

#ReForMediaMKD

THE FUTURE OF THE AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA INDUSTRY IN MACEDONIA



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#ReForMediaMKD - Citizens, CSOs and Institutions Reforming Media in Macedonia

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MEDIA INDUSTRY IN MACEDONIA



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THE FUTURE OF THE AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA INDUSTRY IN MACEDONIA



PREFACE

Television channels are the most viewed and the most influential media in Macedonia, and they have an extremely important role in building the public opinion of the citizens. They are the biggest actors in the media business and have significant potential in the advancement and growth of the audiovisual industry, in promoting the public interest, and in the further development of the media sphere in Macedonia.

In the past three years, the Macedonian Institute for Media (MIM) has worked on a number of surveys that have dealt with various aspects of the media industry and media business, such as the ownership and financial models of the most influential TV channels, their programme diversity, political pluralism in the media content, the role of the regulator in the development of structural pluralism, the programming council of the Public Service Broadcaster and hate speech in the media.

An indispensable and crucial segment in the media sphere, underlined as one of the main factors that influence the independence, transparency and credibility of the media, are the media owners. Therefore, we decided to turn to them and give the opportunity to the owners and directors of the most influential media in Macedonia to express their views and considerations about the future of the audiovisual media industry in Macedonia.

We asked them to address their vision of the media industry and business through their own analyses, and to reveal something new, different and original, that they are planning to offer to their viewers in the future. We also asked them to tell us their opinion in terms of what the state and the regulator could do to improve the environment and the conditions in which the media entities operate. We felt it important to hear their opinion on whether it is possible for the television channels to operate freely on the media market in our political and social context, without maintaining relations with the political and business centres of power. In their texts, the owners and media directors also talk about what the public interest means and how they encourage it within their media, as one of the core values of today's contemporary democracies.

We hope that the opinions of the seven owners and media directors will benefit the expert and general public, decision-makers and other stakeholders. We believe that this compilation of texts will remain an important resource of information in the perception of the media situation in the country and in shaping the reform priorities in the media sphere in the future.



People are interested in debate shows, as well as educational, cultural and documentary programmes from the regions we cover

Author: Irena Arnaudova, Manager of TV M, Ohrid

The advancement of technology is rapidly changing the image of the media industry. In that context, five years, is a long period of time for any predictions with respect to the direction that the media business would take. Hence, it is becoming increasingly difficult to conceive a vision for the future. Some in the business will keep pace with the technology, others will adapt as much as they can to the new trends.

If we take into account the research of some communication companies, according to which in the next five years only 10% of the population will be informed and watch content on the traditional television format, efforts must be taken immediately in order to catch up with the innovative solutions offered by the digital revolution.

People are virtually connected through smart phones, the Internet and social networks everywhere and at all times. For this reason, our vision is to bring the media to the consumer, no matter where they are. Streaming and presence on social networks that bring more people to the content of the medium than the Internet search engines are the two technological benefits that must be exploited. Classical journalism will always be the pillar of democracy necessary as a counterbalance to the ugly face of the extremely rapid information releasing and availability, such as speculative, false, sensational, manipulative information.

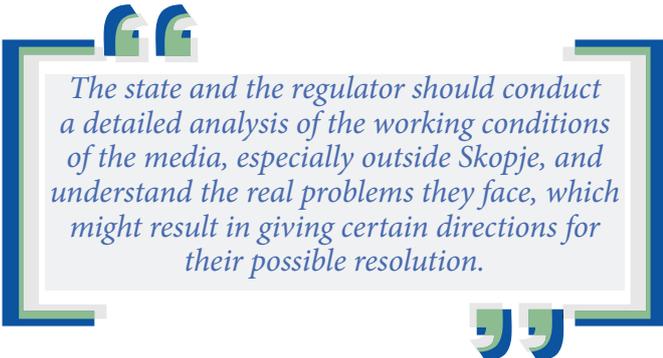
Television channels must work round the clock to bring the objective, reliable and quality news from the journalist to the user in a timely manner, at the same time taking into consideration the fact that they are no longer sitting in front of their TV screens.

Our television channel broadcasts a general entertaining programme. In more than half of the 25-years of work, the emphasis has been on the informative programme and the informative-political programmes. The audience sought information, especially locally specific information. However, in recent years, information has been so widely available and the end user could quickly access information through the huge number of internet portals and social networks that created saturation. Nobody reads the articles any longer. They are rather reading the headlines, titles, posts, tweets. At the same time, our experience and analyses with respect to the responses of the audience and the feedback we receive directly from the viewers, people want to see debate shows, educational and cultural programmes, as well as documentary shows which will include topics from the region we cover. Viewers are interested in this type of content and want to see their fellow citizens on television expressing their views on local problems and events, showing their talent and earning recognition. The national media allocate very little time to the local events and trends in every city. Smaller, local and regional media are not as financially powerful to fund their own production to such an extent. By complicating the market conditions, increasing the costs and reducing the advertising market, most of them are brought to the verge of existence.

In general, in order to improve the conditions in which the media operate in the Republic of Macedonia, the legislator must create equal working conditions for all media, without favouring any of them. Moreover, the legislation needs to be adapted to their real needs. Any deviation from these guidelines, which was the case in the previous period, proved to be unfavourable for many media outlets.

The state and the regulator should make a detailed analysis of the conditions in which the media operate, especially outside of Skopje, and understand the real problems they face, which might result in giving certain directions for their possible resolution. Here, the difference in the market, the attitude of the business sector towards the media, as well as the attitude of the local and state authorities in Skopje and outside the capital is striking. Therefore, such an analysis and the implementation of the guidelines that might emerge from this are of particular importance for a large part of the media to continue with their normal functioning.

There is a huge number of electronic media in the country. The original idea of the legislator and the rationale behind the establishment of the regulatory body (Broadcasting Council) twenty years ago that the market would make a natural selection, has obviously not been reflected in reality. Even then, the media demanded a market analysis in the state and disagreed with the view that the selection that would remain would create the market. The reasons behind this are numerous. The market would have made a natural selection if all media had worked on a market economy principle and had been financed exclusively from commercial advertisements and the sale of services from its business activity. Some media survived because they were “favoured” and close to political parties in power, thus finding other sources of funding. All that time the regulator was lenient in exercising control with respect to the fulfilment of the conditions (technical, staff, programme), with the exception of collecting concession/license fees which they strictly adhered to.



The state and the regulator should conduct a detailed analysis of the working conditions of the media, especially outside Skopje, and understand the real problems they face, which might result in giving certain directions for their possible resolution.

It is also necessary to regulate the Internet portals, which take a large portion of the marketing pie, which in practice are almost not regulated at all, and are often tools for confronting one's opponents, and means for racketeering and presenting one's own views to the public (anonymously, with no impressum, signature ...). The institutions of the country should create conditions in which media and journalists can protect the public interest. The media should be encouraged and their efforts for releasing content focused on the public interest

should be supported. This is somewhat done with the help of the EU funds and the resources of global non-profit organizations. However, the state should not be excluded from this and it should allocate certain funds to the smaller, more endangered players, such as the local and regional media, through transparent criteria and selection made by competent and independent experts.



