

## In This Issue You Can Read About:

- ◆ RTVBIH and RTRS: Public Service Programming Below the Designated Minimum
- ◆ Media In the Eve of the Elections:
  - Serbia: Who Will Announce the Victory?
- ◆ Montenegro: No Elections Propaganda
- ◆ Macedonia: Political Propaganda and Scoring Points
- ◆ News

# Media News

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## ◆ Journalism and Democracy • Media in Transition

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## RTVBiH and RTRS

### Public Service Programming Below the Designated Minimum

Media Plan Institute has conducted an extensive monitoring project on the public service and advertising programming of the two main public broadcasters in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Radio and TV of Bosnia and Herzegovina (RTVBiH) in the Federation and Radio and TV of Republic of Srpska (RTRS) in Republika Srpska, as well as the following commercial broadcasters: Open Broadcast Network (OBN), Independent TV Hayat (NTV Hayat), Independent TV Studio 99 (NTV Studio 99) in the Federation of BiH, and Alternative TV (ATV), TV Bel and Independent TV of Banjaluka (Nezavisna TV Banjaluka) from the Republic of Srpska. The research was conducted under a contract from IREX ProMedia, which carries out media development and assistance programs for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

IREX has stated that its purpose in sponsoring this research is to assist the international community in developing sound, practical policies in its current efforts to reform public broadcasting in BiH.

#### **A Standing Obligation: 40% of Public Service Programming**

The international community, including the Independent Media Commission, is currently working to encourage the evolution of these two remnants of former state television in Yugoslavia toward the standards of programming and professionalism observed by European public broadcasting. In particular, it is intended that RTVBH develop into two components—a two-channel Federation TV serving the Federation entity, and a new Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) serving the entire country.

As part of these reforms, the IMC on 21 October 1999 adopted a broad Rule on the Definition and Obligations of Public Radio and Television Broadcasting. In this rule, the IMC notes that:

“Consistent with general European practice public broadcasters have distinct obligations to society including the providing of programming that serves the news, information, educational and cultural needs of the public” because they are supported in part by public funds.

Accordingly, the IMC requires that all public broadcasting stations—including those licensed to a government body or supported to an extent greater than 51% by municipalities and cantons—must devote “at least 40% of program time in any week [to] news and other informative or educational programming.” The IMC has stated that this rule will apply to each public station as it receives a long-term IMC licence, a process now under way.

The same rule limits the amount of commercial advertising or commercially sponsored programming that public television stations may broadcast to 4 minutes per hour. Separately, the IMC issued a Code of Advertising on 09 March 1999 that restated the 4 minute per hour limit for public TV stations or 6 minutes per hour for public radio stations and put it into force on 15 April 2000.

MediaPlan’s research project addresses three questions that arise from these regulations:

Is it practical for public stations, particularly RTVBH and RTRS, to achieve the 40% minimum of public service broadcasting as set by the IMC?

Do IMC regulations define public service broadcasting clearly enough to permit and others to measure the public service content of a station’s program?

Is the 4-minute advertising limit currently being observed by the major public broadcasters?

MediaPlan Institute monitored and measured all programming broadcast by RTVBH and RTRS for four consecutive weeks, from 1-28 May, a period judged to be sufficiently long after local elections on 8 April that the data would not be distorted by post-election news coverage and discussion. For purposes of comparison, MediaPlan Institute carried out the same monitoring of three private, commercial stations licensed as such by IMC in Sarajevo (OBN, NTV Hayat and NTV Studio 99) and three others in Banjaluka (ATV, TV Bel and NTV Banjaluka) during the same time period.



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## **Commercial TV Broadcasters More Public Than Public Broadcasters?!**

The main findings of this research are:

The programs of RTVBH and RTRS consistently fall short of the IMC's 40% minimum amount of public service broadcasting, averaging 32.25% and 29.93% respectively in May. In four weeks of monitoring, RTVBH never exceeded 34% and RTRS never exceeded 30%.

In contrast, public service programming broadcast by two of the six private stations Media Plan monitored—OBN and NTV 99—consistently exceeded 40%, even though this requirement does not apply to them.

Following IMC definitions, NTV Studio 99 achieved the highest proportion of public service broadcasting (53% on a weekly average), but this was due to a large quantity of news and interviews repeated from the previous day, and to the station's limited entertainment offering. OBN's public service programming averaged 42.52%. NTV Hayat averaged 33.22% of public service programming, pushing RTVBH and RTRS into 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> place respectively.

Thus the 40% minimum appears practical, and may even be too low to establish a clear distinction between public and private broadcasting.

RTRS broadcast more entertainment than any other station monitored, averaging 4652 minutes or 64.83% of total weekly programming, compared to 3672 minutes or 48.62% broadcast by RTVBH. RTVBH carried more sports programming than any other station—1026 minutes or 13.6% of its total broadcasting from 1-28 May.

