



**Monitoring of the Media Reporting on Corruption in
Macedonia**

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INTRODUCTION

Since its establishment in 2005, the Center for Civil Communications (CCC) is committed for enhancing the role of media as a powerful weapon in the fight against corruption. Significant efforts are made towards strengthening the professional journalistic standards on reporting about corruption. The Center for Civil Communications realizes its mission through occasional monitoring of the media reporting on corruption as well as through providing training for journalists aimed at improving their know-how for researching and reporting on corruption.

With professional and quality reporting on corruption, the media contribute to increasing the pressure of the public on the holders of the publicly awarded power to demonstrate transparency, accountability, and responsibility, to increasing the awareness of the harmful effects of corruption, and to exerting pressure on the authorized institutions to take measures for solving cases of corruption.

As corruption is a low-risk, high-profit activity in which it is in the mutual interest of the participants to keep silent about the act – it is easier to unfold and spread the corruption than to obtain information which can expose or prove a case of corruption. Hence is the need for greater persistence and thoroughness of journalists when researching the corruption cases. This requires knowledge, commitment, sacrifice, time and other resources. But it also requires favorable conditions in the society, as well as understanding, willingness and capacity of the media owners.

The non-governmental organizations also play vital role in the fight against corruption and in pressurizing the authorities to work for the public interest, particularly through their “watchdog” activities. However, their activities in this area usually remain isolated and not sufficiently vocal. The cooperation between the non-governmental organizations and the media, which can be strong allies in the fight against corruption, is weak and not stable. So, many researches, expert opinions and knowledge held by the non-governmental

sector are not available to the wider public, while on the other hand the media fail to substantiate their journalistic reports with the analysis, findings and data of the non-governmental organizations.

This research on media reporting on corruption, realized as part of the project “Media and Non-Governmental Organizations against Corruption,” was focused on strengthening the role of media and non-governmental organizations in the fight against corruption in Macedonia. The project should build the capacity, participation and cooperation between media and the non-governmental organizations in the fight against corruption. It is foreseen to initiate a network of media and non-governmental organizations for fighting against corruption, which will also sign a declaration for this specific purpose. The project is implemented in partnership with the non-governmental organizations Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) Macedonia from Skopje and EHO from Stip.

The Center for Civil Communications was established in 2005, as a non-governmental, nonpartisan, and non-profit association of citizens, which focuses its activities on anticorruption in two key and mutually related directions. The first deals with discovering corruption practices and proposing measures and policies for eliminating corruption. The second concerns supporting and enhancing the media for a more efficient realization of their role in the fight against corruption. In this respect, CCC has developed and proposed several hundred motions and recommendations for enhancing the regulations and practice in terms of more transparent, accountable and responsible work of the central and local authorities. It has also provided training for almost 200 journalists from the national and local media on researching and reporting on corruption and has published dozen researches and handbooks.

METHODOLOGY

The stories on corruption published from January 1 to March 31, 2011 in three daily newspapers (“Dnevnik”, “Vreme”, and “Koha”), two national TV broadcasters (“A1 TV” и “Alsat M”) and two local broadcasters (“Tera TV” from Bitola and “Iris” from Stip) were monitored. The focus of the analysis was the aggregated results of the monitoring, and not the results of any of the monitored media.

The monitoring included stories referring to corruption, corruption practices, accusations and allegations for corruption, abuse of public means, as well as the undertaken anticorruption measures, activities, and policies.

The published stories and the content were analyzed from the following aspects:

- The page on which the story was published;
- The section in which the story was published;
- The size of the story;
- The announcement of the story on the front page;
- Illustrations of the story;
- The author of the story;
- The genre of the story;
- The number, status, formality, and location of the sources in the story;
- A fair and balanced approach;
- The occasion for the story;
- The area in which the example of corruption emerges;
- The act of corruption;
- Possession of documents and evidence to support the corruption,
- Affiliation of the perpetrator of corruption (current of former government).

The research and monitoring pattern were designed in such way to provide an answer to the following key questions:

- To what extent do the Macedonian media report on corruption?