By making space for the citizens to publicly express their opinions and by providing objective, impartial and balanced information on the programme selection, our aim is to encourage the citizens to freely and publicly speak about their problems before the authorized institutions and provoke them to act and solve their problems...

Regarding whether it is possible for television broadcasters to operate freely on the media market in our political and social context without maintaining any relations with the political and business centres of power, I consider that they are only declaratively independent and free. The media cannot be completely abstracted from the involvement of politics in the overall social life. In particular, they cannot be immune to influences in our political and social context, in which politics permeates every pore of society. The media space in our country is politicized and polarized vertically, starting from the national service broadcaster, to the national televisions, and all the way to the regional and local media.

The volume of revenue through which commercial television channels were funded and the scope of investments in the technical equipping and staff engagement are a thing of the past. The part of the advertising pie for traditional media is getting smaller and smaller.

Social networks and portals reduce the advertising revenue of the television channels because they are cheaper when it comes to spreading marketing messages and reaching a huge audience. Cable operators neither have a legal obligation to broadcast local and regional media, nor can they expect any income from subscription. Much of the television channels are on the brink of existence. It is therefore difficult to talk about the free functioning of the media market, without maintaining any relations

with the political and business centres of power, until a healthy economic situation in the country is created.



The media should be encouraged and their efforts for releasing content focused on the public interest should be supported. This is somewhat done with the help of the EU funds and the resources of the world non-profit organizations. However, the state should not be excluded from this and it should allocate certain funds to the smaller, more endangered players, such as the local and regional media.



Insufficient enforcement of media laws, political and economic influence in awarding licenses, publishing viewership surveys that do not reflect reality, as well as the low salaries of journalists create poor media, which turn into instruments in the hands of the elites to achieve their goals or the aims of individuals. There has to be a way of financing and creating an environment in which the media can recover financially and thereby enable them to move away and free themselves from the pressure of the political and economic centres of power. The support from the entire society and the legislator is extremely important, because journalism as a “watchdog” of democracy and a corrective to the government must not cease to exist and be overwhelmed by the Internet trends that release uncritical, unproven, superficial and poor quality content.

Television should inform, offer entertainment, educate citizens, from the youngest to the eldest, provide them with content from various spheres of life, but most of all, the emphasis should be on the public interest. This is especially prominent in the local and regional media, as it is precisely through the media in such smaller communities that the voice of the citizen becomes stronger and contributes to creating a proactive approach in modelling the living conditions in the community. The people have the right to be informed, but they also have the right to freely express their views. This is exactly what we are trying to accomplish by insisting on the transparency of the institutions, calling for accountability of officials and politicians and securing a place for social debate. By making room for the citizens to publicly express their opinions and by providing objective, impartial and balanced information on the programme selection,

our aim is to encourage the citizens to freely and publicly speak about their problems before the authorized institutions and provoke them to act and solve their problems based on the applicable legislation in Macedonia, regardless of their political, religious, social, ethnic or any orientation.

Here we would like to mention the example of our News edition adjusted for people with hearing impairments. “Information for everyone without prejudice” is a project that has been successfully implemented on the TV M programme for 11 years. This project is of particular significance for a sensitive group of our fellow citizens, that is, it is intended primarily for the deaf and hard of hearing persons and for the hearing impaired persons. With the introduction of the daily special edition of the news for the deaf and hard of hearing people in the programme scheme of TVM television channel, the access to information for the deaf and hard of hearing people from the Ohrid-Struga region has improved, and according to them, they see this as a “window to the world for all deaf people from our city”.

Informative and political debates and TV debates play a key role in sensitizing the public.

Through our own production of debate and interactive shows, in the future, we expect that freedom of expression and the publicly expressed position would be a part of the daily normal functioning of the citizen, which is the ultimate goal in terms of creating a civil society in accordance with all democratic standards and norms.



Providing timely and accurate information is sufficient, the public shall make their own deductions

Author: Ferik Velija, Manager of TV Alsat-M

I think that in the next five years there will be no chance for all existing media to survive. There are several reasons for that, including the population census, as well as the lack of the exact number of viewers. This caused an inability of the marketing segment to grow due to lack of interest in advertising. Digital media are growing, which makes me think that in the following years a large part of the audience will shift there. Consequently, televisions do not have the opportunity to advance sufficiently, especially when it comes to the domestic production for which the costs compared to how much the marketing segment can offer are much greater. Therefore, I think that the number of media will decrease in the future.

In the future, our goal as a television would be to increase domestic production. In addition to the broadcast political programmes, the entertainment and educational segment has also developed. Moreover, the cultural section, such as the documentary shows, might be slightly more prevalent in order to achieve greater “colourfulness” of programmes. However, due to the great competition compared to the low budgets in terms of marketing, it would be difficult to achieve this over a period of five years. Another reason is the very taste of the viewers, meeting the expectations of whom takes a lot of time and financial resources.

Regarding what the state and the regulator can do to improve the environment and the conditions in which the media entities work, the main problem is precisely the fact that every step that has been made by the state together with

the media entities was not “designed” to help the media. On the contrary, everything was done so as to collect more taxes and money for their own budget. Such an example are the fees we pay for the film and music copyright to the film fund or the music associations, as well as awarding different levels of licenses for the new media. This does not go in favour of the existing media, because there is a market breakdown, which is so small.

I personally am pretty detached from the everyday policy, and I leave it to the management to do their work, and in this way each of them is responsible for the job that they are doing.

This not only reduce the quality, but also forces the television channels to conduct research and determine to what extent do our country and market realistically have the need and capacity for sustainable media, and on the basis of this research, make the right decisions. Improving the quality, proper informing and independence of the media from the state are also in favour of the state.

When talking about whether it is possible for the televisions to operate freely on the media market in our political and social context, without maintaining any relation with the political and business centres of power, I consider that - yes, it is possible, although all of us, the media, the

business community and the politics, have the same goal, to get as many people as possible on our side. The difference is that media see people as an audience that needs to be won on their side, business sees them as customers, while politicians see them as voters.

This shows that the media, politics and business must be interconnected in some way and this is the case everywhere in the world. However, there are rules, principles and norms that must be respected. When these standards are violated, viewers, customers and voters are the ones who decide whether they would stay put or to seek a different medium, another political ideology or another supplier.

As far as the public interest is concerned, for me, first of all, it means correct release of information. The moment the public is properly informed, it becomes aware and makes the right decisions.

Digital media are growing, which makes me think that in the following years a large part of the audience will shift there. Consequently, televisions do not have the opportunity to advance sufficiently, especially when it comes to the domestic production for which the costs compared to how much the marketing segment can offer are much greater. Therefore, I think that the number of media will decrease in the future.

In our political and social context, is it possible for the televisions to operate freely on the media market without maintaining any relations with the political and business centers of power? I think that it is possible... Media, politics and business need to be interconnected and this is the case everywhere in the world. However, there are certain rules, principles and norms that must be respected. When these standards are violated, viewers, customers and voters are the ones that decide whether they would stay put or seek a different media, another political ideology or another provider.