Based on IMC definitions, OBN fits the profile of a public broadcaster more fully than any other major station in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the highest average weekly content of public service programming—3113 minutes or 42.52%--and one of the lowest entertainment offerings, averaging 3289 minutes or 44.03% of total air time.

During the monitoring period of 1-28 May only OBN and ATV carried contact programs (allowing the public to call in comments and questions) involving public figures, an IMC criterion for defining such programming as a form of public service. RTVBH had no contact programming at all during this period.

Of all eight stations, Bel TV carried the largest amount of news (a weekly average of 980 minutes) followed by NTV Studio 99 (824 minutes) and NTV Hayat (744 minutes). RTVBH and RTRS ranked fourth and fifth with 654 and 540 minutes respectively. ATV ranked sixth with 538 minutes. OBN and NTV Banjaluka ranked lowest in average weekly news content with 456 and 366 minutes respectively.

OBN's educational programming far exceeded that of any other station—1812 minutes on a weekly average compared to second-ranked RTVBH with 853 minutes, a figure that pushed OBN into the top rank of public-service broadcasting.. ATV scored lowest in educational programs with an average of 314 minutes or 18% of programming. (These programs include animal or wildlife documentaries which many stations appear to use as inexpensive time-fillers.)

No station achieved the IMC's requirement of at least 10 hours of children's educational programming per week for public broadcasters. RTRS carried essentially no children's educational programming during the monitoring period.

RTVBH systematically exceeds the IMC limit of 4 minutes per hour of commercial advertising, both in morning and prime-time evening hours. From 1-28 May, RTVBH exceeded this limit 100 times, reaching as high as 19.72 minutes of advertising between 20:00 and 21:00 hours on 19 May. Even though it carries relatively little advertising, RTRS

exceeded the 4-minute limit 19 times, reaching as high as 13.35 minutes between 18:00 and 19:00 hours on 11 May.

TV Bel carried the highest overall amount of advertising—an average of 1112 minutes per week or 15.66% of programming. NTV BL and NTV Hayat were second and third at 741 minutes (10.44%) and 513 minutes (6.88%) respectively. Advertising occupied a weekly average of 407 minutes (5.56%) of OBN's program, 352 minutes (5.63%) of ATV's, 293 minutes (3.88%) of RTVBH, 194 minutes (4.92%) of NTV Studio 99's and 68 minutes ((0.96%) of the RTRS program.

RTVBH, however, carries the second largest proportion of high-value international commercial advertising, which makes up more than 50% of its overall ad content. NTV BL ranks highest in this respect. TV Bel, with the highest overall proportion of ads, was one of the two lowest (along with NTV Studio 99) in the category of international ads.

The actual programs broadcast by some stations deviate significantly and often from their published program schedules. Such deviations are disorienting to the audience and unwelcome to advertisers. RTVBH and RTRS show relatively low levels of such deviation.

There is a need for more precise definitions from the IMC for certain types of programming which according to its rules constitute public service broadcasting, particularly with regard to children's programming and to "collage" programs that usually combine entertainment, news, information and advertising.

### **Forthcoming Changes in the Media Policy – Perhaps**

These findings place in doubt IMC's conception of the mission and effectiveness of public broadcasters. In setting a required minimum level of public service broadcasting, the IMC appears to have intended that stations supported by public money give priority to news, information, education and related programming – all to serve the most urgent needs of society – over entertainment. However, the main public broadcasters – i.e. RTVBH and RTRS – evidently favour entertainment over public service at the moment and even more so than commercial broadcasters. As a result, their programming is more commercial in nature than the programme of some of the leading private commercial broadcasters.

There are two possible remedies that IMC can apply. One is to retain the existing course of media strategy while increasing the public service programming minimum quota to allow for a finer distinction between public and commercial broadcasters, and providing better specified terms and definitions of public service as well as more detailed guidance to public broadcasters with regards to their function in society and assistance with self-monitoring of public service programming. Another remedy however is draconic but may prove fruitful in long-term perspective. Namely, it would involve a shift in the overall media policy – devised by international community along the lines of specifically European understanding of the public broadcasters as prime patrons of public interest - towards the North American model of commercial broadcasters obligated under legal framework to incorporate a certain ratio of public service programming. This model may appear particularly suited to BiH circumstances for two reasons. Firstly, the programming of commercial broadcasters is already more public service oriented than the programming of public broadcasters. Secondly, it would help broadcasters overcome their financial difficulties, particularly grave in the case of public broadcasters. These reasons suggest that any reconsideration of media policy and media legislation by international community and IMC in particular would be worthwhile. **(MPI research team, led by Tarik Jusic. The conclusion and headings by Media News editorial bureau. Media Plan is grateful to Robert Gillette of IREX ProMedia for his support and valuable expertise provided in the course of this research.)**