- Are the basic professional standards in journalism observed in the reporting on this topic?
- To what extent is the reporting balanced, objective and whether all parties in the story were consulted?
- Are the stories in this area instigated by independent and original research of the journalists or are they merely reports on events organized on this topic?
- To what extent do the news stories contain the elements of reliability, relevancy, trust, and credibility?
- To what extent do the media realize their role of government watchdogs when they report on corruption?

Bearing in mind the volume, scope, and manner of the monitoring, this is one of the most comprehensive and in depth monitoring processes ever conducted in the country, which offers relevant quantitative and qualitative indicators of the manner in which the media inform about corruption.

KEY FINDINGS

- The corruption as a topic is relatively frequent in the media.
- The corruption is not present on the front pages or the first minutes of the newscast.
- The corruption stories are dominantly not announced at the front pages or in the breaking news.
- One third of the stories are small, one third medium-sized and one third large.
- Few of the stories are illustrated with original photo or authentic recording.
- The news is dominating over the investigative stories.
- The author is not identified in almost half of the stories.
- The independent investigation of the journalist is seen in very few of the stories.
- More than half of the texts do not identify the sources or provide only one source.
- Police, political parties and officials are main sources of information on corruption.
- More than half of the stories provide only one angle of the story.
- The sources are dominantly identified.
- The actor of corruption is not consulted in dominant part of the stories.
- The journalist does not possess, nor has seen evidence (documents) to support the reporting on corruption in dominant part of the stories.
- The abuse of official position is the most common act of corruption reported in the Macedonian media.
- Half of the texts refer to corruption in governmental institutions.
- In majority of texts, the actor of corruption belongs to the current government.

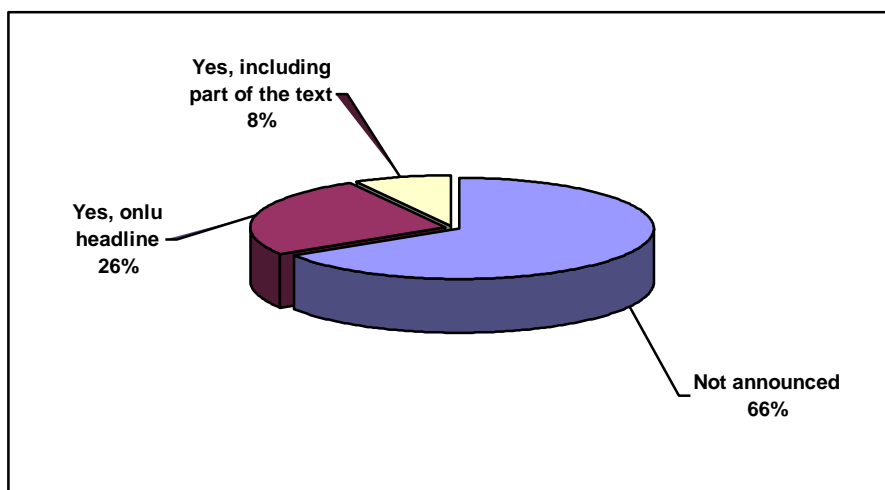
MEDIA MONITORING RESULTS

The corruption as a topic is relatively frequent in the media. In the period from January 1 to March 31, 2011, in the seven monitored media, a total of 242 news items on corruption were published. In average, each medium published corruption-related stories every other day. The number of news items on corruption was large and more frequent in the daily newspapers than the TV stations. Compared with the similar monitoring conducted in 2008 there is a decrease in the number of news items on corruption published in the media. Back then the media ran such stories on a daily basis.

The corruption is not present on the front pages or the first minutes of the newscast. In average the corruption-related stories are published on the 7th and 8th page in the newspapers (7.5 in average) and broadcast in the 14th minute in the main newscast. Regarding the type of section in which they are published (though sections differ in different newspapers and TV stations), they are most frequent in the *Current Affairs* (18%), *Macedonia* (14%), *Crime* (12%) and *Economy/ Money* (7%) section in the newspapers, and in the news from the country in the TV stations. The comparison with the previous monitoring shows that the number of news items on corruption published in the *Crime* section was reduced in favor of other sections, mainly *Macedonia*.