Our television has its own management in accordance with the highest standards, starting with the executive director, the financial director, the programme director, etc. Personally, I am completely distanced from the everyday work, leaving the leadership to do their job, and at the same time, each of them takes responsibility for the job they are doing. This means that I am only involved when it comes to the full coordination and selection of principles that a media company should follow. One of the main principles as the main factor for raising the public interest for me is the unobtrusive opinion. This means that our views are not the most relevant thing. It is enough to provide accurate and timely information and follow up on the story in an appropriate manner, and thus enable the public to draw their own conclusions.

That is why we, as media, should decide whether we would like to be present on the market in the long run or not. Depending on this aspect, we should make long-term or short-term decisions.



Nothing from the analogue halcyon days is sacred ... except money and the truth

Author: Zoran Mangovski, owner of TV Tera, Bitola

Good news! Thanks to the digital revolution, we have the entire media world at the tip of our fingers on our smartphones.

Bad news!

The industries working in the business of releasing content on the old analogue channels, on paper and on the air, are in a state of collapse.

Print media are on their deathbed. The music industry as well. The publishing industry has a story of its own. We should not even dare to mention the magazines.

Even the television channels are in the same position. And not only in our country, but worldwide.

“How come?”, you might wonder. We are in the golden age of billions of different types of content. We have greater choice, better quality, more ideas now more than ever in the history of humanity. And almost everything is free. In fact, that is the problem, the fact that everything is free.

If we look back and focus on the media evolution, one thing was constant, and that was profitability, which was mainly based on the power of advertising, hence, free TV programmes.

Once upon a time the owners of the media had decent budgets because there was a demand for their products. And their product was not just the news or just entertainment, it was the audience. The pupil of their eyes was their value.

The number of media was not big enough to seriously worry about the competition, as few had the capital to place transmitter towers, to buy expensive TV broadcasting equipment, not to mention afford 50 or so employees in local television stations that produced the TV programme.

How are we expected to draft a development strategy when this digital revolution has created two devastating consequences? First, large part of the audience dispersed on literary a million of online URLs, most of them unregulated and with no investment or operation expenses; and second, content saturation caused advertisement saturation...

Then came the revolution. And suddenly, everyone became a publisher, music producer, anyone could become a film director. Anyone could be a broadcaster.

How are we expected to draft a development strategy when this digital revolution has created two devastating consequences? First, large part of the audience dispersed on literary a million of online URLs, most of them unregulated and with no investment or operation expenses; and second, content saturation caused advertisement

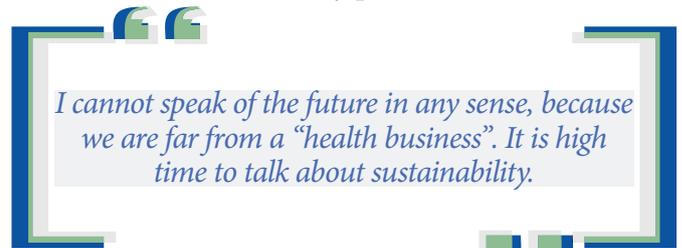
saturation which according to the law of supply and demand meant that the advertisers have less opportunity to use their advertising time.

Simple mathematics shows the following: Less Advertising Space X Less Audience = Insignificant Income for each Content.

And, if this was not disastrous enough, the same digital tools that enabled anyone to release content, also allowed users to avoid advertising. What we learned in the last 20 years was that the audience is avoiding the ads at all costs. Due to the high costs of running a TV business in our country, the advertising prices are high, which brings advertisers to online advertising, since it is far cheaper. Whether it is affordable and cost effective, I am sceptical, due to the ad blockers, the ability to rewrite video content instead of watching it, spam filters and the like ... so, those ads are rarely seen by the human eye.

Hence, I cannot speak of the future in any sense, because we are far from a “healthy business”. It is high time to talk about sustainability. And no matter how much we tend to say that Macedonia and the region are isolated from the world market forces and trends, we cannot say that anymore, that moment ended a few years ago. That is why, it is pointless to write what we expect from the regulator, and even from the politics...those debates have become pointless. We are no longer an isolated island in relation to the others. The audience will

simply have the content they want and the content which is offered from any place in the world.



There are no more topics for me of the type of the new aesthetics offered to the passive audience. Now, the topic is how to simultaneously provide content that would be paid by advertisers, donors, subscribers and commercial partners, and everyone who seeks attention.

This is an existential crisis, which can neither be avoided by drafting better laws, nor by having a more agile regulator or a democratic political structure. It can neither be negotiated with the editors to encourage a higher journalism quality, nor will it resolve by itself.

We are in the midst of a total havoc of the media business.

Nothing from the old analogue halcyon days is sacred. Except for money ... And the truth.



Focused on domestic (co)production and engaging the citizens in the programme

Author: Ivan Mirchevski, Manager of TV Kanal 5

Unfortunately, the Macedonian media space cannot be analyzed and predicted as it is, especially with questions such as – what can we expect to happen tomorrow, or the day after, or three months from now, or even five years along the line.

The situation with the media market is so tragic that there are moments which are quite practical, on one hand, when paired with the sad Macedonian media reality, and on the other hand, they are contradictory from the business aspect.

Therefore, I think that we should take this analysis seriously:

1. The current situation with the media market in Macedonia

The media market in Macedonia is facing the lack of relevant analysis of the media market (with the exception of the last one, which is a real masterpiece, done at the request of the AAVMS), which should set the media system on sound foundations. I say foundations, because the media, especially the television stations, have been vividly described as high-rise building. Below the ground floor, under the foundations, are the owners and managers, and at the top, on the top floor, are the editors and journalists.

If there is no stable funding, which should be provided by the management, then that high-rise building has problems with its foundations, the base, and the smallest wind or earthquake (political or economic pressure) can make that same high-rise building, in our case medium or television, swing either left or right. In those “strokes” of the wind or earthquakes, the rocking will be felt the most on the highest floors, where editors and journalists are

sitting on their desks, and when this happens they will begin to fall, or “cling” to something so that they do not fall out of the building.

That is the essence of this business, and it is postulate that is valid everywhere in the world, even in our country. There are mainly two large funding sources, i.e.:

- selling advertising time (marketing);
- retransmission revenues from cable operators;
- revenues are also possible from selling TV content, especially in countries where domestic production is quite advanced.

Out of the aforementioned sources, in Macedonia, unfortunately, only the marketing works. However, due to the fact that there is no “support” from the second source – retransmission revenues from cable operators, the marketing segment is blackmailing the media and constantly reducing its budget.

If the second source would be present in Macedonia, that is, if the cable operators would have to maintain commercial relationships with the most watched TV stations (to pay for their TV content), as is common in Europe, then the situation would be far better for all players on the media market.

However, in order to make a concrete assessment of how the media market in Macedonia would develop, we must have a precise and clean media situation, which, unfortunately, we do not have at the moment.

2. Initial and rapid steps for solving the Macedonia media agony

I believe that in the near future, the Macedonian

society MUST urgently take the following steps explained herewith:

2a. Serious fight with the so-called “fake news”, disinformation, spin.

I think this would be the main struggle of media and regulators in the coming years, because the technology (the Internet) does not provide many tools to suppress this upward trend.

Therefore, each state must use its potential and create a mechanism that will, above all, economically block those sources of fake news.

