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Media and media model as factor for media culture in the Republic of North Macedonia

Abstract

The media and the media model are factors that influence the level of mass culture and media literacy in communities. One of the sub-segments of mass culture is media culture. The media culture reflects attitudes, expectations, and values of the citizens regarding the media and the consumption of media content. The focus of this paper will be given to several questions: 1. analysis of the setup of the media model in the Republic of North Macedonia and 2. evaluation and grading of the media in The Republic of North Macedonia. In this context, all relevant reports on the situation with the media in the Republic of North Macedonia by relevant international institutions for a certain period will be presented. The paper is based on official reports on the situation with the media and the results of conducted research. The research shows that the degree of mistrust among the citizens in the media is a result of the politicization and deep division in the media sector into “pro-governmental” and “opposition” media, which is a kind of reflection of the deep political polarization in the Macedonian society. Media and journalists are generally considered to have a dominantly active control-critical role i.e., journalistic research contributes towards discovering numerous scandals, corruption, and various forms of nepotism. For example, even 80.3 percent of respondents think that the media and journalists have the power and contribute to the detection of irregularities in the system (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). This percentage can be and should be interpreted by the media, journalists, and their associations as an opportunity that should be used for building confidence in the public towards journalists and the media. The public service has extremely low ratings and trust among the citizens. If we take into consideration that the majority of citizens are informed about the most important social topics by the news on television, then the data about the low rating of the program services of the Macedonian Television should be taken very seriously, because it indicates there is no influential public medium that will impartially inform the citizens about the official state policy.

Keywords:

Media, media culture, communications, journalism

Introduction

Two media systems are defined at a global level: American and European. These two systems have different socio-political grounds and legal characteristics. Looking from the perspective of political tradition and political culture, the Republic of North Macedonia belongs to the European media system or organization of the media. In the European system there is a specific kind of political socialization of the media, whereas political public is being cherished and respected. This public is not to be considered as a market and traditionally it has never been compared to the treatment of the political public in the USA, which are to be considered leaders of the American type of media system. Series of analysis, including this one, have shown that the media model in the Republic of North Macedonia is not likely to be characterized as a typical European media system.

Most typical for the European media system is the existence of a strong public broadcaster center, then multi political pluralism of the media and the journalists, guaranties for independence of the media, as well as standards in the journalistic profession, with an accent to professionalization and intellectualization of the journalist.

In this paper, data from a research study from 2017¹ will be used (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). The research had two segments: 1. Citizens' perception of the media system and journalism (general public) in the Republic of North Macedonia or to be precise - what the citizen believes is the role of the media in political communications. Then, if the media and the information for politics influence citizens' political decisions and if citizens are aware for possible misuses and special media techniques and methods for creating „desired public opinion“; and 2. Journalistic attitudes (expert public) for conditions that the media system of the Republic of North Macedonia is offering in terms of professional standards, ethical frames and investigative journalism.

We also analyzed the reports on the democratic progress (in terms of media) of the Republic of North Macedonia of important institutions such as the European Commission and renowned international organizations such as Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House.

Media Model in The Republic of North Macedonia

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the audience numbers of the public broadcaster are plummeting, because only 3,9 percent of the citizens have said that they are following the public broadcaster compared to 81.7 percent of citizens which follow private national televisions. Low levels of ratings are registered for the online TV stations. For example, TV Nova 2.7 percent, local televisions like TV Kiss 0,9 percent, televisions of the communities 0,7 percent, regional televisions (HRT, TV PINK, RTS etc.) 1.2%, foreign televisions (CNN, AL JAZEERA, BBC...) 5.7.

1 Jasna Bacovska Nedikj, Goce Pacemski, Citizens and journalists for professionalism in the media <http://www.cup.org.mk/> - this research and analysis is perception of the citizens and journalists in the Republic of Macedonia for the media system and the level of media culture in the Macedonian society.

