

# MEDIA MONITORING

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## INTRODUCTION

The media is one of the most important social instigators that citizens use to inform themselves on matters of public interest. It is the responsibility of the media to enable citizens to obtain all of the information they need to take a stance on important issues of concern. Taking into consideration the media's role in delivering relevant and objective information to citizens, the media is able to influence the general level of understanding of public policies, thus creating a space, among other social factors, for public debate regarding these policies. Moreover, its role is as a guardian of the public interest, and, by representing citizens, the media is able to incite debate on certain issues and exert pressure on public authorities and other centers of power responsible for these issues. In order to successfully fulfill its social role, the media needs an appropriate and favorable climate, including establishing and respecting certain ethical and professional standards, as well as establishing cooperation with other social actors that share a similar influence and represent similar interests.

In this regard, cooperating with civil society organizations is of great significance to the media sector, as CSOs are an important factor that primarily influences the advancement of public policies and ensures citizens wider access to different levels of decision-making in society. Having this in mind, the Project for Investigative Journalism and Cooperation between Media and Civil Society, as part of USAID's Program for Strengthening Independent Media in Macedonia, has conducted research on the manner in which media outlets report on priority issues of public interest and how media and CSOs cooperate during such reporting. The main objective of the monitoring process was to procure sufficient and relevant information for an analysis of the way the Macedonian media report on priority issues of public interest, as determined through public debates among representatives of CSOs and journalists. In addition to its main objective, the monitoring served as the basis for designing a series of workshops with journalists and CSOs with the purpose of increasing the number and improving the quality of articles in the media relating to the selected topics of public interest. The monitoring, among other results, provided an answer to the following questions:



1. How much do Macedonian media outlets report on each of the analyzed topics?
2. Was the reporting on the selected topics conducted in accordance with professional journalistic standards?
3. Was the media reporting balanced, objective, and were all of the concerned parties in the story consulted?
4. Were the articles motivated by independent and original research on the side of journalists or were they solely reports of events organized on the chosen topics?
5. Whether the articles contained the following aspects: reliability, relevance, trust, and credibility?

Aside from its main objective, this monitoring could further serve as the basis for a range of other actions aimed at improving media reporting, both in a broader sense and specifically relating to each of the analyzed topics. On one hand, it could help journalists locate weaknesses in their current reporting on these topics and provide directions towards improving them. On the other hand, this analysis could help CSOs, by indicating which areas require greater commitment in order for the public to be informed more regularly and in a more professional and objective manner.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The approach utilized in the monitoring was to choose a sample of several media outlets that reported on ten topics of public interest, jointly selected by journalists and representatives of CSOs.

The choice of media outlets, whose articles were analyzed in accordance with the selected topics, was made while taking into account the outlet's situation, the aims of the monitoring, the requirements for the analysis of results of the monitoring, the project postulates and set-up, as well as their experience in the given area. In addition, the chosen media outlets needed to be relevant, viewed or read by a certain number of people, and appropriate for monitoring. They had to be electronic and print media outlets that were actively present in the media sector, as well as viewed or read on a national and local level, either in Macedonian or Albanian. All chosen media outlets had to have different owners and editorial policies.

According to the criteria above, the following media outlets were chosen as part of the sample:



- MTV1 - National TV station/public-service/in Macedonian
- Alsat M - National TV station/in Albanian
- Tera TV - Local (regional) TV station from Bitola/in Macedonian
- Dnevnik - National daily newspaper/in Macedonian
- Vest - National daily newspaper/in Macedonian.

The subject of immediate monitoring was articles reported by these media outlets relating to the chosen topics published in the period from April 1 to June 30, 2013.
















The conducted research was a combination of qualitative and quantitative monitoring that, in addition to numerical data, provided insight into the quality of the analyzed articles, in terms of the extent to which the journalists abided by professional journalistic standards.












Analysis of the data focused solely on the cumulative results of the monitoring and did not take into consideration the individual results received from each of the media outlets.

The following aspects of the published articles were analyzed:

- the topic or area covered in the article
- the page or section in the news where the article is published
- the heading under which the article is published
- the headline for the article featured on the first page
- the illustrations in the article
- whether the author of the article is known or anonymous
- the genre to which the article belongs
- the number, status, and location of sources
- whether the approach was fair and balanced
- the occasion for the article
- whether the concerned parties were consulted and the way this communication was treated in the article



