

PART 1

UNINFORMED MEDIA SPACE, CHANGED WAYS OF CONTROL AND IMPACT

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Twelve printed editions this year got lucky for covering state-run printing costs from last year. That year, the number of printed media received government subsidies was down by one, with a total of 11 print publications receiving state aid. However, that amount was about 700,000 euros. Although the government, along with representatives of some of the media community, justified the distributions as being maximally transparent and with the support of the Association of Journalists of Macedonia, the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) concludes that the criteria on the basis of which such assistance is granted are insufficiently precise and allow for inappropriate use of the allocated funds. The SCPC, as well as the community journalism, also point out that budget financing of a paid political campaign program is a potential risk of corruption and the creation of a clientelistic relationship.

According to the information obtained through the "Open Finances" tool, the Government of VMRO-DPMNE had spent as much as 38 million euros for the period 2008-2015 to advertise government policies, which 24 million were directly invested in the media. Since 2017, when the SDSM coalition came to power, the practice of government's advertising has ceased, but the rule has been introduced to subsidize print media in order to help with printing and distribution costs. The government has earmarked about 1.5m euros for print media subsidies over the past two years, while the State Election Commission (SEC) has spent around 4m euros only for the presidential election in 2019. While, through Parliament, about 1m euros in 2018 for the name-change referendum.

Most experts agree that these advertisements and subsidies can endanger the freedom of the media. And while the state is on the verge of new elections, this sentiment is also held by journalists, who find that corrupt practices were presented during the previous government also, and during the time of this government and despite the abolition of government advertising practices in the country in the media.

INDEPENDENCE OF PRINTED MEDIA - WITH GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES?

Executive Director of the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM), Dragan Sekulovski, says that two years ago as an organization they offered their proposals to the Government in order to make their contribution to change things. He says AJM and colleagues in the print media reviewed the findings of Priebe's report that generally print media were in economic decline and under economic pressure at that time.

An example of this, according to Sekulovski, this is the closure of the MPM company, a point that Priebe's report treats as a sign that this type of media is not viable without significant government support. Sekulovski says this was also the occasion for a research on subsidies, in order to prepare recommendations that are translated into the Public Policy Document to support print media in the media space.

AJM supports state aid to the print media, but with a model that will offset the costs of printing services and the distribution of all print media that contribute the most to their total costs.

"The percentage of reimbursement is different in different countries, but given the characteristics and realities on the ground, AJM thinks that percentage in Macedonia should be around 50 percent. The system of subsidizing printing and distribution costs should cover all print media that have public interest content, indiscriminately and under clear criteria", says Sekulovski.



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The government's list of subsidies this year included 12 print media, which received government support for printing and distribution in 2019. At the Government's call, 16 requested applications for assistance were received, of which 12 were approved, allocating 712,000 euros.

The highest amount for 2019 was received by the newspaper "Free Press" in the amount of 236,015 euros, second was "Vecher" with 137,176 euros, while "Nova Makedonija" received 110,401 euros. The list of print media that received subsidies included Albanian-language newspapers "Koha" with 80,864 euros and "Lajm" with 15,641 euros, "Focus" weekly with 75,037 euros and "Capital" with 34,081 euros, followed by the monthly Economics. and business "with 10,755 euros," Face to face "with 3,752 euros and" Shenja "with 3,446 euros. Subsidies are also awarded to local weekly newspapers "Bitola Vesnik" with 7.980 euros and "Zenith" with 4,825 euros.

ELECTIONS - A BIG CHALLENGE FOR THE MEDIA SPHERE

Upcoming elections in the country will be another major challenge for the media, especially when it comes to whether the media will play its essential role in providing objective, transparent and accountable information to the public. Although the most significant law regulating the media sphere was enacted two years ago - on December 28, 2018, the Assembly voted 79 to approve the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, which supported both the government and the opposition - with amendments to the law offered solutions on how to provide a transparent, independent, efficient and accountable regulatory body in the field of audio and audiovisual media services. The law has been amended these days, but generally with the changes of two years ago media workers have been allowed by law to take over the work of the media in their own hands, and politics to take it away.