Almost one third of the citizens i.e., 32,8 percent have said they follow the foreign TV stations (CNN, AL JAZEERA, BBC), and 38,8 percent have pointed out the public broadcaster as another media they follow. Exactly 29.6 percent of the citizens (Albanian, Roma) have said that they follow the media of the communities, while 41.1 percent do not follow these media (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

With the introduction of cable and satellite television, a question for diasporic or so-called transnational audiences has arisen. Transnational audience consists of the members of national minorities or communities that live in one state². A study from the 90-s of the 20-th century has shown that the minorities (now communities) in the Republic of North Macedonia primarily follow satellite programs of their own national countries, and then the private TV stations based on national grounds, afterward Macedonian commercial televisions, and at the end Macedonian television (Dona Kolar Panova, 2000). The same is happening in the countries of Western Europe. For example, the Turkish minority in Germany. Naturally, this fact should be taken into account when we consider for political behavior of the members of the communities of the Republic of North Macedonia and the structure of their behavior.

The influence over the media in the European media system varies from country to country and that control depends from the type of political system. The control over the state media is being done by the ones who control the state and the media follow the official state politics, not the one of the party.

While at the global level, empirical surveys show that, with the growth of the internet and online journalism, the distrust in television of the viewers, especially youngsters, is growing. A high percentage of 46.7% of the respondents in the Republic of North Macedonia have declared that they get the information about the most important social areas (politics, economy) from television (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). The theorist Fidler speaks about the phenomenon of technomyopia when we give too much meaning to the influence of new technologies, considering that the main development goes in direction of the new media or to be exact - multimedia. His opinion seems to be typical for the Republic of North Macedonia.

Indicators: Media Culture and Macedonian Citizens

In regards to how citizens rank quality and the degree of objectivity about the information on politics and political events, the research showed that the news, whether they are presented on television, radio, newspaper or informative portals, has the highest credibility or 39.2 percent i.e., the respondents believe that the most objective information come from the news. Then, the debate shows have been ranked high (for example: “Top Tema on Telma”, “360 Stepeni” on Alsat, “Samo Vistina” on Kanal 5, “Zid” on Alfa etc. Exactly 29.4 percent of the respondents said that these sources provide objective information. Only 10,2 percent of citizens believe that good quality knowledge of certain political happenings can be obtained from documentaries (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

One-fifth of the citizens i.e., 20,1 percent said that they watch the news most often on TV Telma, while 19.4 percent answered that their source was TV Sitel. Only 5.9 percent of the respondents said that they watch the news on the public broadcaster (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017)..

2 So, for example, diasporic public is the Indian community in Great Britain, Turkish community and Albanian minority in North Macedonia, Turkish community in Germany, Macedonian minority in Bulgaira etc.

The most objective television station according to 55.9 percent of the citizens is TV Telma, while the least objective for 54.7 percent is TV Sitel. Exactly 39.7 percent consider the Macedonian radio television1 (MRT1) to be unobjective and 35.2 percent believe this broadcaster is objective. MRT2 - the Macedonian radio television 2 (second channel) is also considered to be unobjective according to 37.5 percent of citizens (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). The opinion about Kanal 5 is divided - 41.4 percent consider this TV station to be unobjective, while 39.1 percent believe it is objective (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). For a large percentage of citizens, ALSAT M is objective, or to be precise for 44.8 percent. In regards to how much citizens believe one TV station, 47.2 percent of the respondents again pointed to TV Telma, and they believe TV Sitel the least, where 59 percent have reflected distrust. High percentage of distrust has been noticed also towards the public broadcaster i.e., 50 percent of respondents said they do not believe the broadcaster or to be precise, saying that they do not believe both channels MTV1 and MTV2 (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

Journalistic Profession in the Republic of North Macedonia - Tendencies

Journalism is an important segment of the media, especially in the sphere of politics. Journalism is generally an unregulated profession in the Republic of North Macedonia, as in most European countries (European journalism). There are no criteria for entering the profession as in other professions (doctors, lawyers, architects), anyone can be a journalist, even without formal criteria about the level and type of education. Whether journalism is a profession or not has been a subject of academic discussion for a long time, but also this issue is the focus of journalistic self-perception. If by applying formal criteria, a conclusion is reached that journalism is not a profession, it remains only the undeniable dramatic importance/influence of the media, and that is the fact that journalists have professional responsibility towards the public. The questions about the standards of professionalization and the conditions in journalism are actualized in a package with the media system. Regarding the conditions for employment, the majority of the journalists who participated in this research (77.9%) reported that they are full-time employees, while 11.7% work on a contractual basis (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).. When asked which is the most important factor in the personnel policy of the media (employment of journalists) in the Republic of North Macedonia, 39.9% of the respondents answered that these are professional qualifications and personal characteristics (skills), while 28.8% think that these are personal connections or lobbying (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). Furthermore, they were asked which is the second most important factor in the personnel policy of the media (employing journalists) in the Republic of North Macedonia, and the same factor again emerges as the most common answer to the previous question.

