the reactions from the other side (VMRO-DPMNE or the institution), when there were any. These television broadcasters did not cover the partisan activities and campaign promises of SDSM. The four government television broadcasters, on the other hand, simultaneously also proceeded with unfounded or demonising attacks on the opposition, often using quotes of virtually created contents on Internet portals or the opinions of 'pro-government' analysts. Regarding current affairs (the negotiation on the media, the parliamentary debate on the new Damjan Gruev National Defence University), these television broadcasters, with the exception of MTV 1, openly attacked the positions of SDSM and defended those of VMRO-DPMNE, leading to the conclusion that, despite the unusual coverage of the opposition in their informative programming, there is still insufficient will for true balance and impartiality in reporting.

In the second week (February 13 – 19) this trend in reporting decreased (45 reports). The Public Service Broadcasters MTV1 broadcasted the highest number of reports (21 reports) with appropriate coverage (February 13th, "SDSM: Manchevski: We guarantee a better life for the citizens", "SDSM: Audit of the allotment of agricultural plots", February 15th, "SDSM promised projects for Cashka and the region"). The remaining 24 reports are aired on Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa: (Sitel, February 15th: "The vice-president of SDSM, Mancevski, in the municipality of Cashka, announced a construction of a highway Veles-Medzitlija, with the change of government", "SDSM with accusation for the shortcomings in the healthcare system", February 16th). Kanal 5 broadcasted an interview with the Minister of Labour and Social Policy (February 19th), wherein the editor, Lydia Bogatinova, tried to "discredit" the guest, alleging that she used to be a member of VMRO-DPMNE and WMC. 24 Vesti, Telma and TV21 rarely reported on the work of the opposition, and primarily through analytical reports (TV21 in Macedonian language, February 14th: "The opposition filibuster "Damjan Gruev" reached a dead end"). The other television broadcasters did not broadcast a single report on the topic.

In the third week (February 20 – 26) there was a significant decrease of the number of reports (19 total), and in the fourth week (February 27th – March 4th) that number went back up, to 49. Most of them were broadcasted on MTV1, Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa and partly on TV 21 in Macedonian). These reports resemble typical election campaign because they promote certain measures announced by the opposition if they win the elections (March 1st "SDSM proposed measures for the youth) or indicate irregularities in the operation of the institutions run by officials of SDSM (March 3rd "Administration Kiracovski: Pressure over the inspectors", March 4th "Criminal charges: Nikolovski: Cvetkov abused the position"). In these same media, the opposition also appears as subject of demonisation (February 28th: "A few days ago, late at night, Sekerinska's yacht was conspiratorially taken out of the hangars and moved to another location", information was conveyed from the web

portal Kurir). The other television broadcasters covered the activities of the opposition in the context of the daily events.

(5) The laying of the foundations for the cross in Butel

Undoubtedly, this was the most dominant topic in the last week of the monitored period (27th February – 4th March), with a total of 162 reports. The pro-government media (MTV1, Kanal 5, Sitel and Alfa) had a relatively small number of reports covering this topic, as opposed to the critical media in Macedonian language, Telma (12) and 24 Vesti (15), which reported with greater intensity. But, the television broadcasters with, relatively speaking, ethnic background extensively reported on the topic (focusing on a possible ethnic problem): TV21 (22 reports in Macedonian and 25 reports in Albanian) and Alsat M (23 in Macedonian and 23 in Albanian). The pro-government media construct the narrative that Albanian citizens led by DUI (a government coalition partner) are provoking an interethnic conflict by protesting against the symbol of Orthodox Macedonians, in a multiethnic community, blaming the Interior Minister, Oliver Spasovski, an official from SDSM, for “failing to protect the citizens”. (Alfa, March 4th, headlines: “Double standards, one for the cross, another one for the eagle. DUI will not withdraw from the camp in Butel. Did the police fail?”, Sitel March 4th “Spasovski should liberate the usurped area in Butel and do what the citizens are paying him to do, said the mayor of Butel”). Unlike them, the other media adopted a strong critical attitude towards the attempts of the ruling parties to provoke ethnic tensions through the use of religious and national symbols (24 Vesti, February 28th: “Eagles and crosses for distraction/The developments surrounding the cross are part of a skillfully constructed scenario of Gruevski and Ahmeti to defocus the public, advise the analysts”, Telma, February 28th “Experts recognise political constructions”). TV21 and Alsat M through expert opinions pointed out that it is a political scenario of the parties in power and a misuse of the symbols. (TV21 March 4th “Klik Plus: The politics is using religion for political mobilization”, Alsat M February 28th: “The political actors are provoking ethnic and religious tensions and divisions in order to cover their incompetence in dealing with the actual problems”). The coverage of MTV1 of this topic only noted the statements of the involved parties without favouring or demonising any of the entities.

