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**USAID PROJECT FOR MEDIA  
LEGAL REFORM AND  
RESPONSIBLE MEDIA**



**MEDIA  
DEVELOPMENT  
CENTER**

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**MONITORING OF IMPLEMENTATION OF  
MEDIA LEGISLATION, OF THE MINISTRY  
OF INFORMATION SOCIETY AND  
ADMINISTRATION, OF THE ASSEMBLY  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA,  
OF THE AGENCY FOR AUDIO AND  
AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA SERVICES AND OF THE  
MACEDONIAN RADIO AND TELEVISION**

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SKOPJE, JULY 2015

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USAID PROGRAM FOR STRENGTHENING INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN MACEDONIA,  
PROJECT FOR RESPONSIBLE MEDIA AND MEDIA LEGAL REFORM

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This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Media Development Center. The authors views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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MACEDONIAN RADIO AND TELEVISION

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**2ND QUARTERLY REPORT**

(APRIL-JUNE 2015)

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PREPARED BY:  
ELENA KOSTOVSKA  
VIKTOR VANGELOV, MA

SKOPJE, JULY 2015



# INTRODUCTION

The Media Development Centre, under the auspices of the programme for monitoring of implementation of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (LAAMS) and the Law on Media (LM), followed the work of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Service (AVMS) and the Macedonian Radio and Television (MRT) in the period April-June 2015.

The implementation of the media legislation is viewed primarily through the effect that legal provisions have on the work and operations of competent institutions and the media. During the period covered by this report, the monitoring focused on the election and appointment of internal bodies of AVMS and MRT, their opera-

tions, transparency and accountability of the regulatory body and the public service broadcaster.

The monitoring relied on a number of instruments: direct observation of sessions of AVMS Council and the Parliament (when discussing the implementation of media legislation), analysis of documents published on the web-sites of the institutions, FOI requests and direct communication with the stakeholders.

The monitoring is implemented under the auspices of the USAID Programme for Strengthening of Independent Media in Macedonia, the Project for Media Legal Reform and Responsible Media.



# AGENCY FOR AUDIO AND AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA SERVICES

Eight months after the first decision to postpone the selection of Deputy Director of the Agency in October 2014, the regulatory body has not yet concluded that process. The Agency continues to work without a Deputy Director.

## LITTLE WORK DONE; HUGE AMOUNTS FOR THE NEW HEADQUARTERS

In the period covered by this monitoring report, the AVMS Council convened in just nine sessions in which it adopted four rulebooks and several other by-laws. The Agency also adopted the Programme for Ensuring Media Access for Persons with Disabilities<sup>1</sup>, the Code of Conduct for Members of the Council and Employees of the Professional Service of the Agency<sup>2</sup>, held the second public meeting for 2015<sup>3</sup> and concluded the IPA TAIB 2009 Project<sup>4</sup>.

During this quarter, the Agency cut its activities in half and focused, above all, on the preparations to move to its new headquarters. The

1 [http://avmu.mk/images/Programa\\_za\\_obebeduvanje\\_pristap\\_do\\_mediumite\\_so\\_setilna\\_popre.pdf](http://avmu.mk/images/Programa_za_obebeduvanje_pristap_do_mediumite_so_setilna_popre.pdf)

2 [http://www.avmu.mk/images/Kodeks\\_za\\_odnesuvanje\\_na\\_clenovite\\_na\\_Sovetot\\_i\\_vrabotenite\\_na\\_strucnata\\_sluzhba.pdf](http://www.avmu.mk/images/Kodeks_za_odnesuvanje_na_clenovite_na_Sovetot_i_vrabotenite_na_strucnata_sluzhba.pdf)

3 [http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2297&lang=mk](http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2297&lang=mk)

4 [http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2287%3A-ipa-taib-2009-&catid=171%3Anastani&Itemid=504&lang=mk](http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2287%3A-ipa-taib-2009-&catid=171%3Anastani&Itemid=504&lang=mk)

Agency has earmarked 63% of its total income for 2015 on construction works and furnishing of the new headquarters. The 2015 Budget of the Agency<sup>5</sup> is projected at €3.4 million. Of that, €2.14 million will be spent on construction works and furnishing of the new building. In addition to its Budget, the Agency has secured a bank loan to the amount of €650,000 to finance the completion of its new headquarters. The projected spending of Agency's Budget show that it will invest much more in furnishing its new offices than in actual regulation of the media sphere.

The focus of the Agency on the new headquarters is best illustrated by the fact that most of the newly adopted by-laws covered issues related to the new office building:

- Decision to sign the Annex No.2 to the Agreement to build administrative building "Panko Brašnarov Palace", to cover unforeseen works.<sup>6</sup>
- Decision on a need to open a public procurement procedure: Financial and insurance services for the new seat of the Agency in Skopje – Administrative Building "Panko Brašnarov" Palace.<sup>7</sup>

5 [http://www.avmu.mk/images/Finansiski\\_plan\\_na\\_Agencijata\\_za\\_audio\\_i\\_audiovizuelni\\_mediumski\\_uslugi\\_za\\_2015\\_godina.pdf](http://www.avmu.mk/images/Finansiski_plan_na_Agencijata_za_audio_i_audiovizuelni_mediumski_uslugi_za_2015_godina.pdf)

6 [http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2209%3A-15-&catid=163%3A2015godinahronika&Itemid=487&lang=mk](http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2209%3A-15-&catid=163%3A2015godinahronika&Itemid=487&lang=mk)

7 [http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com\\_](http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com_)

- Decision to open a public procurement procedure: Maintenance of the system for recording of audio and video contents.<sup>8</sup>
- Decision to change the seat of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services.<sup>9</sup>

## LITTLE CARE FOR PUBLIC INTEREST

In the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of AVMS Council held on March 30, 2015, council member Zoran Fidanoski proposed that the Agency should issue a public call to MRT to demand from the public service to comply to the legal provisions on objective, impartial and professional public broadcasting service that informs the citizens about all current social and political affairs, events and developments. In his proposal, Fidanoski noted that MRT doesn't air the recordings of wiretapped phone conversations released by the opposition, using as an excuse the February 3 public statement by the Office of Public Prosecution demanding from the media to refrain from publishing the materials released by the opposition. In Fidanoski's view, that demand from the Public Prosecutor had no legal grounds and the Public Prosecutor can't act as editor in chief of Macedonian Media. After a prolonged and fierce discussion, mostly directed against Fidanoski's proposal, the Council decided that the Agency should not call on MRT, thus allowing the public broadcaster to continue violating the Law and misinforming the public.