A particularly interesting fact in the research is that almost half of the journalists (47.2%) stated that the political views of the media where they work are in accordance with their personal political views, while for 31.3% of journalists it is not in accordance with their personal political views (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).. This is a sufficient indicator that self-selection in employment is also a modality of self-censorship. Journalists are inclined to be employed in media outlets whose political orientation corresponds to their attitudes. In the Republic of North Macedonia, after the independence and restructuring of the media system, one can notice the “movement” of the journalists according to their political interests, even without carrying out any research.

But this is a typical feature not only of our system. In critical theories (Noam Chomsky, for example), the concept of ‘extortion’ is conceptualized, when a reporter who is employed in a financially powerful media company must support the position of the main editorial line and the owner of the media outlet³. Asked whether they believe that some criteria should be introduced for entering the profession “journalist” in the Republic of Macedonia, 73% of the respondents answered positively, while only 17.8% answered that criteria for entering this profession should not be introduced (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

This attitude of the journalists in the Republic of Macedonia is in line with the tendency in journalism from the 20th century, but today there is an inevitable need for professionalization in journalism, which will contribute to more journalists entering the profession through journalistic schools with an appropriate diploma⁴. Journalism schools⁵ on a global level has a traditional approach to journalistic education, which includes general journalistic knowledge and training on journalistic skills. Almost half of the journalists who believe that some criteria for entering the profession “journalists” should be introduced (47.1%) answered that this should be a specific diploma, 39.5% as a criterion indicated the diploma of higher education, while a third of them (33.6%) refer to the license as a criterion, namely, according to the statements of the interviewed journalists, the majority of the journalists (76.7%) are not specialized in reporting/writing and research in a particular area, and they work in several areas in parallel, while only less than one-fifth of the journalists (17.2%) work in one area for which they are specialized (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). Almost a third (29.2%) of the low percentage of journalists who specialize in reporting/writing and research in a particular area work in the field of politics, 20.8% work in the field of economics, while (12, 5%) work in the field of the judiciary (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). Only 8.2% of the journalists in Macedonia work on the topics of “corruption” and “organized crime”, which are the focus of investigative journalism in developed democracies and their media systems (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).. Topics in the field of “healthcare” are covered by 4.2% of journalists, which can be interpreted as a disastrous and extremely illogical figure, considering the fact that this area refers to the health and quality of life of all citizens. “During the last decades, in conditions of growing competition, professionalization in journalism has grown, although, when it comes to this profession, it is still impossible to talk about strict rules of professionalization (Glutz/Langenbucher 1993).”

3 Editor-in-chief of the New York newspaper Time, Ray Cave, in 1984, declared openly: “Although in Time, we have employees with a variety of persuasions, they must respect the position of the newspaper in relation to the topic they write. If the author’s position is not identical with the one of Time, that text cannot be published by the newspaper.

4 In order to achieve this global approach to conceptual journalism education, we must emphasize that Mark Deuze writes in his notes about various examples of international collaborative projects in assessing the needs for changes in journalism and journalism education. Namely, calls for attention to the following initiatives: 1) In Europe: various publications and programs for journalistic trainings in the European Journalism Center in Maastricht, The Netherlands, merging graduates and students into the international collaborative program “Eurojournalism” by schools in Wales, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. 2) In Africa: reviews, notices and programs from the Southern Africa Media Training Trust and the Media Institute of Southern Africa, as well as reviews provided by media professionals. 3) In Asia-Pacific: various collaborations between schools and media institutions and universities in the region, including Europe and the United States as partners. 4) In South America: research and training programs for the entire region began with the Ciespal Institute in Quito, Ecuador. 5) Globally: the UNESCO Journet initiative, a self-proclaimed global network for professional education in the field of journalism and the media: Global Journalism Education: A conceptual approach, Mark Deuze, Routledge, Journalism Studies, Vol. 7, No 1, 2006, introduction: Future of Journalism Education, Challenges and Prospects, Media Dialogue, Journal for Research of the Media and Society, 2012, <https://medijskidijalozi.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/md-number-13-14.pdf>

5 The term school is generally accepted as a term meaning a name that indicates an institution or part of that institution (for example faculty, department, college, division).