(6) The negotiations on the media

The topic concerning the negotiations on the media, which was opened during the last week of January, continued to capture the attention of the media in February as well (117 reports total). The question of whether the negotiations on media reforms will continue was at the peak of interest, mainly with the neutrally-critical media outlets, i.e. the activities of the Belgian expert Vanhoutte on Twitter, mainly with pro-government television stations (with an explicitly negative and offensive tone towards the Belgian expert).

In the week from the 6th to the 12th of February 34 reports were broadcast. The television broadcasters Sitel (5 packages), Alfa (4 packages) and Kanal 5 (4 packages) attacked the position of SDSM and their proposed Media Bill, insinuating links with the negotiation facilitator Peter Van Haute and suggesting he was biased. Additionally, they favoured the views of the Macedonian Media Association (MMA) on regulating this sphere. Other television broadcasters, such as Alsat-M (6 packages), reported neutrally on the development of the negotiations on the media, that is, that the parties were far from reaching an agreement and were passing blame on the fault for the standstill, and what was also broadcast was DUI's request that the Macedonian Radio and Television was renamed into Radio and Television of Macedonia.

The following week (February 13 – 19) 52 reports were broadcast. 24 Vesti, Telma, TV21, Alsat M and MTV 1 properly conveyed the statements of the participants in the process – the mediator Vanhoutte, the representatives of the parties and the journalists' associations, or provided expert discussions (TV21, February 19th: “Frozen” media negotiations. Is somebody going to break the ice over the media reforms!?). The pro-government media Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa covered this topic with an extremely negative attitude towards the Belgian expert, especially towards his activity on Twitter, where he expressed personal views on the daily events (February 19th, Alfa “The “Catman” changed his mind!/? The deadline was yesterday, but the controversial Belgian cat lover changed his

mind and the media negotiations continued today as well”, Sitel, February 16th: “Vanhoutte violated the declared objectivity by ridiculing the citizens on Twitter”).

In the third week 31 reports were aired on this topic, however in the context of intense political negotiations and mostly associated with the announcement of the president of VMRO-DPMNE, Nikola Gruevski, that he will no longer negotiate on the issue, and the reactions to his statement of the representatives of the European Union and the journalists’ organizations. The television which covered the topic more extensively was Alsat M, which on February 24th broadcasted an interview with the mediator in the negotiations, Peter Vanhoutte.

(7) The initiative submitted to the Constitutional Court

This was a remarkably present topic towards the end of the month (February 20 – 26), with 116 reports total. In the *initiative presented to the Constitutional Court* it was requested that the provisions from the Law on Pardoning that prevent the President of the state to pardon persons convicted of electoral irregularities should be cancelled. The broadcasters covered the submission of the initiative, its approval by the Constitutional Court with five votes “for” and four “against”, the reactions of the political entities and the public, as well as the protests of the citizens against the court decision. There were differences in the reporting. Part of the television broadcasters placed the initiative in the current context reminding that the provision is contested just when electoral fraud proceedings are brought against top officials from VMRO-DPMNE (Alsat M: “Is it a coincidence that the initiative came at a time when legal proceedings for possible criminal liability are brought against officials from VMRO-DPMNE”) or pointed out to the inconsistency of the constitutional judges (February 25th, 24 Vesti: “It is interesting that the same constitutional judges who in 2012 voted that a registry for pedophiles is constitutional, this time gave their vote for the right of pedophiles to be pardoned”). The other broadcasters (Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa) accused the opposition of inconsistency, to be precise that they opposed the adoption of the legal provision in 2009, and now they oppose its annulment, moving the focus away from the current context (February 25th, Sitel: “SDSM in 2009 voted against the amendments to the Law on Pardons, and today they take the opposite stand”; Kanal 5 “They used to claim that the amendments to Law on Pardons are unconstitutional, yet now they protest in front of the constitutional court, writes Press 24”; Alfa: “Current and former MPs of SDSM several years ago claimed that the amendments to the Law on Pardons are unconstitutional, yet now they protest in front of the Constitutional Court”). All three televisions broadcasted old statement of MP from SDSM Cvetanka Ivanova from 2009 in support of this thesis.

CURRENT – AFFAIR PROGRAMS

Throughout the monitored period, 38 editions total were aired of 11 different programs which are broadcast on televisions on a national level. Out of all of them, only the shows that continuously favourize a particular political entity were analyzed, i.e. the ones which violate the journalistic rule of professional distance from political entities, as well as the shows where hate speech or a discriminating and negative speech was detected against individuals or groups.

