



MONITORING REPORT

CURRENT HIGH POLITICS SUPPRESSES ORIGINAL JOURNALISTIC TOPICS TO THE SIDELINES IN THE NEWS PROGRAMMMES

October 2019



MACEDONIAN INSTITUTE FOR MEDIA

REPORT

CURRENT HIGH POLITICS SUPPRESSES ORIGINAL JOURNALISTIC TOPICS TO THE SIDELINES OF THE NEWS PROGRAMMMES

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Skopje, October 2019

The report was prepared as part of the project *“Building Trust in Media in South East Europe and Turkey”*, funded by the European Union and UNESCO. The content of the report is the sole responsibility of the Macedonian Institute for Media and in no way reflects the views of the EU and UNESCO.



The project is funded by EU



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INTRODUCTION

The free reporting of different ideas and views through independent media is one of the fundamental values of a democratic society. In this context, media pluralism is a concept that indicates the extent to which social and political diversity is reflected in the content of certain media (internal pluralism), and the diversity of the media, media owners, and media programmes in the general media spectrum (external pluralism). The aim is to provide greater content diversity for different audience segments, and thus enable them to get high-quality complete information. This is critical for the active participation of citizens in the decision making processes.

For two consecutive years, the polls in the country show that despite the growth of the Internet, television is still the undisputed source of social and political news (85 percent of the citizens).¹ Thus, television is the primary source of information based on which the citizens build their views on the current social and political developments and take part in the decision making process about affairs serving the public interest.

The aim of this analysis is to determine the level of diversity of topics, genres, actors, journalistic dedication and geographical distribution in the central news editions of the most viewed TV stations in the country. The subject of the analysis were the breaking news, the genre choice, i.e. the different approaches in covering the topics, the most common geographical locations, the engagement of the media and journalists, and the involvement of different actors from the political, social, economic and cultural life. The survey specifically addresses the extent to which the most watched television channels in the country are “citizen-oriented”, i.e. open to engaging the citizens in the creation of content through the choice of topics coming from the citizens or directly affecting them, and by giving voice to the citizens and civil society organizations when reporting on topics related to the internal and foreign policy, the economy, justice, health, education, and other areas of social life.

Subject to the monitoring were the central news editions of the six most watched television stations in the country – the five national terrestrial channels, TV Alfa, Alsat-M, TV Telma, TV Sitel and TV Kanal 5, and TV 24 which is broadcasting via satellite at the state level. The monitoring was conducted over a period of one week from 17 to 23 June 2019

1. TOPICS: High politics dominates over all other topics

Two major political events occurred in the monitored period – the European leaders were deciding on whether the country should get a date for the start of the negotiations to join the European Union, and at home, the governing coalition was finalizing the discussions on the cabinet reshuffle or replacement of certain ministers with others (the so-called “broom” announced by Prime Minister Zoran Zaev in the campaign for presidential elections). As expected, these two topics dominated in all six TV stations covered by the monitoring.

A total of 72 news reports (14%) were published on the topic of EU integrations, making it the topic with the most news reports in all the media i.e. from the eight news reports of TV Telma to the 17 news reports of TV Alfa.

The reporting included the decisions of the Council of Ministers and the EU Summit, the statements of foreign political figures such as Angela Merkel, Johannes Hahn or Federica Mogherini, the reactions at home by the government and the opposition, etc. A sub-topic of this topic, with 10 out of the 72 news reports was the disagreement between North Macedonia and Bulgaria over the ethnic affiliation of the national hero Goce Delchev, which was interpreted as a possible cause for creating problems in the EU integration process.

¹ IRI Survey, August 2018, p. 66
(https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri_macedonia_july_2018_poll_public_final.pdf)

Table 1: The most common topics reported by the six monitored television channels

Topic	Number of reports
EU Integration	72
Government reshuffle “broom”	44
Civil protests	28
Recorded conversations (El Cheka, Kurto Dudush etc.).	20
Presentation of the project “My VAT”	19
Enrolment in secondary schools	17
Health	17
SPO cases in court	13
New SPO Law	11
Traffic Safety	11
Total number of news reports	497

With respect to the government’s “broom” all television channels reported between five and nine news reports in the seven days, while the monitoring was conducted, totalling 44 news reports in all six media. The final agreement on the new composition of the government was announced on the last monitored day (Sunday, 23 June), when Prime Minister Zoran Zaev gave the exact names. On that day, the television channels released three or four news reports on this topic each - reports, analyses, reactions from the opposition, etc. Thus, the topic of the government reshuffle came second in all television channels.

In both cases the reported and commented topics from the aspect of inter-state or inter-party relations were from the so-called high politics, i.e. the absence of the citizens’ aspect on the afore-stated topics, including any attempts of elaboration how these processes affect the daily life of citizens, was evident (TV Alfa, 17 June: *“Small hopes from the Council of Ministers in Luxembourg, Zaev is still optimistic”*; TV Alsat-M, 18 June: *“EU ministers confirmed the decision for Macedonia”*; TV Kanal 5, 19 June: *“The EU summit starts tomorrow: Guarantee for negotiations or a cold shower from the EU?”*; TV Telma, 20 June: *“The reconstruction is the responsibility of Zaev”*; TV Sitel, 21 June: *“The names of the new ministers to be sent to Parliament on Sunday”*; TV 24, 22 June: *“Zaev will present the proposed Government reshuffle in Parliament tomorrow”*).

Almost a quarter of the total number of published news reports on all television channels referred to these two topics. Still, their dominance was even more pronounced in the prime time of the news, in the first five news reports. Five of the six television channels opened their central news on 18 June (Tuesday) and 19 June (Wednesday) with one or more news reports on the decision to delay granting the date for the start of the negotiations between Macedonia and the European Union. All six news reports on Sunday, 23 June, began identically - with information about the government reshuffle. A total of 45 percent of the news reports in the prime time of the central news related to the two main topics of the week.