The Media Development Center reiterates that AVMS, as a regulatory body and in accordance with its Rules of Procedure, is obligated to tend to and protect the interests of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia in the area

[content&view=article&id=2310%3A-21---&catid=163%3A2015godinahronika&Itemid=487&lang=mk](http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2310%3A-21---&catid=163%3A2015godinahronika&Itemid=487&lang=mk)

8 [http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2310%3A-21---&catid=163%3A2015godinahronika&Itemid=487&lang=mk](http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2310%3A-21---&catid=163%3A2015godinahronika&Itemid=487&lang=mk)

9 [http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2318%3A-22---&catid=163%3A2015godinahronika&Itemid=487&lang=mk](http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2318%3A-22---&catid=163%3A2015godinahronika&Itemid=487&lang=mk)

of audio and audiovisual media services<sup>10</sup>. Having in mind that a number of media outlets continue the practice of neglect and disrespect for the interests of the citizens and don't offer professional and objective reporting of current affairs in the country, MDC points out that they don't comply with provisions of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>11</sup> which state that everyone has the right to receive information and that the Agency needs to adopt a more active stance and start acting as a true regulatory body towards all media, and especially in its relations with the public service that is funded by the citizens.

The publication of press releases<sup>12</sup> ("In the context of coverage of current events in the country, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services reminds the media that they need to perform their role – to inform the public – in full compliance with professional standards and principles of journalism.

It is of great importance for the media to allow the public to freely create its opinion by providing it with comprehensive, objective and impartial information and presenting the events in a manner that will secure equal treatment to competing views and opinions. Whenever possible, the information has to be checked and the source of information listed. If information can't be confirmed or if a source insists on anonymity, it should be clearly stated.

The media should be careful when presenting libellous, defamatory or intolerant statements, to avoid that they are abused for incitement to violence or discrimination on any grounds.") do not exhaust, by any means, the legal obligation of AVMS to protect the interests of the citizens

10 [http://www.avmu.mk/images/Delovnik\\_zarabota\\_na\\_Agencijata\\_za\\_audio\\_i\\_audiosvizuelni\\_mediumski\\_uslugi.pdf](http://www.avmu.mk/images/Delovnik_zarabota_na_Agencijata_za_audio_i_audiosvizuelni_mediumski_uslugi.pdf) (pg.2 article 7)

11 <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

12 [http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2264%3A2015-05-15-13-10-26&catid=88%3Asoopstenija-media&Itemid=313&lang=mk](http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2264%3A2015-05-15-13-10-26&catid=88%3Asoopstenija-media&Itemid=313&lang=mk)



in the area of audio and audiovisual media services.

Even the Code of Conduct for the Members of the Council and the Employees of the Professional Service of AVMS obligates the Council Members to work to protect the public interest and tend to the needs of the citizens in the area of audio and audiovisual media services.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.avmu.mk/images/Kodeks\\_za\\_odnesuvanje\\_na\\_clenovite\\_na\\_Sovetot\\_i\\_vrabotenite\\_na\\_strucnata\\_sluzhba.pdf](http://www.avmu.mk/images/Kodeks_za_odnesuvanje_na_clenovite_na_Sovetot_i_vrabotenite_na_strucnata_sluzhba.pdf) (article 4)



# MACEDONIAN RADIO AND TELEVISION

## MRT'S 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

The Macedonian Radio and Television (MRT) is legally obligated to submit to the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia a report for the previous calendar year no later than March 31 of the current year. The Programming Council of MRT adopted its 2014 Report on the very day of expiration of the legal deadline, while the Parliament reviewed and adopted the Report together with MRT's Financial Report on May 11, 2015.

The analysis of the 2014 Report submitted by MRT shows that the document is a compilation of separate reports on realized programmes for the individual programming services of MRT, all of them using different formats. Some reports are purely narrative, without spreadsheets, some combine narrative and spreadsheets, and some contain only spreadsheets.

For example, the Annual Report for Programming Service MTV1, for example, contains a table of all contents shot and aired by the news and information, cultural and artistic, educational, feature and documentary film and sports departments. The majority of those programmes were produced or co-produced by MRT, while some of them were purchased from independent producers. The quantitative overview shows that, out of a total of 8,760 hours of broadcasts, 3,345 hours (38%) were entertainment format programming. The information programming, including the daily newscasts, accounts for 25% of the programming, and 15.5% of the broadcasts were promotional and advertising contents. The table also has a column "Various Programmes", which doesn't clearly state which types of programmes were included. The list of cultural programming dedicated to music shows that MRT mostly promotes pop and folk genres, while other genres receive far

less attention or are completely absent from the programmes.

## PROGRAMMING COUNCIL – APPOINTMENTS AND DISMISSALS

In the period covered by this report, the public broadcasting service continued with its opaque and non-transparent operations and remained closed to the public. In spite of the clear legal obligations, MRT publishes few of the materials and documents it produces in their day-to-day operations. The website of MRT doesn't offer documents on the election and appointment of the Director, Deputy Director or members of Supervisory Board, MRT doesn't publish the agendas and the minutes recorded in the sessions of the Programming Council or decisions adopted by public broadcaster's governing bodies.

Also, MRT's management has not responded to any of MDC's requests to be allowed to sit in and monitor the sessions of the Programming Council, which is a violation of Article 122 of LAAMS and Article 40 of MRT Statute, which stipulate that the sessions of the Programming Council are public.

The public broadcasting service is extremely slow in responding to FOI requests and, almost without exception, presents the required documents and information on the day of expiration of the prescribed legal deadlines. Occasionally, it even exceeds the legally prescribed 30 day period that it has to respond to FOI requests.

**Appointment of Director** – The practice to respond to FOI requests at the last possible moment was repeated regarding the documentation for selection and appointment of the Director, the Deputy Director and the Supervisory Board. According to the documents we received,



five persons applied to the public call for the position of director, and two persons applied for the position of deputy director of MRT. The two positions went to the persons who performed them in the previous period - Marjan Cvetkovski for the position of Director and Harun Ibrahimski for the position of Deputy Director of MRT.