The modern journalist should have a solid general education and interdisciplinary knowledge from different fields gained at the university level and specialist knowledge that will cover the social fields (politics, sports, medicine, economics, electrical engineering, education, entertainment, science, fashion, etc.).

The specialization in journalism certainly cannot completely follow the social differentiation.

The majority of interviewed journalists (52.8%) reported that they personally did not face pressure or threat from their employer/media or other stakeholders, while 28.8% responded positively to this issue (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). Quite the contrary is the opinion on the pressures and threats on journalists dealing with investigative journalism. Namely, 64.4% of the researched journalists think they are facing pressures and threats, while almost a quarter (24.5%) consider themselves only partly facing pressures and threats. Given the increasing number of publicly presented cases in which journalists were faced with attacks and court proceedings in the last few years, it is less puzzling to see that the largest percentage of researched journalists (42.9%) had no answer to the question of whether they can recall the name of a journalist who was “the victim of his work” in the Republic of Macedonia or the region (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). Only a third of them (32.5%) said they could, while almost a quarter (25.5%) cannot remember a name of a colleague of theirs who, because of their work was the target of attacks and persecution by the institutions (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

However, among the journalists who remembered the name of a journalist who was “the victim of their job” in the Republic of North Macedonia or the region, the majority of them (87.2%) answered that they remembered Tomislav Kezarovski (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). Such a result is not surprising, since the trial of journalist Kezarovski attracted much public attention, triggered political turbulence and protests by several civil society organizations and was singled out in the EC reports as an example of political pressure on the media and journalists.

We can conclude that in the Republic of North Macedonia both at the general level and at the level of the journalistic profession there is a crisis in trade union organization. In such conditions, the worker’s fight for work is a personal choice. Trade union activism is a guarantee for the exercise of rights and a reduction in pressure on journalists and a prerequisite for freedom of the media. The state must have a responsibility and should demonstrate awareness that outside of the public sector, trade union organization is de facto aggravated and almost impossible.

The results of this research show that 42.9 percent of the interviewed journalists do not feel protected by the trade union organizations of journalists in the Republic of North Macedonia, while 39.3 percent feel only partially protected. Trade unions and professional associations are an extremely important factor for the integrity of a profession and its credibility in society (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

The level of integration in professional associations is a guarantor of higher business ethics, greater credibility, and higher social status in a profession (comparing: a doctor’s chamber, a bar association, etc.). This research showed that there is a very high percentage of journalists who are not members of any professional association. Namely, the distribution of responses from journalists who stated that they are members (50.3%) and those who stated that they are not members (49.7%) of any professional journalistic association in the country, are almost equal (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

The high percentage of journalists who are not members of a journalist association may be the reason why journalists think that these associations do not do their job at all and do not sensitize them about the important problems, questions, information and opportunities in the profession. 44.2 percent of the journalists are not sufficiently sensitized by professional journalistic associations in the Republic of North Macedonia, while 22.7 percent answered that they are sufficiently sensitized by these associations (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

The political crisis also had repercussions in this sphere. The core of professional association has broken down, professional associations have been formed on a political basis, like in other social areas where parallel associations have been formed, which is completely contrary to professionalism. The problem of journalists' distrust of their professional associations remains. 28.8 percent of the journalists think that the professional associations of journalists in the Republic of North Macedonia are politicized, but what can be taken as a certain indicator is that a very high percentage of journalists (58.3%) have no opinion on this issue, while only one-eighth of journalists (12.9%) think that professional associations of journalists are not politicized and they are professional (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

Professional organizations such as the International Federation of Journalists⁶, the International Press Institute and the International Publisher Association have numerous actions and prepare reports on certain issues such as media concentration and transparency in terms of regulations on freedom of information or corruption. They are supported by civil society organizations specialized in the freedom of the press and the media, such as the "Article 19" organization for reporters without borders, as well as non-governmental organizations for human rights such as Amnesty International, International Council on Human Rights Policy, etc.