The television channels overlapped in the selection of topics in the first five news reports with other topics as well. 17 June, the first day of the monitored period, marked the first anniversary of the Prespa Agreement for resolving the difference over the name issue between Macedonia and Greece. Five television channels broadcasted reports on this occasion, while some primarily stuck to the statement of the members of the Government and international officials, others (TV Alfa and TV Kanal 5) prepared extensive analyses that included the opinion of the citizens on this topic.

On 22 June, however, four television stations started the news with information on the compromising audio recordings in which the mayor of Shuto Orizari, Kurto Dudush, could allegedly be heard physically attacking a citizen.

Table 2: The most common topics in the first five news reports of the six monitored television channels

Topic	Number of reports
EU Integration (EU - date)	47
Government reshuffle “broom”	38
Recorded conversations (El Cheka, Kurto Dudush etc.).	10
Anniversary of the Prespa Agreement	10
EU Integration (Goce Delchev debate)	9
Enrolment in secondary schools	8
Project “My VAT”	5
New SPO Law	3
SPO cases in court	3
Weather	3
Total number of news reports	210

Alsat-M TV had the most different approaches in opening the news, where usually the central news edition started with the problems of the citizens after the bad weather conditions (17 June: “Rain in Tetovo, damages in the village of Poroj”, 18 June “*Butel: Citizens complaining about polluted water*”), with the announcement and the result of the repeated verdict on the controversial court case “Almir” about the four-year old child ran over by a car, the announced census, and the enrolment of students in the secondary schools, a topic this TV dedicated greater attention compared to the other television channels (17 June: “*Tetovo, high interest in the secondary medical schools*”, 19 June “*Albanian class in Veles facing the risk of closing?*”).

The enrolment in the secondary schools, along with the presentation of the project “My VAT” (a government programme which provides for a return of one part of the paid VAT to the citizens scanning receipts) were the next two topics represented in the news, with 17 or 19 broadcasted news reports. The citizens’ perspective was more prevalent when reporting on these topics. With respect to the enrolment, the reporting focused on the students enrolling in the gymnasiums as opposed to the vocational secondary schools, and the manner in which that would affect the working force of the future. These topics were analyzed in more detail by TV 24 and especially Alsat-M (TV 24, 17 June: “*The lack of interest of the young people for becoming bakers, locksmiths, masons, could leave us without skilled workers*”). The topic “My VAT” was explored from all aspects, by preparing analyses and including the opinions of citizens, economic experts, civil society organizations, public authorities and other relevant factors (TV Alfa, 19 June: “*Getting the maximum 7,200 denars monthly VAT returns, means spending 22,220 denars*”; TV Telma, 19 June: “*Is the VAT return project realistic?*”). TV Alsat-M diverged from this practice by reporting only on the basic information about the project in the monitored period.

Among the most reported topics were the two related to the Special Prosecutor’s Office. The media reported on the inter-party negotiations over the new law on SPO (11 news reports) and the cases that this prosecution is presenting before court (13 news reports).

1.1 Citizens’ topics covered mostly through reports

In the monitored period, there were several protests by groups of citizens who came out with their own requirements. The citizens from the south-eastern part protested against the mine “Ilovica”, the businessmen from Vizbegovo protested to speed up the construction of a local road, the residents of Kisela Voda issued a request to relocate the centre for addicts, a citizens’ initiative asked handling the situation with the enforcement agents, fire fighters from Tetovo demanded better working conditions, Bitola farmers protested against the pollution from a local factory, former employees of the “Ohis” factory demanded the payment of their outstanding wages, and the citizens with physical disabilities held a protest as well. The television channels followed most of these events and reported a total of 28 news reports. In most cases there were no reports of the events with a more extensive analysis of the problems, by including the second party, i.e. in most of the cases, the reports only covered the statement of the institution that needs to resolve the situation (Alfa, 18 June: “*Blocks on the access road to Ilovica – citizens asking for revocation of the concession for the mine*”; TV Alsat-M, 19 June: “*Protests in Tetovo, fire fighters asking*”).

for payment of allowances”; TV 24, 18 June: “Protest of businessmen from the Vizbegovo industrial area”; TV Sitel, 23 June: “Persons with disabilities seeking accessibility by signing a petition”).

The discrepancy from this format was rare. TV Alfa broadcasted an extensive news report in connection with the protests in Vizbegovo, including multiple views of citizens, and TV Sitel was the only monitored media which, reporting from the protests for the relocation of the centre for addicts in Kisela Voda, broadcasted a statement of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Mila Carovska, calling to stop prejudice against the addicts. The only case where public pressure gave result was the protest for all students who have applied to enrol in the Skopje Gymnasium “Orce Nikolov” to be accepted in the school (TV Sitel, 20 June: “The protests changed the position of the Ministry, all ‘straight A students’ will be enrolled in Orce”, TV Telma, 20 June: “No tests in the high schools”).