# Media In the Eve of the Elections

**Media News continue to monitor the media situation during the preelections campaign in the countries of South East Europe. In this issue, we bring about information and analyses provided by our associates from Yugoslavia, i.e. Serbia and Montenegro, and Macedonia.**

## Serbia (24th September)

### Who Will Announce the Victory?

Judging by the bipolarisation of the media in Serbia, harshness and tone of reporting primarily by those state-controlled, zeal of their journalists and their unscrupulous editing policy, it is fairly easy to deduce a rather dramatic conclusion: actual elections results will not yield any effect and there will be no normal consolidation of authorities in Serbia and Yugoslavia – a conflict between two political groups and its uncertain outcome are inevitability that will mark the climax of the protracted Serbian political crisis.

Even at some earlier stages Serbia would normally enter its elections in an absolute media turmoil. Almost from the very outset of his rule, Milosevic ensured absolute control over the leading media in the country, primarily RTV Serbia, the most influential daily Politika as well as a number of smaller magazines yet with large circulation such as Vecernje Novosti, Politika Ekspres, Dnevnik from Novi Sad and others. Despite this, however, there has always been at least a form of a smokescreen, suggesting a balanced number of pages or minutes reserved for the opponents whereas the influential Belgrade TV Studio B – now in the firm hands of the state – and independent B92 Radio – also taken over by the authorities – observed the standards of professional journalism, thereby allowing potential voters to learn objective information and decide for themselves how to cast their votes. In the eve of decisive elections 2000 and in the atmosphere of prevailing optimism as to the prospects of Democratic Opposition of Serbia and primarily their Presidential candidate Vojislav Kostunica, the situation is significantly different even in the media arena of a Serbia kept in dark and silence for years now.

Reporting on the elections by the state-owned media - as well as those pro-Government oriented that are privately owned only *pro forma* - is entirely focused on the pre-elections campaign of the ruling coalition, primarily the SPS-JUL elections team, reconstruction of the country, unbalanced criticism of the rival opposition and assaults of the Montenegrin Government. In other words, the opposition hardly features in reports by the major regime-controlled media, apart from certain statements of theirs – deliberately decontextualised – that fit the pre-elections regime-created image of the opposition as treacherous, corrupted, non-patriotic, willing to sell the country or, in a word, NATO opposition, as it is exclusively referred to in the state-owned media.

On the other hand, the media that elude the state control – above all, Blic and Glas as dailies with the highest circulation rates, Vreme and Nin weeklies, as well as a number of independent local broadcasters – mostly cover activities of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia and report on their pre-elections rallies, agreements and the overall campaign, including statements and interviews by party leaders and representatives of NGOs with addition of research findings of various institutes and agencies - invariably presented rather visibly - that assert good elections prospects of the opposition. On a smaller scale but also without any unfavourable bias, these media cover activities by the ruling party representatives, mostly their press conferences and pre-elections rallies, rarely missing the opportunity to inspire the citizens to cast their votes at least by an odd comic or occasional photograph.

Montenegrin dailies close to the Montenegrin authorities are effectively running an anti-elections campaign - although the authorities officially have stated their support only to the

elections boycott - whereas the Dan daily promotes the elections, supporting the SPS-JUL coalition and Slobodan Milosevic as a Presidential candidate.

As much as this media landscape of the pre-elections Serbia may appear complete, one should not disregard a fresh and most significant fact that has by and large been shaping the public opinion over the last two years: it is also undoubtedly contributing to quality information and balancing the propaganda by the state-owned media. Namely, the research findings indicate that independent, nongovernmental Blic has been the most popular daily in Serbia, beating the traditionally most popular Politika and Vecernje Novosti with standard higher circulation rate. According to the latest research done by Media Centre research team, the estimate is that 1,904,580 people in Serbia read Blic every day. Vecernje Novosti and Politika follow with 1,307,960 and 1,132,000 readers respectively whereas independent nongovernmental Glas Javnosti occupies the fourth place with 721,961 readers a day. Being aware of this ratio among the daily newspapers and the bearing that these two independent dailies beyond any doubt have, the Government has unsuccessfully employed various means on several occasions – ranging from the ban on paper import to brutal confiscation of the press – in order to terminate their publication.

Such environment has naturally fostered the determination of editors of state-owned dailies, subjugated to the regime, to go to the extremes in terms of editing policy and turn their papers into openly propagandist bulletins of the ruling parties. This can be illustrated with infinite number of examples. Having monitored Politika's reporting between 7th of August when the elections were announced, and 1st of September, the Media Centre research team learnt the following: Politika reported on the decisions and statements by the Democratic Opposition of Serbia very briefly and only three times in this time period – firstly, that the DOS decided that Kostunica would run for the President; secondly, it brought about a fragment of Kostunica's statement reproaching the Montenegrin Government for its decision, and finally, a statement by a DOS official criticising the policy of Serb Renewal Movement! By contrast, this newspaper is packed with headlines such as: 'No Elections Can Be Won By Traitors!', 'Voting for Separatist Parties Is Fatal for Peace', 'Soros' Servants', etc. every single day.