Unfortunately, even though our whole society supports FREEDOM OF SPEECH, especially through the Internet portals, the entire Macedonian public is aware that the FREEDOM SPEECH is often also FREEDOM OF LIES AND LIBEL.

Therefore, I think that a type of soft regulation (registration) of the internet market will lead to a certain reduction of this ever-growing trend in Macedonia.

We need URGENT LEGAL AMENDMENTS, i.e. implementing regional, but also European experiences when it comes to online media or the so-called electronic publications, allowing a certain period of time for their voluntary registration in the Central Register of the Republic of Macedonia, which according to me should be free of charge for the first year.



We only need the honest and good will of the owners of the internet portals to be registered as legal entities to work legally on this inexhaustible internet market.

The registration would transform them into a serious legal entity and they would not need to hide behind various companies for making New Year’s greeting cards or agricultural development agencies on one hand, and on the other hand, foreign donors, especially those coming from the EU or the US, would know that the donations would be directed

to legal entities which have certain legal rights and obligations.

This move would ensure the primary selection in some of those Internet portals that deserve the respect of their colleagues and the public due to their professionalism and, most of all, authorship. However, those electronic editions that would not register voluntarily and would remain working in the so-called gray or black area, deserve neither domestic, nor foreign assistance of any kind.

2b. Solving the problem of piracy, especially present in some of the cable operators, thus giving the cable operators in Macedonia the opportunity (due to legal copyright and license barriers) to retransmit more than 15 foreign TV channels.

In addition to the problem that the domestic TV stations have with the cable operators that persistently refuse to make adequate financial compensation, as they are doing with the foreign TV channels, TV stations and the entire media market suffers serious damage from the lack of control with respect to the quantity of retransmission of foreign TV channels in Macedonia.

Cable operators retransmit not particularly a small number of TV channels in their basic package (this number has lately reached around a hundred of foreign channels), for which they do not have any rights for the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, in general or in part, which brutally disrupts the media business in our country.

For example, almost all cable operators retransmit the *RTL Croatia* package. If there was an attempt by a competent institution in Macedonia to contact *RTL* or any other channel, they would have received an answer that *RTL* has not purchased rights for foreign TV content that is broadcast on its channel in the Republic of Croatia (foreign series, films, entertainment programmes) for the territory of the Republic of Macedonia.

There are numerous film and series channels as well as sports channels that are being re-broadcasted in Macedonia, whose programmes have films, series, sports, for which these channels do not have the rights to retransmit in Macedonia.

It is regretful that many institutions in the country, although they are familiar with this data, literally do not undertake anything to protect our domestic market and the domestic media, which suffer direct damage from this anarchy.

The national terrestrial television stations in Macedonia demand that the authorized stakeholders in Macedonia adopt several amendments to the

Law on the AAVMS, with respect to the obligations of the cable operators, which would oblige them to provide a notarized copy of their contract with the TV channel, prior to registering that TV channel on their stations, clearly stating that the foreign TV channel in question has all the rights with respect to their entire TV content (self-owned production or foreign television licensed) for the territory of the Republic of Macedonia as well.

This change could drastically reduce the number of pirate retransmissions of foreign channels, which would be a serious start for normalizing the media market in our country. Precisely because of these anomalies, some of the Macedonian national TV channels filed complaints to the Public Prosecution, which is conducting examinations/preparing the elements of a criminal act against one cable provider.

Such rare examples of copyright protection, as well as TV content licenses, will inevitably have to become constant in our everyday life, so that we could start thinking about “healing” the sick Macedonian media market.

2c. Obligatory registration of the Macedonian portals

The Internet space in Macedonia is in absolute chaos and it is extremely abused by many natural and legal entities.

At the moment, due to lack of legal status, the Internet portals are not subject to any law, so it is peculiar that some of the portals even have their own TV studios and broadcast studio programmes through the internet space, while at the same time they have no employees, not a single person, they do not have an obligation to pay contributions and taxes for the equipment, or for the advertisements they air.

In this way they are doing great damage to the Budget of the Republic of Macedonia, but at the same time there are serious indications of illegal criminal activities.

There are already a lot of ideas about how to minimize the chaotic online media market, which is also damaging the serious and professional media.

If basic registration of internet portals is introduced (explained in the section on the so-called “fake news” phenomenon), then our society would have a range of available tools that would make a serious selection of the large number of “dark” portals, which would separate those who really want to work in journalism through this new, digital space.

2d. Media self-regulation

Self-regulation must be present in the everyday life of the Macedonian media space in order to change the mindset of the editors and journalists.

That is the reason we need to have “aware” managers of the biggest TV stations in Macedonia, because they must act as a guide to all other “smaller” players on the market.

Unfortunately, with the exception of *Kanal 5 TV* channel, which actively participates in the self-regulation body in Macedonia, there are only a few other examples of the most influential TV studios in Macedonia that believe in this idea.

Therefore, our unique self-regulatory body must be an integrative body, which, on a single or a collective basis, would place all the most influential media and/or proven media workers under a single “umbrella”, all in their respective areas of operation.

The establishment of persons - members of a part of the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (CMEM) governing bodies that neither have a serious media background, nor do they have elementary knowledge of commercial TV-media business, only causes additional, unnecessary negative reactions among the biggest players on the media market, including *Kanal 5 TV*.

Such remarks must be detected by CMEM for a simple reason - the Council of Ethics and the self-Regulation is a tool OF the media, in order to set new, European and modern rules for playing on the media market, and not a tool FOR the media and for their control!

I think that part of the fault can be found in most of the national TV companies in Macedonia, which together with CMEM must understand that we need a serious dialogue of all stakeholders so that this body could function with all its human and professional ideas.

As for the plans and visions of *Kanal 5TV*, they are directly related to the aforementioned problems and solutions.

However, in order to be able to offer new content, we must finalize the appropriate changes, which are in the final phase and are moving in the following direction:

- professionalization of the staff, in terms of their training and education. In particular, this is done with the technicians and the journalists working in the newsroom;

- promoting new technologies and the so-called TV gadgets, which are already giving results and enriching the visual aspect of the viewer;
- equipping the studio and the transmission technology with particular emphasis on the transmission technique.

These are important advanced elements that we are working on at the moment with our resources and with the help of foreign donations that recognized the professional momentum of *Kanal 5 TV*.

Then there is the “novelty” programme, which moves in two directions:

- Own TV (co)production, in terms of drama and entertainment domestic projects, something that is my personal commitment and for which we have already provided and developed specific scenarios.



We need serious financial resources to implement this idea, which, unfortunately cannot be provided via our marketing segment at the moment, and I have already explained the reasons in item no.1.

I believe that as a powerful national TV media we should try to reduce the exploitation of the foreign feature film programme, which we are actually doing gradually, thus making room for the domestic audience.

The idea of *Kanal 5 TV* is to get Macedonian actors in front of the domestic cameras, and not behind the domestic microphones, borrowing their voices for synchronization.

- engaging the citizens/viewers through the internet.

We have introduced Facebook comments in the mega-successful project “*Samo vistina (Only the truth)*” which are visible in “real time” on the TV screens, at the same time paying particular importance to filtrate the offensive and vulgar comments.