Table 3: Citizens’ topics in the central news of the six monitored television channels

Topic	Number of reports
Protests against the mine “Ilovica”	8
Citizens dealing with natural disasters	7
Protest for speeding up the construction of a local road	4
Relocation of the centre for addicts in Kisela Voda	5
Citizens’ initiative for dealing with the enforcement agents	3
Protest of fire fighters from Tetovo	1
Protest of farmers about the pollution	1
Protest of “Ohis” employees	1
Protest of citizens with physical disabilities	4
Water supply problems in Chaska	1
Anniversary of the work action in Strezhevo	1
Water supply problems in Butel	2
Problem with electricity in the hospital in Demir Hisar	1
Salary discrimination of the employees in the culture department	1
Protest of taxi drivers in Bitola	1
Bed-ridden father from Prilep does not get any medical assistance	2
Student in Utrecht is not receiving the scholarship from the state	1
Snake bit a child in Dojran	1
Female football players without a sports hall achieving international successes	1
Teacher travels 100 miles to work	1
Girl living with Candle Syndrome	2
Report on the conditions of the Oncology Clinic	1
Total number of news reports	50

During the monitored week, there were **17 news reports of human interest stories (3%)** - people in neighbourhoods without water (TV Alfa, 19 June: “Residents of Chaska complain – we have no water in the 21st century”), living in a building that recently had a fire (TV Kanal 5, 20 June: “The building that was damaged in the recent fire is still without electricity”), a life of a child with a rare disease (TV 24, 17 June: “12-year-old Christina living with ‘Candle syndrome’ must receive treatment in the United States”), public sector employees complaining about injustice (TV Sitel, June 18: “Employees in the University Library receive a 200 to 400 denars raise”).

These topics were covered through feature stories, with greater journalist engagement, as exclusive stories on each media channel. The greatest number of news reports on this topic (six) were published on TV Sitel; Kanal 5 and TV 24 broadcasted four each; and the remaining three television channels broadcasted one each. TV Sitel was the only television channel where the broadcasting of the news report caused a reaction from the competent institutions. This television station published a story about a father and son living alone in very bad conditions in Prilep; the father was bed-ridden as a result to a gangrene of his leg (TV Sitel, 19 June: *"The son is begging the institutions to provide care for his sick father, a touching story from Prilep"*). The son complained that, even though he knocked on every door, he failed to provide medical treatment for his father. The next day they reported that the father was hospitalized in the Prilep hospital (TV Sitel, 20 June: *"After Sitel's story, Boris from Prilep finally got health care"*). On the other hand, TV 24 reported the story about the 12-year old girl living with a rare disease, but despite the fact that the news report started a donation campaign for her treatment, the Health Insurance Fund stated that they cannot help the girl (TV 24, 18 June: *"Citizens engaged, institutions shrugging shoulders for 12-year old Hristina suffering from the rare disease"*).

In addition to reporting on the problems, there were also two positive stories, one was about the success of a local children's sports club (TV Sitel, 21 June: *"From the asphalt playground in Koleshino, female futsal team managed to win the title Balkan Champion"*) and the second was about the celebration of the anniversary of the working action for building the dam (TV Alfa, 22 June: *"Participants in the youth working action gather at the HS Strezhevo after 40 years"*).

A total of 23 news reports were broadcasted on local issues (less than 5%), such as lack of parking spaces, public hygiene, improper handling of medical waste, removing illegal summer terraces and more. Some of these topics were present on multiple media (TV Telma, 22 June: *"The Summer Terraces in the Old Skopje Bazaar are being demolished"*; TV Alsat-M, 21 June: *"Not everyone in the Old Bazaar is respecting the order to demolish their summer terraces"*). Only part of the stories were covered only by one media (TV Alsat-M, 23 June: *"Treska Lake is turning into a landfill"*).

The difference in reporting on the effects of the weather was striking. Some media included human stories (TV Alsat-M, 18 June: *"Rainfalls in Poroj demolished the rural bridge once again"*), while others reported the official information (TV Kanal 5, 17 June: *"Floods in Kumanovo, flooded houses, basements and garages"*). Two television channels reported from a different angle about the same event concerning the storm in the Bitola village of Egri on 17 June. While TV Alfa focused on the farmers by reporting on the suffered damage, TV Sitel conveyed the same information only with a statement by the representative of the municipal committee for damage assessment.

Greater number of civil society organizations had activities in the monitoring period presenting their activities or research results on issues of public interest. The topics that the civil sector covered referred to human trafficking, food waste, family violence, migration, displacement, corruption, the struggle of the LGBT - community, as well as the functioning of the institutions and corruption. The six television channels reported a total of 25 reports on these activities, and most of them were broadcasted by TV Alfa, TV Telma and TV 24. Almost without exception, they were covered with simple reports from the organized events (TV Kanal 5, 19 June: *"Shocking 30 percent of food ends up as waste"*, TV Telma, 20 June: *"More than half of the citizens do not know about the regulatory bodies AEC and AAVMS"*, TV 24, 18 June: *"Thirty inmates from the Strumica prison will be covered with the Law on Probation"*; TV 24, 22 June, *"Blood donation should be promoted, the Red Cross sent a message at a forum in Strumica"*).

2. REPORTS WERE THE MOST COMMON GENRE IN THE CENTRAL NEWS

The reports from the daily developments were by far the most common genre on all televisions in the monitored period. They covered 62 percent of the news reports, or a total of 309 news reports. This genre was most typical for each television, covering between half (TV Alfa) and two thirds (TV Sitel) of the broadcasted news reports. In most cases, it was a case of simply transmitting information about the daily events, including statements from the stakeholders, and sometimes by giving a brief description of the context in which the events happened (TV Alfa, 17 June, a report from the press conference: *"80% of the young people want to leave the country"*, TV 24, 18 June: *"Businessmen ask to be included in the amendments to the Law on Financial Discipline"*, TV Kanal 5, 20 June: *"The case 'Torture': Kamchev did not appear in court to testify, the Prosecutor asked for him to be taken in court"*; TV Telma, 20 June: *"Increased salaries for the specialist medical doctors"*, etc.).