The terms of reference of the public call stipulated that all candidates were to submit an envelope with the required documents and an envelop, signed with a code, with the proposed working programme. The key for the code used for the latter was to be listed in the documents submitted in the first envelope. According to the minutes recorded in the session in which the applications were opened, the members of the Programming Council read the proposed programmes that they received after the start of the session, and then moved to identify the candidates. Only then they voted on the applications. The question is, why would they ask for the programmes to be submitted under code-name, if they disclosed the names of the candidates behind each code-name before the vote, when the council members knew who proposed which programme? Another question is why were the proposed programmes distributed to the Council members at the start of the session to be read during the session? That didn't allow them proper time to look into the details of the proposed programmes and make an informed decision on their quality. Marjan Cvetkovski and Harun Ibrahimski both got the unanimous vote, while none of the other candidates - Vangel Božinovski, Iskra Popova, Ile Maksimovski and Brane Stefanovski – didn't receive a single vote.

**Appointment of members of Supervisory Board** – Fifteen persons applied to the public call for selection of members of MRT Supervisory Board, and their applications were reviewed by a commission of three members of the Programming Council - Snežana Klinčarova, Agim Leka and Jagnula Kunovska. Abedin Salija, Darko Stefanovski, Ljupčo Zoreski, Nikola Gjørčev, Bojan Petrovski, Shqelzen Halimi and Dafina Talevska Hadži-Vaskova were appointed to the

new Supervisory Board. The decision for selection of members of Supervisory Board was adopted with a unanimous vote.

One cause of concern is the fact that five of the seven elected members of the Supervisory Board are employed in the state administration, two of them coming from the Office of the Prime Minister. Darko Stefanovski is advisor at the Ministry of Culture; Ljupčo Zoreski and Bojan Petrevski are employed in the Office of the Prime Minister; Nikola Gjørčev works at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Dafina Taleva Hadži-Vaskova comes from the Council for Advancement and Supervision of Auditing of the Republic of Macedonia.

Such a composition of the Supervisory Board undermines the independence of the public broadcasting service and establishes direct control by the state institutions and the government over its operations.

**Dismissal of Editor-in-Chief of the Parliamentary Channel** – During the period covered by this report, the Programming Council voted unanimously to dismiss Snežana Kotovska from the position of Editor-in-Chief of the Parliamentary Channel and appoint Violeta Dimovska in her place.

The Director of the Common Offices Goran Atanasov gave a verbal explanation for the proposal to remove Kotovska, but his explanation was not recorded in the minutes and there is no explanation why Kotovska was removed. It is evident from the minutes that the proposal by MRT's editorial office wasn't complete and contained no written explanation so that verbal presentation of the rationale was required. In the end, several members of the Programming Council proposed that written rationales should be mandatory in the future, while some council members complained that the sessions are scheduled on a short-notice and that they don't receive the materials in time to be able to review them properly.

Additional shadow on Kotovska's dismissal and the appointment of the new editor-in-chief of the Parliamentary Channel is thrown by the fact that the public was not informed about

the change, not to mention the actual reasons for the move. That is another indicator of the opaque practices and the total neglect of the public interest by the Macedonian Radio and Television.

## STATE AUDIT REPORT

MRT has submitted to the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia the Audit Report prepared by the State Audit Office. The report covers years 2013 and 2014, and the audit was conducted in the period from June 2 to July 1, 2014. The final version of the report was prepared and submitted to MRT in November 2014. The audit focused on the success, i.e. the efficiency and effectiveness of financial management and internal controls of MRT.

The Report concluded that MRT management has implemented proper policies and concrete activities for adoption and implementation of by-laws and internal acts for realisation of ongoing activities, distribution of duties and responsibilities, financial controls, control of access to resources, general and application controls of the IT system and the system for communications and exchange of information.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the Report notes a number of weaknesses and omissions, as well as areas that need to be improved. The Report also noted a legislative discrepancy regarding the obligations that public enterprises have under the Law on Internal Financial control and the Standards on Internal Controls in the Public Sector. The Law doesn't obligate MRT to establish systems for financial management and control, while the Standards make no difference between different types of entities and they apply equally to the public enterprises. The auditors propose that the problem should be solved through the Law on Standards and the adoption and implementation of ISO standards.

The report notes several weaknesses related to the efficiency and effectiveness of fi-

<sup>14</sup> The Report of the State Audit Office is available, in Macedonia, at the URL <http://sobranie.mk/materialdetails.aspx?materialId=b9efb2dd-2dda-4e31-8902e2280caedd6e>

ancial management and internal controls at MRT. According to the auditors, the Rulebook on Systemisation of Positions provides only the most general instructions on the tasks and obligations of the employees, which has adverse effect on employment contracts which are equally generally worded and don't provide for performance measurement. Furthermore, MRT lacks an action plan or programme for training of employees, nor has it started the process for ISO certification of working processes although the Director of MRT pointed out in a session of the Programming Council that the process commenced and was under way. According to the auditors, it "could influence the quality of performance of the employees, reduce the quality of control systems and increase the risks for achievement of set goals and targets".<sup>15</sup>

The auditors also determined that the internal inventory commissions at MRT are composed of persons employed in the Financial Operations Sector, and that some inventory commissions didn't conduct inventory of assets and facilities while their reports don't offer proof that they actually conducted the necessary checks<sup>16</sup>.

*The report notes that no head of unit, auditors and authorized internal auditors were appointed to the internal audit unit, and as a result it can't perform its functions and "doesn't provide objective evidence or advice on the functioning of financial management and control systems".<sup>17</sup> Thus, MRT violates the provisions of article 36 of the Law on Public Internal Financial Controls which prescribes that a head, auditors and internal auditors of the internal audit unit shall be appointed, as well as the provisions of article 40 of the Law which prescribes that the unit shall prepare audit reports. The last available report prepared by MRT's internal audit unit dates from 2011.*

*The report lists a series of recommendations*

<sup>15</sup> State Audit Office, Ibid. p.15

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.23

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.3



*for elimination of noted weaknesses.<sup>18</sup> The Programming Council took the audit report into consideration and voted unanimously that it realistically reflects the situation at MRT.*