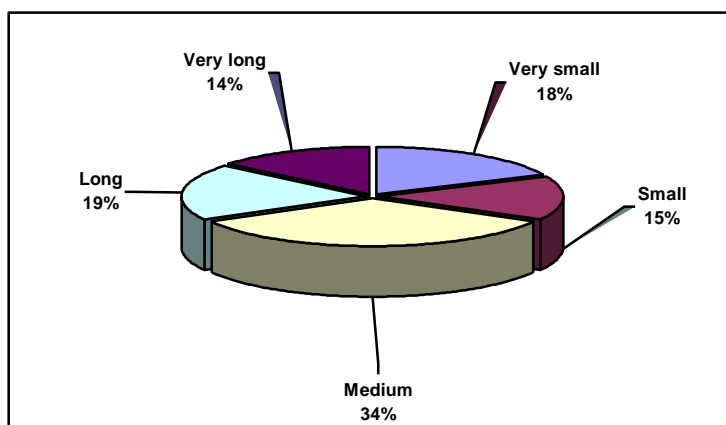
The stories on corruption are dominantly not published or announced on the front page or the breaking news. As much as two thirds of the corruption stories (66%) were not announced or published on the front pages of the newspapers or announced in the breaking TV news. 13% of the news items were announced in the breaking news on the TV stations and the front pages of the newspapers, but only the headline was featured. In 8% of the newspaper stories, portion of the text was also featured. Compared with the previous monitoring, there is an increase in the number of texts on corruption announced on the front pages of the newspapers.

Graph 1. Announcements of the story on the front page/ breaking news



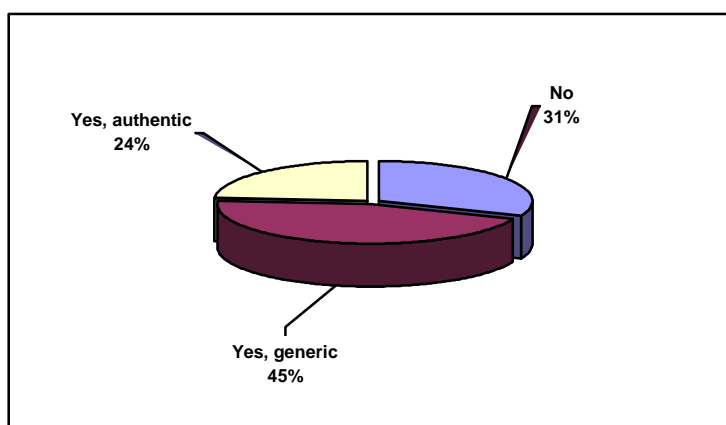
One third of the stories are small, one third medium-sized and one third large. In terms of the size of the text, the small (33%), medium (34%) and large (33%) texts are equally present. The number of small news items is more frequent in the newspapers while the longer reports are more often featured in the TV news. The comparison with the previous survey shows significant decrease of the number of small stories in favor of the longer ones.

Graph 2. Size of the text



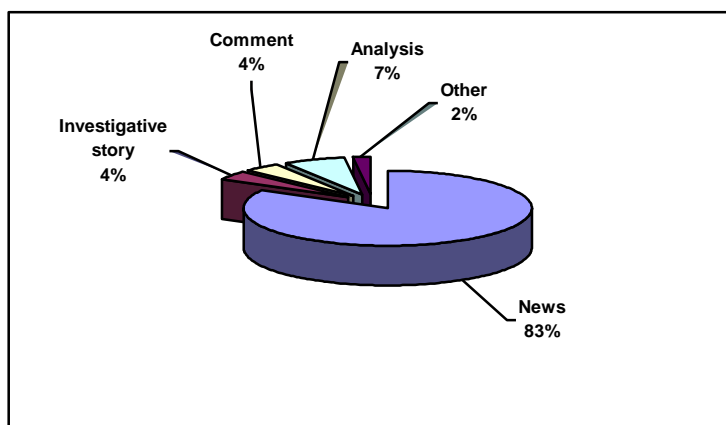
Few of the stories are illustrated with original photo or authentic recording. The dominating types of texts are those featuring a generic (thematic) photo or recording (45%) and stories that are not illustrated with a photo (31%). Original (authentic) photo or recording is featured in smaller number of the texts (24%). Compared with the previous monitoring, the number of stories without photo has been significantly reduced in favor of the texts with generic photo.

Graph 3. Is the text accompanied by a photograph?