The major broadcasters – primarily RTS, Studio B, TV Politika, BKTv, etc. – cannot boast any more professionalism. Monitoring of the timing devoted to the parties and Presidential candidates over only one preelections week led to next to unbelievable findings. RTV Serbia devoted 39.31% of the total programming time to the activities of the SPS-JUL coalition whereas the Democratic Opposition got only 9.95 %. It is worth bearing in mind that this timing is the timing of reports directly related to pre-elections party activities, disregarding those on reconstruction, health care achievements, the air of popular content and ever increasing number of countries that approve of, and even admire, the policy of Yugoslav Government. The ratio appears even more drastic with regards to Presidential candidates: RTS devoted 32.95 % of the total informative programming time to the direct coverage of Slobodan Milosevic's campaign in one single week. Another Presidential candidate Vojislav Kostunica, evidently a rising star, was not even mentioned!

A reasonably better balanced ratio in the programming of a local TV in Nis testifies to somewhat more professional conduct of local independent TV broadcasters: while Vojislav Kostunica got 11.11% of the total programming time, Slobodan Milosevic did get 8.52%.

It is in this media landscape that the citizens of Serbia will cast their votes on 24th of September. These elections are special and different in another aspect as well. It is for the first time that the majority of voters is convinced that the opposition and its presidential candidate above all stand an actual chance of winning. But one outstanding dilemma remains: who will announce the victory?

Opinions of numerous analysts, politicians, journalists, public persons and ordinary citizens are divided as to the aftermath of elections and possible victory of the opposition. What however not even the greatest optimists even dare envisage is the title page of Politika on 25th of September reading the headline: 'Milosevic Lost the Elections'.

Perhaps this last assertion is most suggestive as to the aftermath of forthcoming elections in Serbia. (Vladan Radosavljević, Media Centre Belgrade)

## Montenegro

### **No Pre-elections Propaganda – But No Compliance with the Recommendation Either**

Montenegrin Ministry of Information directed the state-controlled media not to cover the campaign of political parties and coalitions whose elections lists have been verified by the Elections Commission. This direction in the eve of forthcoming elections in Yugoslavia that have been declared illegal by the Montenegrin Government applies to the mass media in Montenegro whose founder is either the Republic or local institutions of the state political organisation. Yet not all the media in this category observe the decision of the Government.

The explanation provided clarifies that the decision stems from the Resolution on the protection of rights and interests of Montenegro and its citizens, adopted by the Assembly of the Republic of Montenegro. It follows that Amendments to FRY Constitution, dated 6th July 2000, are invalid and that any decisions derived thereof by illegitimate federal institutions will not be complied with, including the elections rules and regulations promulgated by the Federal Elections Commission on 2nd August 2000.

The Ministry however does not prohibit all reporting on elections activities. This is clearly explicated by the provision that 'the public media whose founder is the state or any local institution of the state political organisation have both the duty and the obligation to report objectively on stances and activities of all Parliamentary parties in the Republic in accordance with their policy as devised by their editing boards.'

According to the regulations in effect, only the parties with seats in the Parliament are entitled to coverage of their activities by the state-owned TV Montenegro and Pobjeda daily. But it is solely the Socialist People's Party of Momir Bulatovic out of seven Montenegrin parties running for the forthcoming elections that falls into that category. This party dedicates every single party press conference to the Federal elections, thus effectively running a form of a pre-elections campaign.

Otherwise, the Federal elections feature in the media on a daily basis through the activities of the ruling coalition, i.e. the Democratic Party of Socialists, People's Party and Social Democratic Party, that do not recognise the elections and denounce them as illegal and contrary to the interests of Montenegro, recommending to the citizens to boycott them.

It is of importance to note that the state-owned TV has recently introduced a new informative programming 'The Objective', addressing major events in Serbia or rather, addressing the Serbian viewership. As 'The Objective' started covering pre-elections activities – primarily of the opposition parties - at the outset of the pre-elections campaign, the Montenegrin TV decided to broadcast the programme solely over the satellite until the elections period has ended. This way the decision by the Ministry of Information is complied with since the pre-elections programming is broadcast but over the satellite - not by TV transmitters on the ground.

It is also interesting that there was no live broadcast of the extraordinary session of the Montenegrin Assembly, summoned up at the request of the Socialist People's Party on 12th September: the explanation was that Terms and Procedures of the Assembly preclude live broadcasts of sessions immediately prior to either Federal or Republic elections. However, the SPP notes that this directly contradicts the stance of the ruling coalition since it effectively stipulates official recognition of the elections by Montenegrin authorities.