The communication with our viewers would be two-way, literally, and with the help of technology, our intention is to be first in providing the information, which would be accurate.

Kanal 5 TV has two other original programme ideas, which I would not mention in this text for obvious reasons.

To summarize: unfortunately, as I described in items 1 and 2 of this text, the situation with the media is far from rosy.

In short, chaos prevails, controlled media chaos, which goes in favour of several powerful people in the country. At the same time, the stakeholders who really want to normalize this media crusade are unfortunately rare, and those people are becoming “extinct”.

We are witnessing the closing of TV stations, flagrant violations of the laws, and especially the intrusion of political actors in the process of adopting legal provisions that would be in favour of the media.

Unfortunately, there are still media that are truly “left” and truly “right”, and examples such as *Kanal 5 TV* that exist in the “middle” are quite rare. If the quick and radical steps described in item 1 and items 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d are not taken soon, I foresee a serious media crisis, which is already becoming more obvious by the simple fact that there is a lack of young people who want to be journalists or media workers.

Maybe we would need to import media professionals soon enough?



There is a need to subsidize the media of the smaller ethnic communities so as to foster pluralism

Author: Mevaip Abdiu, owner of TV Koha, Tetovo

In times of economic and political instability when the regulating body, the Agency for Audio and Audio Visual Media services, has still not drafted a Strategy for Development of the Audio and Audio Visual Service for the forthcoming period, and taking into consideration the fact that the Law on Audio and Audio Visual Services is lost in the labyrinth of the Assembly, it is very difficult to prepare for and predict the vision of the media industry, especially the future of the media business in the Republic of Macedonia.

World experts predict the growth of the media industry in the coming years from 10 to 100%, taking as examples the media *Buzzfeed*, *The Guardian*, *Vice*, *Wired* and others, but such an example cannot be found in the region, and that global growth is likely to remain the unfulfilled desire of the media in the Republic of Macedonia, especially with respect to the traditional television and radio stations.

I see my vision of the media industry and the media as a business in the future in terms of finding new revenue sources enabled by the digital environment, integration and close connection of traditional TV with online TV platforms (Facebook, the Web, YouTube), a new diversified program offer, increasing public interest content for informing the citizens of the region and beyond, and, if more favourable economic and political conditions are created, our television station aims to become a national television channel, with a diverse and multicultural and multinational programme.

Koha Television is a terrestrial-regional television, covering the D8 region, i.e. populated areas of the Polog region, with a total of 300,000 potential viewers. Various nationalities live in this region, with different religious confessions. Therefore, we can freely say that this is a multiethnic and multi-confessional environment with a long tradition of coexistence.

In the future, we are planning to offer the audience a programme content that would be available to all of the above-mentioned groups of viewers. Namely, our TV station is planning to request from the AAVMS a new broadcasting license, in Albanian, Macedonian and Turkish. To date, the TV has had a license for broadcasting programmes only in Albanian. We feel that there is a need for this, because the number of viewers from other nationalities will increase, which will increase the number of advertisers in our television, because at the moment there is only one TV station in the region that broadcasts a programme at the local level in Macedonian language. Regarding what is lacking in our programme content, we can conclude that many segments in the part of the programme diversity and in the realization are lacking. Although the television currently does not differ much from the national schemes of national televisions, which are predominantly focused on entertainment and news, however, the lack of funds at the moment does not allow for rapid quality changes. In the future, the television would focus on producing new content, especially in the part of the feature programme, and the production of small videos that would be broadcast every day on the social networks and our YouTube channel.

The state and the regulator in every country, even in our country, are one of the important factors for improving the work of the media entities. So far, frankly, we have not seen any difference between these two institutions, because the regulatory bodies were in direct dependence and under influence of the state. The management and the majority of the members of these bodies are selected from the state itself (government), i.e. political figures are selected only to satisfy the political appetites of the government coalition, without taking into account the professionalism and quality of the candidates.

The regulator should take into account the economic sustainability of the media, conduct professional market analyses, create equal

conditions for all market participants, take care of the transparency of the ownership share in the media, find a way to consolidate the media market, to continually improve the legislation, while taking into account the requests and proposals of the media guild. The government also needs to find a way to subsidize the media of the minority communities that cannot survive on the market, thereby encouraging the development of pluralism of the media.

Practice shows that from the very beginning of commercial media in the Republic of Macedonia, most televisions could not function freely on the media market, without maintaining close relations with the political and business centres of power. In the '90s, in the Republic of Macedonia, there were about 170 radio and TV stations at all levels of geographical coverage of the country. At the moment, 76 TV and 71 radio stations are registered in the register of AAVMS, which broadcast programme on a national, regional and local level. From 2013 to date, 21 TV and 10 radio stations have stopped working due to different circumstances, and AAVMS has revoked their licences. Most of them do not work because of financial problems, and others because of the change of power, that is, the cessation of financial incentives by the government and the mayors on a local level.

My conclusion is that a large number of media in Macedonia are economically dependent on politics at all levels, and politicians by pressuring the business community and marketing agencies indirectly provide funding for the television stations, thus creating unfair competition in the media market.

Therefore, the answer to the question of whether it is possible for TV stations to function freely on the media market without maintaining any relation with the political and business centres of power is – YES, it is possible; however, politics should take their hands off the media. The regulatory bodies should have a staffing and financial independence, thus creating realistic atmosphere of competition on the market, and not targeting advertisements towards certain television stations. And, of course, right now, the state should find measures for financial consolidation of the media of the minority communities, as the main pillar of pluralism in the Republic of Macedonia, which will restore the integrity of these media in the Macedonian air.

Public interest means serving the interests of the public and defending democracy, and at the same time providing accurate, and impartial information, being transparent and accountable, protecting the privacy and marginalized groups with great internal integrity

and having an independent editorial policy. Of course, the public interest is a broad term, which is sometimes not clear not only for the viewers, but also for journalists themselves, who cannot distinguish between public and non-public interest.



At the moment, in my medium, in every part of the programme, we are trying to keep the public interest in mind, and especially in the news and informative programmes dominated by information about events in the region. Journalists fail to always recognize information of public interest and do not investigate them sufficiently. In informative programmes, the news and other contact programmes, the main actors are the citizens who with their opinion contribute to overcoming a certain issue. The television largely informs about the events in the region, and less about the events in the country and the world, except when it comes to a major event or issues. Unlike the national media, which, in my opinion, inform only about Skopje and the activities of the government, *TV Koha* also informs about local problems such as pollution, negative issues in society, migration of the population with special reference to this problem, local governance, infrastructure, local sports and culture, as well as informing the citizens about their rights that arise from new laws and by-laws, as novelties.

I must underline that there is not enough work done with respect to investigative journalism. In the future, we will try to consolidate the financial condition of the media, which would create conditions for engaging additional journalists and technical staff, which will encourage public debate and awareness among the citizens for overcoming the negative phenomena in the society.



Media should engage in fair competition by offering new domestic content and world brands

Zoran Anastasovski, Manager of TV 24

The developments in the media sector in Macedonia in the past few years will determine the way forward of the media in the next five to seven years. Namely, this past period, the country was subject to situations in which the media market was completely unbalanced, and at times even chaotic.