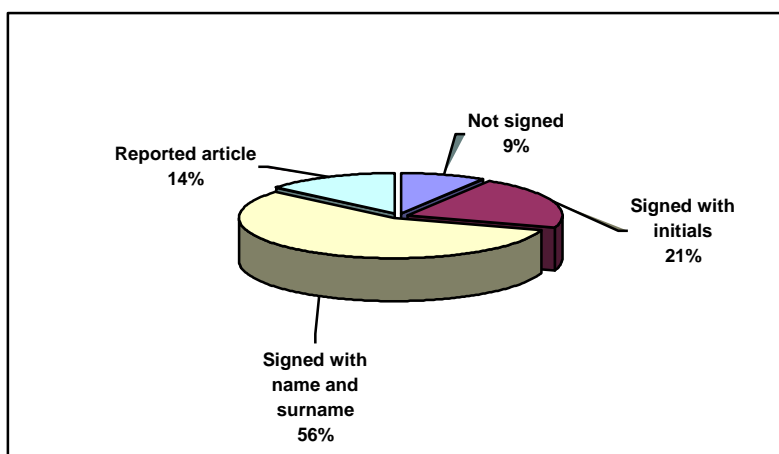
The news is dominating over the investigative stories. According to the genre, regardless of the size, the most frequent is the news (83%), compared to analyses (7%), investigative stories (4%), comments (4%), etc. The corruption related items in the media dominantly refer to events and are hardly ever original investigations or analyses conducted by the journalists. Taking into consideration the size of the texts in the news genre, the longer news reports are slightly more frequent than the short news. The comparison with the previous survey shows that the situation has not changed regarding the genre, but there is significant decline in the number of investigative stories which have been halved. Only the analytical stories are on the rise.

Graph 4. Genre of the story



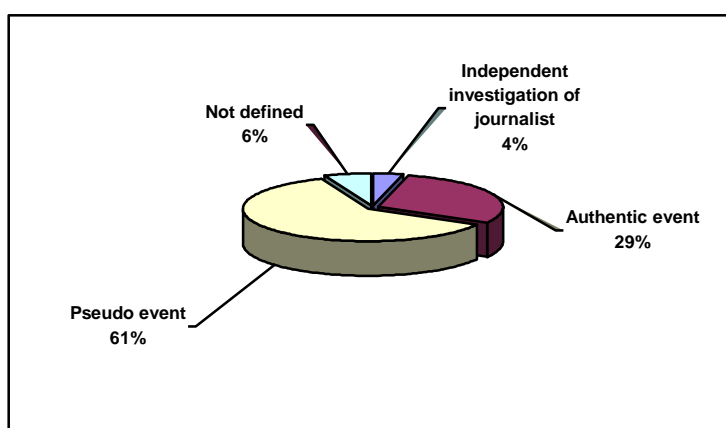
The author is not identified in almost half of the stories. In 44% of the published stories the author cannot be identified. In 21% of the news reports the author has only put his initials, while 14% of the stories are taken from a news agency or another medium, while in 9% of the cases the author is not signed at all. The journalist has signed his name and surname in 56% of the corruption related stories. In comparison with the previous monitoring, there is increased number of texts in which the author can be identified.

Graph 5. Reliability of the text



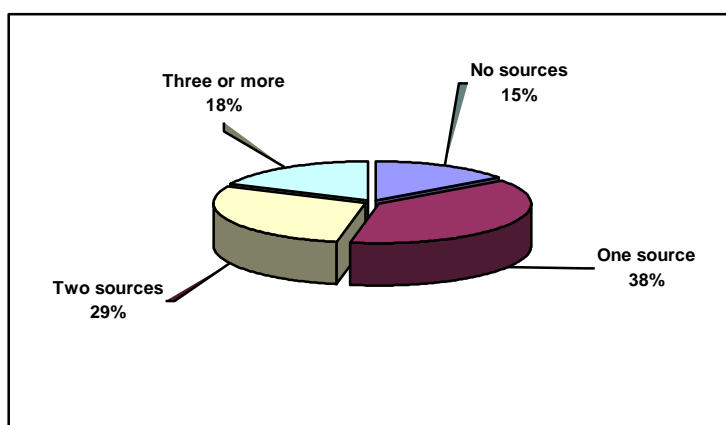
The independent investigation of the journalist is seen in very few of the stories. Only 4% of the news stories on corruption are result of the independent investigation of the journalist. In the other cases (90%), the dominant motive for the story was an event, either authentic or pseudo (press conference, statement, press release, session, etc.). The comparison with the previous survey speaks of deteriorating situation in the investigative reporting and halving of the already small number of texts resulting from the independent investigation of the journalist.