## THE EUROSONG CONTROVERSY

*This year's EUROSONG contest, held in Vienna, Austria, was marked by the incident when the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) decided to disqualify the votes cast by Macedonian jury. Instead of securing that one half of the votes are based on the votes of the viewing audience and the other half to be cast by a jury of experts, Macedonia provided only tele-voting results, in violation of the EUROSONG contest's rules<sup>19</sup>.*

*MRT denied any responsibility for the incident and is yet to come forward with explanation and proper information about the reasons for the disqualification. Knowing that the participation in the EUROSONG contest is paid by the tax-payers, the citizens have the right to know why EBU suspended Macedonian votes and who is responsible and shall be held accountable for the disgraceful incident.*

## MUSIC PRODUCTION

The implementation of the Law on Support for Domestic Music Production continued during the period covered by this report. On May 15, MRT released the list of approved and refused songs that applied in the first quarterly competition in 2015. The list of names of performers that applied to the competition and received funding is similar to the list of winners of subsidies in the competitions organized in 2014. The second and the third quarterly competitions for 2015 opened, but the decisions on which songs will receive subsidies for production costs were not adopted or published by the time of writing of this report.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.25

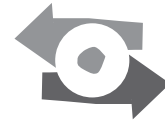
<sup>19</sup> [http://www.eurovision.tv/page/news?id=full\\_voting\\_results\\_revealed\\_by\\_the\\_ebu](http://www.eurovision.tv/page/news?id=full_voting_results_revealed_by_the_ebu)

# CONCLUSIONS

- Eight months after the first decision to postpone the selection of Deputy Director of the Agency in October 2014, the regulatory body has not yet concluded that process. The Agency continues to work without a Deputy Director.
- During the quarter, the Agency cut its activities in half and focused, above all, on the preparations to move to its new headquarters. The Agency has earmarked 63% of its total income for 2015 on construction works and furnishing of the new headquarters. The projected spending of Agency's Budget shows that it will invest much more in furnishing its new offices than in the development and advancement of the media sphere.
- Having in mind that some media continue to neglect the interests of the citizens and report the current affairs in the country in a professional and objective manner, MDC believes that AVMS has to adopt a more active stance and act as a true regulatory body towards all media, especially the public broadcasting service which is financed with tax-payers' money and yet doesn't provide professional, impartial and objective reporting.
- The public broadcasting service remains non-transparent and closed to the citizens and the public. In spite of the clear legal obligations, MRT publishes few of the materials and documents it produces in their day-to-day operations. The website of MRT doesn't offer documents on the election and appointment of the Director, Deputy Director or members of Supervisory Board, MRT doesn't publish the agendas and the minutes recorded in the sessions of the Programming Council or decisions adopted by public broadcaster's governing bodies. MRT's management didn't respond to any of MDC's requests to be allowed to sit and follow the sessions of the Programming Council which should be open to the public, under the law. The public broadcasting service is extremely slow in responding to FOI requests and, almost without exception, presents the required documents and information on the day of expiration of the prescribed legal deadlines. Occasionally, it even exceeds the legally prescribed 30 day period that it has to respond to FOI requests.
- MRT's Programming Council didn't follow its own criteria for selection of director and deputy director. The members of the Council disclosed the identity of the candidates before they took the vote, although the terms of reference of the public call stipulate that all candidates should submit two envelopes with their applications – one with the requirement documents and another, signed with a code-name, containing the candidate's proposed working programmes. The question is, why would they ask for the programmes to be submitted under code-name, if they disclosed the names of the candidates behind each code-name before the vote, when the council members knew who proposed which programme? Another question is why were the proposed programmes distributed to the Council members at the start of the session to be read during the session? That didn't allow them proper time to look into the details of the proposed programmes and make an informed decision on their quality.
- One cause of concern is the fact that five of the seven elected members of the Super-

visory Board are employed in the state administration, two of them coming from the Office of the Prime Minister. Such a composition of the Supervisory Board undermines the independence of the public broadcasting service and establishes direct control by the state institutions and the government over its operations.

- During this monitoring period, the Programming Council voted unanimously to remove the editor-in-chief of the Parliamentary Channel and appoint a new editor in chief. MRT chose to not inform the public at all about the procedure to remove the old and appoint new editor-in-chief of the Parliamentary Channel or the reasons for the change, which is another indicator of the lack of transparency and the neglect of public interest by the public broadcaster.



**HQO INFO-CENTER**

ANNEX 1

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# MONITORING OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF TOPICS RELATED TO MEDIA LEGISLATION AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

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(APRIL - JUNE 2015)

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SKOPJE, JULY 2015

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# INTRODUCTION

The NGO Infocentre, under the auspices of the USAID Programme for Strengthening of Independent Media in the Republic of Macedonia and the Project for Media Legal Reform and Responsible Media implemented by the Media Development Center, conducted a continuous monitoring and analysis of the public debate in Macedonian media.

This analysis covers the implementation of the Law on Media (LM) and the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (LAAVMS), and the topics related to the media freedoms and freedom of expression in general.

A total of 16 traditional and online media outlets were included in the this monitoring: the daily newspapers - Utrinski vesnik, Nova Makedonija, Dnevnik, Sloboden pečat and Večer; one weekly – Fokus; main newscasts of national TV broadcasters: Kanal 5 TV, Sitel TV, Telma TV, MRT1 and 24 Vesti TV; and internet news sites A1on.mk, Kurir.mk, Republika.mk, Plusinfo.mk and NovaTV.mk.

For the purposes of this report, we analyzed journalistic articles, columns, editorials and op-ed articles, photographs and other illustrations related to or covering the topics that are subject to this monitoring.