Table 4: Genres represented in the central news of the six monitored television channels

Genres	TV Sitel	TV Kanal 5	TV Alfa	Telma	TV 24	Alsat-M	Total
Reports	53	53	48	49	48	58	309
News	5	5	10	3	7	8	38
Press release	0	3	0	1	1	3	8
Statements alone	5	12	10	12	6	5	50
Analyses	6	6	19	7	6	5	49
Reportage	8	3	3	5	8	5	32
Interviews	1	1	0	0	4	1	7
Research	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Citizen surveys	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	78	83	92	78	81	85	497

Other broadcasted information genres included 38 news, eight press releases and 50 news reports only with statements without any journalistic engagement. Accordingly, the sole transmission of the information was evident in more than 80 percent of all broadcasted news reports in the monitored period.

The transmission approach in the reporting was particularly prevalent in the prime time of the central news editions, i.e. in the first five news reports, which contains the topics that the media gives priority to. Considering that most news reports in the prime time referred to the two main topics of the week (EU integrations and government reshuffle), the television channels were competing as to which television channel will provide and broadcast more information on these topics, which is why they did not go into greater elaboration of the topics they were reporting. An exception to this practice was TV Alfa, which had an in-depth and analytical approach to more than 40 percent of the news reports broadcasted in the first part of the news (TV Alfa, 19 June: “*Vague EU decision, blurred European perspective, and yet satisfaction in the Government*”) and partially TV 24, with 25 percent (TV 24, 23 June: “*The broom brought five new ministers, in addition to being the Prime Minister, Zaev to become a Minister as well*”). However, the cases where the in-depth approach of TV Alfa was turned into a subjective commentary were also frequent (TV Alfa, 17 June: “*The government with a secretive tactics, without the participation of the opposition and the president, negotiated the new name for Macedonia. From Ilinden Macedonia to North Macedonia, with too many concessions made by the government*”).

Beyond that, the television channels had an almost identical approach in sharing the information conveyed in the first five news reports of its news editions. The dominant genres in all the television channels were the reports, news and statements when informing about the EU integration process and the reconstruction of the Government. All had an analytical approach in their stories on the anniversary of the Prespa Agreement, and they simply informed about the other topics.

The television channel with the most analyses in the monitoring period was Alfa, broadcasting three times more news reports from this genre in comparison to any other television channel. However, when speaking about the analytical genres, we should not forget that the survey focused on the quantitative data analysis, and not the qualitative. In addition to the two main topics, this media analyzed topics such as tourism, government officials travelling with commercial flights, public procurement, VAT return, the emigration of medical doctors and others (17 June: “*Macedonia is striving to achieve the tourism figures from 32 years ago*”, 18 June: “*False modesty? Government plane pending overhaul, Prime Minister travelling with a commercial flight*”). In accordance with its editorial policy, the analytical news reports of this television channel were very critical of the government, especially in the news reports referring to national issues, such as the name change (Alfa, 19 June: “*Donev: The damage is done by the government changing the constitution and name without any guarantee from the EU for admission*”).

Presenting the content as reportage was evident on all television channels. This genre was used to tell stories about local medical treatment conditions (TV Alfa, 22 June: “*Struga still waiting for the promised Hospital*”) problems with the parking (TV Alsat M, 22 June: “*Tetovo, the lack of parking lots causing chaos*”), depopulation of rural areas

(TV Kanal 5, 22 June, in Krivogashtani: *"A better life needs investments"*), animals (TV Telma, 18 June: *"Teddy Bear to remain in Shtip"*) etc. Total published reportages 32, most of them, eight each, were broadcasted by TV Sitel and TV 24 (TV Sitel, 22 June: *"Dojran readily awaiting the tourists in the summer season"*, TV 24, 19 June, *"Roma begging in the streets entered the EC report"*).

Out of the total of seven interviews broadcasted in the monitored period, four were broadcasted by TV 24, one with the EU Ambassador Samuel Zhbogar, one with the MEP Andrej Kovachev, one with the composer Dzijan Emin and one re-broadcasted interview with the Greek historian Tassos Kostopoulos for Radio Free Europe. The other television channels broadcasted the guest appearance of the Vice-President of VMRO-DPMNE Aleksandar Nikolovski in the news edition on TV Alsat-M, the Director of the PRO Sanja Lukarevska on TV Kanal 5, and the political analyst Peter Arsovski on TV Sitel.

Only two packages in the monitored week had elements of investigative research. One was broadcasted by TV Telma as an excerpt from the show "Kod" (Code) (TV Telma, 23 June, *"Seven-year-old girl complained that her father pointed a gun at her"*) and the other was broadcasted on TV 24 and focused on the details about the scandal with the Mayor of Shuto Orizari Kurto Dudush, who was accused of violence (TV 24, 23 June: *"This is not the first time the Mayor has been accused of beating someone, Dudush is waiting for another violence sentence in September"*).

TV Alfa was the only one that published interviews with citizens as separate news reports (TV Alfa, 17 June: *"Citizens on the Prespa Agreement"*; 21 June: *"Alfa survey: only the richest will profit from the VAT refund, the rest will get only crumbs"*).

3. ORIGINAL TOPIC OF THE NEWSROOMS SUPPRESSED BY THE CURRENT EVENTS

Only 28 (less than 6%) of the nearly 500 news reports in the monitored week referred to the topics opened by the newsrooms. (and they were not related to current events. Out of this number, only six were broadcasted in the prime time of the news, i.e. among the top five contents in the central news editions. None of the television channels stood out by the number of broadcasted news reports that were the product of the ideas and the engagement of newsrooms. Their number ranged from three news reports on TV Telma to seven on TV Sitel. These news report were related to different topics as possible inconsistencies in the implementation of the Prespa Agreement from Greece (TV Alfa, 18 June: *"RONM instead of FYROM, Greece gave Macedonia a new abbreviation"*), problems in the education (TV Alsat-M, 19 June: *"Albanian class in Veles is at risk of closing?"*), the living conditions in the rural areas (TV Kanal 5, 22 June: *"A better life needs investments"*), scholarships for studying abroad (TV Sitel, 19 June: *"He enrolled at the University of Utrecht, but he will not receive a scholarship from the state, the reason is paradoxical"*), animal welfare (TV Telma, 18 June: *"Teddy Bear to remain in Shtip"*), problems with medical treatment (TV 24, 21 June: *"Crowds in the Oncology Ward, patients waiting for their medicine for months, authorities say that the open call is in its final stage"*) etc.