Graph 6. Motive for the story



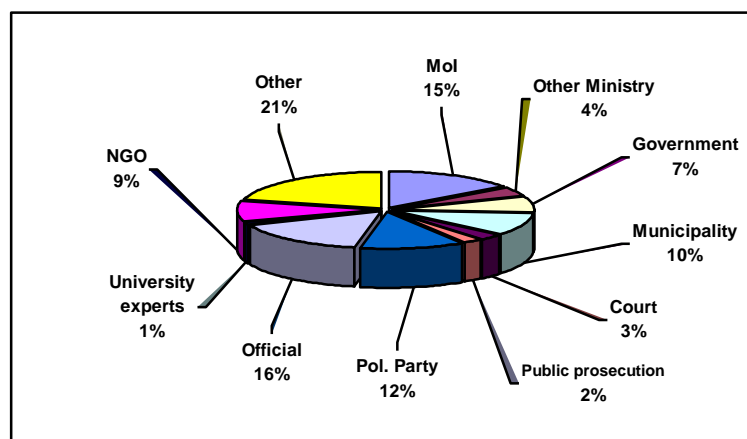
More than half of the texts do not identify the sources or provide only one source. When it comes to the number of sources, less than half of the stories (47%) have provided two or several sources, while in high percentage of the stories (38%) only one source is provided. Total of 15% of the texts have not identified a single source of information. In comparison with the previous media monitoring results, there is certain improvement in the number of sources in corruption stories.

Graph 7. Number of sources



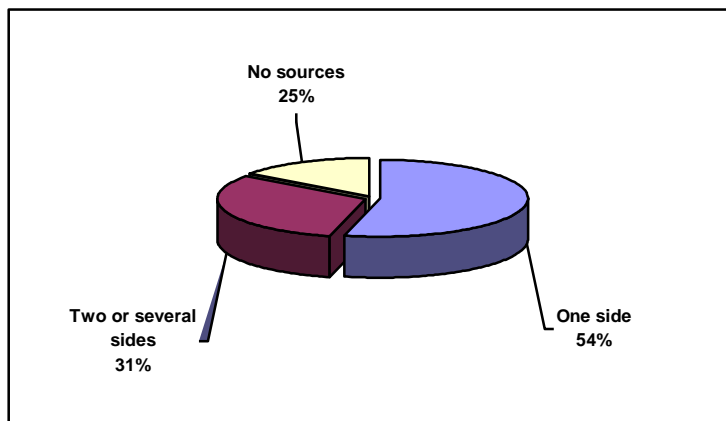
Police, political parties and officials are main sources of information on corruption. In terms of the origin of the sources in the corruption stories, the prevailing institution is the Ministry of Interior (15%), followed by the political parties (12%), municipalities (10%), non-governmental organizations (9%) and the government (7%). The holders of different public duties are also significant source of information (16%).

Graph 8. Origin of the sources



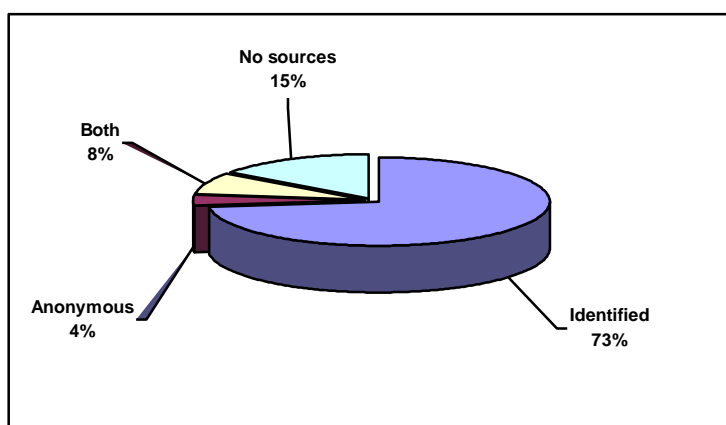
More than half of the stories provide only one angle of the story. In 54% of the stories only one of the concerned parties in the story is consulted, while two or several parties are consulted and listed in 31% of the texts. In 15% of the stories, not a single of the concerned parties is mentioned. This situation has not changed in comparison with the media monitoring conducted three years ago.