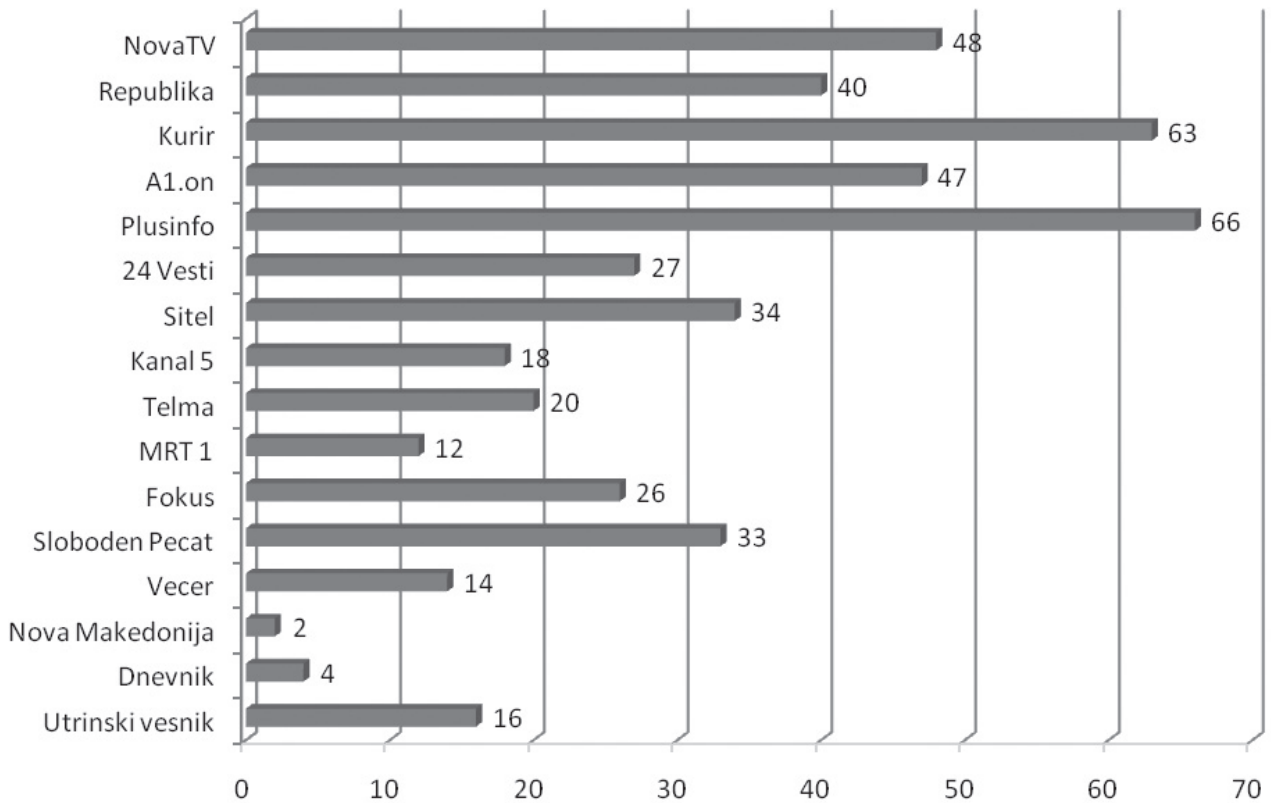
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# QUANTITATIVE OVERVIEW

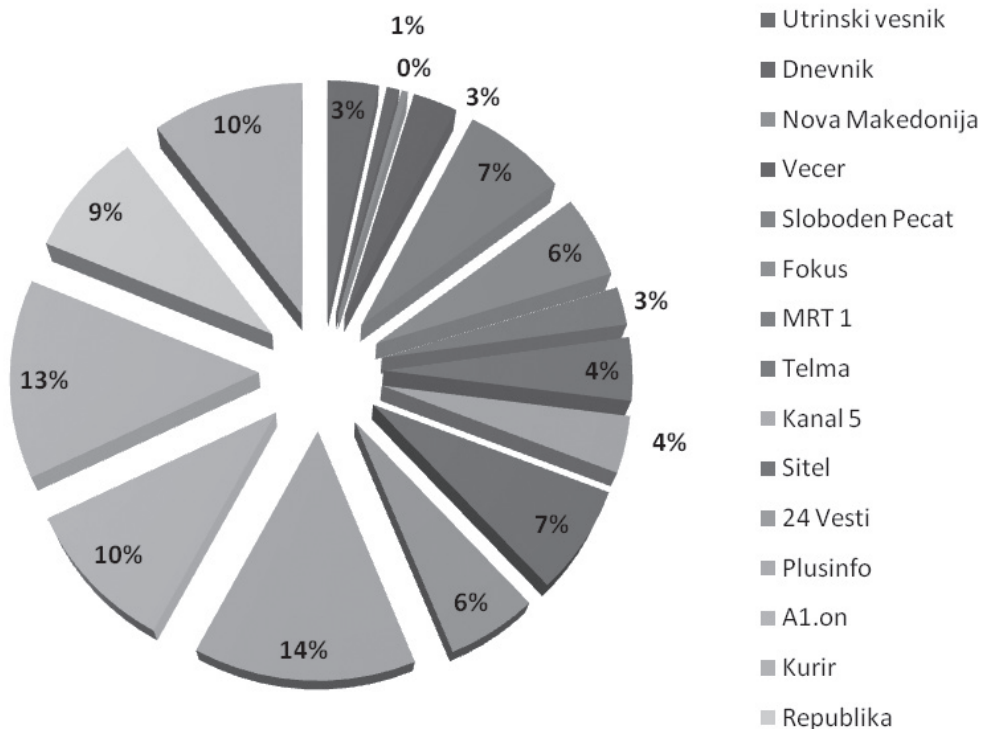
In the period from April 1 to June 30, 2015, the monitoring registered a total of 470 journalistic articles and reports. The biggest number of articles were published on news sites Plusinfo.mk (66 articles) and Kurir.mk (63 articles).



NUMBER OF ARTICLES PER MEDIA:



INDIVIDUAL MEDIA'S COVERAGE AS PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF ARTICLES:



# QUALITATIVE OVERVIEW

Several interesting topics and events marked this monitoring period:

## RESTRICTIONS TO THE PERFORMANCE OF JOURNALISTIC PROFESSION

The tense political situation and the deep social division into “us” and “them”, deepened to the level in which it manifesting itself in personal threats issued against journalists and physical attacks on them. The most extensive coverage was given to the case of delivery, by unknown persons, of a „funereal wreath“ to the home of journalist Borjan Jovanovski.

All media covered by the monitoring reported on the incident and on the fierce reactions by media associations, civil sector and the general public. Of course, we should note the different perspectives that different media camps applied to their reporting.

The critical media focused on the condemnation of the incident, reported the appeals by domestic and international public and the demands to the authorities to not leave such cases uninvestigated.