The Dan daily, close to the Belgrade regime, openly propagates the elections and supports the SPS-JUL coalition and Slobodan Milosevic as a Presidential candidate. Two municipal media, that is – Radio Pljevlja and Radio Herceg Novi, consistently violate the Ministry's direction. Initially, these two radio stations differed in the approach to the direction: while Radio Pljevlja openly declared that it would ignore the decision by the Ministry, Radio Herceg Novi initially stated its compliance with the direction but subsequently altered its decisions due to the pressurisation by the Municipal administration, controlled by the Socialist People's Party, and joined the pre-elections campaign.

As to the independent media in Montenegro, they cover the pre-elections activities at their own discretion, endeavouring to inform on the elections but also to state their own position with regards to the elections, normally informed by their own political preferences. They, however, are not obligated to comply with the warning in concern anyhow. (Julka Pejović, Montena Fax Podgorica)

## **Macedonia (10th September)**

### **Political Propaganda and Scoring Points**

For several years in succession the Republic of Macedonia has been living with elections of all sorts – the Parliamentary elections in 1998, followed by the Presidential elections in 1999 and finally, the local elections now in year 2000. Perhaps this is the reason – in addition to summer holidays season – why the pre-elections campaign was initially envisaged as ‘insipid, uninteresting and dull’. However, if judging by the course of the campaign, these forecasts were wrong. Summer heat has not prevented political parties and their candidates running for Mayors or other municipal administrators from organising rallies and press-conferences – nor have they been impeded in visiting towns and villages throughout the Republic.

#### **Amplitude of Parties and Coalitions**

All existing and newly born minor and major political parties and coalitions have joined the run for positions in local administration. Still, the campaign was predominated by the ruling coalition – or rather, VMRO-DPMNE and the Democratic Alternative solely, then the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA – the third partner in the ruling coalition but standing for elections independently of other members), the United Opposition, composed of four parties (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia – SDSM, Liberal Democratic Party – LDP, Socialist Party of Macedonia – SPM, League for Democracy); Party of Democratic Prosperity (PDP – an Albanian party that participated in the previous Government); Liberal Party (LP – a separated wing of LDP run by Stojan Andov, the former Speaker of Macedonian Assembly); True Macedonian Reform Option (VMRO – a newly formed political party led by Boris Stojmenov, up until recently the Finance Minister in Ljupco Georgievski's Cabinet – now his resolute enemy); finally, a newly formed Democratic Union (DS), led by Pavle Trajanov, former Minister of Interior in Georgievski's Cabinet.

All events throughout the pre-elections campaign indicate that these elections are of great significance but not due to the importance of local authorities for the overall national democratisation. It is a rather different matter. Namely, the opposition represented by the United Opposition made it clear in the course of its campaign that 10<sup>th</sup> September was not only about electing local authorities but assessing the incumbent Government as well. They also called for extraordinary Parliamentary elections, officially scheduled for year 2002. Prime Minister Ljupco Georgievski did not hesitate to respond to the challenge and he

laconically stated in public that if the coalition of VMRO-DPMNE and DA won at least 10% fewer votes than the united opposition at the local elections, he himself would announce extraordinary Parliamentary elections on 1<sup>st</sup> October. However, his coalition partners, Arben Djaferi of DPA and Vasil Tupurkovski of DA (currently in the USA for a heart surgery and expected to be back in Macedonia on 25<sup>th</sup> September) have not consented to this, asking Georgievski to reconsider his statement whereas Savo Klimovski, the Speaker of the Assembly, denounced Georgievski's statement as 'sheer rhetoric'. Naturally, it is a totally different matter how these elections could be organised at all when they are conditioned upon the abolition of the Parliament declared by Parliamentarians themselves – at least 61 of them – and/or upon the vote of Macedonian citizens at a referendum.

### **Use Or Rather Misuse of the Media in the Preelections Campaign**

What role then do the media play in all these politico-electoral games? No special expert analysis is required for categorisation of the media: (1) supporters of the Government, particularly the public service such as the Macedonian RTV or dailies Nova Makedonija and Vecer; (2) supporters of the opposition – weeklies Start and Denes; (3) politically impartial media such as the Dnevnik daily. Had this been it, one could have dismissed the whole thing as 'déjà vu'. However, as the campaign was heating up and the first round approaching (10<sup>th</sup> September), it became ever more evident that the media played the main role in the elections process. What is the whole thing about?

Some ten days prior to the elections, both direct and indirect pressurisation of the media started. The public witnessed legitimisation of violence by the Government and a campaign against more influential independent media in the Republic.