When speaking of the public broadcasting service there has been some improvement in the sense of greater balance in the selection of guests who are invited to debate shows. In both editions of the show ‘Akcent’ (Accent) on MTV1, in the observed period, the invited guests, despite the pro-government ones, also included analysts who are critically inclined towards the government who discussed the possibility for holding elections on April 24th and the work of the SPPO. That being said, in the show ‘Od nas ago!’ (‘From our perspective’) that was not the case. In both editions aired in February (on the topic of negotiations on the media and the upcoming elections) the guests were exclusively pro-government commentators and analysts. The hosts of the shows did not take a favourizing or an attacking attitude towards any entity, although with the guests the political inclinations were visible. In the show ‘Argument’ aired on MTV2, guests were journalists and analysts who are Albanians and who discussed the current political topics such as the Przino reforms, the possibility to hold elections on April 24th and the activities of the opposition parties of Albanians in Macedonia. There was no evidence of a favourizing or an attacking attitude towards political

entities in any of the shows. It is important to point out that, although there has been some improvement with the public service in the sense of a neutral approach taken by the hosts, still in the overall approach towards the organization of the debate shows, it remains that the selection of the guests, the absence of critical treatment of the topics and the absence of well renowned representatives of the opposition still speak of the fact that the public service still does not provide sufficient space for critical public debate on current political topics.

The pro-government private TV stations (Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa) hardly make any space for political pluralism in their current – informative shows, i.e. they try to present primarily the views of the ruling structure. They do not allow a chance for the oppositional actors to state their views or they attack or demonize them:

- Sitel has no debate shows with prime time slots. Only the show ‘Jadi burek’ was analyzed, which airs on Sitel 3 and where domestic political events are regularly commented on. In the monitored period 17 editions were analyzed. Because of the contents of the discussions and because of the attitude of the host and the guests, all these shows were indicative in terms of balance of the political opinions represented in them, i.e. the manner in which the political entities are treated by the host. Seven public persons were guests in the show, all of them close to the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE: **Aleksandar Pandov** – pro-government commentator, **Ivona Talevska** – Editor in Sitel and Vecer and President of MAN, **Ilija Dimovski** – coordinator of the MP group of VMRO-DPMNE, Cvetin Chilimanov - journalist and a pro-government commentator, Aleksandar Klimovski – university professor and pro-government commentator, Edmon Temelko – mayor of Pustec and suspected by the SPPO in the case of electoral crime, Filip Petrovski – director of the Archive of Macedonia and member of VMRO-DPMNE. In the shows, the host publicly invites on several occasions members of SDSM, however he claims that in the opposition party there is a ban on appearing in the show ‘Jadi burek’. What was typical for all three editions was the openly offensive and demonizing attitude of the host and of the guests directed towards the opposition and the non-critical and favourizing stand towards the ruling VMRO-DPMNE. The host did take a critical stand towards VMRO-DPMNE on several occasions, although in the sense that the ruling party is too permissive when it comes to the demands of the opposition. A similar attitude is expressed on several occasions from the callers in the show, however exceptions were present here, i.e. there were citizens who also criticized the ruling party. The host did not distance himself from the speech of his guests.
- When it comes to the shows aired on Kanal 5, the object of monitoring were the shows ‘Milenko Late Night Show’ and the show ‘Vo centar’ (‘In the Centre’). Four editions of the show ‘Milenko Late Night Show’ were analyzed, two of which were devoted to current internal-political events, and two on international politics. The shows from February 5th and 12th were dedicated to the topics of current internal-political events, and the guests in the studio were Dragan Pavlovic Latas (on February 5th) and Boban Nonkovic (on February 12th). In the show on February 5th the topic set by the host is the air pollution. Nedelkovski and Latas had an accusatory and negative stand towards SDSM and a positive stand towards the role of VMRO-DPMNE in the problem with pollution. By commenting on the previous work of the large industrial complexes in Skopje (OHIS, Zelezarnica, FAS 11 Oktomvri, Treska, etc.), Latas compared them to the concentration camps Treblinka and Ausvic to make the point of the negative impact from the closing of these factories and that the ones guilty for that are SDSM. In the show aired on February 12th Nedelkovski and the journalist Boban Nonkovic took a negative and accusatory stand towards SDSM, and also towards some journalists and NGOs (ZNM, MIM, etc.) who are critical towards the government. Once again the homophobic rhetoric of Nedelkovski could once again be heard in the show directed towards the LGBT community, which in fact is an implicit hate speech towards this group of people.

Example: “*They should be medically treated, they should be restricted by law, family values should be protected, our church and religion*“ Nedelkovski.