However, things are not going in the right way. Media law professor, Snezana Trpevska, expressed dissatisfaction with what was happening in the Parliament in the past, primarily about the lack of candidates for the new composition of the Councils for the Macedonian Radio Television and the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services.

"The public broadcaster does not serve on the citizens because it is not transformed and I think it overlaps with some of its political games and interests, which is reflected in the interests of the citizens," Trpevska says.

She recalled the not-so-distant period, when she and her colleagues from the media community and foreign experts in the so-called "Przhinski Period" made their contribution to media reforms, which were then transposed into legal solutions in 2017, with the aim of to establish a positive climate in the media space. But this tenth round of elections, too, seems to have to take place without what was to be done, and these were the announcements of the appointment of the new composition of the MRT and AVMS Councils.



PART 2

RESEARCH: WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MEDIA CLIENTELISM?

For the needs of this story we conducted a survey with 30 journalists from print and electronic media in the country, which was conducted between November 20 and December 20, 2019. According to the results of the survey, clientelist practices and corruption in the media existed during the previous and during the present government also.



Most journalists responded affirmatively to the question of whether there were clientelistic practices in the media during the previous government. To the question "Are clientelist practices in the media space still present during this government", 86.6% answered "yes".

Of the three reasons used for influencing the media and journalists, the results showed that the majority of journalists consider media and individuals to be the most likely cause of funding, with a smaller number believing that it is the political pressures that are most prevalent in the media space, others cited intimidation and blackmail in the workplace. Some, however, feel the editor's presence in terms of attempts at manipulation and of the forms of clientelism in the media. Some respondents cited the collaboration of some journalists with marketing agencies as well as government spokesmen as the main cause of clientelism by engaging in specific projects. For some, the reason lies in the impact of the international focus on editorial policy-making and the inefficiency of journalistic organizations, and for others there is nepotism.

To the extent that politics and economic centers of power influence the emergence of clientelistic practice in the media space, 60% of journalists perceive the cause of corruption among media owners, 11% say that the owners and the the journalists as well, allow political and economic power to operate. in editorial policy, but also in the pursuit of benefit, while 29% refused to respond.

Some of the journalists, or 20% of them, were offered money to publish or or not to publish a story or article, most of them, more precisely 66.7% have no such experience, while 13.3% refused to answer the question. On the question "Do you consider that journalistic work in our country is essential for the political participation of the citizen and the functioning of the society", 73.3% stated that the profession is very



important in involving the citizens in influencing decision-making, others said that journalism is not such a crucial profession.

For the reputation of the journalistic profession in society, 80% of respondents think that it is low. In response to the additional question of explaining why they report the most for the low reputation of journalists, our respondents cited the reasons, among other things: illiteracy and corruption.

Regarding the question "Are those journalists engaged in investigative journalism faced with pressures and threats", most of the respondents consider that they are partially faced with pressures and threats.

In a survey of journalists, they were allowed the opportunity to give their assessment related to the current situation in all aspects in the media. In general, journalists believe that the media climate has improved in the last two years, but that it is far from what it should be, as long as there are media outlets that are still professional in presenting basic information, news, etc. However, there are also journalists who are truly professional and up to the high standards of the profession.

WHEN THERE IS MONEY, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE

Is media clientelism present only in North Macedonia or is it also present in other countries in the region? This answer comes from Zagreb-based Institute for Partnerships and Social Development, which researched the extent of media clientelism in all 6 Western Balkan countries, conducted between 2014 and 2018, showed that the country is at the top of the list.

The institute's executive director, Momir Poduvnjak, says the research was conducted within the framework of the Media Circle project, supported by EU pre-accession funds and the Civil Society Facility (CSF). He told us that the last measurement was made at the end of 2017 and that they had not entered the empirical data since the new government came to power in North Macedonia in 2016.

"The most characteristic and most visible problem for your country in 2017 is the consolidation of media ownership. Namely, a significant part of the media has fallen into the hands of the owners, with the media being a secondary activity in their business," says Poduvnjak.