Graph 9. Sides represented in the story



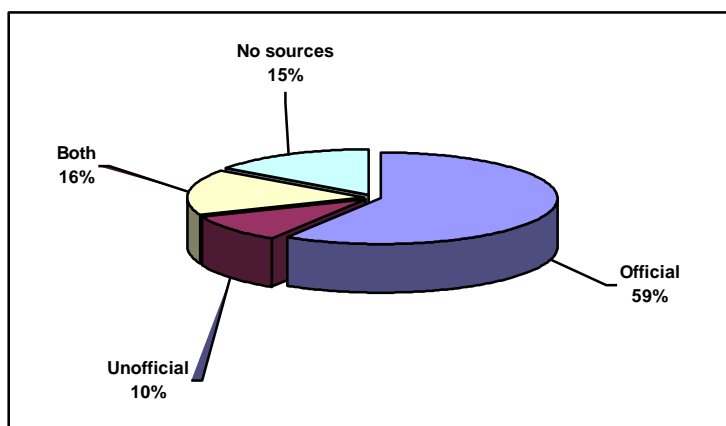
The sources are dominantly listed. Anonymous sources are used in only 4% of the stories, which coincides with the number of investigative stories. In 73% of the stories the sources are identified, while in 8% of the stories there are both identified and anonymous sources. 15% of the stories do not provide any sources. Compared with the previous survey, the number of stories with identified sources has increased, while those with anonymous sources has been reduced.

Graph 10. Status of the sources



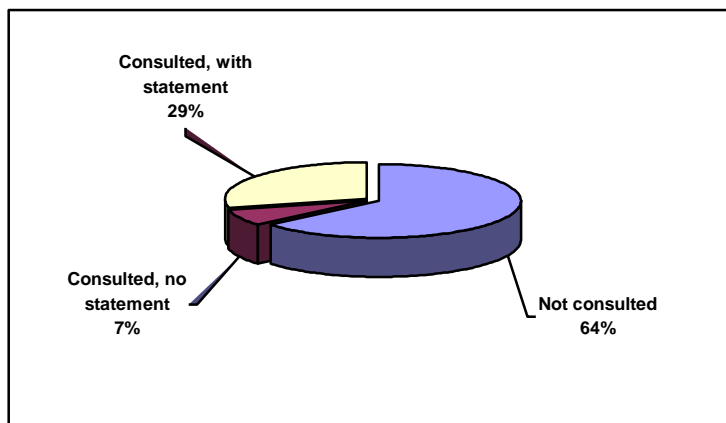
The official sources are prevailing. In more than half of the texts (59%) official sources are used, while in 10% the sources are unofficial. 16% of the stories used both official and unofficial sources, while 15% have not identified any sources.

Graph 11. Formality of sources



The actor of corruption is not consulted in dominant number of the news stories. In as many as 64% of the published stories, the actor subject to corruption was not even consulted. The actor was consulted and made statement (which was either quoted or reported) in 29% of the stories, while 7% were consulted but were not willing to make a statement. The comparison with the previous monitoring shows only slight decrease of the number of stories in which the actor of corruption was not consulted.

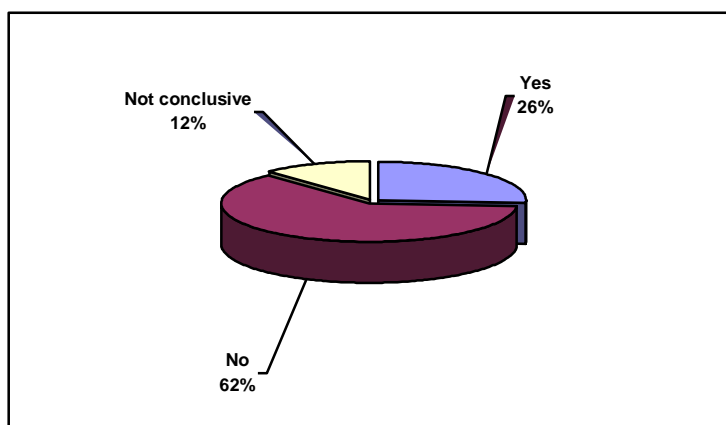
Graph 12. Is the actor in corruption consulted?