It is interesting that the television channels Sitel, Kanal 5 and Telma did not broadcast any of the news reports that emerged as an initiative of the newsroom in the prime time of the central news, but they were rather moved later in the schedule. The reason for this is that the monitored media focused on two main topics in that particular week - EU integration of the country and government reshuffle.

Out of the topics initiated by the media, 12 cases referred to problems that required institutional response: an intervention of the MoFA concerning the abbreviation RONM, which Greece has used to refer to the country in a document of a citizen (TV Alfa), dealing with the project Skopje 2014 (TV Alsat-M), repairing the electricity in a building that was recently caught up in a fire (TV Kanal 5) assisting people facing health problems (TV Sitel and TV 24) etc. The desired effects were achieved only in the case broadcasted by TV Sitel, about the son that begged the institutions to take care of his sick father.

On the other hand, the contents arising from the current events and conditions were not always only transmitted. Occasionally, the media addressed these issues by adding "background" context or additional information and explanations. For instance, in most of the reports about the government reshuffle, in addition to conveying the latest information, there were explanations that the reshuffle is the result of the announcement by the Prime Minister given between the two election rounds, as an attempt to improve the unfavourable result for the ruling party candidate. A total of 170 news reports were broadcasted, and in those news reports

the journalists additionally elaborated the topics arising from the current events. Each television channel reported thirty such contents, half of which were broadcasted in the first part of the news.

However, most of the news releases, 299 (60%) of the total broadcasted news releases, consisted of simply covering the daily events. Among different television channels, there were very small discrepancies in the number of news reports that limited the journalists' engagement to transmitting information from the events, without further elaboration. In each monitored media there were fifty such broadcasts. In most cases this was the correct and professional manner of sharing information with the public, in which, in addition to the informative function, the media does not play any other function.

4. THE CAPITAL – IN THE MEDIA FOCUS

Speaking about the geographical locations reported from or about in the news, the news reports concerning Skopje were the absolute majority. The capital was the scene of the events in a total of 362 news reports, i.e. three quarters of the total number of broadcasts. The metropolis was dominantly present in 65 to 80 percent in the news editions of the six monitored television channels.

Concerning other locations, 101 news reports mentioned cities and other areas of the country, and 50 news reports mentioned locations abroad. The monitoring did not cover the news of the world, but only the news from abroad referring to Macedonia. Such were the information on the meetings of the heads of the EU in Luxembourg and Brussels on the decision to postpone granting the date for the start of the negotiations of the country for membership in the EU, responses concerning the decision by Athens and Sofia, then a report by the US State Department on the situation with the trafficking, reporting on the attendance of Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and Vice Prime Minister Kocho Angjushev at the investment forum in London etc. Apart from TV Kanal 5, which had a reporter in Brussels, other TV stations covered the events from Skopje. In general, everyone reported on the same topics from abroad and there were quite rare cases when a certain television channel covered content which was not covered in the other television stations (TV Kanal 5, 18 June: *"In 23 months the country has improved its rating at the global peace index"* research published in Australia).

Table 5: Locations included in the reports from the six monitored television channels

Skopje	362
Other cities	101 (Ohrid - 17 news reports, 10 Tetovo – news reports, rural areas – 30 news reports)
Abroad	50

The news reports from other cities were related to visits by members of the Government to the cities (TV 24, 23 June: *"The construction of the irrigation system for the South Vardar Valley in Valandovo has started, the beginning was marked by the Prime Minister"*), which upholds the principle that other locations are becoming interesting for the media, i.e. visible in the news, if they are associated with visits of domestic and foreign political representatives and dignitaries. Then, there were news reports related to dealing with natural disasters (TV Sitel, 17 June: *"Strong storm in Bitola region caused damage to agricultural crops"*), human interest stories (TV Sitel, 20 June: *"After Sitel's story Boris from Prilep finally received health care"*), court cases, events that were organized by civil society organizations (TV Telma, 22 June: *"The number of victims of domestic violence is growing"*, a report from a conference in Strumica), cultural and other events (TV Sitel, 23 June: *"Vevchani inspiration for artists"*). Most of them were covered or prepared by local correspondents.

Most news reports from other towns and villages were broadcasted on TV Sitel, a total of 23, including seven in the prime time of the news. However, those seven were related primarily to the daily events, such statements on the anniversary of the Prespa Agreement given in Krivolak, the ruling in the "Almir" case in Kumanovo, the tragic case of a women dying after childbirth in Ohrid, the investigation of the murder in Strumica, and others. Their original stories, such as the story about the sick father from Prilep whose son sought help, or the story about the child bitten by a snake in Dojran were broadcasted later in the news.

On the other hand, although there were fewer articles from locations outside of Skopje (15), Alsat-M give them a higher priority in the first part of the news, especially the content that was not presented in the other media, the content of which they used in starting the central news editions (TV Alsat-M, 17 June: *“Rainfalls in Tetovo, damages in the village of Poroj”*; 18 June: *“The hospital in Demir Hisar without electricity all night”*). This television channel followed the “Almir” case in more detail compared to the other, which is why they had multiple news releases from Kumanovo, where the trial for the death of the four-year-old child was held.