According to him, in such a designed structure it is easy to buy media loyalty by favoring a secondary activity, which is often a business activity.

Professor Snezana Trpevska is on the same line. She says the picture of the ownership structure is more or less the same, and they are again serving the new government. "Media owners behave in the context we call clientelistic relationships, using the media to exert influence and some benefit from politics. Private media do not want to get out of the financial clientelist triangle. They want to continue serving the political elites, but that does not represent their interests in the role of public service broadcasters," she said.

In the section on N. Macedonia, in a report from the Poduvnjak-led project, said the country was "falling in the Index of media clientelism, especially as regards the ability of the state to comprehensively understand the state of the media according to the declarative availability of data, which means a problem in detecting and preventing clientelistic practices. "



"Full transparency of true ownership of the media is essential, as a first priority that must be addressed by all future policies governing the media space, but that comprehensive media ownership registrations, financial and material support must be available. awards the media subsidies as well as declared interests of those involved in deciding on media issues. The financial 'support' of the media with budgetary means has been a well-known model to all authorities in Macedonia in recent years," the report said.

But who is behind the media in the country? According to data obtained through the Law on Free Access to Public Information and Open Databases, most of the Macedonian televisions, radios and print media are owned by individuals.

Of the 49 television stations - only 14 are owned by legal entities, and most of them are state-run television stations. Namely, nine out of the 12 state-owned televisions, four of the eighteen regional televisions and only one of the nineteen local televisions are owned by legal entities.

Almost all commercial radio stations broadcasting are owned by one or more natural persons. Legal entities own only six radio stations - one at the state level, two regional and three local radio stations. Of the 22 print media publishers, 19 are owned by one or more natural persons, and the owners of only three publishers are legal entities.

Foreign physical or legal entities are the owners of ten media outlets: four television stations (Alfa TV - from Serbia and Hungary; Kompany TV 21 - from Kosovo, Klan TV - from Albania and TV 24 News - from Austria), one radio station (RA Urban FM - from Finland and China) and five print media publishers (Repro Print and Capital Media Group - from the Virgin Islands, Free Press and Color Media - from Serbia and Independent Balkan News Agencies - from Greece).

In 2018, four legal entities and three natural persons were owners of more than one broadcaster. As of June 2019, capital integration exists only between: state-level television Chennai and regional Era TV; then state-run television Our TV and regional radio station FHM; as well as the regional TV station Uskana One and the local TV station Uskana Media and the state-level radio station Metropolis and the regional radio station City. In 2018, the Agency made a total of seven decisions approving a change in the ownership structure of three televisions and four radio stations.

WITHOUT FINANCIAL, THERE IS NO MEDIA FREEDOM

According to AJM research and the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers, the average journalistic salary does not even reach 300 euros. The results of the analysis show that the term "economically reliable journalist" can not even be reached in the country, as 85% of the journalists have a salary of less than 500 euros per month, and 45% have a salary lower than the national average of 376 euros. The analysis was conducted in August 2017, involving 127 media workers. The average salary in the media branch is less than 300 euros, or slightly more than 17,600 denars.

55% of the surveyed workers are late paid, while 54% of the journalists are not employed indefinitely, and 19% are temporarily employed as part-time contractors.

Professor Snezana Trpevska, too, says the worrying trend of increasing unreliable employment with part-time or part-time employment is very worrying.

"It makes the position of journalists and media workers even more difficult and more susceptible to pressure and blackmail. It is therefore our alarm that only an economically reliable and freelance journalist can produce professional media content and use the power of the journalistic community to realize that



questions about how much media workers are paid and in what conditions they work is a common goal. " she thinks.



PART 3

JOURNALIST'S ALARM - JOURNALISM IS STILL DEVALUATED

Journalist Hristo Ivanovski believes that, despite the modern trends, there are still media outlets that are close to the government and the opposition.

"As long as the media is influenced by different centers of power, there will be no professional journalism. The media is constantly targeting journalists to write commissioned texts or just read it, even though they themselves often do not know what the background is at the moment," Ivanovski says.