The journalist does not possess, nor has seen evidence (documents) to support the reporting on corruption in dominant number of the stories.

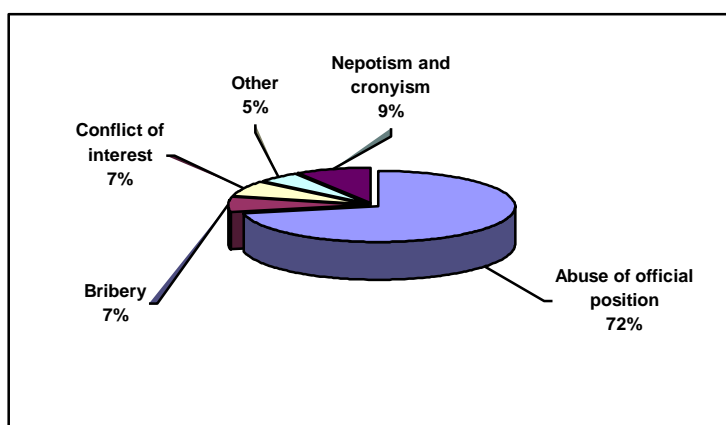
In 62% of the published stories it is evident that the journalist cannot substantiate the act of corruption reported in the story neither with any evidence nor documents. In only 26% of the stories it is obvious that the journalist holds or at least has seen such evidence, while in 12% of the stories this is not conclusive. In this case there is a significant deterioration in comparison with the previous monitoring as there is increased number of stories in which the journalist fails to support the story with adequate evidence.

Graph 13. Documents/ evidence to support the corruption



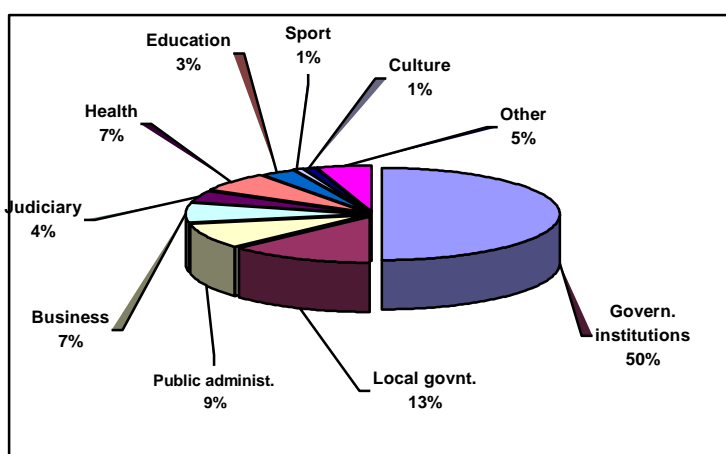
The abuse of official position is the most common act of corruption reported in the Macedonian media. In 72% of the published stories, the act of corruption referred to abuse of official position. Less frequent were nepotism and cronyism (9%), bribe (7%) and conflict of interest (7%). In comparison with the previous monitoring, there is increased number of stories in which the act of corruption is the abuse of official position, while decreased number of texts where the act of corruption is bribe.