The first in a series of actions was the decision by the Government to freeze the bank account of Denes publishing company that published Makedonija Denes daily and Denes weekly. Editors believe that the action was triggered off by their articles on 'Blagovestije', a foundation run by Snezana Georgievska, the wife of incumbent Macedonian Prime Minister, who had warned a week earlier that two separate charges would be raised against Denes. Namely, these newspapers brought about a series of articles on her foundation, exploring its source of funding. On 31<sup>st</sup> August 2000 the headline on the title page of Makedonija Denes read: 'Denes and Makedonija Denes Banned – Georgievski Establishes Dictatorship!' The article further reads that these two newspapers were facing a serious risk of permanent closure. Namely, on 30<sup>th</sup> August, the Prime Minister directed the Public Taxation Office to put into effect a rather questionable resolution, freezing the bank account of these newspapers. However, despite the ban, the management has decided to proceed with publication as they enjoy the public support.

On 4<sup>th</sup> September, the Ministry of Transportation and Communications announced that a newly constructed company building of TV Kanal 5 would be demolished. TV Kanal 5 is a private broadcaster covering the area of Skopje, owned by Emil Stojmenov, the son of Boris Stojmenov, the former Finance Minister and the current leader of the newly formed VMRO – The True Macedonian Reform Option that has already been joined by 6 Parliamentarians of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE and the 'transfer' of another 18 is expected in near future. It is worth adding that VMRO-DPMNE 'supporters' proved hostile to these Parliamentarians and stoned their houses – a reaction perceived as 'spontaneous' by Prime Minister Georgievski. Police response was delayed as the police seemed to have disregarded the fact that these politicians enjoyed diplomatic immunity under the Macedonian Constitution. As to the TV Kanal 5, the act by the Ministry directs instantaneous demolition of the entire building whereas only a storey of the building is problematic due to the lack of a formal construction permit. In reality, owners of the broadcaster obtained the permit back in 1997 when they also applied for the permit to construct an additional storey.

Finally, three days prior to the elections day the Ministry of Transportation and Communications decided to demolish the company building of TV A1. This broadcaster, as one of the oldest private broadcasters in Macedonia, holds a national concession and covers over 70% of the Macedonian population. In this case – as well as the one aforementioned – it is again about additional construction that is presently a matter of court proceedings and the law precludes any demolition prior to the court decision. Note that TV A1 was registered in the Property Register and City Planning Act as a property-owner in this particular part of Skopje as early as 1995.

Similarly, the Pirin building in Skopje downtown, owned by UPA Enterprise Civil Constructing Company, is also scheduled for demolition. Why? Because it is a company of Ljupco Palevski, also the owner of Start weekly and a local TV Skopje, but most importantly – the leader of the city branch of SDSM, an opposition party. And what did the authorities do? The authorities knocked down a part of the building - despite the fact that the tenants had already moved in – and sent the financial police to investigate the finances of Start weekly. TV Skopje remains untouched thanks to its rather ‘uninteresting’ programmatic scheme consisting mainly of entertainment shows. Other companies eschewing the Government control have not escaped the financial investigators either: Alkaloid – the largest pharmaceutical company in Macedonia, Sileks – a company run by the SPM leader, Fersped – the largest Macedonian agent are only some of them. It is even more absurd that these incidents coincided with the Prime Minister’s campaign promoting the implementation of the Law on Denationalisation when he symbolically presented the owners deprived of their property under the communist regime with the keys of their estates. This vividly illustrates the grave crisis of legal culture that Macedonia is experiencing at the moment.

However, what is of particular concern but has been concealed from the public is the matter of anonymous threats to journalists. Inertia of journalists and Macedonian journalism in general over this matter is appalling but unfortunately not surprising. Namely, the Macedonian Association of Journalists has not stated a word of deploration with regards to all these events in the media and their environment.

### **Action and Response**

As to the Governmental pressurisation of the media, the story does not end here. What followed was an action and then a response, both direct and public. Denes announced that it would sue the Prime Minister for libel and false allegations concerning tax evasion on the part of this publisher. TV A1 addressed the public, emphasising that this broadcaster was in the service of all citizens and no Government could subdue them, pointing out that their journalists can work only professionally and in the best interests of the public. TV Kanal 5 employees as well as their colleagues from other media blocked all access roads to the TV building by buses on the day of planned demolition.

Political parties reacted rather resolutely as well. As an act of solidarity with the media pressurised by the authorities, the United Opposition (SDSM, SPM, LDP and the League for Democracy) decided not to appear in the programming of Macedonian RTV any more. They accused the authorities of playing dirty and entangling the Macedonian RTV in the cobweb of their games: serving the ruling party, this broadcaster is now experiencing the worst degradation ever since its foundation. VMRO – the True Macedonian Reform Option made the same decision, announcing that it would decline any invitation to participate in debate programming of MTV due to the MTV’s partisanship in the course of the pre-elections campaign. Naturally, the ruling coalition did not miss the opportunity to respond. Slobodan Casula, up until recently a fellow-journalist and now the DA spokesman, states that it is the time neither to demolish the Kanal 5 building nor to block the bank account of Denes Publishing. However, he pointed out that the rule of law must be finally established in the

state, forgetting that no rule of law can be established by encroachment upon the freedom of press.