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In the recent period, he adds, "we are seeing improvements in journalism, but more responsibility is needed. In some newsrooms, there are constant pressures and often if a journalist refuses to write biased on a particular topic, he or she faces a salary penalty or threats of dismissal if he or she fails to do what he or she is told. "

"This requires encouragement for a journalist with sound arguments to reject that kind of writing. In addition, the monthly income of journalists does not correspond to the responsibility that a journalist has, "says Ivanovski.

Journalist Toni Glamchevski thinks that professionalism is low, but this is not due to the journalists alone.

"Each of us has his own political, ideological and religious conviction, but this should not turn into partisan behavior and the media into party media of one or the other party, in power or in opposition. It has become really difficult to differentiate what is news from a journalist or text taken from a social network or a spokesman for a party or government, "he says.

The other problem, according to him, is the financial dependence of journalists and the media on political and economic centers of power. He emphasizes:

"So many media outlets in Macedonia have been created, especially online, but also local and national radio and television, without a true and quality written press, which certainly contributes to the unprofessionalism of the media and their reliability." Another aspect, Glamchevski adds, is the non-giving. the true protection of journalists - as a profession. "Despite existing unions and associations, journalists are still left to their own devices against the editors and above all the bosses of those media," he said.

According to journalist Dusko Arsovski, almost nothing has changed for the better in the media space, although expectations have been high.

"The same pests in the media (especially televisions) remained to be factors in the media market so that the owners subtly (some brutally) turned the plate and now acted as a balancing act in the reporting. This responds to everyone", Arsovski emphasized.

According to him, the new government should show a difference from the previous one that captured the state by concluding a new pact in which now all those who have destroyed journalism become part of a project to improve the media sphere. "Absurd of an epic scale. He went a step further. Ministers broadly and unintentionally accepted interviews with journalistic pests, thereby feeding their legitimacy but at the same time trampling on what they had previously trumpeted and criticized as opposition, "he added.

According to him, AJM continues to be an "armchair" group that talks to diplomats, organizes round tables, participates in a dialogue with the government and so far has no concrete indication that the media is free of political influence from other centers of power.

For longtime media worker from the Center for Media Development (CRM), Dejan Georgievski, who actively participates in media policy-making, most of the provisions of the Electoral Code relating to media coverage of election campaigns are standard for all similar legislation.

"Here I mean the obligation to provide fair, balanced and impartial information and coverage of the activities of candidates, the obligation of all election participants to be granted, on equal terms, access to all types of electoral media presentation ..."

What, he argues, is controversial, despite the above-mentioned obligation to provide equal access, the Electoral Code actively supports established parties through different treatment in terms of quotas reserved



for paid political advertising, or in terms of quotas for ruling majority and opposition to parties not represented in Parliament or political parties established between the previous election and the election subject to media coverage.



EUROPE RESERVED TO POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENTS

In Europe there is no unified approach to this issue. Some countries, for example the United Kingdom, Ireland, Switzerland, but also Sweden, Norway or France, have partial or complete bans on political advertising in broadcasting. The UK, for example, allows the so-called. "Party political shows" referring to party conventions, conferences and similar events, defining specific time periods in which such "broadcast" must be broadcast. Other countries allow political advertising only during election campaigns, believing that transmitting such messages is crucial for citizens to make an informed choice on election day. Denmark, on the other hand, bans broadcasting political messages during the campaign to "protect voters from undue influence" and to prevent discrimination against smaller or minority parties that do not have as much funding as large established parties.

Although the European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly stated that such prohibitions are considered as an unlawful restriction on the right to freedom of expression, they persist, and the regulation or self-regulation of such issues is left to be resolved locally / nationally, depending on the local context, situation or traditions. The print and online media are subject to far milder access to regulation. That has changed, however, especially in light of recent experiences with the use and abuse of social media advertising during the 2016 US presidential election or the voting in the UK referendum on the EU (Brexit). Some steps in the area of regulating political advertising on social networks have already been made, and further steps are expected, both from legislators and from major technology platforms. Lastly, we have Twitter's decision to ban political advertising on the platform, as well as Facebook's decision not to fact-check political advertising on the network. Otherwise, like all other types of political party financing, the financing of election campaigns and media presentations is subject to rather strict regulation.