From the other settlements in the country stories were broadcasted about disgruntled farmers (TV Sitel, 20 June: *“Apples and peaches thrown from trucks, Ministry of Agriculture says it will take appropriate measures”*) about the tourist potential (TV 24, 23 June: *“Vevchani lacks accommodation facilities”*), urban stories (Telma, 18 June: *“Teddy Bear to remain in Shtip”*), local anniversaries (TV Alfa, 22 June: *“Youth working action participants gathered in HS Strezhevo after 40 years”*) and other. Most of the articles were reports for which there was no need to consult additional interlocutors, as second opinion, and the like. When reporting on issues, the news reporting sought responses from institutions to resolve them (TV Alfa, 19 June: *“Residents of Chaska complaining - we have no water in the 21st century”*; TV Telma, 23 June: *“Professor travels 100 kilometres without compensation to hold lectures”*).

Out of a hundred news reports referring to locations outside Skopje, around 20 were initiated by citizens or were related to citizens' activities or problems. Most of them, five, were aired on TV Alfa (Alfa 19 Jun: *“Farmers from Rosoman throwing peaches in the streets”*) and TV Sitel (TV Sitel, 21 June: *“A three-year-old child from Dojran bitten by a snake in the yard of the family house”*). Other news reports related to subjects such as local government, civil society organizations, the local business community, cultural institutions, etc. But, the voice of the citizens was occasionally present in other news reports, when the citizens were asked what they thought about certain decisions of the local authorities (TV Alsat-M, 22 June: *“Tetovo, the lack of parking lots causes chaos”*).

In the central news editions of the six monitored television stations, the second most represented city was Ohrid (17 news reports) in the news reports related to the government reshuffle, the judicial conference, the pension system, the woman that died after giving birth, the endangered status of the UNESCO town, etc. Tetovo was next on the list with ten news reports, followed with seven on Kumanovo, four on Bitola and three on Prilep.

The rural areas were represented in thirty news reports, but this was due to a larger number of events, such as natural disasters, military exercise in Krivolak, the body discovered in Turija, the protests against the mine in Illova etc. The original stories from the rural areas were rare (TV Sitel, 21 June: *“From the asphalt playground in Koleshino, women's futsal team managed to win the Balkan champions title”*, TV Telma, 23 June: *“Wastewater polluting the soil in Egri for more than 15 years”*; TV Kanal 5, 22 June from Krivogashtani: *“A better life needs investments”*).

5. ACTORS: GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES AND CITIZENS – MOST COMMON “FACES” IN THE NEWS

A total of 1,318 subjects appeared in the central television news editions of the television stations covered in the monitored period. Considering the function in which they were represented in the articles, they could be divided into thirty categories. The most prevalent category was the members of the government, appearing 274 times in the central news reports, which is 20 percent of the appearances of all actors. Right after them came the citizens with 169 appearances, and they were followed by foreign officials, political parties, government officials, institutions, civil society organizations, the judiciary and others, each with less than 100 appearances. The representatives of the business community appeared a total of 32 times, followed by cultural, health and educational workers, somewhat less space was given to the people from vulnerable groups, and incidentally, only on some television channels, there were some university professors, trade unions, religious communities, sports professionals and other categories. Given the limited topic diversity, the differences between the monitored television stations in terms of the presence of the most frequent actors were not that significant.

Table 6: Actors represented in the news reports of the six monitored television stations

Actor	Total appearances	Appearances in the first five news reports	Appearances in the rest of the news edition
Government members	274	164	110
Citizens	169	65	104
President	23	11	12
Members of Parliament	25	16	9
Foreign dignitaries	92	72	20
Diplomats	36	16	20
International organizations	32	17	15
Political parties, government	85	70	15
Political parties, opposition	84	59	25
State officials	64	22	42
Institutions	46	16	30
Local government	60	12	48
Political analysts	12	9	3
Journalists	10	7	3
Civil society organizations	55	8	47
Judicial authorities	49	24	25
Accused and suspects	48	20	28
Business community	32	7	25
Cultural workers	30	4	26
Health workers	23	8	15
Educators	22	12	10
Vulnerable groups	14		14
University professors	9	4	5
Unions	7	1	6
Religious communities	1		1
Sports professionals	1		1

Speaking about the prime time in the news, the domination of government members was even more pronounced, with 169 appearances, or 25 percent of all actors present in the top five stories on the television stations. Partly, this was due to the fact that one of the central topics in the monitored period was the preparation for the reconstruction of the government and various ministers were constantly displayed in the combinations over who might go and who might stay. Citizens were again among the most prevalent subjects here, but in this part of the news they were surpassed by the political parties and foreign dignitaries. Citizens appeared almost twice as likely in the second part of the news (104 times) compared to the first part of the news (65 times).

The comparison of which subjects appeared in the prime time of the news, and which appeared afterwards, shows several indicators. Citizens are not the only category that often appears in the second part, rather than in the first part of the news. This difference is even more pronounced in the local government (12 appearances

in the first part of the news compared to the 48 in the later part of the news) and the civil society organizations (8 versus 47), the business community (7 versus 25), cultural workers (4 versus 26), health professionals (8 versus 15) or vulnerable groups (none versus 14). The impression is that the social affairs are moved to a later spot in the news, while the first part of the news is reserved for high politics, and reinforces the disproportionate ratio of appearance of other actors in the first five news reports and those after. The proportion of the members of the Government and other actors is 164 appearances in the prime time of the news versus 110 in the second part of the news, the ration of the governing political party is 70 versus 15, for the opposition parties the ratio is 59 versus 25, among foreign statesmen the ratio is 72 versus 20, and concerning the members of the Assembly the ratio is 16 versus 9. The exception is President Stevo Pendarovski, who appeared one time more in the second part of the news than in the first, when reporting on his activities in the country (TV Alfa, 19 June: *“Pendarovski: the business community should fully engage in the negotiating process with the EU”*).