This was mainly related to the attempt of political elites to establish full domination in the media space, using all kinds of tools. The most powerful were the government advertisements and advertisements from other government institutions that managed to distort the market, that is, to promote non-market competition, in which the media that did not respect any professional, moral, or ethical standards in the work rose to the surface.

All this contributed to perceiving the media as a necessary evil, and not as a corrector of government or other stakeholder policies. The consequences of this can be felt even today, and I think that in the coming years we will all be experiencing the negative consequences of the events. What does that mean?

Currently, the media industry is facing the reverse order of events, so the process of creating any order whatsoever is moving in a completely illogical way. Due to the above stated reasons, in Macedonia, we have been facing a drop in the advertising prices for years (because the government gave money), and now all the media are facing the inability to be profitable and to invest.

On the contrary, a good deal of TV channels cannot even reach the positive zero, and today they are hardly making ends meet when it comes to earning their income, out of which they have to cover salaries, the current costs and, more importantly, to buy a serious and quality programme to attract more viewers.

This is done slowly, because even the good programme cannot guarantee a serious income needed for normal functioning. Under such conditions, the system needs to undergo a serious reform, we need a lot of political will, and the understanding of the advertisers about what happened in the media sector, for the benefit of all.

If we succeed as media actors to impose the solution to this problem as a priority, I am convinced that we will make a significant step towards creating a better programme in terms of quality, which will not be based solely on Turkish soap operas, Serbian folk programs and other pulp type blocks that additionally contaminate the space.

In this context, not only we, as television channels, but also other media players, must realize that we should engage in fair competition for the viewers, by presenting new content through our programmes. What is important and what we have already recognized is bringing world brands in the sports programme (such as, for example, Formula 1), returning the national world championships to Macedonian programmes (Premier League, etc.),

which will contribute to creating a new social sense and restoring some of the traditional qualities of the media.

Especially since nowadays we are increasingly losing the Macedonian language from being present on the TV channels. Now-a-days, we almost do not have a sports competition that is commented on in Macedonian, instead we have started to get used to watching football, basketball and handball on foreign channels. If we manage to get them back on the screens in Macedonia, this would have a double significance.

Namely, today, despite the fact that there are not enough advertisers on the market, and the prices are low, we have the outflow of Macedonian advertisers on foreign channels, where such strong sports events are broadcast. The fact that part of the national sports or competitions of the national teams might be broadcast on foreign channels in the future, which will contribute to a new decrease in the marketing pie, is even more disturbing. Therefore, I consider that this is one of the urgent issues that need resolving, and this is not only the concern of TV 24. All other national television channels would be affected by this. In addition to the sports programmes, the media space is also lacking its own production of series or films, as well as famous licensed show programmes and quizzes as one of the tools for creating cultural values that will not only promote drinking tea with your neighbours, but will contribute to educating and raising the awareness about the world trends, which now-a-days only seem to be passing through Macedonia.

Therefore, it is important to introduce an interesting educational and documentary programme, whose primary task would be to create a free society, unburdened by everyday political worries or trivialities on the social scene.

We might be wondering why we are not offering this, or why we are offering it in an insufficient quantity, and the answer is clear, it brings us back to the beginning of this essay, that in the media there is neither enough money for such a programme, nor do those who are financially powerful have the interest or social awareness of producing a quality programme instead of pulp fiction.

The state and the regulator had a whole bunch

of mechanisms to help the media in this sphere. Of course, political will is needed for this, money provided by sources that will not produce the possibility of corruption and change laws in the direction of protection of the domestic production, in order to promote linguistic, cultural and ethical values that encourage the creation of a just society, unburdened by everyday political experiences.



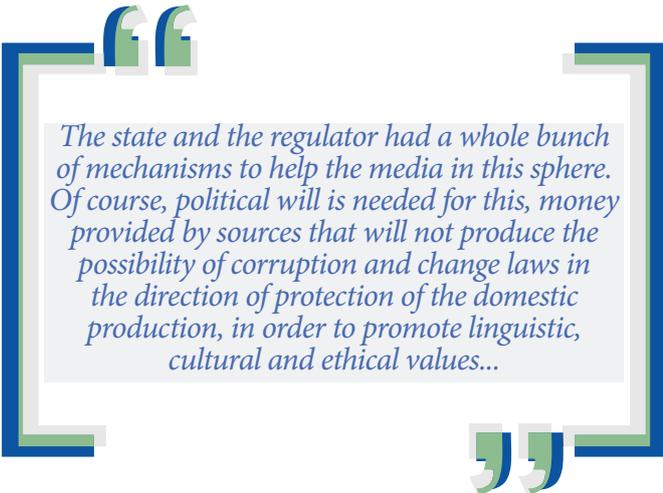
If there is a political will to do this, it means that the chains that hold the political parties, the media/television stations and the centres of business power in conjunction will break in this way.

If the question arises as to whether that is possible, the answer is yes, of course it is possible, but this requires not only changes in the laws, but also changes in the staff, both horizontally and vertically.

You cannot expect the same people who once promoted divisions and malice, to promote unity and love now. The impression in Macedonia is that television channels have only changed their owners, and not their behaviour. This is especially true for TV stations that had been part of the corrupt regime of government advertisements for years. Of course, this is not good and I do not think that the government or the TV channels are responsible for this, but the overall impression is that this love is still around, but on some other level now.

Therefore, I believe that regulators can do a great deal to regulate the market, not just blindly follow someone else's interpretations of the laws, but to promote new values, to recognize the quality of certain television channels and projects, to

provide access to funding opportunities, which all together can contribute to creating a much better picture in the media. If this is done simultaneously by communicating with the marketing agencies and larger companies, if they are not the stick of certain political centres of power, but rather want to recognize good projects and advertise there for their own benefit, then perhaps we will step in the right direction and return the TV channels to their rightful place.



The state and the regulator had a whole bunch of mechanisms to help the media in this sphere. Of course, political will is needed for this, money provided by sources that will not produce the possibility of corruption and change laws in the direction of protection of the domestic production, in order to promote linguistic, cultural and ethical values...

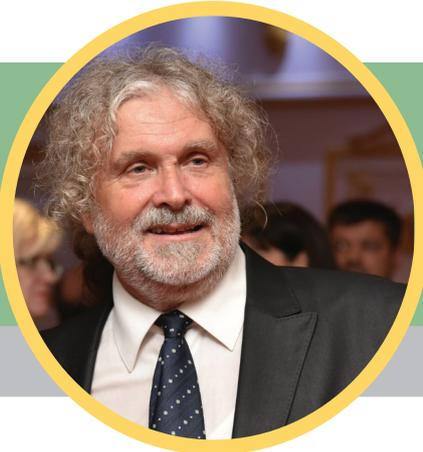
As long as the television stations are financially weak, there will be a problem in their operation, which will make them more prone to influences from the centres of power, that is, the government, the political parties and the big advertisers. We should not fool ourselves that those connections would be permanently interrupted. In a society that is still struggling to get out of a media agony in which it has been for years this would not be possible. However, if we bring them back to normal, I expect that we will all be happier and more independent. When I say happier I mean better salaries for the employees and better programmes and, of course, a stronger sense of independence that is a prerequisite for promoting a strong public interest.