Example: “*If SDSM wins the elections, I propose that the homosexual from Kriva Palanka should become Minister for European Integrations because he could most easily integrate there with his body and mentally, if he can hold it*”, Nedelkovski.

Nedelkovski's practice of publishing private photographs of people who are not public personas and commenting on them in a negative or in an offensive context should also be specifically mentioned (he published a photograph of the son of a public person, hugging another boy with an offensive comment).

- Four editions of the show 'Vo Centar' of the journalist Vasko Eftov were analyzed in the observed period. The show aired on February 15th, dedicated to the initiative to create an Albanian orthodox church in Macedonia abounded with ethnic stereotypization and demonizing the 'Albanians'. Albanians were shown as attackers of the Macedonian orthodoxy by the host and the guests whose statements were given on the show. According to the way in which the sentences were formulated in this show, this could be categorized as hate speech.

Example: *The most aggressive population that civilization has given birth to are the Ghegs* „Tosks are not as aggressive as the Ghegs, they are a noble white race“ Petar Popovski.

Example: *“We can see, dear viewers, the wish to strike straight into the heart of being Macedonian, and that is the Macedonian religion and the Macedonian church.”* Vasko Eftov.

In the show on February 22nd, Eftov set as the topic the thesis that the opposition is led by the American Ambassador Jess Bailey. At the same time, the attitude towards SDSM is negative and accusatory and the party is designated as the 'executioner of foreign interests' who wish to 'demolish the foundation of Macedonian statehood, the church, the name and the authorities. In the show on February 29th a negative, offensive and also demonizing attitude could be seen towards SDSM and their leader Zoran Zaev. Eftov concluded that Zaev manipulated the case 'Lake Smilkovci' and the relatives of the murder victims and he made a parallel between the events from Divo Naselje and Lake Smilkovci, and at the same time used speculations to insinuate that SDSM is behind those events.

The other group of private televisions (Telma, 24 Vesti, ...) continued to make efforts to include in their debate shows as many political subjects as possible and to discuss various topics:

- Sixteen (16) editions of the show 'Top tema' ('Top Theme') were analyzed on Telma during the monitored period on various political topics. In two of the editions there was notice of an accusatory attitude coming from the guests towards the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE, however the hosts maintained a critical and neutral stand towards the political entities. During the observed period, as guests in the show were representatives of SDSM, DUI and in several editions the hosts underlined that representatives from VMRO-DPMNE were invited, however none responded to the invitations. The show hosts made sure that there was representation of commentators and analysts who support the standpoints of the government and of those who are critical towards these policies. All relevant topics from the current political events were touched upon: the option of holding the elections on April 24th, the Przino reforms, the work of the SPPO, the decisions of the Constitutional Court, the refugee and the migrant crisis, etc.
- Nine editions of the show '24 Analiza' ('24 Analysis') on 24 Vesti were analyzed during the monitored period, where the following topics were debated: the elections of April 24th and the options for their postponement, the political crisis, the action 'Titanic' of the SPPO, the electoral registry, the placement of monuments that cause ethnic turmoil, etc. In the shows there was no notice of a favourizing or an offensive attitude from the show hosts towards any political entities, positive or negative framing of political entities, nor was there any hate speech.

During the monitored period, four editions of the show 'Win-win' were also aired. In the shows there were no representatives of political entities as guests, rather there were journalists, analysts, artists and university professors who addressed the political situation. Also, no unsupported offensive or favouring attitude was observed against political entities.

- On Alsat M analyses were made of the shows ‘Patot kon’ (‘The Road Towards’), ‘360 stepeni’ (‘360 degrees’) and ‘200’. In the three editions that were analyzed of the show ‘Patot kon’ guests were representatives of DPA, DUI, SDSM and BESA, as well as journalists and representatives of media organizations. The topics for discussion were: the negotiations on the media, SPPO and the action titled Titanic, the cases Sopot and Monstrum and the current political turmoil in Butel and Chair. Eleven editions of the show ‘360 stepeni’ were analyzed. As guests in the show were representatives of DUI, SDSM, NGOs and the ambassadors of USA, France and the negotiations mediator Peter Vanhoutte. Also guests in the shows were analysts, commentators and journalists who discussed the current political events such as: the voting in Parliament on the postponement of the elections, the work of the SPPO and the Titanic action, revision of the electoral registry and the possibilities for pre-election coalitions of parties from the Macedonian and the Albanian political block. No favourizing or accusatory attitude was evident from the hosts of all three shows towards any political entities.
- On television TV 21 four editions of the show ‘Klik’ were analyzed. The guests in these editions were members of the parties SDSM, DUI, DPA and BESA, and the topics concerned the current political events and relations. In all editions there was no favourizing or negative attitude towards the political entities that was observed.