Apart from the many opportunities for protection and promotion of the profession offered by international organizations of journalists (grants, scholarships, training...), most the domestic journalists are not members of international associations. When asked if they are members of an international journalist association, the majority of journalists (87.7%) answered negatively, while one in eight journalists (12.3%) answered that they were members of an international journalist association (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

As we have previously pointed out, journalism and journalists are one of the most important components of the media system (clarification: the media refers also to movies, advertisements, music and entertainment). In the process of formation of political communication, the journalists are the mediator that enables communication between the social groups. Based on expert perception, it can be concluded that in the period after gaining independence of the Republic of Macedonia and as a result of certain socio-political circumstances, such as the dissolution of the SFRY, the creation of a state, the transition from one socio-political system to another, as well as the developments in the media system etc., a character of a strong journalist with a pronounced socio-political function was imposed. Those journalists had a strong influence on the perceptions of the citizen and politics and also on other social processes like the globalization, economy, culture, and ecology.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, 79.8 percent of the citizens (the respondents in this research) believe that the journalistic work is essential for the political participation of the citizen and the functioning of democracy, and only 12.9 percent claimed the opposite, exactly 80.3 percent of the respondents claimed that the journalists have a very active control-critical role and that the journalist research contributes to revealing irregularities of the system such as scandals, corruption, and nepotism. Only 12.8 percent of the respondents think that the journalists do not reveal certain irregularities. However, a high percentage of the respondents, 60.4 percent think that the journalists with their writings can't influence voter views or voting decisions. On the other hand, a solid percentage of 36.2 of the respondents said that journalists could influence their decision on the elections (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

6 ZNM is a member of the International Federation of Journalists.

In this context, it may be interesting to note that 39.5 percent of the citizens are inclined to check the information they receive from the media (through other media, interpersonal communication, later information), 28.5 percent of the citizens reported that sometimes they check the information received from the media, while 30.8 percent reported that they do not verify the information received from the media (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

The citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia, or more precisely the sample of citizens that was interviewed, have a partial or low degree of confidence in journalists and their work because they think they are corrupt. A high 52.4 percent of the respondents believe that there is corruption, influence, threats to the journalists in the media and 28 percent of the citizens believe that only some individual journalists are corrupt (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

It is interesting to point out that the journalists themselves claim that there is corruption in the media and among the journalists. Namely, the majority of journalists (89.6%) believe that there are corrupt journalists in the Republic of North Macedonia. According to 36.9 percent of the interviewed journalists, the corruption among the journalists is the main reason for the low reputation of the journalistic profession in the country. Namely, 71.2 percent of interviewed journalists consider that journalists have a low reputation in society, and only 3.7 percent think that their social reputation is high (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

According to 30.6 percent of the respondents, the organization of the media system (media legislation) in the country is the second important reason for the low social reputation of journalism. Despite such indicators for the level of corruption among journalists, as well as the low reputation of the journalistic profession, 76.7 percent of the interviewed journalists think that the citizens have partial trust in their work, while 18.4 percent of the journalists think that the citizens do not have trust in their work at all (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

The corruption, the organization of the media system (media legislation), the lack of education of certain journalists are the reasons that reflect on the status and the valuation of this profession in the social sphere. The journalists have a low social status. A negative image of the journalistic profession is dominant. The profession is seen as a pseudo-profession and as unserious. In the theories of journalism and in the empirical research, this is confirmed by the fact that the stereotypes contribute to the fact that many people, besides their profession, also deal with journalism. One of the first to write about the prestige of journalism was Max Weber in his writings “Politics as a Profession”.

Macedonia has not been a “free country“ since 1998

The media system today is one of the criteria for democratic equality and protection of human rights and is no longer a condition for a democratic political system, but, as an absolute channel for political communication, it is a part of the democratic political system. Because of these reasons, the media system in the Republic of North Macedonia has been and still is being monitored by affected institutions, especially the EU for which we have representative reports that have been many times quoted and debated.

North Macedonia ranked 90th out of 180 countries in the newest 2021 World Press Freedom Index⁷ of the “Reporters without borders”. In 2020 the country was two places down, ranking at 92. Still, in the newest report, it is noted that “impunity culture persists”.