Commissioner Bojan Kordalov, who specializes in modern technological processes in the media, says there is a need to introduce a system of media protection in the country in order to reduce the possibility for the government to influence them, including the public service, with emphasis on be placed on media self-regulation. In terms of advertising, however, he says he has never been a vocal opponent or supporter, for the simple reason that this topic is not black and white as political parties and their exponents want to put it.

"Let's be plastic. The previous government thought it should be promoted and boasted of popular money, and the then opposition was against it. When the opposition became incumbent, its public relations spokesmen offered subsidies to the print media and even went a step further, announcing that they would fund research stories in the media," said Kordalov.

He clarifies that "the government wants to convince the citizens that it will pay the media to criticize it." "Believe that in neither of the two approaches (to the previous and current government) will the government persuade citizens and media workers that they are sincere. intent in media relations, that is, these measures are intended to deter political and governmental influence in the media. "

Frame: TO WHOM SERVES THE PUBLIC BROADCAST SERVICE?

The Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, which has been amended several times so far, has brought the country closer to EU legislation, but the law has not been fully implemented. Concerns remain over public service reforms.

In a research entitled "The Future for the Absent Present" media expert, Klime Babunski, addresses the question of what the role of the public service broadcaster should be, taking into account the assessments and recommendations of a group of 2017 experts on the rule of law issues . "It can be said freely that what links all the changes that have been taking place in and around MRT since the early 1990s is their failure to establish and operate a public service broadcaster in the country. Therefore, MRT is much more a "blind transition street" than a public service broadcaster," he said.

In his policy recommendations for what should happen at MRT, Babunski recommends that a necessary, large, Copernican turnaround be made at MRT to respond to the role and needs of a truly public service.

According to him, the current new Law on Amendments to the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services has shown a serious intention to discontinue existing clientelist practice, the decision-making structure of MRT no longer being the result of loyalty to the party-political ruling elite, but should be the result of choosing a MRT revitalization model. However, such a principled intention, - adds Babunski - "first of all for a clear goal, at the expense of party influence to increase social influence in the management of MRT, is stalled by the opposition, which means political reality will continue to hold MRT hostage." "



On the other hand, the Director General of MRT, Marjan Cvetkovski, believes that the financial model, according to the legal solution, is respected in order for this service to have independence. But, he says, there are many limitations in the work because MRT's legal status is not fully defined.

"One of the reasons for this is that some state bodies, such as the State Audit Office, under the current law see television as a public company, which should operate as such, although in the media law the public service is defined as Public. a diffuse company," says Cvetkovski. Another problem, according to him, is the fact that since 2015 MRT employees are included in the group of administrative staff as service providers.

"Here we are preserved with serious consequences. For example, MRT cannot carry out the project of opening correspondent centers where some areas need to be rented out just because the government is not authorized to do so, but other institutions. Because of this, four correspondent centers owned by MRT have been equipped and provided with equipment, but now they cannot be used," says Cvetkovski.

For the Minister of Accountability and Transparency Robert Popovski, the way or model of financing for MRT may not be ideal, but it still provides greater financial stability, which makes this service now able to repay debts, operate more easily, acquire new programs, co - finance co - products.

"Yes, there are difficulties in financing on one side of the spectrum, but on the other hand, it should be reminded of the fact that the AVMS law was stuck for a year and reforms needed to start. It was only adopted in 2018 but not fully implemented to begin the procedure for selecting new members of the national service councils and AVMS as the regulatory body," said Popovski.

Biljana Petkovska from the Macedonian Institute for Media (MIM) says that from the work of all MRT councils so far, the general conclusion is that none of them has performed their role and task successfully. "The impression from MIM's research is that they functioned and functioned only to formalize the decisions of the ruling parties. The issue of depoliticization of the MRT Program Council is an important issue for media independence, which we have been pointing to in recent years especially during the political crisis that ended with the Prespa Agreement. And this issue will become even more important if we get a date for negotiations with the EU," Petkovska says.

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