*“This is not the first time for journalist to receive death threats in this country. For years, the ruling party created an atmosphere of hatred against independent journalists. The journalist critical of the ruling party are commonly labelled at “traitors” and “foreign spies”. The hate-speech directed at journalists was never politically condemned by the ruling party, and no legal action was ever taken. This has to stop now”, several international journalistic associations said.*” (“Utrinski vesnik” daily, April 22, 2015)

*“After the death of our colleague Nikola Mladenov, nothing can surprise us, knowing the suspicious circumstances of his death. We want po-*

*lice protection for Borjan, says journalist Biljana Sekulovska. Strong statements of condemnation for the death threats against Borjan Jovanovski were issued by the International Federation of Journalists and the European Federation of Journalists.”* (Telma TV, April 22, 2015)

The pro-government camp didn’t miss the opportunity to smear the journalists critical of the government once again.

- In its main daily newscast on April 22, 2015, MRT1 aired a correct report from the protest rally of journalists in front of the Government: *“Journalist associations and political parties condemned, as they say, the dastardly act that took place in front of the home of journalist Borjan Jovanovski, where an unknown person left a funereal wreath. AJM says that the leaving a wreath with a message “Last farewell” at Jovanovski’s home was a cowardly act aimed at all journalists in Macedonia. The Macedonian Association of Journalists MAN strongly condemns the sending of a funereal wreath with the sign “Last farewell” to the home address of journalist Borjan Jovanovski by a sender with code-name Todor Aleksandrov.*” The same newscast on MRT1, just minutes later, aired an interview with analyst Aleksandar Pandov with the headline “Fight for freedom of media inconsistent”, in which he draws and equation mark between Jovanovski’s case and the prolonged pressure on MRT by the critical public opinion that demands objective reporting and coverage of all social events and developments from the public broadcaster. He then reduced the reactions by journalists and civil sector to a “private party”, with emphasis on the notion that it is always the same group of journalists

and activists selectively fight for freedom of expression, undermining the stability of the state: *“It is all calculated for them. Those are people paid by Vlade Milčin, i.e. the Soros Foundation, to do what they do. They threaten all that as a private party. Several months back, we had the protests in front of the Macedonian Television, insults against the journalists, the media itself, insults against the editor in chief Goran Petreski, threaten him with jail, and not one of them said a word about it. They have entered a scenario that they copied from 2001. Back then, they were organized in “It’s Enough” (Dosta e!) campaign, know they are in some sort of plenum, in this particular situation, the Journalists Plenum.”*

- Sitel TV adopted similar approach in its coverage of Jovanovski case. In a subtle way, talking about the perpetrator as a person who was not seen or could be described by anyone, the report lead the viewers to the conclusion that the incident might not have happened at all: *“An unknown person that nobody saw and nobody can describe delivered a funereal wreath, last night at about 19:00 hours, at the front door of the home of journalist Borjan Jovanovski. His wife immediately reported the case to the police but gave little or no information that could help the investigation identify the perpetrator. According to sources in the investigation, the person that reported the incident couldn’t give any description, not even the sex and the age of the person that delivered the wreath. The police immediately interviewed the neighbours, but they, too, said that they didn’t notice movement of suspicious persons at that time... Such a reaction was missing when activists close to the opposition threatened journalists, even with physical liquidation.”* (Sitel TV, April 22, 2015)
- Kurir.mk went even further in the effort to defocus the public and, in its well known style, published a whole series of articles on April 22 and 23. With a clear intent to discredit the critical media, Kurir.mk writes

that the incident never really took place, and didn’t miss a chance to smear Borjan Jovanovski personally: *“In view of the fierce manipulation in Soros’s media, gaining in intensity over the past several days and revealing their corruption, the latest event with the delivery of a funereal wreath to the home of Borjan Jovanovski was completely invented and politically motivated.”* (Kurir.mk, April 22, 2015, headline: They invented Borjan’s wreath so they can present themselves as victims); *“The public knows about several affairs involving the biggest opposition party and the media that happened over the past several years. The services of the journalists that Zaev calls professional had cost, on average, about 5 million Euro per year. The SOROS Macedonia Foundation, chaired by Vladimir Milčin, former member of SDSM leadership, throughout its years of existence spent more than 93 million Euro intended for direct corruption of all social spheres. The foundation finances media like Plusinfo.mk and Sloboden pečat daily, owned by Branko Geroski; Aco Kabranov’s Libertas.mk; Borjan Jovanovski’s NovaTV.mk; Lenče Nikolovska’s Brif.mk; Predrag Petrovik’s A1on.mk; Fokus; the CentarNews portal; and many other of their satellites. Those media lead the way with manipulations and everyday constructions aimed against VMRO-DPMNE.”* (Kurir.mk, April 22, 2015, headline: SDSM and its series of affairs tied to media – shopping for journalists, shared ownership in companies, SOROS’s millions); *“The public has clearly seen that the aim of the alleged delivery of a wreath to Jovanovski’s home is nothing but an attempt to create infamy and a simple trick to attract the public attention. The opposition’s front-runners went so far with their morbid scenario to purchase a new fake wreath, parade it in front of the Government and declare themselves victims.”* (Kurir.mk, April 23, 2015, headline: Borjan prepared the ground for Zaev with invented wreath)

The media also covered the verbal altercation between journalist Boban Nonkovik and journalist and civic activist Petrit Saracini:



*“Boban Nonkovik is one of the agents of the black propaganda of this regime. His “reports” from Brussels are full of spin and manipulation. His very presence at MIM is a disgrace for the institution, the lecturers and the students.”* (Plusinfo.mk, April 9, 2015)

*“The violence of SDSM’s supporters against those who don’t share their opinions and journalists has a new dimension. The correspondent of the state news agency MIA Boban Nonkovik describes, in a show aired by Radio Slobodna Makedonija, the physical assault on him perpetrated by Petrit Saracini, activist and supporter of the opposition.”* (Kurir.mk, April 9, 2015)

The opposition party SDSM, in the “Truth about Macedonia” series of reveals of wiretapped phone conversations, on April 22 released a new so-called “bomb” on the direct meddling by government officials in the editorial policies of Macedonian Radio and Television and several private national media:

*“Minister Gordana Jankulovska has a notebook not just for judges, but for journalists, too. The recorded phone conversations released by SDSM, according to the party, demonstrate how journalists were appointed, why they perform every order of Gruevski in a servile manner, and why MRTV airs information that has no connection with reality. The prime minister maintains the most brutal and unacceptable control over the private media Sitel and Kanal 5, Zaev said. According to Zaev, it is an entanglement of connections between the government and the media that indicate criminal conspiracy.”* (Telma TV, April 22, 2015)