## KEY FINDINGS

-  Media outlets regularly reported on the selected topics of public interest, publishing an average of 4 articles per day relating to some of these topics. This average was higher with print media outlets (6 articles per day relating to the selected topics), and lower with TV outlets (3 articles per day).
-  The topic most reported on by the media outlets was Accession to the European Union, followed by Quality of Life, Health and Patients' Rights, and Good Governance—three topics that were equally represented in the reporting. Conversely, the topic reported on the least was Social Inclusion of Marginalized Groups, which was followed by Cultural Politics and Interethnic Relations. These topics were less prevalent in the reporting.
-  Many of the articles were not in accordance with basic professional standards; they lacked reliability, relevance, trust, and credibility. The reported topics and issues were treated superficially and lacked comprehensive, thorough, and detailed research or analysis.
-  Many of the articles were not featured as headlines, either on the first page of newspapers or as top headlines at the start of TV news programs. Many did not contain a specific photograph or specific footage relating to the event or people treated in the article; some did not contain photographs or footage at all.
-  The author of the article was known in many of the cases (the article contained their name and last name or initials), although the author remained anonymous in 25 per cent of the articles.
-  Sorted by genre, a higher number of articles were news articles—only 3 per cent were investigative stories.
-  Slightly over half of the articles had cited only one source, while 7 per cent had no sources cited at all. In most of the articles, sources were named. Sources were anonymous in only 3 per cent. In two-thirds of the texts, only one side of the story was consulted.
-  State institutions dominated as the sources included in the articles, with ministries leading amongst them. CSOs were identified as the main source in only a small number of articles.
-  The concerned party was not consulted in two-thirds of the articles. When they were consulted, the concerned party agreed to make a statement in one-third of cases, refusing to do so in only a handful of examples.
-  In two-thirds of the articles, the occasion for reporting was a pseudo-event (press conference, press release, statement, etc.). Compared to this, only 18 per cent of the articles had a genuine or actual event as the occasion for their reporting, and only 9 per cent resulted from personal knowledge or individual research conducted by the journalist.
-  In almost half of the articles, the organizer of the event was a governmental institution, as opposed to 10 per cent of cases where the organizer was a CSO.
-  The reporting of media outlets, when analyzed according to the different topics, resulted in the following key findings:
-  Although Cultural Politics was the second least prevalent topic, it was the topic on which media outlets reported most professionally.
-  The topic included most in headlines on the first page, or in the top headlines on TV news programs, was Accession to the European Union, while the one that appeared least was Environment.
-  The topic that featured the highest number of original photographs or footage was Cultural Politics, while Environment had the least.

-  Cultural Politics was the only topic in which the author's name was known in all the published articles. By comparison, the author remained unknown in half of the articles on Environment.
-  Although only a small number of articles were investigative stories, most of these were related to Cultural Politics, while none was related to Quality of Life or Social Inclusion of Marginalized Groups.
-  In terms of the number of sources, Cultural Politics was the topic that had the most articles with two or more sources. Conversely, Good Governance was the topic that featured the highest number of articles that used only one source (69 per cent).
-  In regards to the status of cited sources, Social Inclusion of Marginalized Groups was the one topic in which all of the sources were named. Good Governance had the highest number of anonymous sources.
-  The topic that featured the most articles without any sources was Accession to the European Union (19 per cent), while every article on Social Inclusion of Marginalized Groups contained sources.
-  In terms of concerned parties, the topic that had the most articles where two or more of the concerned parties were consulted was Education and Youth, while Environment and Good Governance had the most articles in which only one of the concerned parties was consulted.
-  The topics with the highest number of articles that included CSOs as sources were Social Inclusion of Marginalized Groups and Human Rights, while none of the articles on Cultural Politics included a CSO as a source.
-  Interethnic Relations was the topic in which the largest number of sources were state institutions such as government, ministries, and local government.
-  The concerned party was consulted most often in articles relating to Cultural Politics and Education and Youth, and consulted least in articles relating to Quality of Life.
-  Pseudo-events were the most common occasion for articles relating to Good Governance, while authentic events were most common for the analyzed articles relating to Cultural Politics. Cultural Politics also had the highest number of articles that resulted from the personal and unique interest of the journalists in question.
-  Most articles that featured an event in which a CSO was the organiser were related to Social Inclusion of Marginalized Groups. Conversely, Quality of Life and Cultural Politics included the least number of events organised by CSOs.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

-  Media outlets should intensify their reporting on topics that are of wider public interest. This would enable citizens to access a wider range of information that they need in order to more genuinely and effectively participate in the processes that affect their lives and work.
-  Journalists should abide by basic professional standards when reporting on issues of public interest by reporting more accurately, by being more balanced and fair, and by taking into account the reliability, relevance, trust, and credibility of their articles. Specifically, they need to:

- publish facts
- check and confirm the information received
- expand their list of sources and cite more than one source
- include and consult all parties in the stories
- Give equal treatment to all concerned parties
- provide and offer evidence for their claims in the articles
- illustrate their articles wherever possible by using the original and authentic photographs and footage
- sign their texts



Journalists need to practice investigative journalism, while owners need to support it and editors need to encourage it, particularly for topics of wider public interest. Investigative journalism is a way for journalists to fulfill their social role and increase trust and credibility among the public. Consequently, it could also increase their income.



Media outlets need to invest more funds, time, equipment, and effort in further educating journalists and editors to not only respect the basic standards of the profession, but also to employ the methods and techniques of investigative journalism.



Media outlets need to provide their journalists with legal protection and other types of security in order for them to be able to report professionally and objectively. In this regard, journalists need to utilize existing legal provisions.



Trade associations and organizations should intensify their efforts to create better conditions for journalists and other media professionals to perform their duties professionally, free of fear or pressure.



CSOs should strengthen their own capacities for more intensive and successful cooperation with journalists and media outlets, in order to deliver more relevant, objective, timely, and meaningful information on issues of wider public interest.



CSOs should nurture a continuous relationship with media outlets, rather than ad-hoc communication, while giving them the necessary support—specifically expertise and resources—to research and report on issues of wider public interest.



As a basis for creating a better informed citizenry, CSOs should include activities that educate and inform journalists on all projects implemented in identified areas of wider public interest.



CSOs and media should strengthen their cooperation in order to fulfill their social roles as key actors in the democratic process.



Domestic and international donors should continue with their efforts to support journalists, media and CSOs, with the intention of furthering professional and objective reporting on processes and issues of wider public interest to citizens.

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