What was the response of the Prime Minister? Somewhat acting as a spokesman of the Government, he tried to prove legitimacy of steps taken by the state administration in his press statements. According to him, Denes was blocked for evading the tax payment amounting to 100,000 DEM; the Prime Minister added that the United Opposition must have the money to pay the debt off. As to Kanal 5, the Prime Minister explains that the case is to be reviewed as the ownership of the building in dispute remains blurred even after the investigation. In addition, the Prime Minister believes that the building is owned neither by Boris Stojmenov nor his son but by a legal person. The question is where the truth lies in this matter – probably somewhere in between the two poles. Perhaps some day the public will be accorded a privilege to learn it publicly and transparently.

### **Pressurisation of the Media – a Known Practice**

As things stand, one could not claim to be taken aback by all these events in the media arena. Those with good memory probably recall that the media were subjected to various pressures after the Parliamentary elections and during the Presidential elections period as well. What follows is a brief reminder of those past events.

In 1998, when the Coalition for Changes, encompassing VMRO-DPMNE, DA and DPA, came to power the public service of Macedonian RTV and Nova Makedonija Publishing were the first ones to fall prey. Pressurisation of MTV by the Government at first manifested in the appointment of new, party-affiliated management. Shortly after, the Deputy Editor in Chief of Informative Programming, an experienced and renown journalist, was removed due to his criticism of the newly elected Government. Another renown journalist, nowadays employed by TV A1, got suspended for inviting an official of the opposition SDSM party as a guest to his programming.

The saga of Nova Makedonija Publishing is well known in the Macedonian public. As a consequence of large debts, the newly appointed Government appoints a new Manager General and Head of the Executive Board: the first appointee was Slobodan Casula, an experienced journalist of Macedonian Radio – now the DA spokesman -, succeeded by Ljubomir Paunovski, the incumbent Defence Minister; neither of them managed to save the oldest Macedonian newspaper from collapse. At the moment Nova Makedonija has the lowest circulation rate and the least competent journalists - as all the good ones fled to other newspapers - ever since its birth but it receives state donations and cherishes the same pro-Governmental editing policy.

In the course of the Presidential campaign in 1999, A1 and Sitel TV broadcasters, the latter holding a national concession, became the most prominent targets as well as TV Era, a private Albanian broadcaster covering the city of Skopje area. At the very peak of the campaign, that is – during the second elections round, TV Era was deprived of power supply for interviewing Tito Petkovski, a Presidential candidate, whereas both the Editor in Chief and the owner were issued death threats by DPA members and the threat to burn down the station itself - what may well have happened had the police not responded promptly. A1 and Sitel were also cut off – particularly in Macedonia inland - on several occasions during the campaign. The same thing happened even after the elections when TV Sitel interviewed Branko Crvenkovski, the leader of the largest opposition party, and A1 broadcast an open debate programming ‘Survey’ that was evidently disliked by the authorities.

After all this, it is clear why no one really discusses local elections – nor do vital interests of the citizens, such as street lighting, roads, watter supply, etc., seem to matter much. The focus of attention is the removal of the incumbent authorities while the citizens are

in a virtual chaos: they are unaware if the whole thing is about local or Parliamentary elections or the confrontation of two major political foes in Macedonia, i.e. VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM. What is absolutely clear is that this political struggle is being fought at the expense of helpless citizens. And the very same citizens get insulted in the course. For example, all citizens taking part at political rallies are simply a 'crowd' to Slobodan Casula, the DA spokesman.

Naturally, a standing requirement for Law on Information as a form of shield against pressurisation upon independent and opposition-controlled media still features in all the debates. However, the draft Law has been rather poorly received by the majority of Macedonian media that found it restrictive rather than protective.

### **By Way of Conclusion**

Even children know that every Government normally makes certain moves, which could be perceived as political propaganda and fishing for votes, prior to elections. However, it seems that all these openings of factories, water supply facilities or highways by authorities prior to local elections are insignificant in comparison to steps taken by the state officials. If it is true that the Government warned some two years ago that privatisation of few major Macedonian enterprises such as Alkaloid, Fersped, Sileks and others would be reviewed, why did the review have to coincide with the pre-elections campaign? If it is true that the decision on demolition of Kanal 5 building was taken last January, why was it revealed to the broadcaster only at the very climax of the pre-elections campaign? Finally, if Dener indeed practiced tax evasion last May, why was its account not blocked any earlier but during the elections period?