7 <https://rsf.org/en/north-macedonia>

“2020 was an extraordinary year for North Macedonia. Parliament was dissolved, a provisional government took over, and then snap parliamentary elections had to be postponed because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting state of emergency. The situation of the media worsened, senior government officials continued to threaten and insult media outlets, while cyber-harassment and verbal attacks against journalists increased on social media. All this served to reinforce the well-entrenched culture of impunity. At the same time, the pandemic complicated reporting. Organizations that represent the media strongly opposed the various proposed amendments to the state and privately-owned broadcast media law that would allow state advertising in the media. They opposed this on the grounds that it could encourage clientelism. The justice ministry is drafting a new penal code that should make journalists and media workers safer”, is stated in the latest report.

The Republic of North Macedonia is defined as “partly free”, being ranked 67 in the newest report of Freedom House “Freedom in the world 2022”⁸. It is noted that “North Macedonia continues to struggle with corruption and clientelism. While media and civil society participate in vigorous public discourse, journalists and activists still face pressure and intimidation”. In the previous report for 2021⁹, North Macedonia has been ranked 66 also being defined as a “partly free country”. In that report it is noted that “North Macedonia continues to struggle with corruption, and while the media and civil society participate in vigorous public discourse, journalists and activists face pressure and intimidation”. It has also been “partly free” in the report for 2020¹⁰.

The reports in previous years were also not satisfactory. The respectable organization “Reporters without Borders” published the newest World Press Freedom Index¹¹ in April 2019, where it was stated that North Macedonia has gone up by 14 places, but is still ranked among the last in the region. In that report, it is stated that it is pitiful that still, high officials have tendencies of habits to intimidate journalists. Improvements in the field of safety of the journalists have also been noted, explaining that the number of attacks in 2018 has reduced threefold compared to the numbers from the previous year. In 2018, the country was ranked two places higher compared to the previous year, when the country was ranked 111¹². According to the report of “Reporters without Borders” for Macedonia, published in 2017, the state has been defined as the “Bad Balkan boy”. Out of 180 countries in the report, Macedonia was ranked 111.

“Freedom of the media decreased in the region, but the erosion in the rule of law is most visible in Macedonia, an EU candidate. Slander has been removed from the Criminal code in 2012, but prosecutions have been replaced with civil court cases, with the possibility of heavy fines and imprisonment for reporters and media owners. There have been lots of reports regarding threats, violence, harassment, and intimidation of journalists during the political demonstrations in 2016, but only a few of the responsible were charged. The political instability influences the work of the journalists and the pressure of the ruling party has forced part of the media to self-censorship”, the report of the “Reporters without Borders” for 2017 states¹³.

Previously in 2016¹⁴, Macedonia was ranked 118 out of 180 states¹⁵. In 2015, the state takes the 117th place and there are no significant replacements in regard to freedom of the media.

8 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/freedom-world/2022>

9 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/freedom-world/2021>

10 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/freedom-world/2020>

11 <https://rsf.org/en/north-macedonia>

12 <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

13 <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

14 <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2016>

15 <http://www.radiomof.mk/reporteri-bez-granici-makedonija-padna-na-118-mesto-po-sloboda-na-mediumi/>

Macedonia reaches the highest position in the report for 2009, when it has been ranked 34th, with a continuous fall in the following years.

“Macedonia continues to struggle with corruption and while the media and the civil society are active, journalists and activists face pressures and threats”, the report “Freedom in the world 2019”¹⁶ states.

In the newest report of “Freedom House” titled “Nations in Transit 2021”¹⁷ there have been some improvements in the field of democracy, even though North Macedonia is still defined as a “transitional government or hybrid regime”.

According to the report “Freedom in the World”¹⁸, North Macedonia since 1998 till now has never been defined as “free country”, but as “partly free”.

In the latest EU progress report on North Macedonia 2021¹⁹ it has been noted that there is “limited progress” and the country is moderately prepared in the field of information society and media. “The media regulator continued to be proactive in the promotion of media literacy and in warning against inflammatory or discriminatory language, hate speech, unprofessional journalistic reporting, as well as pressure and threats on journalists and media outlets. Transparency of media ownership is a legal obligation for the audio-visual and print media, however, there are no legal obligations for online media. The fight against disinformation and activities related to media literacy is mostly carried out by civil society. Enhanced efforts and inter-institutional cooperation on the side of the authorities is needed”, is noted in the report. While the EU progress reports from previous years have detected other weaknesses.