The released conversations and the strong reactions of media associations were reported by the critical media. The media that faithfully support Government’s policies didn’t report the materials released by the opposition, not even the material referring directly to their work. As in the previous several months, they continued the practice of publishing information that aim to fully discredit the critical media and journalists and the information they report, also discrediting the efforts of the civil sector to improve the situation in the media and the free-

dom of expression in general:

*“The public knows about several affairs involving the biggest opposition party and the media that happened over the past several years. The services of the journalists that Zaev calls professional had cost, on average, about 5 million Euro per year. The SOROS Macedonia Foundation, chaired by Vladimir Milcin, former member of SDSM leadership, throughout its years of existence spent more than 93 million Euro intended for direct corruption of all social spheres. The foundation finances media like Plusinfo.mk and Sloboden pecat daily, owned by Branko Geroski; Aco Kabranov’s Libertas.mk; Borjan Jovanovski’s NovaTV.mk; Lence Nikolovska’s Brif.mk; Predrag Petrovik’s A1on.mk; Fokus; the CentarNews portal; and many other of their satellites. Those media lead the way with manipulations and everyday constructions aimed against VMRO-DPMNE... In this whole ambience and corruption of the media sector, there is the added moment of favouring and corruption of the whole non-governmental sector and the countless satellite NGOs financed with the money from SOROS Macedonia, for example SDSM’s institute Progres, Kontrapunkt, Ploštad Sloboda, Transparency Macedonia, the Helsinki Committee of Human Rights, the Macedonian Centre for European Training and many others.”* (Republika.mk, April 22, 2015)

## ON THE SITUATION OF THE MEDIA IN MACEDONIA

Several domestic and international organisations presented their findings and reactions on the situation with the media and the freedom of expression in the country.

The joint statement of the International and the Macedonian PEN Centre expressing their deep concerns over the alleged unauthorized surveillance of the media and the attempt of the Office of the Public Prosecutor for preventive censorship of the journalists who investigate allegations of corruption in the Government, went almost unnoticed by the media:

*“Free expression, public and private, is under increasing threat in Macedonia. In December 2014, a survey found that more than a half*

*of Macedonian citizens were scared to openly express their opinions, while almost two-thirds believed they were exposed to state surveillance. Journalists and activists, so often the focus of heavy-handed tactics aimed at crushing criticism of the government, are being pushed into self-censorship by this fear of surveillance.* (NovaTV.mk, April 7, 2015)

The reaction by U.S.-based NGO Freedom House, too, was carried by only a handful of critical media:

*“Macedonia tumbles down the Freedom House’s ratings. The situation of the freedom of the media was seen as worse than last year, with registered drop of 1 point to the current score of 58. Macedonia has the worst score in the Balkans, and the report states that it has dropped by 10 index points over the past five years.”* (Telma TV, April 29, 2015)

The report on the amounts of money that the Government spent in the media to promote political campaigns, released by the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM), provoked strong reactions and received huge coverage by the media. AJM’s report asked that government advertising campaigns are regulated with a special law that will prohibit public institutions from spending money on political propaganda in the media and will provide clear definition of public interest in such campaigns.

It should be noted that the great coverage extended to AJM’s report was due primarily to the replies and denials of the mentioned media companies in response to AJM’s claims:

*“The Government spends huge amounts of money on government media campaigns that, in most cases, have nothing to do with the public interest. The Government arbitrarily declares its policies matters of public interest, which is unimaginable in a democratic society in which every measure applied by the government is subject to a fierce debate about its justification. With six million Euro spent in the electronic and the print media in a period of just three months, the Government becomes one of the leading advertisers in the media. It brings about high risk of corruption and creates conditions to influence the editorial*

*policies and the treatment, or the lack thereof, of certain topics in the society.”* (Plusinfo.mk, May 28, 2015)

*“Unlike the Association that presented its so-called analysis yesterday, and for the sake of the truth, MMA wants to assure the citizens that the funds paid to our television stations for airing of public campaigns of social interest over the said period were several times smaller than the figures presented at the press-conference yesterday.”* (“Večer“ daily, July 15, 2015)

The regional conference “The Media and the Public Interest – Risks and Challenges”, organized by MDC, received limited media coverage, mostly in the critical media. Most of the published items were announcements that the event was being held and several news items, while only 24 Vesti TV and “Utrinski vesnik” informed in greater detail on the discussions and the conclusions presented by the panellists:

*“Macedonia is one of the countries in the region with the worst situation in the media sphere, estimate domestic and foreign experts. They note the prominent existence of pro-government media and media that create a fake picture they present to the citizens, raising the alarm that it could have very negative effects on the people.*

*You now find yourselves in a slightly worse situation as journalists in Macedonia because you are not accepted as corrector of the government, and no government in the world can be sustained if there is no one to control it. People in power can often get distant from the people and the public, and that is dangerous because they lose all criteria and start acting as if they were selected by God and not elected by the people. Of course, they can also be removed by the people in a democratic way, says Gordana Vilović, professor at the Zagreb University’s School of Political Sciences.”* (24 News TV, June 3, 2015)

The majority of the media marked the World Press Freedom Day, May 3, with publication of the appeals issued by AJM and the Independent Trade Union of Journalists of Macedonia to put an end to all forms of pressure suffered by the media and the journalists in the country. The “progovernment” media made an effort to rela-



tivize the bad situation in Macedonia with publication of statistics about the bad situation of the media across the world.

The Media Ethics Council of Macedonia (MEC), one of the new forms of self-regulation, is rarely mentioned in the media coverage. The few mentions in the media were in reports on MEC's reactions in concrete cases, without an effort at more detailed and indepth analysis.

The Recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group on systemic Rule of Law issues relate to the communications interception revealed in Spring 2015, the so-called "Pribe Report", of June 8, 2015, did not appear to be a reason enough to provoke publication of articles that offer indepth analysis in the media, or coverage of topics that will promote debate in the media sphere. The critical media that reported on the event or republished it in its integral text<sup>20</sup>.