TV 24 is continuously trying to follow the public interest and promote the concept of civil society, to report on the problems of the common man as the main component of life. In this context, we are trying to prevent the authorities or other social actors from dictating our day and the daily events. We are rather doing this through stories and people who have something to say.

We are trying even now to make the public interest more present on the programme, to create stories about people who have problems in communicating with the state, with its institutions. Actually, that is what we have been advocating for years. Perhaps we are not always the most successful in that, but we always have an idea of what it should look like. Sometimes the problems we face in our day-to-day operations or the lack of funds can actually be the reason for creating a medium that promotes the public interest. But, I think it would be considered only as an excuse if we change that public interest with the interest of the politicians, because at the end of the day, ethics and moral must not allow us to escape from the public interest.

In the future, I expect that we would focus on the ever stronger promotion of basic human rights, i.e. the problems that citizens are facing because it is an interest not only for the citizens, but also for our television channel. In fact, creating a symbiosis between the citizens and the TV channels creates opportunities for more viewers, thus increasing our accessibility to different categories of people.

All this, and I would reiterate once again, is significant and achievable, only if the basic pre-conditions exist, i.e. the return of the marketing prices on television channels, the promotion of market competition, the release of television stations from illogical fees (Film Agency, Association for Protection of Music Copywriters - ZAMP), and breaking away with political ties. It may sound too stringent, but I expect that in the upcoming period things would move in this direction, so that in a few years we could talk about much more important values and higher quality programmes.



With this legislation, our ideas, opportunities and visions are impossible

Janko Micev, owner of the TV channel Vis, Strumica

The main principle of any business is the vision, i.e. the ability to create an image of how we see the business, regardless of its nature, in the coming months, years, decades. It is not at all different with the television business, which is why this segment is very important and is directly related to the creation of new technologies and their availability. Following all the media in our country, I can conclude that no matter how much technologies have developed, we have not been able to follow them; in fact, we cannot even invest in technology and fulfil our visionary dreams in that way.

The difference between the media and all other businesses is the human factor. We are witnesses that investing in the advancement of the human potential in the media, in fact, contributes to the advancement of the media itself, with respect to achieving greater visibility, increasing its presence on the market and attracting more viewers. In this segment, the local and regional media have contributed a great deal, as we are the ones that give young and prospective journalists the chance to “forge” their skills, since they are rarely given the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities or work for a national medium.

The national media keep a close eye, they know which journalist, cameraman or editor from which region is successful in his/her work and, it is by no accident that most of them end up being employed by a national medium, as regional correspondents or as journalist working in the head office of the national media. In this respect, *TV channel VIS* is very strong, as much as 90% of the staff working on presenting the news editions and informative programmes is hired to work in one of the national media. This is directly linked to the vision for advancement of the media industry and the media business. Looking at the current technical equipment and staffing in *TV channel VIS*, I can freely say that their utilization is optimal.

Personally, I think that the media industry will

not change in the next five years. The number of television and radio channels might drop, which is the trend today, and the number of online media might increase. Since the number of users of the online media is increasing every day, we have been investing in our channel on the social networks for several years now, and this is bearing fruit. The number of YouTube followers has risen to more than 1,200, and the Facebook fan page has more than 14,000. In the future, every media owner should seriously consider increasing their online presence, and thus contribute to the creation of a new sector in the media business, the IT sector.

With the change in the television signal transmission, that sector is certainly necessary, since the analogue transmission is no longer necessary, and the entire communication with the operators is carried out through digital networking, which is why it is necessary to engage people and develop this new segment. Although this sounds frightening to my colleagues, it is more than a necessity.

Until just a few years ago, we invested in improving the quality of the video footage, from standard definition to high definition, the way of communicating with the equipment, from analogue to digital, and today it is more than necessary to invest in IT technology for transmission of audio and video signals. While television channels in the world compete in the programme and image quality, we are struggling to survive, which results in a very slow advancement, both at the programme and at the technical level.

In the process of implementing digitization, for which I personally believe that it was unsuccessful, we aimed to create local teams in the region, which would work efficiently and promptly cover events and communicate with the local people. To date we have not managed to implement this plan as digitalization itself has dealt us such a crushing financial blow, which practically took many television channels out

of business as a result. This reduced our chances for regional advancement.

Today, TV channel VIS broadcasts exclusively through the cable operators operating in the settlements where we have coverage. With the license change, we encountered a new challenge, which also limits our ideas and work opportunities. It might sound pessimistic, but while this legislation is in force, our ideas, opportunities and visions are practically impossible to realize. With the laws in the state, it is obvious that the most controlled media are television stations and the most stringent rules apply to them. Therefore, until substantial changes in the laws are not introduced, there will be no real media.



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What I as a spectator am missing is the presence of specialized media. In Macedonia, there are no specialized media. The law does not even allow one owner to have more television channels and by using the experience they have with one TV channel to introduce a television channel specialized in character. In the region, we are witnessing the presence of such channels, I would mention only BTV - Bulgaria, they have BTV movie, BTV music, BTV children, or Pink - Serbia, they have Pink film, Pink music ... and unfortunately for us they are all on satellite and are present in all countries in the region and beyond.

TV channel VIS is unique in one thing - the focus is on the region we cover, we produce shows with themes of regional character, we follow only regional events and we focus on the viewer in the region where we broadcast our programme. In the information programme we dedicate only 5% to events of national character, the entire focus is on providing information on regional events and stories, producing shows with guests from the region or interesting to the region in which we broadcast.

In the near future we are planning to increase our own programme production and offer them direct transfer from the sessions in the municipalities where we are broadcasting, so as to inform the

citizens on the way the municipalities work and the way they manage the resources provided by the citizens. We are planning to produce programmes for vulnerable categories of citizens, their participation in society, and thus introduce them to their rights and obligations, and monitor the changes related to their implementation in the institutions and organizations, as well as continue with our own production from the area of agriculture, health, culture and educational children's shows. In general, our intention is to increase the volume of our own production, because the economic indicators are showing that we need to allocate far less resources in the production of regional interest shows than to buy shows produced by others. At the same time, we cannot be competitive with the national media as they have their own production which is why we need to engage more people, and economically speaking, the money invested in our own production stays in our house, and thus we keep the investments in our country.

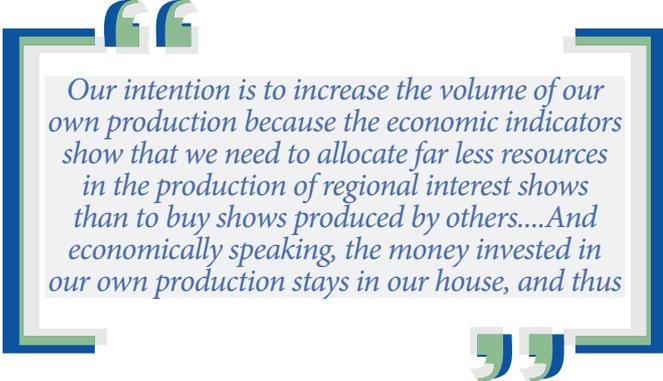
Our program lacks interactivity and direct broadcasts from the scene. The reason we cannot offer this to our audience is again economic in character. We lack the equipment for this, including the devices for transmitting the signal from the spot to the studio. Although the technical staff has the knowledge and experience for this, the lack of technical equipment prevents us in covering events live from the scene, and we truly believe that the viewers pay much attention on the speed of information transmission, and this has always been the case. Our market analyses show that, despite investing in that type of equipment and making regular correspondences from the scene of the event including the calculated cost of transmitting the signal, we cannot cover our investment, i.e. it is correct that our viewership would grow, however at the same time the advertising pie would remain the same, which is why this type of production is economically unfeasible.