The TV A1 building has not been demolished yet and the TV continues its broadcast. The new building of TV Kanal 5 has not yet been demolished either whereas their offices are still situated in their old building. Denes and Makedonija Denes are published regularly but it remains unknown if they have already paid their taxes. Start weekly is being freely published as well although the majority of its journalists left it and founded a new weekly titled ZUM. The dilemma whether all this has been only about the tricks of political marketing or it indeed was a dress rehearsal for the post-elections 'first night', remains outstanding. Awaiting the epilogue, citizens have again cast their votes for new local authorities. Are the final elections results going to resolve the dilemma or perhaps not?

Judging by the first unofficial elections results, sourced by the political parties themselves, there are so many contradictory discrepancies that any – even rough – estimate will have to wait until the official results have been released by the National Elections Commissions – late as usual. On the one hand, the ruling coalition claims that there is no room for celebration of the opposition and that the coalition beats them by some 2%. On the other hand, the United Opposition is already celebrating, claiming to have won over 10% votes more, i.e. beating the quota set by Prime Minister Georgievski. Hence they rush to remind him that it is his turn to keep his promise and schedule extraordinary Parliamentary elections. If not, they warn of their back-up plan which will be timely publicised. Being positive about its victory at least in the capital, the United Opposition has not waited for final elections results and promptly organised a celebratory rally in Skopje only a day after the polling day.

Up until the printing of this issue of Media News, the elections results have not yet been released. The media mainly deal with incidents taking place on the polling day – such as the instance of eight wounded Albanians in Debar, waiting for municipal elections commissions to post elections results on notice boards in their respective HQs. The second elections round

is due in two weeks. OSCE, in charge of elections monitoring, announced that 'the elections did not fully comply with certain international standards'. (Vesna Sopar, Skopje)

## NEWS

### **IMC Fined Four Media**

Independent Media Commission fined four BiH media. Kanal S TV from Pale and RTV of Bosnia and Herzegovina are compelled to pay 5,000 KM each. On 29th August, the Kanal S broadcast a documentary titled 'Truth About Markale' and thereby violated a number of provisions under the IMC Codex concerning decency and civility, fair and impartial programming, false and deceptive material.

On several occasions, RTVBiH exceeded the designated advertising time per hour. Article 15.c of the Codex specifies the maximum advertising time of four minutes per hour whereas RTVBiH run advertising sports at a minimum of 4.23 minutes and a maximum of 9.10 minutes per hour between 21st and 27th of July.

IMC Enforcement Panel brought a fine of 1000 KM against RTV Srebrenica for violation of Article on 'Fair and Impartial Programming' by promoting specific parties to the exclusion of others whereas the Hrvatska Radio Postaja Mostar was issued a fine of 1000 KM for similar reasons as RTVBiH: it exceeded the time limit of 6 minutes on advertising spots per hour for radio stations, running ads at a minimum of 7.02 minutes and a maximum of 10.30 minutes per hour, similarly to RTVBiH.

### **8 Local TV Stations and 24 Local Radio Stations in Tuzla Canton**

Oslobodjenje Daily reports that 32 broadcasters operate in the area of Tuzla Canton. Eight of those are TV stations and 24 are radio stations. All these are local media except the TV of Tuzla Canton that is registered as a cantonal broadcaster.

It is interesting that 90% of the media in the Canton broadcast informative programming produced by foreign broadcasters such as DW and VOA.

As to the newspapers, 23 of them are circulated in Tuzla Canton. Oglasnik TK is published weekly whereas Front slobode is a fortnightly. Others are published monthly and bi-monthly. No dailies are published in the canton.

Oslobodjenje adds that none of the media operating in Tuzla Canton has yet been penalised by the IMC.

### **Awards in Oslobodjenje**

On the occasion of the Day of Oslobodjenje, 30th of August, the Executive and Editorial Boards of this daily awarded Oslobodjenje awards for year 2000. Nusret Banjanovic and Faruk Midzic were awarded the 30th August Award for lifetime achievement. Senka Kurtovic, Ramo Kolar and Azhar Kalamujic were awarded the Year 2000 Award.

Nusret Banjanovic is an experienced journalist of Oslobodjenje who devoted his life-long work efforts to reporting on the development of agriculture in BiH whereas Faruk

Midzic, a correspondent of *Oslobodjenje* from Zenica, is renown for his writing on the development of metallurgy in Zenica and life stories of workers and miners.

## **No New Media Legislation in the RS in Due Course**

The RS National Assembly was supposed to discuss the draft Act on Public Information and draft Bill on RTRS on 7th September. However, both these drafts were withdrawn from the proceedings. Ostoja Kremenovic, the Speaker of the Assembly, states that this was necessary in order to discuss additionally certain aspects of the drafts.

On several occasions over the last two years the High Representative insisted on adoption of these two bills that should be harmonised with respective international standards. Due to the violation of deadlines, he imposed amendments and supplements to the Bill on RTRS in August last year: these made certain essential amendments to the previous law and renamed Srpska RTV to RTRS.



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