The EU progress report on North Macedonia 2018²⁰ stated that “the climate for media freedom and freedom of expression has improved, with more open political debate and critical media reporting. There has been a decrease in pressure on journalists. Reporting on both recent electoral campaigns has been more balanced, as acknowledged by the OSCE/ODIHR and other observers. Government advertising has ended. Further efforts are needed to improve the independence of the public broadcaster. It is essential that the authorities demonstrate zero tolerance towards all incidents of physical and verbal abuse or threats against journalists and that these are effectively followed up by the relevant authorities.

There has been extensive stakeholder consultation on changes to media legislation”. In the EU Progress report for following year, 2019²¹ it is stated that “the country has some level of preparation / is moderately prepared in the area of freedom of expression and made good progress. The climate for media freedom and freedom of expression has improved. Open political debate and critical media reporting continued. Further self-regulation efforts are required to improve professional standards and the quality of journalism. The ban on government advertising was respected. Sustained efforts are needed to improve the independence, professional standards and financial sustainability of the public broadcaster. It is essential that the authorities continue to promote freedom of expression. Amendments to the Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services have been adopted and their implementation will require a strong political commitment to guarantee professionalism, respect for the principles of transparency, merit-based appointments, and equitable representation.

16 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/north-macedonia>

17 https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NIT_2021_final_042321.pdf

18 https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Freedom_in_the_World_2008_complete_book.pdf

19 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/north-macedonia-report-2021_en

20 <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2019-05/20180417-the-former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia-report.pdf>

21 <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2019-05/20190529-north-macedonia-report.pdf>

The financial sustainability of private media and working conditions of journalists remain a challenge. The country has addressed some of the recommendations from the 2018 report, notably by creating a climate that is favourable for expressing pluralistic viewpoints”.

In the EU progress report for 2020²² there is a part that refers to independent media. “The country has some level of preparation / is moderately prepared in the area of freedom of expression and has made limited progress during the reporting period. The overall situation and climate in which media operates remain generally conducive to media freedom and allow for critical media reporting, although there have been some increased tensions during the COVID-19 crisis and in the context of the elections. Self-regulation efforts need to be intensified to support advancement in professional standards and the quality of journalism. It is important to ensure greater transparency of media advertising by state institutions, political parties, and public enterprises. Sustainable solutions to ensure the public service broadcaster’s independence, professional standards and financial sustainability are needed. It is essential to continue supporting media pluralism, promoting professionalism, unbiased reporting and investigative journalism, and building resilience to effectively combat disinformation. The financial sustainability of independent media and working conditions of journalists remains a challenge”.

In the newest Human rights report 2020 of the State department²³ for North Macedonia it is notified that “the media environment continued to improve during the year. According to the Association of Journalists of Macedonia, the authorities’ response to instances of violence toward and intimidation of journalists was slow and inefficient”.

In the previous Human Rights Report 2019 for North Macedonia²⁴, problems have been notified. It stated: “the government made progress in respecting media freedom and freedom of expression, but problems remained, including weak media independence, and violence toward and intimidation of journalists”. Obstacles in regards to freedom of the press were notified also in the Human rights report 2018 for North Macedonia²⁵. “The government made progress respecting media freedom and freedom of expression, but problems remained, including weak media independence, and violence and intimidation of journalists”, the report says. In the same report it is also noted that “while outlets and reporting continued to be largely divided along political lines, the number of independent media voices actively expressing a variety of views without overt restriction increased. Laws that restrict speech inciting national, religious, or ethnic hatred also cover print and broadcast media, publication of books, and online newspapers and journals”.

Conclusion

The level of trust of citizens in our media is low. An analysis of the responses to the questionnaire reveals the main reasons for the low public trust in the media and journalism in the country. Mistrust of the media mainly stems from the negative image of many influential media (with rare exceptions among the media that enjoy the trust of citizens), as well as the bad behavior of certain journalists.

22 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2020-10/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

23 <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/north-macedonia/>

24 <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/north-macedonia/>

25 <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/north-macedonia/>

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