Without any doubt, an important factor for creating a vision in the future is the legislation that we must follow, and this legislation creates a plethora of barriers and narrows the choice for the realization of ideas and opportunities. Since the focus in our work has always been and would be the interest of the citizens in the region we cover, we project the advancement of the media business linearly with the advancement of the region with the existing legislation. I presume that there would not be any drastic changes in the Media Law and the Law on Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services, but the existing laws set direct limits to the opportunities we have. We are witnesses that many factors affect

the realization of any purpose, but I have to separate the following elements that have impeded the development to date, and I think that this would happen in the future.

The first factor is the economic power of the private sector in the region. Since we have always secured and provided the finances from the private sector our remark is that the first thing a company does when facing a decrease in its revenue is to cut any type of advertising, including television. This is why we are unable to realize our financial projections and year in and out the advertising pie in the region is constantly reducing. In my opinion, this crucial factor can be easily solved if the Ministry of Economy has little understanding and resolves this in one step - the money given in advertising is considered as an investment rather than an expense. In this way, the companies will be left to invest in their own brands, in the services they offer or in the affirmation of the company itself.

The second factor is securing independence, which I would also call economic-political independence. I would cite the example of the Netherlands, where regional and local media are more important to the state than the national media. There they decided that if a regional or local medium meets the requirements (which are undoubtedly stricter than ours), each operator is obliged to transfer them to the “free to air” offer, and moreover, they receive certain percentage of the local budget from the municipality they broadcast, somewhere from 1% to 2%, which is given to the media regardless of which party is in power, to cover regional character events and advocate the public interest. Practically, the local and regional media thus receive funds and are free of pressure, with the sole purpose of informing the citizens about the events in the region and presenting the actual situation without having to deal with any type of influence.



Our intention is to increase the volume of our own production because the economic indicators show that we need to allocate far less resources in the production of regional interest shows than to buy shows produced by others....And economically speaking, the money invested in our own production stays in our house, and thus

I notice the moment of censorship in our country, or as I would like to say self-censorship. If a company

or a municipality is a client of the television and makes a mistake or works incorrectly, the owner, the editor or the journalist himself self-censor and partially cover up the actual elements of the event, the story, the incident or whatever, going as far as even not reporting about it to the public. I am talking about cases that I recognize with certain media, and practices in companies where, as an example, if a large company decided to dismiss a large number of workers, it first becomes a client of many media and practically purchases the protection of the media. These practices are not uncommon in Macedonia, but seeing the fact that the economic and political dependence of the media is at a low level, we are practically “cheap” in the implementation of these practices. Fortunately, until today, we have not succumbed to any pressure of influence, and I hope that the same goes for the editors and journalists.

The third factor is the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. First of all, the inequality in the amount of the fines provided for in the Law, i.e. the same fine for a local radio and a national television, is most sticking. Frankly speaking, there is a difference in the licence fee, as well as the income and coverage, and with the opportunities, there differ in practically everything. Perhaps the most effective and fair approach would be for the fines to represent a percentage from the amount of the annual licence fee of that particular media. While we are on the subject of the license fee, the law prescribes a formula that I also think is not equal for everyone. It is not foreseen that the gross domestic product is not the same in each region and the GDP is taken as a unit of measurement at the national level. It is not foreseen that if the particular media is transmitted through a cable provider, the number of potential viewers is not the same with the media transmitted through a digital terrestrial multiplex. Since each operator is obliged to report the exact number of subscribers, we get an accurate number of potential viewers if the particular media has the broadcasting license programme through a cable provider.

Another thing that could change in the same law is the manner of payment of the license. In Macedonia, the license is paid for the entire year in advance, there is no possibility to pay in instalments, and if the media stops working, and at the same time it has paid the license, the agency has no way to get the money they have paid in advance back if they have not broadcast in a particular period.

Regarding the political influence in the media, I think that if the situation remains as it is, in the media business things change on a daily basis. We

forget, first as citizens, and second as owners, that politicians are where they are to serve us, not the other way around. Practically, we are the ones that need to correct them in their work and we must not stop doing that. Relationships with the political centres of power can be exclusively professional, and they have an obligation to answer to us, on each question that is in the interest of the viewers. I have deliberately excluded the business centres of power because the media is not economically independent at all, which contributes to our fragility. We all know that if something cannot be bought with money, it can be bought with a lot of money. This does not only refer to us, it has become a world trend.

Still, I have considered the fact that the number of media in Macedonia is quite great and their financial independence is practically nonexistent, which makes them quite dependent, which contributes to the fact that they are being easily manipulated and controlled. I have witnessed the changes in the media business, having in mind that a lot has changed since 1991, and the media, or more precisely the TV channels are going nowhere. I am talking about the political and social responsibilities we have, not only before the law, but also with respect to the moral responsibilities.

The popularity and viewership of television channels directly depends on the advocacy of the public interest. Only the work of socially responsible media is appreciated. Primarily, it is the very term “medium”, a mediator for presenting the problems in the public and seeking answers from the relevant persons. The informative editorial office is the pillar of our television channel, through which the public in the region can share all irregularities and problems, and so far it has successfully dealt with the presentation of the actual situation on the ground. It is not permissible to express views of journalists or editors, as we have had examples in the past, and to construct a distorted picture of any condition. It is important for us to check all the parties involved in the situation.

So far, we have been aiming to encourage the public to freely express their will, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, to share a problem, an event, and we will continue to prove that we are absolutely open to contacts, praise and criticism with the same pace. We encourage viewers and show them that it is possible to solve their problems or situations by presenting them through our TV channel, where they can get answers or solutions to their problems. So far, we have seen numerous situations where, after presenting a certain story, our newsroom has been contacted by a relevant institution, since

they have become aware of the story, and certain problems were even resolved. We also have open studios where we discuss problems, host relevant guests and contact with our viewers. Only through such a serious approach can we get more visibility and build confidence in the television among the citizens.

I have to mention the most recent example: when the situation with the potential mines became a hot topic in the region, the company had an advertising campaign for raising the awareness among the people in its favour, allocating a solid budget for the advertising campaign. When activists opposed the opening of the mines in the region with their own video campaign against the opening of the mines, also by raising public awareness, we, as a media, gave them equal access to advertise as the company that aired in that particular time, naturally, free of charge.

Practically, if we want to survive and maintain our viewership, we must follow the public interest. This is an indispensable practice in a democratic society, and viewers must know and I believe that they know that the television channel is always here, close to them, listening to what they have to say.

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