*"The recommendations emphasize that all media need to be free from any form of political pressure, meddling and threats, and the media need to distance themselves from party politics and should not serve politicians and political parties."* (NovaTV.mk, June 20, 2015)

There were few reports on the public debates organized at the so-called "Freedom Camp", discussing topics related to the situation in the media ("Who Captured Journalism in Macedonia?", held on June 22, and "MRT – Public Service for the Citizens or Announcement Board for the Government?", held on May 31, 2015):

*"Journalists emphasized that radical changes are necessary in the preparatory, that is, the transition period before the elections, especially in the media because, in their view, there are still people in Macedonia who are not sufficiently informed about the political bombs of the opposition, and generally lack an objective picture of political events, because of the way in which the pro-government media approach the public and the distortions of reality they engage in."* (A1on.mk, June 23, 2015)

<sup>20</sup> Telma TV, June 19, 2015, Што содржи извештајот на Прибе (целосен текст)

## OVERVIEW OF EVENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN AND AROUND THE MACEDONIAN RADIO AND TELEVISION

In this monitoring period, the strong and continuous pressure of the critical segments of the general public on the public broadcasting service MRT continued.

The reactions on the issue if MRT met its legal obligation to act as professional and impartial public broadcasting service of the citizens continued with the series of protests organized by general Stojanče Angelov, president of "Dostoinstvo" (Dignity) party, in front of MRT's building. The Journalists' Plenum and the LGBT community in Macedonia joined the demands and reactions on the work of MRT.

In April 2015, the Journalists' Plenum started the publication of reviews of the main newscasts aired by MRT1, in an attempt to reveal the manipulative techniques used in MRT's reporting and to point the attention of the public towards the issues not covered by MRT. The reviews and the conclusions of the debate on the situation, the professional integrity and the public service obligations of the Macedonian Radio and Television (MRTV), held on April 4, 2015, were published by a handful of critical internet portals.

*"The turbulent political situation mentioned by MRTV is a reason more why we need to discuss the problems faced by the public service, which is obligated to provide the citizens with continuous, full, impartial, fair and timely information. A public service that will respect the Ethical Code of Journalists and won't advocate and/or protect the views and interests of any given political party but will create its programming contents led solely by public interest and will be protected from influence of the government, political parties and other centres of power."* (Plusinfo.mk, April 6, 2015)

In response to the calls of the Journalists Plenum, MRT sent a letter to the Plenum in which it was the debate as belated and tendentious, intentionally questioning the intents and prolonged attempts of the media associations and the civil sector for reforms in MRT: *"There*

*were many reasons and occasions to open a debate on the functioning of the public service for many years back, so we ask the question - where were the fighters for the good of the profession then?”*

According to the reports on the debate “What kind of public service the Republic of Macedonia Needs”, organized by AJM on April 16, 2015, published primarily by the critical media, the position of MRT’s leadership, supported by the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, is that the broadcaster should represent the interests of the state and that there were noted improvements in the professional performance of its tasks:

*“Ratajkovski responded that if the Office of Public Prosecution demanded for a newscast of MRTV to be stopped, just as it demanded from the media not to cover and air the recordings released by SDSM, they would accept that request and would interrupt the programme. Instead of “public service” he used the term “state service”, because the Macedonian Television was financed by the state and they wouldn’t move a step from the position of defence of state’s interests.”* (Fokus online edition, April 16, 2015)

During this monitoring period, the main newscasts of MRT1 didn’t report the reactions and criticism directed at the public service broadcaster, and continued with its biased, unilateral, tendentious and manipulative reporting. It approaches the facts in a selective manner, motivated by the intent to offer full and unconditional support for Government’s policies:

*“Financial stability for a stable public service. That is the joint view resulting from the debate organized by AJM and MRT today. There were different views on whether there should be a broadcasting tax or not. The president of the journalist association believes that reforms are necessary.”* (MRT’s website, April 16, 2015)

## UNBRIDGEABLE CHASM IN THE MEDIA SCENE

The trend of full discrediting of any information published by the critical media went on with unrelenting intensity. The continuous harangue was led by pro-government media Kurir.mk and

Republika.mk, followed by Sitel TV and Kanal 5 TV, as well as “Dnevnik” and “Večer” dailies and public broadcaster MRT. In an orchestrated series of articles aired and published in a period encompassing several days before and several days after major social events and developments (protests, international reports on the situation in the country, release of “bombs” by the opposition, etc.), they attempted to convince the public that the funding that the critical media receive from grants and donations, mostly from the Foundation Open Society Macedonia (FOSM), but also from USAID and the embassies of western European countries, are forms of “direct political opposition activities, corruption of the media and an attempt to kill journalism”. At the same time, pro-government media not only question the credibility and the democratic capacities of the critical media, they also accuse them of working against the interests of the state.

*“SDSM’s analysts and their media protagonists, faced with the fact that the so-called bombs have no effect and the citizens are more concerned with the real problems than the bombs, save no effort to make political gains by pushing Macedonia towards destabilisation.”* (Sitel TV, April 20, 2015)

*“Below, we summarize the 10 biggest lies that continue to be published with great intensity in a tight race between the portals controlled by SDSM and SOROS who will invent the biggest lie.”* (Kurir.mk, May 13, 2015)

*“Over a period of several hours, Soros’s media carried about a dozen of different news with totally opposed contents. At that, each new article was opposed to what the previous one said, but they cared little about what they wrote earlier. It indicates that they lack, to put it mildly, sufficient professional standards and shows that they primarily serve as SDSM’s propaganda. That behaviour and the frequent lies have let to them losing credibility and public trust.”* (Republika.mk, June 6, 2015)



# CONCLUSIONS:

- The critical media continuously cover current events and processes on the media scene, the threats against the freedom of media, freedom of expression and information;
- There is an obvious effort by the pro-government media to ignore and neglect the processes related to the media scene, especially the threats against the freedom of media, freedom of information and expression, and to blame some of the critical media, the opposition and the civil sector for the situation in Macedonian media scene;
- The journalists rely mostly on presentation of statements and positions of domestic and foreign actors active in the area of media, as well as the statements and positions of Macedonian and foreign politicians. The coverage is dominated by news and reports. Commentaries are rare and there are almost no analysis pieces.
- MRT's continue with its biased, one-sided, tendentious and manipulative reporting. It approaches the facts in a selective manner, motivated by the intent to offer full and unconditional support for Government's policies.