Graph 14. Act of corruption



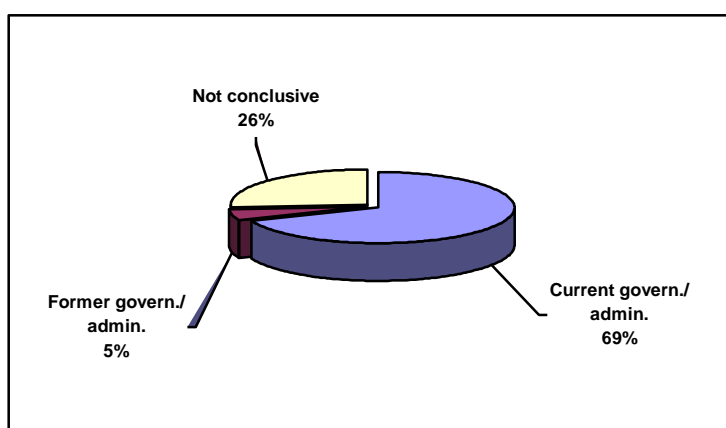
Half of the texts refer to corruption in governmental institutions. Half of the published stories (50%) speak of corruption in governmental institutions, while much less of the stories refer to corruption in the local governments (13%), public administration (9%), health sector (7%), business (7%) and judiciary (4%). Compared with the previous survey, the number of stories on corruption in governmental institutions has significantly increased, while the number of stories on corruption in local governments has decreased.

Graph 15. Area of corruption



In majority of texts, the actor of corruption belongs to the current government. In more than two thirds of the published stories (69%), the actor subject to corruption is from the current government, while in smaller number of stories (5%), the actor belongs to the former government. In 26% of the stories the background of the actor subject to corruption cannot be identified. In comparison with the previous monitoring, the number of text in which the actor belongs to the current government increases, while the number of texts in which the actor belongs to the former government decreases.

Graph 16. Background of the actor in corruption



CONCLUSIONS

The results of the monitoring and the analysis of the way in which the media report about corruption in 2011 as well as the comparison with the similar research conducted in 2008 point to the general conclusion that **the media in Macedonia still fail to play their critical role in the fight against corruption** and there is still plenty of room for strengthening the professionalism in reporting on corruption.

Although some improvement is observed in certain segments in comparison with the situation three years ago, still **there is a frequent lack of even fundamental professional journalistic standards in the stories on corruption.**

The fact that the number of stories on corruption has been reduced on one hand and the fact that half of the stories fail to identify sources or list only one source, by presenting only one perspective, without providing any evidence on the corruption allegations and without even consulting the “actor” of corruption points out that the reduced number of stories does not mean better quality.

The halved number of texts on corruption instigated by an independent investigation of the journalist speaks of **deterioration of the investigative reporting**, which is considered to be crucial for revealing the corruptive activities, which by nature are covert. Having in mind the increasing number of news stories on corruption instigated by an event produced by the state bodies, the media do not represent the real picture of corruption in the country and the fight against it. With this **the media fail to play their societal role of being watchdogs of the government.**

Despite the elaborative nature of this topic, as many as two thirds of the stories on corruption is small or medium sized. This means that **the corruption related topics are only informative (reporting an event) and superficial**, without any in depth, comprehensive or detailed research and analysis.

Taking into consideration that many of the stories on corruption are not signed by the author, while huge number of stories do not provide evidence for the corruption allegations, nor are substantiated with any authentic photo to illustrate these claims, one may conclude that the corruption stories **lack reliability, relevancy, trust and credibility**. This situation may be interpreted as frivolous approach of the media towards the corruption problem.

The fact that more than half of the corruption stories provide no sources or identify only a single source, present only one side of the story and fail to consult the subject suspected of corruption speaks that the journalists wholeheartedly take the statements of the creator of events (mostly state institutions). In this way, **the media fail to observe even the basic professional reporting standards**: fair and balanced approach towards all sides in the story i.e. consultation with and presentation of all concerned parties by having equal and impartial approach towards each of them. This leaves room for abuse and manipulation with the media.

The small number of corruption stories that are announced at the front pages or in the breaking news as well as the relative concordance between the number of texts containing the basic professional elements with the ones announced on the front pages or in the breaking news speaks that the **media are maybe aware of their unprofessional reporting on corruption**. Hence is the conclusion that the media would probably announce even more stories on the front pages or in the breaking news if the stories are written in more professional manner.

Based on the results and conclusions of the monitoring, as well as the discussions and views of the journalists expressed in the corruption related debates, the Center for Civil Communications will propose specific recommendations for enhancing and strengthening the role of the media in the fight against corruption in Macedonia. The recommendations will be publicized and provided to all relevant media in the country, while more than 20 journalists will be trained to apply them in their everyday reporting. We

believe that this will contribute for strengthening the role of the media to fight against the corruption in Macedonia and to create better living and working conditions.