VI. METHODOLOGY

1) Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The method applied in this research is based on the theory of framing that explains how the media frame the topics of the social and political life on which they report. The frame of reporting (news frame) is the “central idea” or “story line” that organises the journalistic text and gives meaning to the outlined events. It is a central organising idea in the informative content that provides context and suggests the essence of the issue, through selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration.

The reporting frame contains four aspects: (1) *Topic* of the informative report – that is included in the frame; (2) *Presentation* – scope and position of the report; in addition, elements that are also assessed in terms of the presentation are photos, quotes, headlines and sub-headlines; (3) *Cognitive attributes* – details of the points included in the frame; (4) *Affective attributes* – the tone of reporting.

The data collection on the quantity of informing or the time devoted to different political parties does not give a complete picture of the pluralism presented by the media. The public image of the political parties, candidates and leaders is not only shaped by the time they are granted, but also by the way they are presented. The evaluation of the approach or the ‘tone’ of the report shows the attitude or the approach of the media outlet to the specific political entity. However, this is not sufficient to assess whether the media outlet reports objectively and accurately. Continuous false reporting is one of the most serious shortcomings in the coverage of political events, which can only be identified by a comprehensive qualitative analysis, which involves complex methodological procedures (for example, comparison of the reporting with the actual events or monitoring of the reporting of several media outlets on the same event).

2) Methodological Approach Applied in the Research

This research aims to determine whether media outlets comply with the professional standards in reporting on political actors defined in the Code of Journalists of Macedonia and the codes of conduct of international organizations. The analysis should answer the following research questions:

- What is the extent of presenting commentaries and opinions in the news that favour or attack certain political positions (unsoundly, or when journalists themselves take sides).
- What are the most evident instances of favouritism or demonisation of the political entities in the news?
- What are the most common instances of manipulation with the sources? Are the opinions of the sources quoted in the news opposing or do they basically represent the same position.

- Which political entities are commonly presented with direct address in the news? Are some political positions too prevalent and others disregarded?
- Is a manipulative audiovisual presentation used in the news? What are its most common forms?
- Do the news and the current affairs programmes contain explicit calls to violence, negative speech and stereotyping of certain groups?
- Are the different positions on the debate topics adequately presented in the current affairs programmes? Do presenters/journalists favour or demonise certain political entities?

The concepts of “unbiased” and “balanced” reporting which actually intertwine need to be defined in order to answer these questions. This segment of the analysis uses the definitions and methodological guidance provided in the *Guidelines on Media Analysis during Elections Observation Missions* prepared in 2005 by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Human Rights Directorate and the Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) of the Council of Europe and the European Commission. The quantitative aspect of the balance relates to the scale or time in the news allocated by the broadcaster for reporting on the activities of a candidate or organiser of an election campaign, whereas with qualitative aspect relates to the approach or ‘tone’ of the reporting.

The subject of this analysis is not the quantitative, but the qualitative aspect of the balance – the approach or the way in which the media “frame” political actors during election campaigns. In addition, the content in the news and in the current affairs programmes containing speech that incites and reinforces stereotypes, discriminatory speech or hate speech towards groups and individuals is also subject to the analysis.

The method used to answer the questions on the manner of framing of political parties is *content analysis* that is defined as a comprehensive approach that focuses on the qualitative and quantitative aspects of media reports/texts. Additionally, the *critical discourse analysis method* is used to determine whether certain content contains hate speech or discriminatory speech of groups and individuals. It is a qualitative method that emphasises the analysis of the function and meaning of the media texts in the present social and political context.

The frame of the reporting of the media on certain political entity is determined after the presence of several elements is encoded in the analysed report: explicit expression of opinions of the journalist/news room on the stakeholders; manipulative use of films, images and sounds; presence and selection of direct address of the political entity; the number and position of the sources; and the main topic that dominates the report.

3) Sample and Implementation Time-frame

All central informative releases and informative programmes of the television broadcasters aired from the 19th of November 2015 to the 29th of January 2016 were subject to analysis.

Samples from the following media outlet were included in the analysis: MTV 1, MTV 2, Sitel, Alsat M, Telma, Alfa, Kanal 5, 24 Vesti, and TV 21.

4) Research Team

The research team includes 15 analysts and 3 researchers from the Institute of Communication studies.

МОДЕМ

МОНИТОРИНГ НА ДЕМОКРАТИЈАТА ВО МАКЕДОНИЈА



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Kingdom of the Netherlands

И Н С Т И Т У Т



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