Members of the government can be seen presenting positions on major political events, promoting new projects (TV 24, 23 June: *“The construction of the irrigation system of the South Vardar Valley in Valandovo”*), participating in conferences (Alfa, 20 June: *“The hole in the pension fund is too big, the government noted positive changes”*, conference in Ohrid attended by Mila Carovska) etc.

The foreign dignitaries were primarily represented in the content related to the topic of EU integration of the country (TV 24, 21 June: *“Merkel’s political weight – pledge in the negotiations with N. Macedonia”*). Political parties appeared in their usual role in the so-called partisan bickering, in which the opposition accused the government of failure in the EU integration, of populism in their measures and dishonest intentions, and the governing party responded to the accusations (TV 24, 22 June: *“Stoilkovski: The project ‘My VAT’ is trying to pull wool over the peoples’ eyes”*; TV Kanal 5, 23 June: *“Acevski: the measure for 15 percent return of the paid VAT starts from 1 July”*). State officials in most of the news reports were presented as promoters of the work of its institutions, such as road construction (TV Telma, 17 June: *“Reconstruction of the road Shtip – Radovish after 40 years”*) or introducing new measures. The representatives of the local government had a similar role. Educators were consulted mainly about enrolment in secondary schools, and health topics, such as the epidemic of measles (TV Kanal 5, 21 June: *“The measles epidemic is going own”*) or the protection from the summer heat.

Gender representation among the actors was extremely uneven in favour of men. A total of 956 actors that appeared in the news were men, which is 72 percent of all occurrences. Women had 210 appearances, which accounts for only 16 percent. By category, women were represented more than men only as representatives of civil society organizations (25 appearances of women versus 19 men in this role). In all other roles, the men predominated, i.e. 249 versus 24 among members of the government, 147 versus 2 in the political parties, 44 versus none in the local government representatives and 40 versus 24 among public officials (here the difference is slightly lower, due to the more frequent appearances of the Director of the PRO Sanja Lukarevska in the news editions, representing the project “My VAT”). Also, 118 male citizens versus 39 female citizens appeared in the central news editions on the television channels.

The best ratio with respect to gender representation was noticed in TV Kanal 5, where the news showed 124 male vs. 38 female subjects, or 3 to 1. Moreover, on TV Alsat-M, men appeared 159 times and women 23 times, which is a ratio of nearly 7 to 1. The most total appearances of women in numbers were on TV Alfa (45) and TV 24 (42), wherein the ratio between the genders was 4 to 1. The representation of women in the prime time of the news was even smaller. Only 13 percent of actors shown in the first five articles were women versus 75 percent men.

In 152 cases the actors involved in the news were not identified by gender. These are cases when the gender neutral generic term (“citizens”, “messengers”, “doctors”) were used, in cases where they were an important element in the news report or when speaking on behalf of the institution, organization or political party, i.e. when transferring a position or reading a statement without having an appearance of a specific representative of the entity.

6. CITIZENS IN THE NEWS

During the monitoring period the citizens appeared as an actor in the news a total of 169 times. From passers-by asked by the media about an issue, via participants in protests with concrete demands, to individuals with specific problems, the citizens were present in the news releases every day of the week that followed. In terms of gender, three times more male citizens (118) were represented compared to female citizens (39), and the citizens were mentioned as a passive actor 12 times. Citizens could be more frequently found in the second (104 news releases) compared to the first part of the news (65).

Table 7: Representation of citizens and CSOs in the news editions of the six monitored television channels

Genres	TV Sitel	TV Kanal 5	TV Alfa	TV Telma	TV 24	TV Alsat M
Citizens	31	17	41	19	29	30
Civil society organizations	9	6	13	12	11	4

Viewed individually by media, the citizens were the second most represented category of actors in each of the monitored television channels in numbers, far behind the members of the government. Starting with 17 appearances on TV Kanal 5 and 19 on TV Telma, up to 41 on TV Alfa. TV Alsat-M was the only one in which the citizens and subjects that concern them got more airtime in any of the first five stories in the news, rather than later in the news (18 appearances in the prime time of the news programme, 12 in the rest of the news).

The analysis also investigated who is the “source” of the content placed on the central news editions, or whose activities or conditions gave the incentive to prepare a news report on a specific topic. Seen from this perspective, members of the government again dominated the news editions. Of the total of broadcasted news reports, 110 (22%) were stimulated by their activities. That is double compared to the second category according to this ranking, i.e. state institutions, which gave rise to 55 news reports. Citizens come in fifth place with 50 news reports (10%) incited by them and the CSOs came fourth with 40 news reports (8%).

TV Kanal 5 is a television with the lowest representation of this type of content - just one news report aired on this medium in the period that followed coming from the citizens themselves (TV Kanal 5, 20 June: *“The building caught in the fire is still without electricity”*). The numbers on other television channels range from 7 stories on TV Telma (17 June: *“Blockades for stopping archaeological excavations”*), 8 Alsat-M (18 June, *“Butel: Citizens complain of polluted water”*), 9 on TV Alfa (19 June: *“Third day protests of the residents of Kisela Voda at the Centre for Addiction, Temelkovski forgot the promises he made before the election”*) and TV 24 (21 June: *“Crowds on Oncology, patients waiting for medicine for months, authorities say the tender is in its final phase”*) and 12 on TV Sitel (18 June: *“Employees at the University library received a 200 to 400 denars salary raise”*).

But TV Alsat-M is one again marking a big difference compared to the other media, as the only television station in which citizens’ content is more often found in the prime time of the central news edition. Of the eight articles about the citizens, six are broadcasted among the top five news reports on different days. Thus, in the days when all other media reported in their prime time about the anniversary of the Prespa Agreement and the EU summit where the decision for the negotiations with Macedonia was agreed, the first two news reports on TV Alsat-M on 17 June were the flooding in Poroj and the water pollution in Butel, and the first three on 18 June were again these two situations and the malfunction that left the hospital in Demir Hisar without electricity.

The news reports engaging the citizens in the monitored period were related to several topics, such as protests against the mine, health issues, agricultural issues, living in difficult conditions and more. Beyond these issues, the citizens were involved in the news with their own views on other topics. However, in some topics, mostly in the main two that marked the week, the citizens’ aspect was completely absent. No television station did a survey on the expectations of the common citizen from the approximation of the country to the European Union, or the faltering on that path, not even the changes in the composition of the government were discussed with the citizens, despite the fact that these issues have a direct affect on the daily lives of the citizens. Just the topics such the introduction of the project “My VAT” and the anniversary of the Prespa Treaty were recognized by the television stations as topic for which the voice of the citizens would be a valuable contribution.

As for civil society organizations, they were often represented in news reports emanating from their activities, and addressing issues such as probation (TV 24, 18 June: *“Thirty inmates from Strumica prison will be covered by the Law on Probation”*) domestic violence (TV Telma, 22 June: *“The number of victims of domestic violence in the rise”*), corruption surveys (TV Sitel, 17 June: *“If you want the public administration to get something done for you, you still need connections and friends - is there a solution?”*) surplus generated food (TV Kanal 5, 19 June: *“Shocking 30 percent of the food ends up as waste”*), the fight against the Law on Enforcement (TV Alfa, 22 June: *“Initiative for reviewing the work of the enforcement agents”*) and other topics.

A total of 40 news reports were solicited from non-governmental organizations. Most of them aired on TV 24 (10 news reports) and TV Alfa (9 news reports). Most of this content (35 news reports) were aired later in the news. Three television channels did not publish a single news report about the NGO activities among the top five news reports in their central news editions. Content related to civil society organization in the prime time of the news editions was reported on TV 24 three times, and Alfa and Kanal 5, once each.

Beyond reporting on their activities, civil society organizations were included in news reports incited by other entities, where they gave their opinions or contribution. One such example is the topic for the project “My VAT” (TV Alfa, 20 June: *“Finance Think: only the wealthiest 5% of the households will profit from the VAT return”*).

7. CONCLUSIONS

In the monitoring period, the television stations showed strong similarities in the choice of topics they covered, the way they approached the topics, the represented actors in the genres they used in their reporting. A major contribution to this was the fact that from 17 to 23 June two important processes were held for the country, the preparations for changes in the government structure and the decision about whether the country will get a date for the start of the negotiations with the European Union. Despite the undisputed importance, these events were not emergency situations which would justify the level of preoccupation of the media with them. These topics completely dominated, especially in the prime time of the news editions, and only one television station, Alsat-M, stood out occasionally by giving preference to citizens’ topics instead of high politics.

Therefore, the number of news reports that were the result of an independent initiative of journalists and newsrooms to open a topic of public interest was extremely low. It was hard to say which television station showed the greatest initiative in this regard, because the channel with the most original contributions altogether aired a total of five such contents for the entire monitored week, and the channel with the least aired only two. This number is small compared to the total published news reports per media (70-80).

The focus of the media to monitoring the activities of the members of the government was much stronger than the reporting about any other category of social and political actors, and no television station was an exception to this practice. Citizens’ involvement in the news was satisfactory, given that they were the second most represented category after the members of the government. Citizens’ participation could be seen by covering topics triggered by the actions or the situation faced by groups of people or individuals, as well as the inclusion of the views of citizens on other current topics. Although they were sufficiently represented, and some of them were original media contents, what was typical about the citizens’ topics was that they were aired later in the news compared to the major events. Another characteristics of the monitored period was that the views of the citizens were completely absent in the reporting about the two most represented topics.

The reporting on most citizens’ problems was done in individual news reports, such as the fact that a protest was held or a group expressed their discontent for a particular condition, and the media included a response from the relevant institutions, but monitored the situation further. That was also true of stories about personal problems that some people had with the system, about their education, labour and health. In the monitored week there was only one instance in which the broadcasting of a case on television provoked an immediate reaction of the competent institution in solving the problem - about the sick father from Prilep who asked to be placed in hospital and to undergo surgery. Other news reports of this type generally boiled down to presenting the citizens’ problems, followed by an explanation by the authorities on why the relevant condition is such, and why the situation cannot be solved.

Engaged journalism was rarely present in the most influential television channels, especially in reporting on original topics related to citizens' problems, which the television channels themselves found and which were not related to a scheduled daily event. However, the discouraging fact is that 80 percent of all published news reports were actually transmission of the information, news reports that contained only statements without any intervention from the journalists. Given the preoccupation with the main topics and political actors (government members, foreign dignitaries, members of Parliament, government officials), the number of citizens' contributions was very small, so most of the reporting was reduced to conveying similar topics and genre news patterns.

The predominant proportion of the actors, about 70%, which appeared in the news were men. This imbalance is even more evident in the prime time of the news where 13 percent of actors shown in the first five news reports were women versus the 75 percent of men. Women were more represented only as representatives of civil society organizations (25 appearances of women versus 19 men in this role). The best ratio of male versus female actors was evident on TV Kanal 5, i.e. the ratio 3 to 1.

In terms of the location focus of the news reports, in 65 to 80 percent of the news releases of the six monitored televisions the metropolis was the most common location where the events occurred. Other cities were part of the reporting usually during visits of government and other political delegations, which confirms the principle that usually in such cases they become interesting to the media.